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Ratings on public education rise, but younger and black Floridians want better

By Susan A. MacManus, *Project director*

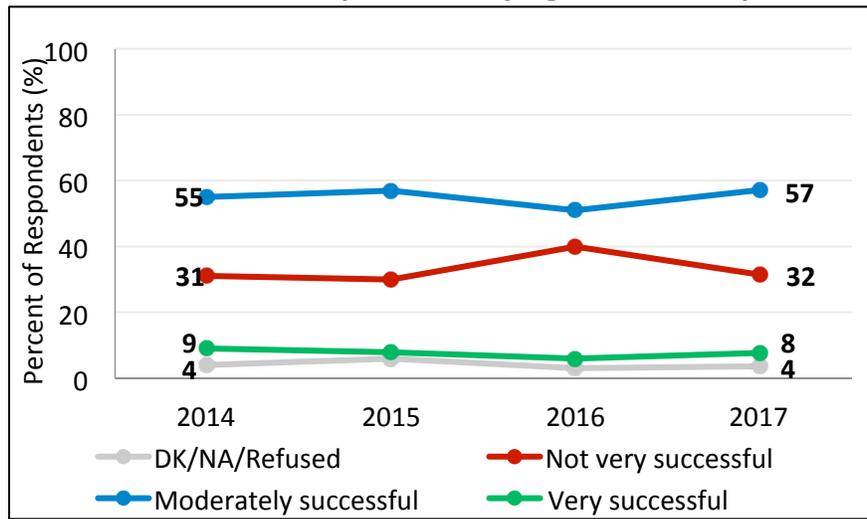
Education consistently ranks among the top issues of concern to Floridians and comprises a major portion of the state budget. **Floridians' positive ("good" and "excellent") ratings of the overall quality of public education went up slightly in 2017—local public schools (+6%) and the state's colleges and universities (+4%).**

At the same time, the 2017 Sunshine State Survey shows **persisting anxieties about the effectiveness of the State's educational system, most noticeably among young adults and African Americans.**

Ratings Rise on Overall Success of Educational System, But More Than a Third of Younger Floridians Are Skeptical.

The good news is that the share of Floridians judging the overall success of the State's educational system at preparing students to be "very" or "moderately" competitive in today's complex global economy rose in 2017: from 57% (2016) to 65%. Even so, 18- to 34-year-olds (the new entrants into the workforce) are not so sure; 38% see the system as "not very successful."

Upswing in judgment of Florida’s educational system as “moderately” successful at preparing students to compete in today’s global economy.



Question wording: “How would you rate the overall success of Florida’s educational system in preparing students to be competitive in today’s complex global economy? Would you say it is very successful, moderately successful, or not very successful?”

Note: Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Annual USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Surveys.

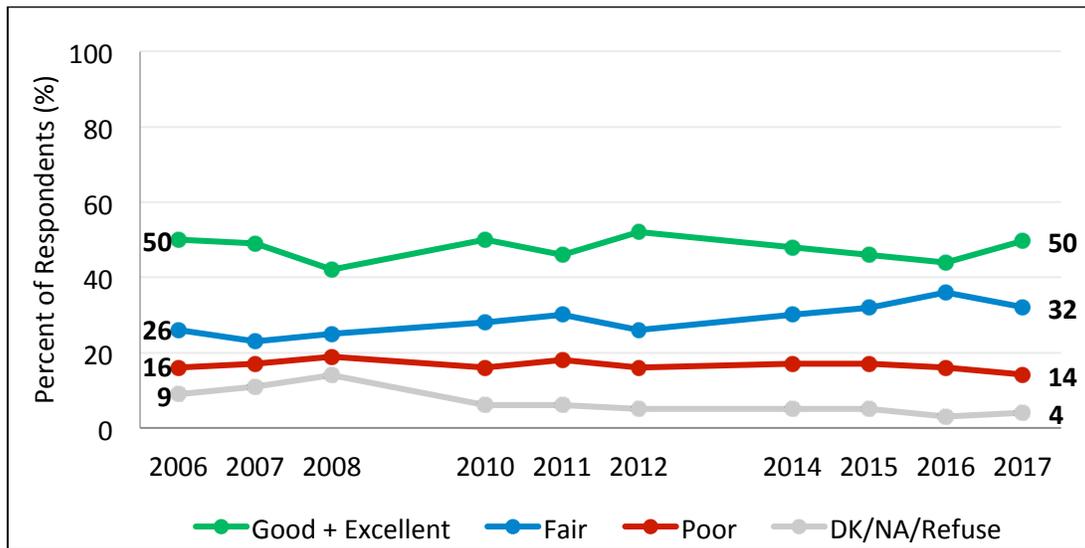
2017 USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey

