

# What Americans Really Think About Durable Skills

Survey findings from EdChoice and America Succeeds



## Executive Summary

Across seven waves of survey data, three audiences, and seven months of fielding, Americans have given a clear and consistent answer to one question and a complicated answer to several others. They agree that durable skills matter. They do not agree on who is most responsible for teaching them, what evidence proves a student has them, or whether their schools are actually delivering them. The gap between public demand and on-the-ground delivery is the central story of this data.

Four findings anchor the report:

- 1. Parents, teachers, and the general public all agree that schools should prioritize durable skills development.** The consensus crosses party lines, income brackets, and geographies. 77 to 86% of parents, teachers, and the general public say durable skills should be a priority for schools.
- 2. The delivery gap is an equity story.** Every measure of durable skills delivery: what experiences schools provide, how teachers rate their schools, how parents rate their schools shows a clear income, geography, and school-type gradient. Low-income parents are six times more likely than high-income parents to say they do not know what their school offers.
- 3. Teachers and the public are speaking different languages about evidence.** 53% of teachers say student reflections best demonstrate durable skills development; only 27% of the general public agrees. Teachers rank standardized tests near last, while parents and the general public view them as a more acceptable signal of durable skills. Gaps in perceptions of durable skills evidence have real consequences for how schools should communicate about students' skill development.
- 4. Teachers and the public agree on the basic shape of the responsibility question: shared ownership is the plurality answer, followed by parents, followed by schools.** But teachers, who are closest to this work, land 12 to 13 points further toward families than the public does, a finding with direct implications for how state policy is designed and delivered.

The case for durable skills has been made. The work now is to close the gaps this data identifies: build systems to better communicate the educational experiences schools offer; invest in building and scaling those experiences, and prioritize that investment in the rural communities, small towns, and low-income schools where access to applied, career-connected learning is most limited today.

## Methodology

The EdChoice Public Opinion Tracker is a monthly polling project, which began in January 2020, conducted in partnership with Morning Consult. These polls referenced in this report were conducted between October 2025 and April 2026. The polls in early October, November, and March targeted a sample of roughly 2,200 U.S. Adults among the General Population and an oversample of 800 U.S. School Parents, defined as adults who have at least one child in their household that is in grades K-12. The interviews were conducted online and the General Population data were weighted to approximate a target sample of Adults based on gender, educational attainment, age, race/ethnicity, and region. The K-12 School Parent interviews are weighted based on age, gender, region, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment. Monthly results based on the full survey have a measure of precision plus or minus 2.10 to 2.70 percentage points. Estimates for demographic subgroups (e.g., by income, geography, generation, or school type) are based on smaller samples and therefore carry wider margins of error than the full-sample figures reported above; smaller subgroup differences should be interpreted with corresponding caution.

The April 2026 wave included a custom teacher survey conducted by Morning Consult. The survey included a national sample of roughly 1,000 K-12 teachers (with at least one year of teaching experience), fielded April 1-9, 2026, with a margin of error of  $\pm 3.05$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Teacher interviews were conducted online and weighted using Morning Consult's standard teacher weighting model.

## Introduction

Americans agree that durable skills matter. Parents, the general public, and teachers all say schools should make durable skills a priority. That consensus holds across party lines, income levels, and geographies. Partnering with EdChoice, we collected seven waves of survey data across three distinct audiences, and the floor never dropped below three-quarters.

But consensus on importance is not the same as consensus on how durable skills are developed and signaled. When you move past the question of whether durable skills matter and start asking who is responsible for their development, how we know students have them, and whether schools are actually providing the experiences that build them, the data tells a more complicated story. The demand is there, but the infrastructure has not caught up.

The gap between public demand and on-the-ground delivery is wide, stratified by income and geography, and increasingly visible to parents and teachers alike.

### Public Support for Durable Skills is Broad and Stable

*Durable skills command overwhelming majority support across every audience and every wave of data we have collected: parents, the general public, and teachers, from October 2025 through April 2026.*

Across the surveys, and whether respondents were asked about individual skills or durable skills as a category, the results land in a consistent range.

Audience	Survey Wave	% Extremely/Very Important to Prioritize Developing Durable Skills
School Parents	October 2025	85%
General Public	October 2025	82%
School Parents	March 2026	77%
General Public	March 2026	78%
Teachers	April 2026	86%

When we asked about individual skills (communication, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, leadership, and character) rather than durable skills as a category, results across October and November 2025 held consistently in the 65-85% range across every skill and audience. These are large, repeated results that are held across audiences, skills, and survey waves.

