



Sam Bloomberg-Rissman

## **Americans Want More Coverage of Teacher Performance and Student Achievement**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Americans want more media coverage of their local schools. In particular, they want more information than they now receive about teacher performance, student academic achievement, crime, and violence in their schools – and more as well about curricula, finances and reform efforts. While there is a great interest in receiving this information through new technological sources more so than ever before (<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1924/state-of-the-news-media-2011>), Americans however, continue to rely on traditional media, particularly newspapers, for information on their schools. There is an imperative to improve both education journalism and the ways in which schools communicate directly to parents, students, and citizens.

In an earlier report (West, Whitehurst, and Dionne, 2009), we noted several problems with the way the media system reports on education, the most basic being that there little national coverage of education. During 2009, only 1.4 percent of national news coverage from television, newspapers, news Web sites, and radio dealt with education. In our content analysis, we found this paucity of coverage was not unique to 2009. In 2008, only 0.7 percent of national news coverage involved education, while 1.0 percent did so in 2007.

Of the education news that is reported, little relates to school policies and ways to improve the curriculum or learning processes. There was hardly any coverage of school reform, teacher quality, or other matters thought to be crucial for educational attainment. Instead, most 2009 stories focused on budget problems, school crime, and the H1N1 flu outbreak. The lack of news coverage of the actual work of schools represents a significant problem for the education area.

In a follow-up paper, we reported on interviews with a number of educational and media leaders, outlined new trends in education coverage, and described how major news organizations are re-imagining their futures (West, Whitehurst, and Dionne, 2010). We examined the development of niche publications, news aggregators, social media, and new content providers, and the emergence of alternative business models for funding news organizations. We also argued that education journalism is transforming itself into a new digital form that looks and behaves differently than traditional models. Digital technologies have altered the manner in which the traditional education news industry produces and disseminates information (Melton, 2009). Through the emergence of the Internet, social media, blogs, electronic news readers, smart phones, and cell phone texting, the cost of information transmission has dropped and the vehicles for communication have expanded dramatically. New content providers have found novel ways of delivering information to students, parents, and the general public.

The new ecosystem has clear strengths, including immediacy, interactivity, and diversity. But these virtues must be linked more effectively

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73 percent wanted more information on teacher performance; 71 percent wanted more on student academic performance; 69 percent wanted more reporting on school crime or violence; 68 percent wanted more on school curricula; and 66 percent more both on school finances and school reform (66 percent).

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to the delivery of in-depth and substantive reporting. It is important to build on the strengths of new media platforms, but we also must find ways to develop high-quality coverage because it is crucial for democratic governance.

With the evolving mix of old and new media, how do Americans get information about elementary and secondary schools? How do they rate the performance of various content providers? What topics deserve additional attention? How would viewers and readers like to get information about schools in the future? And how do consumer differences in age, gender, race, income, region, and parental status affect their views about these issues?

In this report, we present the results of a national public opinion survey on education news. From December 6 to 19, 2010, we conducted telephone interviews with 1,211 adults aged 18 years or older (including an over-sample of parents) in the continental United States. We asked a series of questions about their education news consumption focusing on where respondents got their information, how they assessed media sources, and how they envisioned the future of education reporting and school communication. (See Appendix for description of survey methodology and questions.)

Respondents were clear on their priorities. Asked about the areas in which they wanted more coverage of their local schools, 73 percent wanted more information on teacher performance; 71 percent wanted more on student academic performance; 69 percent wanted more reporting on school crime or violence; 68 percent wanted more on school curricula; and 66 percent more both on school finances and school reform (66 percent). The matters about which respondents were least likely to seek more information were school athletic team performance (42 percent), and scandals or undesirable activities at their local schools (50 percent). The relatively smaller number of respondents seeking more coverage for school sports teams may not be surprising, since in many communities, athletics — particularly at the high school level — already receive substantial coverage.

The survey also asked respondents where they received education information now and how they would like to receive it the future. The most common sources of current education news were family and friends (75 percent), followed by daily newspapers (60 percent), school publications (56 percent), local television (54 percent), community groups (42 percent), national television (38 percent), Internet sites (37 percent), radio (33 percent), school specialty publications (28 percent), school Facebook or MySpace sites (14 percent), electronic newsreaders (11 percent), cellphone texts (nine percent), and blogs (nine percent). However, there were interesting age differences with young people being more likely than older people to rely on a range of Internet and electronic sources such as blogs, social media, electronic news readers, and cellphone texts.

