

New Poll Finds 20% Spike In Parents' Plans To Volunteer In Classrooms.

Contributed by Harris Interactive
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This Year Amid Concerns Over Economy and Education National Back-to-School Report Finds Parents Plan to Volunteer in Schools, Reconsider Public vs. Private School, and Shop Smarter for Supplies

As families prepare to go back to school amid economic woes, a groundbreaking new study finds that parents, worried about the economy and education cutbacks, are planning to pitch in with greater volunteerism and shop smarter for school supplies.

Many are also reconsidering what type of school their kids should attend. Issued by GreatSchools, a national independent education nonprofit, and Harris Interactive, "The Economy's Impact on Back to School" report finds that nearly two in three parents (64%) believe that, because of the recession, it more important for them to volunteer in the classroom than before.

Many parents are taking the need to volunteer to heart.

A majority of parents (53%) plan to volunteer at their child's school this year versus 44% last year -- an increase of 20%.

This trend is most pronounced among African American parents, 60% of whom plan to volunteer (up from 23% who say they volunteered last year).

Despite their strong interest in volunteering, however, parents may still remain an untapped resource.

According to the report, nearly half of parents (49%) list the lack of opportunities offered by teacher or schools among the main challenges they face to being more involved in ensuring their child receive a quality education.

"As American families prepare for back-to-school season in this economic climate -- when family, school and state budgets are tighter than ever -- there is a silver lining: parents," said Bill Jackson, founder and president of GreatSchools. "With their profound ability to influence their children's academic success and contribute to their children's schools, this report shows that parents hold the potential to be the new economic stimulus package for education in America. This report is a wake-up call to parents and teachers alike to clearly communicate on ways they can work together."

The study also highlights several key findings about the level of parent confidence in education and how parents are navigating back to school in a struggling economy.

The findings include:

- Parents are concerned about school cutbacks and some are rethinking school choices -- More than three in five parents (61%) believe the quality of education will suffer because of school cutbacks. Regardless of whether their children now attend public or private school, nearly one in four parents (24%) are rethinking the type of school their children should attend going forward. This trend is most prominent among lower-income urban and suburban parents.
- Parents may not be fully prepared for the start of school -- While most parents (93%) plan to buy school supplies ahead of time, fewer than half focus on the content of their children's education and reducing distractions prior to the start of school. Only 47% of parents find out which subjects their child will be learning, 39% have their kids start reading more often, and 33% cut down on TV and video games.
- Parents are addressing economic difficulties by shopping smarter for school supplies -- With 74% of families expecting their economic situation to worsen or stay the same, a majority of parents (nearly 90%) plan to take cost-saving steps when shopping for school supplies. These steps include reusing old supplies (57%) and delaying purchases until after school starts so as to only buy what's truly needed (26%).

Inspiring Action: The Great Parents Pledge

Today's report follows the launch of The Great Parents Pledge, GreatSchools social media initiative that enlists parents to commit to greater levels of involvement in the coming school year.

The GreatSchools website also features rich content on preparing for the back-to-school season, including tips on avoiding the summer "brain drain," a shopping guide for affordable school supplies, and a back-to-school quiz to help families get off to a smart start.

Methodology

The "Economy's Impact on Back to School" survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of GreatSchools between June 16 and June 30, 2009 among 1,086 U.S. adults 18 years or older who are parents

of children ages 5-17 who will be attending a public or private elementary, middle or high school in the 2009-2010 academic year.

Results were weighted as needed for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income.

Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading.

All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates.

These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the (add appropriate representative population here: e.g., U.S. adult population).

Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate in the Harris Interactive online research panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

About GreatSchools

GreatSchools is an independent nonprofit organization that improves education by inspiring parents to be involved. Parents choose GreatSchools to connect with each other “to find the right schools, share stories and advice, and get their parenting questions answered.

Over the past 10 years, GreatSchools has empowered and inspired millions of parents to support their children's education.

In the past year alone, more than 35 million people “approximately one in three K-12 households in the U.S. - visited GreatSchools (www.greatschools.org). With hundreds of thousands of ratings and parent reviews of schools nationwide, GreatSchools is the paramount parent-to-parent education community.

A Webby Award-winning site, GreatSchools is now expanding its reach and impact with its College Bound initiative, a new program that will provide structured online and offline training, mentoring and community resources to unlock the power of parents in guiding their children's success in school and beyond.

GreatSchools is supported by numerous foundations and corporations, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Robertson Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation.

For more information, please visit <http://www.greatschools.org> .

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