

To: Interested Parties
Fr: Lake Research Partners
Re: The PACE/USC Poll Only Shows Part of the Story
Date: June 27, 2014

In the wake of the Vergara versus California trial, this week the PACE/USC Rossier School of Education released a poll which generated headlines around parent's negative views toward teachers unions and their impact on the quality of public education. We believe that such headlines miss the full picture of attitudes toward public education in California that other questions in the poll show, which are consistent with recent research we have conducted.

We agree with the USC's poll finding that voters believe California public schools are underfunded. In the USC poll, 64 percent of voters and 70 percent of parents say "the state of California should be spending more on schools." Our research found broad agreement that "California schools are underfunded" – 68 percent of voters and 79 percent of parents agree.

But the ongoing discourse before during and after the Vergara trial decision has tried to blame teachers and further the idea that current policies keep ineffective teachers in low-performing school districts and perpetuate unequal outcomes. Our research suggests voters do not agree with this causality.

We found 82 percent of voters agreed that "blaming teachers when schools struggle may make headlines but it does nothing to help kids." Additionally, 92 percent of voters agree that "teachers should have a voice in shaping education policies because teachers are in the classroom every day and understand the real problems facing schools."

California voters overwhelmingly reject the notion that teacher quality explains the differences between high-performing and low-performing districts. By more than 2-to-1, voters believe the main reason for differences between high- and low-performing districts is the resources of the parents and the community (62 percent). Just 28 percent say the quality of teachers in the district explains the differences between high- and low-performing districts.

In contrast to the USC poll, our research shows voters favor due process protections for teachers so that they are not dismissed arbitrarily. The USC poll framed tenure as an "award" and tested two positions that equate experienced teachers with poorly performing teachers, and not surprisingly found a majority rejecting tenure. We asked if they favor or oppose providing tenure for teachers in their 3rd year of

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teaching after they have passed performance evaluations. Only 41 percent of parents oppose while a 52 majority of parents favor. But when we read the following before asking if they favor or oppose – “Teachers who have passed performance evaluations are eligible for tenure in their third year of teaching. This grants them due process protections from being dismissed arbitrarily” – we find 52 percent of voters and 59 percent of parents favoring tenure.

The backers of the Vergara case want to replace current policies with those that would hold teachers and students accountable based on standardized test scores. While our research shows a strong desire for more accountability in the public school system, it also mirrors the USC poll in showing a rejection of a reliance on standardized tests. The USC poll shows voters and parents alike rejecting Common Core because it is a one-size-fits-all approach that increases our reliance on standardized testing.

We did not test Common Core, but we found that voters and parents strongly believe that a child is “more than a test score,” and reject that standardized test scores are an effective way to measure teacher performance. When asked to compare two statements, 51 percent of voters agree that “we need to have rigorous standards that focus on teaching and learning, and judging how students learn, not standardized testing.” Just 9 percent agree that “we need to hold teachers accountable for their performance basing promotions and dismissals on their student’s test scores.” (29 percent agree with both statements).

We agree with many of the findings of the USC poll about the broader context of education, but disagree with the headlines it has spawned that perpetuate the Vergara trial narrative that teachers are responsible for the difference between high- and low-performing districts. The reality is voters believe the difference in community resources explains district differences. They believe public schools are underfunded, and want to restore the promise of public education for all communities.

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Lake Research Partners conducted an online survey of 800 registered likely California voters April 29th through May 6th, 2014. The data was weighted by age, gender, party identification, race, and media market to reflect the proportions of the electorate. The survey has a margin of error of $\pm 3.46\%$ at the 95% confidence interval.