The most highly regarded current news-providers were family and friends, with 62 percent rating that source positively. This was followed by

school publications (45 percent), daily newspapers (44 percent), local television (38 percent), community groups (32 percent), school specialty publications (28 percent), Internet sites (25 percent), national television (24 percent), radio (24 percent), school Facebook sites (12 percent), electronic news readers (nine percent), blogs (nine percent), and cellphone texts (seven percent).

Young people were more likely than older respondents to have positive assessments of electronic outlets: 35 percent of those aged 18 to 29 gave excellent or good ratings to Internet news sites, compared to 9 percent of senior citizens. There were similar magnitudes of difference when it came to school Facebook sites (21 percent of the young but only four percent of older respondents have them positive ratings), blogs (11 percent positive from young people and five percent among those 65 years or older), electronic news readers (13 percent among the young, four percent among older respondents), and cell phone texts (10 percent versus two percent). Whites (46 percent) were more likely than non-whites (38 percent) to feel that newspaper coverage was excellent or good.

There were variations in respondents' assessments of the overall quantity of the education news they received. Thirty-nine percent said they received too little information about elementary and secondary schools, 56 percent got "the right amount of information," and only two percent said there was too much information. When asked about changes over time, 22 percent felt the quantity of news had increased, 60 percent felt it had stayed about the same, 10 percent believed that it had decreased. Thirty percent considered themselves well-informed about elementary and secondary schools in the community, 47 percent moderately informed, and 22 percent said they were poorly-informed.

When given a list of suggestions for improving the information they received on education information, 82 percent said their schools should communicate more through printed newsletters; 74 percent wanted to receive more school information through the Internet; and 71 percent wanted more from email communications. A noticeably large proportion, 67 percent, said they wanted to get more information through newspaper blogs and forums. The least popular areas for an expanded flow of education information were schools communication through Facebook pages (38 percent), through cell phone texts (32 percent) and cellphone texts from newspapers (23 percent).

Younger respondents were more interested in the newer technological approaches. Among younger respondents, 76 percent were interested in seeing schools communicate through the Internet, compared with 52 percent of older respondents. There were similar findings for newspaper blogs and forums (63 percent for the young, 42 percent for older respondents; school emails (80 versus 49 percent); cellphone texts (44 versus 22 percent); school Facebook pages (51 versus 30 percent); newspaper text alerts (70 versus 42



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Education reform generated just 4.7 percent of the national stories on education.

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percent); newspaper cellphone texts (37 versus 18 percent), and newspaper blogs or forums (74 versus 56 percent). Non-whites were more interested than whites in expanded school communication through cellphone texts (42 for non-whites compared with 30 percent for whites), through Facebook (46 versus 35 percent), email alerts (65 versus 52 percent) and cellphone messages (40 versus 18 percent).

## The Changing Education News Landscape

The media have undergone dramatic changes in recent years. As the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism 2011 State of the News Media report indicates, readers are now relying more on online outlets than newspapers (<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1924/state-of-the-news-media-2011>). Traditional content — newspapers, television, and radio — have been supplemented by a remarkable range of new outlets and digital delivery systems. There are free online sites that cover costs through banner advertising, paid seminars, and job postings. Niche publications meanwhile target specialized audiences and deliver focused content to those individuals. News aggregators compile material from other sources. And non-profit sites use grants from foundations to produce and distribute education news.

Yet many of the most important topics in education receive little coverage. Our study of coverage in 2009 found scant emphasis in national news reporting on education policy, curricular issues, teacher training, or school reform. Education reform generated just 4.7 percent of the national stories on education, and there was only 3.4 percent of the coverage devoted to curricular matters, 1.6 percent for education research, 1.3 percent on technology in schools, and 0.5 percent in regard to teaching training (West, Whitehurst, and Dionne, 2009).