K-12 LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

K-12 Schools: Overall Quality Ratings Reverse Downward Trend.

Floridians are divided on the quality of education in their local public schools, with half (50%) rating it as “good” or “excellent,” but 46% as just “fair” or “poor.” **Positive ratings (“good” and “excellent”) rose in 2017—from 44% in 2016 to 50% in 2017—reversing a downward trend that began after 2012.** Highest marks (“excellent”) come from those with a child in school (20%). But among the 46% who judge local public school education more harshly, a higher share are 18- to 34-year-olds and unemployed persons—perhaps feeling they are unprepared for college and/or the workforce.

**Increase in positive ratings of education in local public schools
reverses decrease since 2012**



Question wording: “How would you rate the quality of education in your local public schools? Would you say excellent, good, fair or poor?”

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

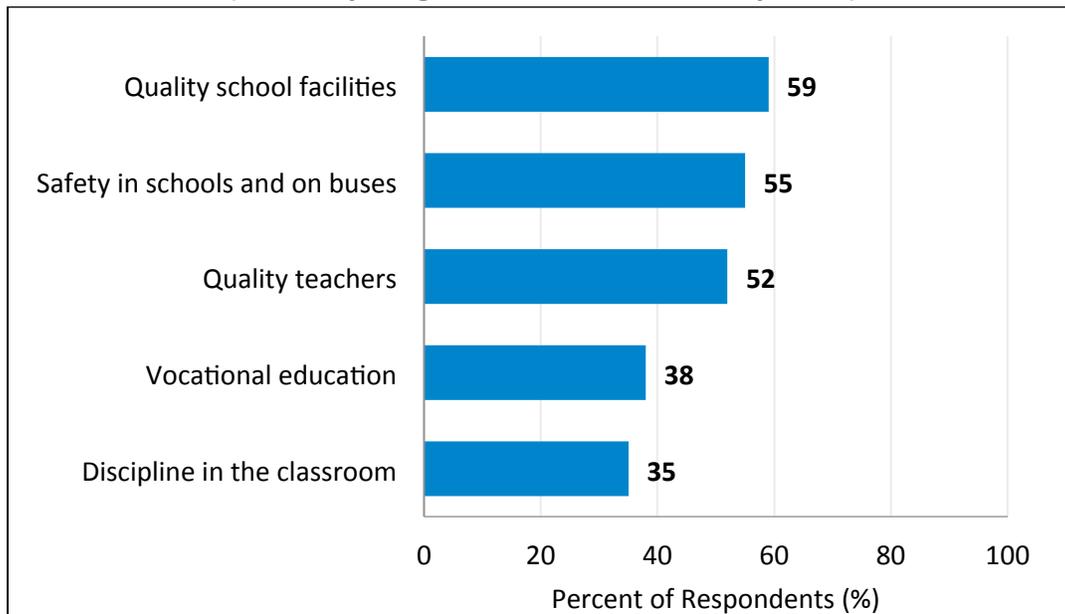
Source: Annual USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Surveys.

2017 USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey

K-12 Local Public Schools: Facilities, Safety, and Teacher Quality Get Positive Ratings, But Vocational Education and Classroom Discipline Need to Improve.

Local public school systems get the best marks (“good” or “excellent”) for providing quality school facilities (59%), safety in schools and on buses (55%), and quality teachers (52%), but fall short on vocational education efforts (38%) and classroom discipline (35%).