The partisan story does not buck this narrative. Republicans and Democrats are within 2-3 points of each other on whether schools should prioritize durable skills broadly. The individual skills data from October and November further confirm this: on every skill at every grade level, the gaps between Republicans and Democrats opinions are minimal.

*In your opinion, how important is it for policymakers and school leaders to prioritize the development of the following skills for students in high school?*

#### October 2025

	% Democrats Responding Extremely/Very Important	% Republicans Responding Extremely/Very Important
Character	84%	81%
Collaboration	82%	74%
Communication	84%	82%
Creativity	78%	75%
Critical Thinking	84%	80%
Leadership	77%	75%

## November 2025

	% Democrats Responding Extremely/Very Important	% Republicans Responding Extremely/Very Important
Character	80%	84%
Collaboration	80%	75%
Communication	82%	81%
Creativity	77%	76%
Critical Thinking	81%	82%
Leadership	76%	75%

The civil debate data adds a useful illustration. When we asked whether it is important for middle and high school students to learn civil debate skills, arguably one of the more politically-relevant applications of durable skills: 57-69% of parents and 49-57% of the general public said it is extremely or very important across October and November. Only 4-6% said they opposed teaching it at all. If there is a more contested application of communication and critical thinking skills in an educational setting than teaching students to argue both sides of an issue, we're not sure what it is. And it still commands broad support.

Across seven waves of data, three audiences, and dozens of demographic subgroups, broad public support for durable skills development has shown up consistently.

## The Delivery Gap is an Equity Story

*Every measure of durable skills delivery, including what experiences parents say their schools provide, how teachers rate their own schools, and how parents rate their children's schools, shows a clear income, geography, and school-type gradient. The students who most need these skills are the least likely to be aware of or involved in the experiences that build them effectively.*

The March 2026 parent survey asked parents which durable-skills-building experiences their child's school provides: career-focused courses, real-world projects, capstone projects, service-learning, internships, and leadership opportunities. Every single experience showed a clear income gradient. Among parents with household incomes under \$50,000, 32% said their school provides leadership opportunities. Among parents with incomes over \$100,000, 57% said the same. The gap on service-learning is 21 points. On career courses, 13 points. On capstone projects, 14 points.

The most striking number in that data is not the experience gap itself. It is the "don't know" rate. Low-income parents (29%) are nearly six times more likely to not know what their school offers than high-income parents (5%). Whether that reflects an absence of programs or a failure to communicate what programs exist, the result is the same: parents who most need to advocate for their children's access to these experiences have the least information to work with.

The geography story mirrors the income story. Access to durable-skills-building experiences declines as you move from urban and suburban communities toward small towns and rural areas, and the gaps on some experiences are substantial.

Experience	Urban	Suburban	Small Town	Rural
Career Courses	42%	38%	37%	31%
Capstone Projects	16%	19%	6%	13%
Internships	31%	32%	24%	26%
Traditional Instruction Only	20%	27%	22%	31%
Don't Know	15%	13%	21%	24%

The “don’t know” numbers are troubling across geographies but especially so among the small town and rural respondents. Nearly a quarter of rural parents and more than one in five small-town parents could not identify what durable-skills experiences their school offers. Policies and programs that fill in these gaps could create substantial impact on the career progression of millions of young people living in these areas.

The April teacher data confirms inequities in durable skills delivery from another angle. When teachers rated their own schools on teaching durable skills, charter and private school teachers were far more positive than their public school counterparts.

	% Excellent/Very Good
Charter School Teachers	74%
Private School Teachers	66%
Public School Teachers	39%

What makes this finding especially striking is how closely it mirrors what we heard from parents four months earlier, where private school parents gave their schools an 80% excellent or very good rating compared to 53% for public school parents.

Durable skills development helps learners from all backgrounds compete in a labor market that has historically used high-cost credentials as proxies for competence. Yet the degree to which that is true depends on durable skills development being broadly available. This data suggests it is not. The students in the communities with the fewest economic advantages are reporting the least access to the applied, experiential learning that builds these skills. The equity promise is only as strong as the infrastructure behind it.

**The Signals Gap: Teachers and the Public Are Speaking Different Languages About Evidence**

*Teachers and the public have fundamentally different views on what evidence demonstrates that a student has well-developed durable skills. Teachers trust student reflections and project-based work. The public trusts grades and work experience. One of the widest teacher-public gap is on standardized tests, which teachers rank far below the public.*

This is the most important new finding in the March and April data. When we asked teachers, parents, and the general public which types of evidence most strongly demonstrate that a student has well-developed durable skills, the results paint a stark gap in consensus.