The lack of coverage on essential education issues is a problem for public deliberation because discussions of teacher performance, school curricula, and education reform are central to improving the performance of public schools. If parents and the general public receive little information on what is going on in the education process, it is hard for them to gauge what steps are needed to improve academic performance. People must know what is unfolding inside schools to evaluate the efficacy of reform options.

## Interest in Additional News Coverage

Our past papers have suggested that the news media were more likely to give extensive coverage to school finance, crime, or flu outbreaks than to issues related to teacher performance, student achievement, or school reform (see West, Whitehurst, and Dionne, 2009). This lack of attention to many of the topics that affect academic achievement is problematic. The survey on which

this paper is based found that there is a mismatch between what people want to know about education and what they are reading and hearing in the media.

To assess which topics would be of interest to consumers, we asked respondents whether they sought more news about any of the following school topics in their communities: school finances, school curricula, teacher performance, new instructional methods, student academic performance, school reform, school health matters, school athletic team performance, school art and music programs, school crime or violence, and scandals or undesirable activities.

Large majorities wanted more news about teacher performance (73 percent), followed by student academic performance (71 percent), school crime or violence (69 percent), school curricula (68 percent), school finances (66 percent), and school reform (66 percent). There was less interest expressed in additional news about school athletic team performance (42 percent), and scandals or undesirable activities (50 percent).

The teacher performance emphasis is noteworthy in light of recent efforts to assess the “value-added” of teachers to student achievement. The *Los Angeles Times* generated controversy when it published a searchable database in 2010 listing individual instructors by name and offering measures of their effectiveness in math and reading education (Felch, Song, and Smith, 2010). There was strenuous opposition from many teachers to making these measures public, and some questioned the methodology behind the assessments (Anderson, 2011). But the wide attention this story received demonstrated how much interest there is in the question of teacher performance among newspaper readers generally, and parents in particular.

| <b>Interest in Hearing More News About Various Topics (percent saying yes)</b>            |    |
|---|----|
| School Finances   | 66 |
| School Curricula  | 68 |
| Teacher Performance   | 73 |
| New Instructional Methods   | 66 |
| Student Academic Performance  | 71 |
| School Reform Initiatives   | 66 |
| School Health Matters   | 65 |
| School Athletic Team Performance  | 42 |
| School Art and Music Programs   | 62 |
| School Crime or Violence  | 69 |
| Scandals or Undesirable Activities  | 50 |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i> |    |

There were striking differences by age. Those aged 30 to 49 were more interested in hearing about school curricula (77 percent) than were senior

citizens (56 percent) – again, a reflection of difference between those in peak child-rearing years, and those beyond them. There were similar differences in the desire of each group to learn more about teacher performance (80 percent compared to 66 percent), student academic performance (77 versus 64 percent), school reform (72 versus 59 percent), school health (73 versus 59 percent), school art and music programs (69 versus 53 percent), and school crime or violence (75 versus 63 percent).

| <b>Interest in Hearing More News About Various Topics by Age</b> |              |              |              |                    |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
|  | <b>18-29</b> | <b>30-49</b> | <b>50-64</b> | <b>65 or older</b> |
| School Finances  | 64           | 70           | 66           | 63                 |
| School Curricula   | 68           | 77           | 65           | 56                 |
| Teacher Performance  | 72           | 80           | 71           | 66                 |
| New Instructional Methods  | 65           | 71           | 64           | 62                 |
| Student Academic Performance                                     | 71           | 77           | 69           | 64                 |
| School Reform Initiatives  | 63           | 72           | 66           | 59                 |
| School Health Matters  | 69           | 73           | 60           | 59                 |
| School Athletic Team Performance                                 | 47           | 51           | 34           | 36                 |
| School Art and Music Programs                                    | 62           | 69           | 61           | 53                 |
| School Crime or Violence   | 71           | 75           | 68           | 63                 |
| Scandals or Undesirable Activities                               | 56           | 57           | 48           | 41                 |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

The only notable gender difference – and it wasn’t that large – involved the matter of covering school art and music programs. In this area, 67 percent of women wanted more coverage, compared with 58 percent of men.