**Local public schools get good grades for facilities, safety, and teachers
(summary of “good” and “excellent” responses)**



Question wording: “How good a job is your local public school system, kindergarten through high school, doing in providing ____, is it excellent, good, fair or poor?”

Source: Telephone survey of a random sample of 1,215 Floridians ages 18 and older conducted July 24-August 14, 2017. Margin of error \pm 2.8%.

2017 USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey

Quality school facilities. The highest ratings (“good” or “excellent”) of school facilities come from those with a child younger than 18 living in the home (67%), whites (63%), men (63%), and those ages 65 to 79 (64%). The most criticism (“fair” or “poor” ratings) comes from African Americans (48%), those out of the workforce (43%), and 18- to 34-year-olds (41%). Regionally, residents of Tampa Bay (65%), Orlando (63%), North Florida (63%), and Naples (61%) are the most approving of quality facilities in their local public schools, while residents of Palm Beach (58%) and Miami/Fort Lauderdale (49%) are less approving. Lower ratings in southeast Florida are, in part, a product of their more crowded K-12 facilities.¹

Safety in schools and on buses. A majority of Floridians (55%) say their local public school system does a “good” or “excellent” job providing safety in schools and on buses, while 28% rate it as “fair” and 11% as “poor.” The most positive evaluations come from men, whites, and Hispanics. **Anxieties about safety in both schools and buses is highest among African Americans; 56% say the local public school system does a “fair” or “poor” job of keeping**

¹ Three of the five largest public school districts in Florida are Miami-Dade County, Broward County, and Palm Beach County. NICHE, “Largest School Districts in Florida,” <https://www.niche.com/k12/search/largest-school-districts/s/florida/>. Enrollment spikes, especially of Hispanic students, has resulted in more crowded schools.

students safe.² One reason is that blacks are more likely to see surveillance and security systems as more racially based.

Quality teachers. More than half of Floridians (52%) say their local public school system is doing a “good” or “excellent” job of providing quality teachers. Another third (33%) say their local public school system does a “fair” job of the same, but relatively few (10%) say that it does a “poor” job. **Teacher quality ratings are highest (“good” or “excellent”) among those with a child younger than 18 enrolled in school (55%) and full-time working Floridians (54%).** They are lowest among the most recent attendees (18- to-34-year-olds)—50% rate teacher quality as “fair” or “poor.”

Regionally, residents of the Tampa Bay region give their local school teachers positive marks (60%), while those in North Florida (49%), Palm Beach (51%), and Naples (51%) rate the local teachers more negatively. (According to one study, six of the 25 best school districts to teach in are in the Tampa Bay area.³)

Vocational education. Floridians see room for improvement in how their local public school systems provide vocational education. Little more than a third (38%) say their local public school system does a “good” or “excellent” job. The best ratings come from those most likely to be aware of the offerings: younger Floridians ages 18 to 34 (46%) and low-income households (46%).

Regionally, residents of the Orlando (43%) area are likely to applaud vocational education in their local public school systems (“good” or “excellent”), while residents of Naples (29%) and Palm Beach (29%), with their older populations, are less likely to agree—perhaps due to lack of awareness or to the shortage of labor with technical and trade skills in these high cost areas.

Classroom discipline. Floridians give their local public school system poor marks for providing discipline in the classroom. **Racial differences are significant: 71% of African Americans judge classroom discipline as either “poor” or “fair”** compared to 52% of Hispanics and 48% of white respondents. (Blacks often see classroom discipline, including suspensions, as disproportionately falling on their children.⁴) Only 35% rate classroom discipline in their local public school system positively. Those with a young child enrolled in school are less critical than

² There are several reasons for this pattern. See Melinda D. Anderson, “When School Feels Like a Prison,” The Atlantic, September 12, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/09/when-school-feels-like-prison/499556/>; Another reason is the feeling that minority students are more subjected to bullying.

³ NICHE, “2018 Best Places to Teach in Florida,” <https://www.niche.com/k12/search/best-places-to-teach/s/florida/>; accessed November 6, 2017. Ranking factors include teacher salaries, teacher tenure, teacher absenteeism, student-teacher ratio, as well as the district’s Niche grades for Overall, Administration, Safety, and Resources.