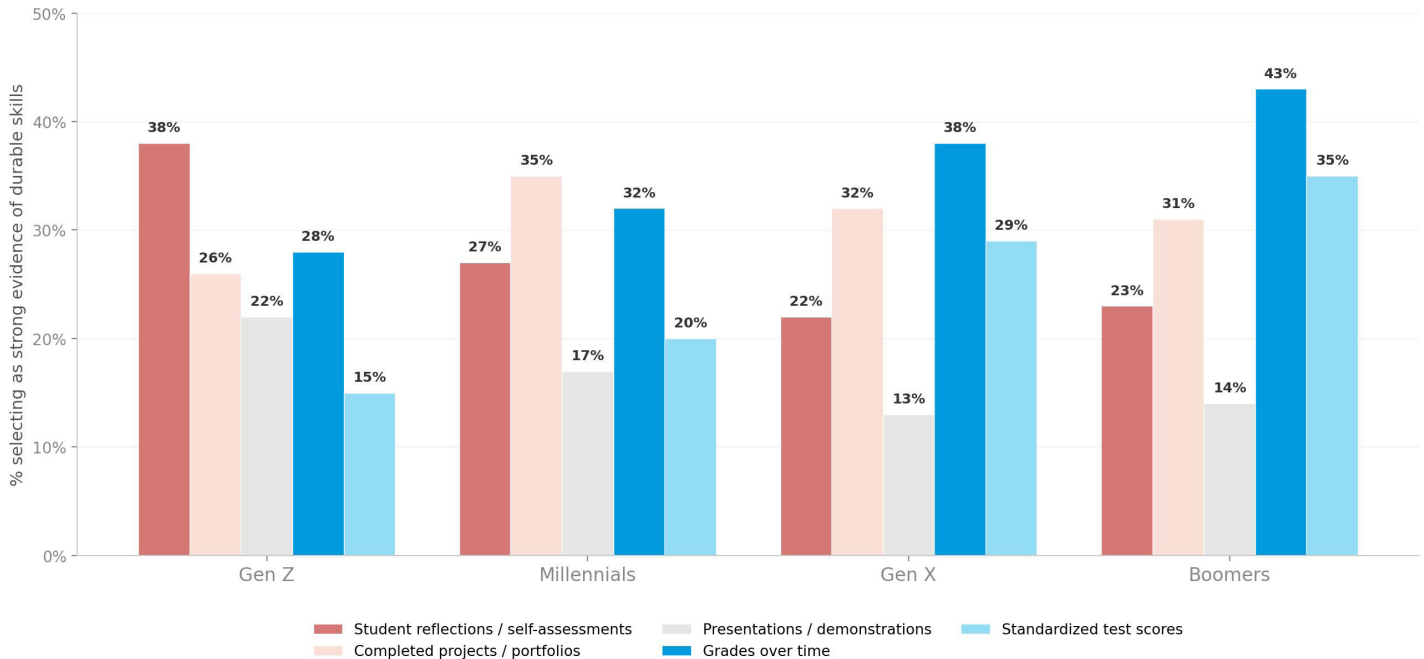
Type of Evidence	Teachers	School Parents	General Public
Student Reflections/Self-assessments	53%	33%	27%
Grades Over Time	28%	37%	43%
Work Experience	38%	38%	40%
Standardized Test Scores	11%	24%	25%
Credentials/Badges	8%	18%	13%
Presentations/Demonstrations	26%	15%	16%
Completed Projects/Portfolios	46%	38%	31%
Recommendations/References	33%	28%	30%
Don't Know/No Opinion	6%	8%	14%

The gap on student reflections alone is 26 points: 53% of teachers versus 27% of the general public. And the inverse is just as striking: teachers rank standardized tests near last, while parents and the general public view them as a more acceptable

signal of durable skills. These are not subtle differences in emphasis. They reflect genuinely different beliefs about what counts as evidence; beliefs that have real consequences for how schools communicate about students' skill development and whether parents can trust what they are hearing.

Within the gap between teacher vs public perceptions of durable skills signals, a generational divide clearly emerged in this data. Gen Z adults, who came of age in a world where project-based learning and portfolio assessment were more common, trust student reflections at 38%, compared to 23% among Baby Boomers. Boomers trust grades at 43% and standardized tests at 35%, both the highest of any generation. One plausible reading is that trust follows familiarity, and that public confidence in newer assessment methods will grow as those methods become more common. That is a hypothesis worth testing, but not a finding we can draw from a single cross-section.