| <b>Interest in Hearing More News About Various Topics by Gender</b> |             |               |
|---|-------------|---------------|
|   | <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b> |
| School Finances   | 68          | 64            |
| School Curricula  | 66          | 69            |
| Teacher Performance   | 72          | 74            |
| New Instructional Methods   | 65          | 66            |
| Student Academic Performance  | 70          | 72            |
| School Reform Initiatives   | 66          | 66            |
| School Health Matters   | 64          | 66            |
| School Athletic Team Performance                                    | 42          | 42            |
| School Art and Music Programs                                       | 58          | 67            |
| School Crime and Violence   | 69          | 70            |
| Scandals or Undesirable Activities                                  | 52          | 49            |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

In general, there were few substantial differences along racial lines. However, non-whites (56 percent) were more likely than whites (38 percent) to be interested in more coverage of school athletic team performance. Non-whites also wanted more information on school curricula (76 versus 65 percent for whites), school health issues (74 versus 62 percent), and scandals and undesirable activities (58 versus 48 percent).

| <b>Interest in Hearing More News About Various Topics by Race</b>                         |               |                   |
|---|---------------|-------------------|
|   | <b>Whites</b> | <b>Non-Whites</b> |
| School Finances   | 67            | 64                |
| School Curricula  | 65            | 76                |
| Teacher Performance   | 71            | 78                |
| New Instructional Methods   | 65            | 68                |
| Student Academic Performance  | 70            | 76                |
| School Reform Initiatives   | 65            | 69                |
| School Health Matters   | 62            | 74                |
| School Athletic Team Performance  | 38            | 56                |
| School Art and Music Programs   | 61            | 67                |
| School Crime and Violence   | 68            | 74                |
| Scandals or Undesirable Activities  | 48            | 58                |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i> |               |                   |

There were systematic differences in news coverage preferences by parental status. Parents were more eager than non-parents for information about every topic on the list.

| <b>Interest in Hearing More News About Various Topics by Parental Status</b>              |                    |                |
|---|--------------------|----------------|
|   | <b>Non-Parents</b> | <b>Parents</b> |
| School Finances   | 64                 | 76             |
| School Curricula  | 65                 | 80             |
| Teacher Performance   | 71                 | 82             |
| New Instructional Methods   | 64                 | 74             |
| Student Academic Performance  | 69                 | 80             |
| School Reform Initiatives   | 64                 | 77             |
| School Health Matters   | 64                 | 71             |
| School Athletic Team Performance  | 41                 | 46             |
| School Art and Music Programs   | 61                 | 67             |
| School Crime and Violence   | 68                 | 78             |
| Scandals or Undesirable Activities  | 48                 | 60             |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i> |                    |                |



There were few differences by region. Respondents in the Northeast were more interested in hearing news about student academic performance (76 percent) than those from the Midwest (68 percent), West (70 percent), or South (71 percent). They also want to learn more about school art and music programs (68 percent) compared to those in the South (59 percent), Midwest (60 percent), or West (65 percent).

| <b>Interest in Hearing More News About Various Topics by Region</b> |                  |                |              |             |
|---|------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
|   | <b>Northeast</b> | <b>Midwest</b> | <b>South</b> | <b>West</b> |
| School Finances   | 70               | 65             | 64           | 68          |
| School Curricula  | 67               | 66             | 66           | 72          |
| Teacher Performance   | 78               | 73             | 71           | 72          |
| New Instructional Methods   | 66               | 61             | 67           | 69          |
| Student Academic Performance  | 76               | 68             | 71           | 70          |
| School Reform Initiatives   | 66               | 61             | 66           | 70          |
| School Health Matters   | 66               | 61             | 67           | 67          |
| School Athletic Team Performance                                    | 40               | 42             | 42           | 43          |
| School Art and Music Programs                                       | 68               | 60             | 59           | 65          |
| School Crime or Violence  | 72               | 72             | 67           | 69          |
| Scandals or Undesirable Activities                                  | 51               | 52             | 52           | 46          |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

High income earners (77 percent) were more interested than low earners (64 percent) in hearing more about student academic performance. They also wanted to learn more about school reform (74 percent versus 56 percent). However, those making under \$20,000 indicated they wanted to hear more about school athletic team performance (53 percent) than high income individuals (35 percent).

