

# Teachers versus the Public: What Americans Think about Schools and How to Fix Them

*Paul E. Peterson, Michael Henderson, Martin R. West*

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## TEACHERS VERSUS THE PUBLIC



WHAT AMERICANS THINK ABOUT  
SCHOOLS AND HOW TO FIX THEM



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and Martin R. West

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**Paul E. Peterson, Michael Henderson, Martin R. West : Teachers versus the Public: What Americans Think about Schools and How to Fix Them** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Teachers versus the Public: What Americans Think about Schools and How to Fix Them:

12 of 17 people found the following review helpful. provocative title, routine informationBy M. HeissThis book sets off sparks with its provocative title: Teachers Versus the Public! It's like pro wrestling, right?The reality is, teachers have views that support their own self-interest and continued employment, and the public have views that support their

own self-interest. And those self-interests are DIFFERENT. This is not shocking information, but it does explain the indignation of public school employees (teachers) at being asked to remake their work environments and performance expectations. It does explain the impatience of the public with three generations of failed school reform. The book explores the misalignment of traditional democrat voting blocs: urban minorities prefer vouchers and school choice; teachers resent the threat to their livelihoods. If those groups can not be reconciled, there may be a split in minority voting patterns. But republicans seem incapable of exploiting the division, so there is not too much danger. The book also shows what happens when industries deregulate: a flowering of innovation and a reduction in cost to the public. Many parents are withdrawing from the hassles of public schools and finding parallel methods of educating their children. It's another form of American innovation. Entrepreneurial approaches to education may slay the education bureaucracy; stay tuned. 14 of 26 people found the following review helpful. Great cover, introduction looks biased but substantive, then it all runs downhill. By Mary Porter I'm a very experienced and very appreciated high school chemistry teacher, and a member of the NEA. I very much wish for a substantive conversation between teachers like me and those who have declared themselves our sworn enemies. It's unfortunate that a major opinion tank like Brookings can't even anchor the opposing side of the argument, whatever it is. They start by declaiming that I'm all three sides of an "iron triangle", which is impeding the familiar corporate reform recipe for for a golden age of universal, personalized data-based rating for every teacher and child in every school, which will facilitate great public savings by freeing entrepreneurs from the burden of career teachers. You have to believe that with a religious fervor, to even follow the remaining development. Instead of laying out a cogent argument for their own (very radical) position, the authors just dish propaganda that flies in the face of everything we know from research about Americans' goals, values and hopes for our public schools and their teachers. Whether you share the mission of turning education into the newest profit-center bubble, or not, this book is useless. it's a mess of specious attributions of the authors own biases to an American people who don't share them. 19 of 34 people found the following review helpful. Another teacher bashing screed, FAIL! By SuperTeacher If you enjoy reading propaganda, then this is the book for you, written at the behest of the profiteers whose policies have failed America's children for over 2 decades now. People are wise to the nonsense of these people as evidenced by the low ranking of this and other books from them and their cronies. Time for them to sign a contract with an off shore click farm to pump up the lies just like they do on FB.

A comprehensive exploration of 21st Century school politics, *Teachers versus the Public* offers the first comparison of the education policy views of both teachers and the public as a whole, and reveals a deep, broad divide between the opinions held by citizens and those who teach in the public schools. Among the findings: **•** Divisions between teachers and the public are wider and deeper than differences between other groups often thought to contest school policy, such as Republicans and Democrats, the young and the old, the rich and the poor, or African Americans and whites. **•** The teacher-public gap is widest on such issues as merit pay, teacher tenure reform, impact of teacher unions, school vouchers, charter schools, and requirements to test students annually. **•** Public support for school vouchers for all students, charter schools, and parent trigger laws increases sharply when people are informed of the national ranking of student performance in their local school district. **•** Public willingness to give local schools high marks, its readiness to support higher spending levels, and its support for teacher unions all decline when the public learns the national ranking of their local schools. **•** On most issues, teacher opinion does not change in response to new information nearly as much as it does for the public as a whole. In fact, the gap between what teachers and the public think about school reform grows even wider when both teachers and the public are given more information about current school performance, current expenditure levels, and current teacher pay. The book provides the first experimental study of public and teacher opinion. Using a recently developed research strategy, the authors ask differently worded questions about the same topic to randomly chosen segments of representative groups of citizens. This approach allows them to identify the impact on public opinion of new information on issues such as student performance and school expenditures in each respondent's community. The changes in public opinion when citizens receive information about school performance are largest in districts that perform below the national average. Altogether, the results indicate that support for many school reforms would increase if common core state standards were established and implemented in such a way as to inform the public about the quality of their local schools. These and many other findings illuminate the distance between teacher opinions and those of the public at large. About the Research: In partnership with the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance and the journal, *Education Next*, authors Paul E. Peterson, Martin West and Michael Henderson surveyed nationally representative samples of teachers and the public as a whole annually between 2007 and 2013.

"Provocatively titled, *Teachers versus the Public* is an eye-opening book about the current state of education reform. While teachers tend to support the status quo, the public—especially as it becomes more informed about school performance—is increasingly looking for major changes. And major changes are what our schools will need if they are to succeed at effectively educating our children for the modern world." —Joel Klein, former chancellor, New York City Department of Education "For a generation, we have been inundated with evidence of schools across our great nation

stagnating, while those in other nations speed ahead of us.... Teachers versus the Public [shows that] common among Americans from all walks of life—conservative or liberal, rich or poor, young or old—is the recognition that for the sake of our country, and for the continuation of the American dream, our education system must improve. Yet, teachers' unions have long made it abundantly clear that their priorities are not focused on students. This in-depth report explores the minds of American teachers, their focus on educating students, and the minds of the general public, identifying the opportunities—and the challenges—for all those who seek to improve the education of the next generation."—Jeb Bush, Governor of Florida, 1999–2007, chairman, Foundation for Excellence in Education

"The immense value of Peterson, Henderson, and West's well-researched overview of our nation's attitude toward education issues is that it highlights the divide between the educators who teach in our American public schools and the general public who have a huge stake in how those schools teach our kids. Their findings underscore an urgent need for supporters of education reform to engage with teachers and work collaboratively toward our shared goal of a world-class public education system."—Michelle Rhee, former Chancellor, District of Columbia Public Schools

"This scholarly book corrects and changes the political debate. The authors reveal that it is teachers themselves—not just their union representatives—who stand opposed to school reforms a majority of the public favors. In many ways this points to a much larger problem with improving our schools."—Eric A. Hanushek, Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University

About the Author Paul E. Peterson is the Henry Lee Shattuck Professor of Government and director of the Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University. He is also editor-in-chief of *Education Next* and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. He is author or editor of numerous books, including *Endangering Prosperity, A Global View of the American School*, with Eric Hanushek and Ludger Woessmann (Brookings, 2013); *The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools*, with William G. Howell (Brookings, 2004 and 2006). He is coeditor (with Martin West) of *No Child Left Behind? The Practice and Politics of School Accountability* (Brookings, 2003).

Michael Henderson is assistant professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Mississippi. Martin R. West is associate professor of education at the Harvard Graduate Schools of Education, deputy director of the Program on Education Policy and Governance, and nonresident senior fellow with the Brown Center on Education Policy, Brookings.