**Trust in evidence of durable skills varies by generation**



The good news is that the public is not attached to grades as the only acceptable signal. When we asked what additional information would make them more confident in a student's durable skills beyond grades, only 9-11% of parents and the general public said nothing would help. The majority said they want concrete examples of how a student demonstrated the skills (48%) and opportunities to directly observe students in action (44-48%). This is not a high bar. It is an invitation to build something specific, whether communication systems, portfolio-sharing tools, or employer-backed credentials, that meets parents where they are.

College-educated adults want concrete examples at 58%, compared to 42% among those without a college degree. Low-income parents say "don't know" at 21% when asked what additional evidence would help, compared to 2% of high-income parents. Parents with fewer resources to navigate the education system are the ones least equipped to ask for better evidence, and the ones who most need schools to proactively close that gap. Any system we build to communicate durable skills development needs to work for those families first, not just for parents who already know the language.

The signals gap helps explain why the delivery gap persists. If teachers and parents cannot agree on what evidence of durable skills looks like, parents cannot reliably tell whether their schools are actually building these skills, and schools cannot reliably communicate the work they are already doing. This raises another question: who is responsible for closing the delivery gap in the first place?

### The Responsibility Gap and What it Means for How Policy Lands

*The public is stable and bipartisan on responsibility. About 43% say it is a shared responsibility, about 26% say parents, and about 17% say schools. Teachers are the significant outlier, pushing responsibility toward families at a much higher rate than the public does.*

The responsibility question produced a consistent finding across two waves of the parent and general population survey. In October 2025, November 2025, and in every subgroup cut we have looked at, the public lands in roughly the same place: shared responsibility is the plurality answer, followed by parents, followed by schools. The numbers barely move from month to month or from the general population to parent survey.

***Who do you think should be most responsible for teaching students durable skills?***

<b>October 2025</b>		
	School Parents	General Population
Parents/Guardians	29%	26%
Shared Responsibility Among Some or All	42%	43%
Schools	17%	16%
Community Organizations (Boys & Girls clubs, sports clubs, arts & theater programs, religious organizations)	5%	4%
Employers (through training or internships)	4%	3%
Not Sure	4%	8%

<b>November 2025</b>		
	School Parents	General Population
Parents/Guardians	25%	26%
Shared Responsibility Among Some or All	41%	42%
Schools	18%	18%
Community Organizations (Boys & Girls clubs, sports clubs, arts & theater programs, religious organizations)	5%	3%
Employers (through training or internships)	4%	2%
Not Sure	7%	9%

On the other hand, in the April 2026 educator survey, 38% of teachers said parents and families should be most responsible for durable skills, which is 12-13 points higher than the public’s stable 25-26% figure. Only 12% of teachers said schools should be most responsible, compared to 16-18% of the general public. Teachers, who have the most direct daily exposure to students’ durable skills development, are the group least likely to claim school ownership of the outcome.

***Who do you think should be most responsible for teaching students durable skills?***

<b>April 2026</b>	
	Teachers
Parents/Guardians	38%
Shared Responsibility Among Some or All	41%
Schools	12%
Community Organizations (Boys & Girls clubs, sports clubs, arts & theater programs, religious organizations)	4%
Employers (through training or internships)	3%
Not Sure	2%

This may reflect a genuine philosophical belief that durable skills are formed at home and reinforced at school. But part of it clearly reflects something about the system rather than about the teachers’ educational philosophy: educators who do not feel equipped or empowered to deliver durable skills systematically are not going to claim responsibility for delivering them. The grade-band pattern inside the teacher data supports this reading. K-4th grade teachers are highly likely to say parents are most responsible (41%), while high school teachers are least likely to share that opinion (33%). The closer teachers are to the labor market, and to the experiences like internships and career-connected learning that make durable skills tangible, the more they see it as a system challenge rather than a family challenge.

The policy implication is more specific than it first appears. State mandates that assign schools sole responsibility for durable skills development will land poorly on a teacher workforce that does not see durable skills development as a one-sided responsibility. But that is not the only kind of policy lever available. Mandates that ask schools to make durable skills visible, to communicate what they are already doing, and to track participation in the experiences that build these skills, are compatible with the shared-responsibility view teachers, parents, and the general public hold. This distinction matters because the first kind of mandate works against teacher perspectives, while the second equips teachers to share that responsibility with parents. And the experiences that shift teachers toward shared ownership, career-connected learning, capstone projects, and work-based learning, are the same experiences a mandate founded on visibility would surface.