| <b>Interest in Hearing More News About Various Topics by Income</b> |                  |               |               |               |                |                       |
|---|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------|
|   | <b>Under 20K</b> | <b>20-35K</b> | <b>35-50K</b> | <b>50-75K</b> | <b>75-100K</b> | <b>More than 100K</b> |
| School Finances   | 62               | 66            | 64            | 68            | 68             | 75                    |
| School Curricula  | 65               | 67            | 66            | 72            | 72             | 73                    |
| Teacher Performance   | 70               | 76            | 73            | 76            | 74             | 77                    |
| New Instructional Methods   | 65               | 68            | 63            | 72            | 68             | 71                    |
| Student Academic Performance  | 64               | 74            | 66            | 76            | 76             | 77                    |

| <b>Interest in Hearing More News About Various Topics by Income<br/>(Continued)</b> |                      |               |               |               |                     |                           |
|---|----------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
|   | <b>Under<br/>20K</b> | <b>20-35K</b> | <b>35-50K</b> | <b>50-75K</b> | <b>75-<br/>100K</b> | <b>More<br/>than 100K</b> |
| School Reform Initiatives   | 56                   | 70            | 64            | 68            | 70                  | 74                        |
| School Health Matters   | 67                   | 76            | 64            | 64            | 67                  | 64                        |
| School Athletic Team Performance  | 53                   | 53            | 44            | 38            | 49                  | 35                        |
| School Art and Music Programs   | 66                   | 66            | 60            | 63            | 64                  | 66                        |
| School Crime or Violence  | 70                   | 77            | 69            | 75            | 70                  | 71                        |
| Scandals or Undesirable Activities  | 56                   | 51            | 52            | 60            | 43                  | 49                        |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

## Sources of Elementary and Secondary Education News

To get a sense of current consumption patterns, we offered respondents in our national survey a list of information sources such as a daily newspaper, radio, local television, national television, Internet sites, blogs, school publications, school Facebook or MySpace sites, specialty education publications, electronic newsreaders, cellphone texts, family and friends, or community groups. We asked them how much information about elementary and secondary schools in their community they got from each source: a great deal, some, not much, or none at all.

The most common sources of education news were family and friends (from whom 75 percent said they received “a great deal” or “some” of this information), followed by daily newspapers (60 percent), school publications (56 percent), local television (54 percent), community groups (42 percent), national television (38 percent), Internet sites (37 percent), radio (33 percent), school specialty publications (28 percent), school Facebook or MySpace sites (14 percent), electronic newsreaders (11 percent), cellphone texts (nine percent), and blogs (nine percent).

| <b>Overall Sources of Information about Elementary and Secondary News</b>                 |                     |             |                 |                   |                              |
|---|---------------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
|   | <b>A Great Deal</b> | <b>Some</b> | <b>Not Much</b> | <b>Not at All</b> | <b>Don't Know/ No Answer</b> |
| Daily Newspaper   | 20                  | 40          | 11              | 28                | 1                            |
| Radio   | 5                   | 28          | 15              | 50                | 2                            |
| Local TV  | 15                  | 39          | 16              | 28                | 2                            |
| National TV   | 10                  | 28          | 15              | 46                | 1                            |
| Internet Sites  | 12                  | 25          | 10              | 52                | 1                            |
| Blogs   | 2                   | 7           | 6               | 80                | 5                            |
| School Publications   | 24                  | 32          | 7               | 35                | 2                            |
| School Facebook Site  | 6                   | 8           | 5               | 78                | 3                            |
| Specialty Publications  | 7                   | 21          | 11              | 59                | 2                            |
| Electronic News Reader  | 3                   | 8           | 6               | 79                | 4                            |
| Cellphone Texts   | 3                   | 6           | 5               | 84                | 2                            |
| Family/Friends  | 36                  | 39          | 8               | 16                | 1                            |
| Community Groups  | 10                  | 32          | 14              | 42                | 2                            |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i> |                     |             |                 |                   |                              |

It is apparent that in an era of new outlets, traditional media remain alive as information sources.

It is apparent that in an era of new outlets, traditional media remain alive as information sources. The most frequently cited sources for Americans on educational issues are old standbys: family and friends, daily newspapers, school publications, and local television. But except for information provided by schools themselves, the daily newspaper remains the single most important source of education news. This suggests, as we argued in our earlier reports, that the most traditional forms of media still have an important obligation to focus on issues and problems surrounding education.