⁴ See Tom Loveless, “Racial Disparities in School Suspensions,” The Brookings Institution, March 24, 2017; <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/03/24/racial-disparities-in-school-suspensions/>; accessed November 6, 2017; also see Denise Amos, “Duval Schools Suspend Larger Number of Blacks than Whites,” Jacksonville.com, July 28, 2017; [includes statistics on Florida at-large] <http://jacksonville.com/news/metro/education/2017-07-28/duval-schools-suspend-larger-number-blacks-whites>; accessed November 6, 2017.

others. Older Floridians are the least likely to express an opinion, most likely because they are the least aware of the issue.

Regionally, North Florida (41%), Tampa Bay (38%), and Orlando (36%) residents give the most positive assessments of classroom discipline in their public school systems. The most negative assessments come from Miami/Fort Lauderdale area residents—home to some of state’s most racially/ethnically diverse schools and some of its most crowded.⁵

Preparedness for Future: Offer More After-School Programs to Help Reduce Juvenile Crime

Those who work closely with children who have committed crimes have recognized that “children do not have the appreciation of risk, the self-control, the judgment or overall maturity of adults” *but* “have a greater capacity for change.”⁶ The vast majority of Floridians (88%) say that it is “going in the *right* direction” for the state to provide after-school programs to help reduce juvenile crime.⁷ **Support for such programs is highest among nearly all African Americans (97%) primarily because juvenile crime rates in the state are highest among black youth,**⁸ causing a disproportionate level of anxiety among many black adults.⁹ Other highly supportive groups are younger Floridians (93% of those ages 18 to 34), women (91%), and those with a young child at home (92%).

Regionally, residents of the Miami/Fort Lauderdale region are the most supportive of after-school programs (92%). Opposition (“going in the wrong direction”) is greatest among residents of North Florida (10%), although the majority supports such prevention-oriented programs.

⁵ See Ari Odzer, “Parents Upset Over School Overcrowding in South Florida,” NBC 6 (Miami), February 18, 2015; <https://www.nbcmiami.com/news/local/Parents-Upset-Over-School-Overcrowding-in-South-Florida-292488451.html>.

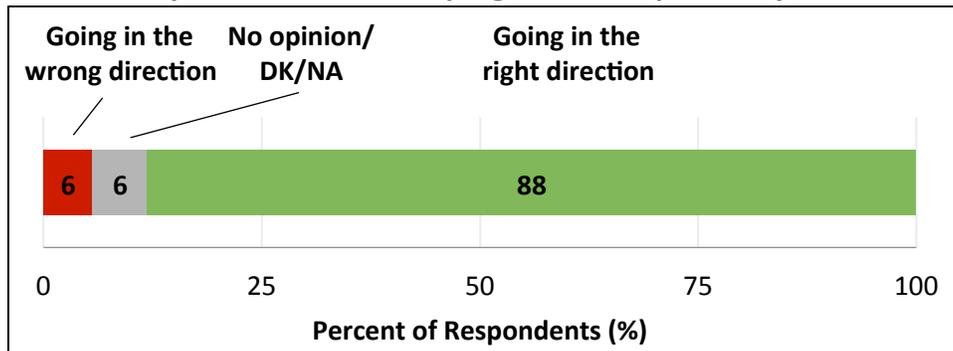
⁶ Cassandra Capobianco, “Children Deserve Better From Florida’s Justice System.” *Huffington Post*, April 30, 2017. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/cassandra-capobianco/children-deserve-better-f_b_9805504.html. Accessed November 2, 2017.

⁷ “National research indicates that youth incarceration is associated with reduced job prospects, higher recidivism and suicide rates and increased mental health issues.” Esubalew Dadi, “Community-Based Treatment More Effective, Less Expensive than Incarceration for Youth Offenders,” Florida Policy Institute, February 2017.

⁸ Christopher Huffaker, “In Many States, Black Juveniles End Up in Adult Court in High Numbers,” *McClatchy*, June 22, 2017; Esubalew Dadi, “Community-Based Treatment More Effective, Less Expensive than Incarceration for Youth Offenders,” Florida Policy Institute, February 2017. <http://www.fpi.institute/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/RP-Florida-youth-offenders.pdf>; accessed November 2, 2017.