The partisan dimension matters here too. The bipartisan consensus on importance does not extend to responsibility. In October and November gen pop data, Republicans were consistently 9-10 points more likely than Democrats to say families are most responsible. Among parents specifically, the gap widens to 13 points (Republicans 31%, Democrats 18%). Democrats are 3-5 points more likely to say schools are responsible. Policymakers on both sides of the aisle can agree that durable skills matter. How responsibility is framed, as a family imperative or a school imperative, is impacted greatly by political affiliation.

## Bottom Line

The data tells a coherent story:

1. Parents, teachers, and the general public all agree that schools should prioritize durable skills development. The consensus crosses party lines, income brackets, and geographies.
2. Delivery is uneven, and unequal by income, geography, and school type.
3. Teachers and the public are working from different definitions of what counts as evidence.
4. Finally, teachers, who are closest to this work, are clear that durable skills development is not a responsibility schools should carry alone.

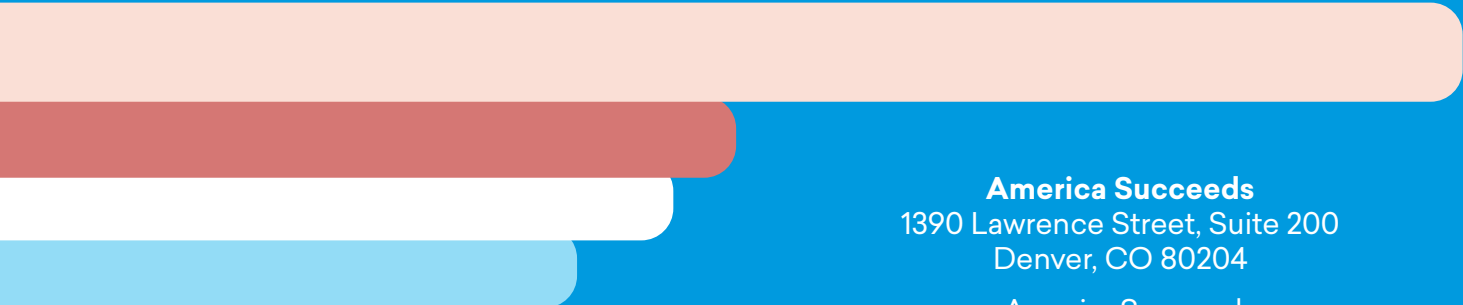
The signals gap helps explain why the delivery gap persists: parents have not been able to reliably tell whether their schools are building durable skills, and schools have not reliably communicated the work they are already doing. The responsibility gap shapes how policy lands: mandates that assign schools sole ownership will work against the teachers' perspectives on how durable skills can be effectively delivered; mandates that build visibility and shared communication will work with them. The delivery gap raises the equity stakes: the students who most need durable skills development are the ones least likely to be aware of or connected to the experiences that build them.

The data also shows an immense amount of room for improvement in how education systems communicate durable skills delivery to students and parents. Only 9 to 11% of parents and the general public say nothing would increase their confidence in students' durable skills development beyond grades, which means roughly 89% are open to better evidence. They want concrete examples of how students demonstrated the skills (48%) and opportunities to directly observe students in action (44 to 48%). That is a specification for what better signals could look like: concrete examples, direct observation, and employer-backed validation that is communicated in language that meets parents where they are rather than where the field wishes they were.

## What This Means

**For state policymakers:** The task is not to mandate that schools deliver durable skills on their own. Teachers do not see that as their sole responsibility, and policy that pretends otherwise will fight the workforce it depends on. The task is to mandate visibility: require schools to communicate what durable skills development they offer, who participates, and how students demonstrate growth. In November 2025, 81% of the general public and 83% of parents said information about a school's emphasis on durable skills would influence their school choice decisions. That is a mandate for transparency, not for sole school ownership. Build durable skills indicators into school profiles, report cards, and accountability frameworks (see [Beyond the Portrait](#)). Portrait of a Graduate implementation needs an infrastructure of communication that translates into something parents can read and act on, not abstract language about competencies, but the concrete examples and observable performance that 48% of parents say would actually improve their confidence.

**For school and district leaders:** The delivery gap is partly an awareness problem. Low-income parents are not just seeing fewer durable-skills experiences; they are six times more likely to say they do not know what their school offers. That is not just a program challenge but also a family communication challenge. Schools that are already delivering these experiences need to make them visible, specifically to the families who have the least context for recognizing them.



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