It was especially striking that for all of the changes in media consumption, younger Americans still relied on newspapers for education news. While respondents 65 years or older were more likely than younger people to rely on daily newspapers — 69 percent of senior citizens said they received information on education from a daily newspaper — it was still the case that 53 percent of those aged 30 to 49 years and 60 percent of those aged 18 to 29 also relied on newspapers. The fact that those under 30 were even more likely than the middle-aged to rely on newspapers for education news suggests that expanding education coverage might be a useful strategy for newspapers trying to shore up their readership among the young.

Still, there were clear signs of generational change in media usage. Younger people were significantly more likely than older respondents to rely on a range of Internet and electronic sources such as blogs, social media, electronic news readers, and cellphone texts. Thirteen percent of young adults aged 18 to 29 said they got a great deal or some information about schools from blogs, compared to five percent of senior citizens. Young people also were more likely than older individuals to rely on a school Facebook or MySpace site (26 percent of younger respondents versus five percent of older respondents), electronic news readers (18 percent versus 11 percent), and cellphone texts (13 percent versus four percent). The digital revolution is emerging, but the new media are still well behind the older media as sources of education information.

| <b>Those Saying They Get Great Deal or Some Information about Elementary and Secondary News by Age</b> |              |              |              |                    |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
|  | <b>18-29</b> | <b>30-49</b> | <b>50-64</b> | <b>65 or older</b> |
| Daily Newspaper  | 60           | 53           | 60           | 69                 |
| Radio  | 33           | 34           | 34           | 32                 |
| Local TV   | 55           | 54           | 54           | 55                 |
| National TV  | 47           | 33           | 39           | 44                 |
| Internet Sites   | 48           | 44           | 36           | 19                 |
| Blogs  | 13           | 12           | 9            | 5                  |
| School Publications  | 54           | 69           | 53           | 38                 |
| School Facebook Site   | 26           | 19           | 9            | 5                  |
| Electronic News Reader   | 18           | 12           | 8            | 11                 |
| Family/Friends   | 76           | 81           | 75           | 68                 |
| Community Groups   | 37           | 43           | 40           | 43                 |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

There were few differences in old or new media information sources based on gender. Nearly all the differences were marginal and insignificant. The largest gender gap came on the use of specialty education publications. Women were more likely (31 percent) to say they relied on them than men (24 percent).

| <b>Those Saying They Get Great Deal or Some Information about Elementary and Secondary News by Gender</b> |             |               |
|---|-------------|---------------|
|   | <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b> |
| Daily Newspaper   | 59          | 60            |
| Radio   | 35          | 32            |
| Local TV  | 55          | 53            |

| <b>Those Saying They Get Great Deal or Some Information about Elementary and Secondary News by Gender (Continued)</b> |             |               |
|---|-------------|---------------|
|   | <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b> |
| National TV   | 38          | 39            |
| Internet Sites  | 37          | 36            |
| Blogs   | 10          | 9             |
| School Publications   | 53          | 58            |
| School Facebook Site  | 12          | 15            |
| Specialty Publications  | 24          | 31            |
| Electronic News Reader  | 13          | 10            |
| Cellphone Texts   | 7           | 9             |
| Family/Friends  | 75          | 75            |
| Community Groups  | 40          | 43            |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i>                             |             |               |

Non-whites were more likely to rely on a range of new media sources. Forty-three percent said they got information from Internet sites, compared to 34 percent for whites. Seventeen percent read information on blogs, higher than the seven percent of whites who got blog news. And 17 percent of non-whites said they used electronic news reader, more than the nine percent of whites.

| <b>Those Saying They Get Great Deal or Some Information about Elementary and Secondary News by Race</b> |               |                   |
|---|---------------|-------------------|
|   | <b>Whites</b> | <b>Non-Whites</b> |
| Daily Newspaper   | 63            | 50                |
| Radio   | 33            | 32                |
| Local TV  | 53            | 57                |
| National TV   | 35            | 49                |
| Internet Sites  | 34            | 43                |
| Blogs   | 7             | 17                |
| School Publications   | 56            | 55                |
| School Facebook Site  | 11            | 20                |
| Specialty Publications  | 26            | 32                |
| Electronic News Reader  | 9             | 17                |
| Cellphone Texts   | 7             | 13                |
| Family/Friends  | 76            | 73                |
| Community Groups  | 41            | 43                |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i>               |               |                   |