⁹ Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, “Disproportionate Minority Contact: Racial Ethnic Disparity Benchmark Report”, <http://www.djj.state.fl.us/research/reports/reports-and-data/interactive-data-reports/disproportionate-minority-contact-reports/dmc-red-profile-fy-2015-16>; accessed November 6, 2017.

Clear majority of Floridians say that it is going in the right direction for the State to provide after-school programs to help reduce juvenile crime



Question wording: “There are lots of issues facing Florida today. If the State of Florida were to provide after-school programs to help reduce juvenile crime, would you say that was going in the right direction or the wrong direction, or do you have no opinion about it?”

Source: Telephone survey of a random sample of 1,215 Floridians ages 18 and older conducted July 24-August 14, 2017. Margin of error $\pm 2.8\%$.

2017 USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey

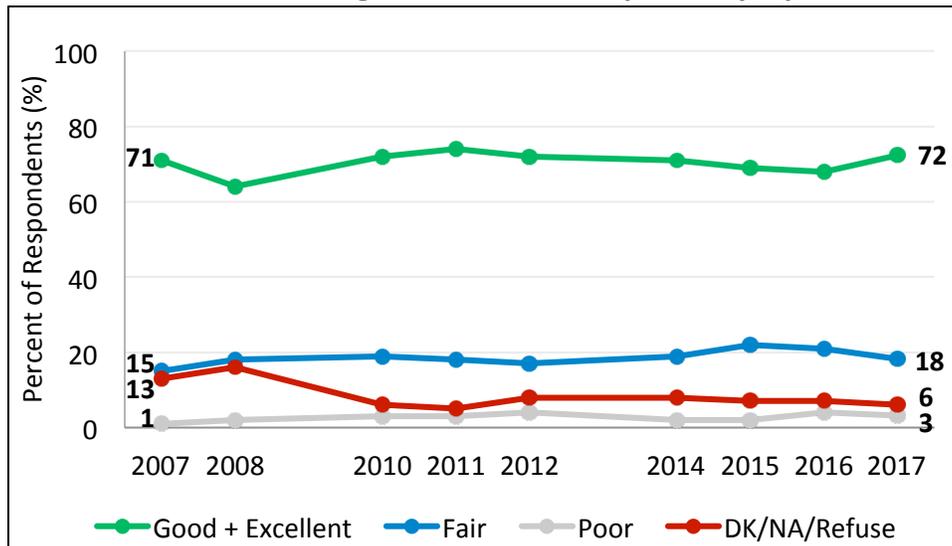
HIGHER EDUCATION AT FLORIDA COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Overall Quality Ratings Up, But Anxieties Persist about Campus Safety, Preparedness, and Future of Graduates.

For several years, Floridians have rated the quality of education in Florida’s state colleges and universities highly (higher than the K-12 public school system). The share rating higher education positively increased from 68% in 2016 to 72% in 2017. The most positive ratings (“good” or “excellent”) come from college graduates (78%), compared with 65% of those with a high school diploma or less. The most critical are minorities and unemployed persons—those most likely to be competing with college graduates for jobs and promotions.

Regionally, top (“excellent”) higher education quality ratings are given by residents of North Florida (28%), while the lowest are from respondents living in the Naples (16%) and Palm Beach (17%) regions.

Over the past 10 years, Floridians have rated the quality of higher education at Florida’s state colleges and universities positively; up in 2017



Question wording: “How would you rate the quality of higher education in Florida’s state colleges and universities, excellent, good, fair or poor?”

Note: Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Annual USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Surveys.

