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PUBLIC SCHOOL SATISFACTION NOTICEABLY DECLINES AFTER PANDEMIC

A new poll shows disapproval among Kansas voters in six school districts for how local schools handled the most recent school year

Wichita, KS – As communities in Kansas continue to grapple with decisions on reopening schools, a new poll shows that **87% of voters want students to return to school in-person full time**. The polling was completed in June 2021 by COR Strategies in the Blue Valley, Shawnee Mission, Kansas City, Wichita, Goddard, and Andover school districts.

Due to school closures many students did not have access to in-person learning for an entire year. The state assessment was not given in 2020 due to school shut-downs. However, the last five years have shown declining achievement in Blue Valley and many other districts.

Many parents cite, and the research agrees, that students have lower grades after the pandemic overall, which has many Kansas parents looking at other educational opportunities.

“On one hand it shouldn’t surprise anyone that a blessedly rare global pandemic has caused people to think twice about public schools. On the other, the pandemic itself has accelerated the trend of innovation and choice we were already witnessing in education. This poll makes clear this trend is driven by concerns about educational opportunity and will likely continue once the pandemic is past,” says James Franko, president of Kansas Policy Institute.

The majority of Kansas voters were unhappy with how their school district handled the most recently concluded school year. In the poll, Kansas voters were asked to grade their school district prior to COVID and then grade their school again after the most recent school year using an A-F grade.

56% of voters in Johnson County’s Blue Valley district rated their school district an A before the pandemic while only 33% of voters gave their school an A for their response and handling of the pandemic in the most recent school year. [Breakdowns by district are available here.](#)

Before the pandemic, 62% of Kansas voters in the surveyed districts graded their school district, overall, with an A or B. After the pandemic, Kansas approval of the way their school district handled the pandemic plummeted to just 50% of voters that were willing to give their school district either an A or B grade.

Lawmakers in Kansas placed parental choice as a centerpiece in their agenda this year, successfully expanding a tax credit scholarship program for low and middle-income children.

They also changed the process by which districts can offer remote learning and came within one vote in the Senate of establishing a new educational savings account program in Kansas.

The legislature saw a need to expand this educational opportunity for kids due to extremely low student achievement, despite record-setting school funding. In Kansas, there are more high school students below grade level than are on track for college and career. **Only about a quarter of Kansas students are on track for college and career.** Only 25% are on track in Math, and just 28% in English Language Arts; those outcomes track with the [2020 ACT test](#), where only 23% of Kansas graduates were considered college-ready in English, Reading, Math, and Science.

“More Kansans know that conventional schools cannot serve each student equally well and we shouldn’t be surprised when more families choose to homeschool, that school choice is expanded legislatively, and that we’re seeing a record number of people running for local school board demanding accountability and reform,” says Franko.

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