Not surprisingly, parents of children 18 years or younger were more likely to rely on school publications (72 percent) than non parents (52 percent). Parents also relied more on family and friends (83 percent versus 74 percent for non-parents). There were few other differences between parents and non-parents in education news consumption patterns. Again, it is striking how much parents, who have more access to school publications than non-parents, still rely on newspapers.

| <b>Those Saying They Get Great Deal or Some Information about Elementary and Secondary News by Parental Status</b> |                    |                |
|--|--------------------|----------------|
|  | <b>Non-Parents</b> | <b>Parents</b> |
| Daily Newspaper  | 60                 | 60             |
| Radio  | 33                 | 34             |
| Local TV   | 54                 | 54             |
| National TV  | 38                 | 39             |
| Internet Sites   | 35                 | 43             |
| Blogs  | 10                 | 9              |
| School Publications  | 52                 | 72             |
| School Facebook Site   | 13                 | 17             |
| Specialty Publications   | 27                 | 29             |
| Electronic News Reader   | 10                 | 14             |
| Cellphone Texts  | 7                  | 13             |
| Family/Friends   | 74                 | 83             |
| Community Groups   | 41                 | 45             |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i>                          |                    |                |

There were some differences by region. Those living in the Northeast (70 percent) were the most likely to get information from a daily newspaper, compared to those in the West (54 percent), South (58 percent), or Midwest (60 percent). Northeasterners (43 percent) were more likely than those in the Midwest (31 percent) to rely on Internet news sites. Those residing in the Midwest (68 percent) were more likely than those in the South (48 percent) to say they got information from school publications such as newsletters.

| <b>Those Saying They Get Great Deal or Some Information about Elementary and Secondary News by Region</b> |                  |                |              |             |
|---|------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
|   | <b>Northeast</b> | <b>Midwest</b> | <b>South</b> | <b>West</b> |
| Daily Newspaper   | 70               | 60             | 58           | 54          |
| Radio   | 34               | 33             | 35           | 31          |
| Local TV  | 58               | 52             | 58           | 47          |
| National TV   | 40               | 34             | 42           | 36          |

The fact that middle-and-higher income people rely significantly more on family and friends for education news suggests that networks around education issues may be stronger among middle and upper income Americans.

| <b>Those Saying They Get Great Deal or Some Information about Elementary and Secondary News by Region (Continued)</b> |                  |                |              |             |
|---|------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
|   | <b>Northeast</b> | <b>Midwest</b> | <b>South</b> | <b>West</b> |
| Internet Sites  | 43               | 31             | 38           | 34          |
| Blogs   | 9                | 8              | 10           | 11          |
| School Publications   | 61               | 68             | 48           | 52          |
| School Facebook Site  | 12               | 12             | 14           | 15          |
| Specialty Publications  | 30               | 28             | 26           | 27          |
| Electronic News Reader  | 13               | 9              | 12           | 10          |
| Cellphone Texts   | 11               | 8              | 8            | 7           |
| Family/Friends  | 76               | 73             | 78           | 72          |
| Community Groups  | 47               | 38             | 41           | 41          |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

Individuals earning over \$100,000 (61 percent) were more likely than those making under \$20,000 (47 percent) to get information from a daily newspaper. High earners also were more likely (51 percent) to receive school information from the Internet than low earners (30 percent). People making over \$100,000 were more likely to get information from school publications (61 percent) and family and friends (85 percent), compared to the poor (46 percent for school publications and 67 percent from family and friends). The fact that middle-and-higher income people rely significantly more on family and friends for education news suggests that networks around education issues may be stronger among middle and upper income Americans, and perhaps also that the subject of education is more central to the conversations of middle class and upper class Americans.