2017 USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey

Student Safety on College Campuses¹⁰: Concerns on the Rise

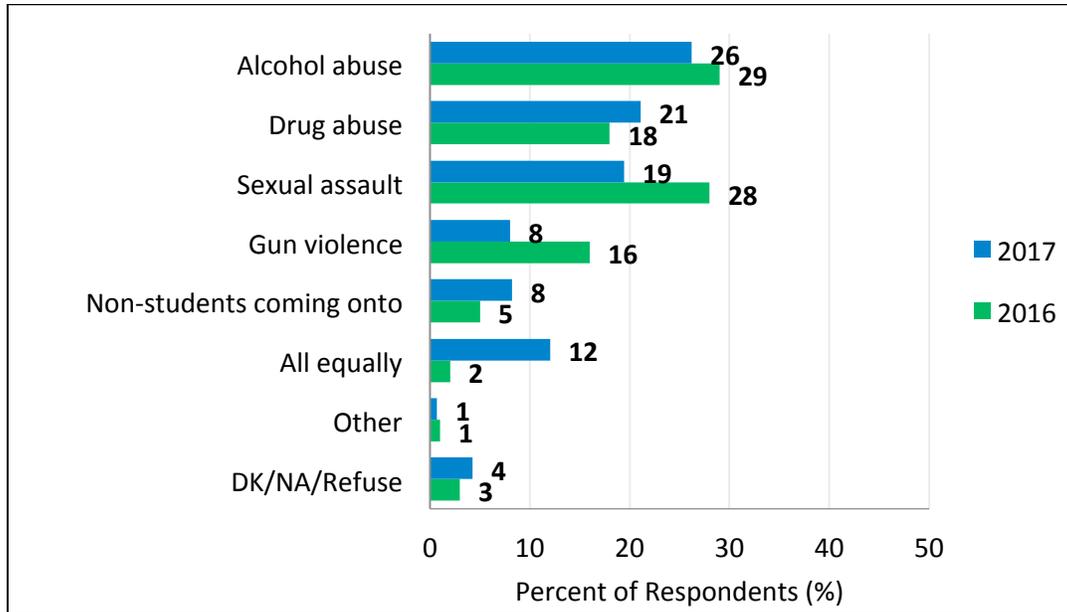
Alcohol abuse is seen as the biggest threat to student safety on Florida’s college and university campuses (26%), followed by drug abuse (21%) and sexual assault (19%). Non-students coming onto campus and gun violence (each 8%) are cited less frequently. All the mentioned safety threats are equally the biggest threat to student safety according to 12 percent of respondents.

Concerns are noticeably different depending on a respondent’s age, gender, and education. For example, a larger share of college graduates than non-college graduates single out alcohol abuse or gun violence. Younger Floridians (ages 18 to 34 and 35 to 54) mention sexual assault more frequently. Males are the most likely to cite non-students coming onto college campuses. And older Floridians are most likely to say “all of the above.”

¹⁰ WTXL Tallahassee, “FBI Report Breaks Down Crime Stats for Florida’s Public Colleges,” (2016 data) September 27, 2017; http://www.wtxl.com/news/fbi-report-breaks-down-crime-stats-for-florida-s-public/article_41371cd8-a39c-11e7-85ba-dfa63edbb681.html; accessed November 5, 2017.

The biggest changes since the 2016 survey have been: (1) a drop in the percent citing sexual assaults (28% to 19%) and gun violence on campuses (16% to 8%), most likely due to increased vigilance on Florida’s college campuses, and (2) a rise in the share who cite “all of the above” (2% to 12%), mostly among older residents, the more news-attentive, who hear more about all these issues via the media.

Alcohol, drugs, and sexual assault top student safety concerns on college campuses



Question wording: “In your opinion, which of the following is the biggest threat to student safety on college and university campuses?”

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Annual USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Surveys.

2017 USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey

Preparedness for Future: Require Remedial Coursework to Struggling College Students

Studies have consistently shown that a high percentage of high school graduates enter colleges and universities with deficiencies needing remedial course work.¹¹ Currently, Florida makes remedial courses optional rather than mandatory—the result of a law passed to reduce the cost of college by speeding up the path to graduation¹². **Nearly half of Floridians (49%) say that Florida state colleges and universities should be *required* to provide remedial coursework to**

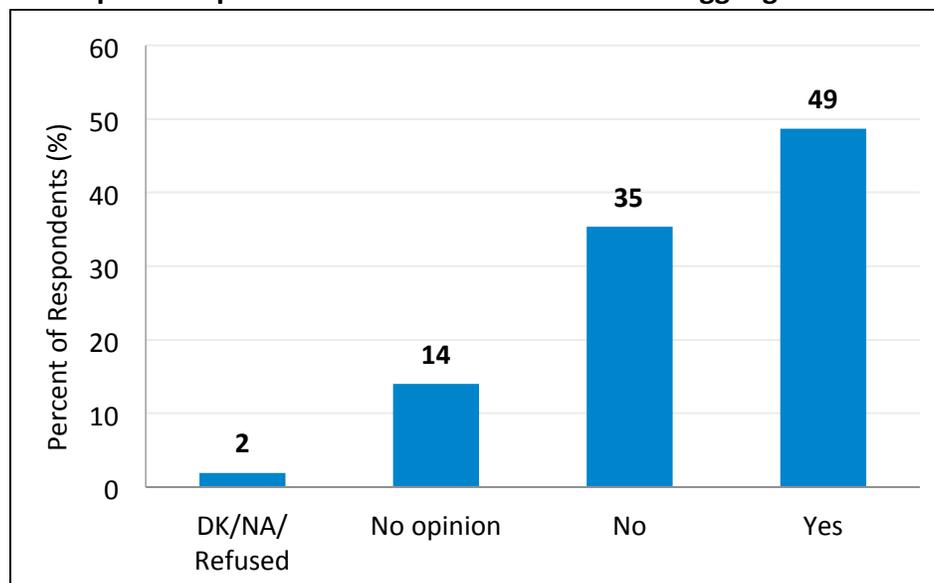
¹¹ Nationwide, more than 40% of first-year college students need remediation in English, math, or both. See Tracu Dell’Angela, “How Florida Is Setting Students Up for Failure By Not Mandating Remedial Courses,” Educationpost.org, October 4, 2016. <http://educationpost.org/how-florida-is-setting-students-up-for-failure-by-not-mandating-remedial-courses/>; accessed November 2, 2017.

¹² See Paul Fain, “Remediation If You Want It,” *Inside Higher Ed*, June 5, 2013. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/06/05/florida-law-gives-students-and-colleges-flexibility-remediation>.

struggling students, while 35% say they should not. A combined 16% did not offer an opinion on the issue. Support for mandatory remedial course offerings is highest among those with only a high school diploma or less (56%), minorities—African Americans (65%) and Hispanics (57%)--unemployed persons (61%), and those in low-income households (58%).

Regionally, the support for requiring remedial courses is highest among residents of the Miami/Fort Lauderdale area (59%), while fewer in Palm Beach (34%) agree. One explanation for the wide gap is that the Miami/Fort Lauderdale area has a higher population of racial minorities and immigrants with English as a second language.

Almost half of Floridians say that public colleges and universities should be required to provide remedial coursework to struggling students



Question wording: “Should Florida’s state colleges and universities be required to provide remedial courses to students who cannot perform college level work? Yes, no, or do you not have an opinion?”

Source: Telephone survey of a random sample of 1,215 Floridians ages 18 and older conducted July 24-August 14, 2017. Margin of error \pm 2.8%.

2017 USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey

Biggest Challenges to Next Step in Life: Debt, Lack of Skills, Shortage of Well-Paying Jobs

The 2017 Survey marks the third year in a row that Floridians say that the most serious situation facing college graduates today is the accumulated debt when they graduate—cited by 35% of Floridians. (In 2014, the most-cited challenge was a lack of well-paying jobs in their fields.) In 2017, the lack of well-paying jobs (21%) was one of three employment-related concerns that accounted for more than half of responses. The other two were graduating

without job skills required by employers (22%) and employer concerns about the inferior work ethic of young workers compared to older workers (12%).

Student debt continues to be most serious situation facing Florida's college graduates

	2014	2015	2016	2017
The debt they have when they graduate	28	33	36	35
Graduating without job skills required by employers	18	20	19	22
A lack of well-paying jobs in their field	35	26	30	21
Employers' worry that young workers' work ethic is inferior to that of older workers	11	9	10	12
Graduating without multi-lingual (foreign language) skills	3	4	2	3
All equally	-	-	0	2
Other	1	2	-	-
DK/NA/Refused	5	6	3	5

Question wording: "Which of the following situations do you think is the most serious one facing Florida's college and university graduates today?"

Note: Columns sum to total. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Annual USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Surveys.

2017 USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey

College loan debt. Recent studies show that 52% of Florida's college graduates in 2016 carry debt for student loans. The average graduate that year owes \$24,041¹³ (a slight improvement over 2015). Debt at graduation is seen as the most serious situation facing college graduates today by nearly half of Floridians ages 18 to 34 (45%), compared with 34% of those ages 35 to 54. Anxieties about college loan debt are also high among African Americans (41%), persons with a young child at home (40%), and part-time workers (47%)—anxieties heightened by current levels of fiscal stress.

Lack of requisite job skills. Concerns about the mismatch of skills learned in college and those needed by employers¹⁴ (22%) have persisted and increased slightly (+3%) from the 2016 survey. Worries are highest among 55- to 64-year-olds (31%) and those living in households earning at least \$75,000 annually (27%)—those most likely to be in a position to hire new college graduates—as well as Hispanics (30%) and college graduates (27%).

¹³ Lendedu, "Student Loan Debt by School by State Report: 2017 Statistics," <https://lendedu.com/blog/student-loan-debt-statistics-by-school-by-state-2017>; accessed November 4, 2017.

¹⁴ The five skills employers say recent graduates are lacking: critical thinking/problem solving; attention to detail; communication; writing skills; and leadership and ownership. See Uwana Ikaidi, "The Top Five Skills Employers Say Recent Grads Lack and How to Learn Them," *Study Breaks*, April 28, 2017. <https://studybreaks.com/2017/04/28/employable-skills/>; accessed November 4, 2017.

Lack of well-paying jobs. While 21% still cite the lack of well-paying jobs in a graduate’s field of study, it has declined from a high of 35% in 2014. These fears are higher among those with *some* college education (27%) than those who have already graduated (17%).

Employer perception of inferior work ethic of younger workers. Surveys of employers have found that when it comes to hiring college graduates, the “motivation, interpersonal skills, appearance, punctuality and flexibility” of younger workers are often more serious problems than their technical skills.¹⁵ Those most likely to identify work ethic as the most serious challenge facing college graduates today include men, those ages 35 to 64, whites, and those with a high school diploma or less, along with residents of North Florida—a more conservative area with a higher share of agricultural and blue collar workers.

Public Education Gets Good Grades But Needs Improvement

Nearly two-thirds of Floridians give a thumbs-up to the State’s educational system in preparing students to compete in today’s global economy. But many residents cite deficiencies. In local public schools, young adults see the need for higher quality teachers and improved vocational education. African Americans lament local school efforts to provide quality facilities, keep children safe at school and on buses, and administer discipline in the classroom. The vast majority (88%) of Floridians, especially blacks (97%), believe more after-school programs could reduce juvenile crime.

Higher education gets positive marks from nearly three-fourths of Floridians, but it could be improved in several ways. One would be to reduce threats to student safety, the biggest of which are alcohol abuse, drug abuse, and sexual assault. Another would be to *require* remedial course work for struggling students. College graduates might face a brighter future if student loan debt decreased and well-paying jobs increased. Employers could benefit if grads had skills that matched available jobs and a work ethic more like their elders.

Interested parties may view results for all questions and detailed analysis, including questions not analyzed here and significant factors for all related questions, on the survey website:

<http://www.sunshinestatesurvey.org/results/2017/>

The USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey is a collaborative learning opportunity between the USF College of Arts and Sciences and The Nielsen Company, LLC., that allows USF students to gain valuable experience before graduation. Each of the students below made significant contributions to this year’s Survey. Valuable input into the survey question content and structure came from all students in the upper-level Media and Politics class (Spring 2017).

¹⁵ See, for example, Martha C. White, “The Real Reason New College Grads Can’t Get Hired,” *Time*, November 10, 2013. <http://business.time.com/2013/11/10/the-real-reason-new-college-grads-cant-get-hired/>; accessed November 4, 2017.

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