| <b>Those Saying They Get Great Deal or Some Information about Elementary and Secondary News by Income</b> |                  |               |               |               |                |                       |
|---|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------|
|   | <b>Under 20K</b> | <b>20-35K</b> | <b>35-50K</b> | <b>50-75K</b> | <b>75-100K</b> | <b>More than 100K</b> |
| Daily Newspaper   | 47               | 60            | 66            | 65            | 59             | 61                    |
| Radio   | 38               | 39            | 33            | 38            | 28             | 35                    |
| Local TV  | 59               | 53            | 63            | 59            | 52             | 47                    |
| National TV   | 45               | 43            | 44            | 37            | 37             | 31                    |
| Internet Sites  | 30               | 30            | 31            | 40            | 40             | 51                    |
| Blogs   | 13               | 12            | 8             | 9             | 10             | 8                     |
| School Publications   | 46               | 50            | 60            | 63            | 57             | 61                    |
| School Facebook Site  | 19               | 17            | 16            | 11            | 15             | 8                     |

| <b>Those Saying They Get Great Deal or Some Information about Elementary and Secondary News by Income (Continued)</b> |                  |               |               |               |                |                       |
|---|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------|
|   | <b>Under 20K</b> | <b>20-35K</b> | <b>35-50K</b> | <b>50-75K</b> | <b>75-100K</b> | <b>More than 100K</b> |
| Specialty Publications  | 32               | 26            | 32            | 29            | 24             | 22                    |
| Electronic News Reader  | 14               | 14            | 11            | 8             | 13             | 10                    |
| Cellphone Texts   | 10               | 11            | 10            | 9             | 8              | 5                     |
| Family/Friends  | 67               | 72            | 80            | 78            | 80             | 85                    |
| Community Groups  | 34               | 44            | 48            | 44            | 42             | 42                    |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

### **Assessment of Education News Sources**

An important component of the media ecosystem is how readers and viewers feel about the job being done by various news sources. We asked respondents to rate how well various information sources performed in providing news about elementary and secondary schools. The survey asked them to rate daily newspapers, radio, local television, national television, Internet sites, blogs, school publications, school Facebook or MySpace sites, specialty education publications, electronic newsreaders, cellphone texts, family and friends, and community groups.

The most highly ranked news-providers were family and friends (62 percent rated these “excellent” or “good”), school publications (45 percent “excellent” or “good”), daily newspapers (44 percent), local television (38 percent), community groups (32 percent), school specialty publications (28 percent), Internet sites (25 percent), national television (24 percent), radio (24 percent), school Facebook sites (12 percent), electronic news readers (nine percent), blogs (nine percent), and cellphone texts (seven percent).

| <b>Assessment of Information about Elementary and Secondary News</b> |                  |             |                  |             |                              |
|--|------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|------------------------------|
|  | <b>Excellent</b> | <b>Good</b> | <b>Only Fair</b> | <b>Poor</b> | <b>Don't Know/ No Answer</b> |
| Daily Newspaper  | 10               | 34          | 28               | 13          | 15                           |
| Radio  | 4                | 20          | 27               | 24          | 25                           |
| Local TV   | 8                | 30          | 30               | 18          | 14                           |
| National TV  | 4                | 20          | 28               | 27          | 21                           |
| Internet Sites   | 5                | 20          | 19               | 18          | 38                           |
| Blogs  | 2                | 7           | 9                | 24          | 58                           |

| <b>Assessment of Information about Elementary and Secondary News<br/>(Continued)</b>      |                  |             |                      |             |                                  |
|---|------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|
|   | <b>Excellent</b> | <b>Good</b> | <b>Only<br/>Fair</b> | <b>Poor</b> | <b>Don't Know/<br/>No Answer</b> |
| School Publications   | 16               | 29          | 20                   | 13          | 22                               |
| School Facebook Site  | 4                | 8           | 10                   | 21          | 57                               |
| Specialty Publications  | 6                | 22          | 18                   | 15          | 39                               |
| Electronic News Reader  | 2                | 7           | 9                    | 22          | 60                               |
| Cellphone Texts   | 3                | 4           | 7                    | 29          | 57                               |
| Family/Friends  | 20               | 43          | 21                   | 8           | 8                                |
| Community Groups  | 6                | 26          | 26                   | 17          | 25                               |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i> |                  |             |                      |             |                                  |

There were few differences in ratings of conventional sources, such as newspapers, radio, and television. But young people were more likely than older people to have positive assessments of electronic outlets. For example, 35 percent of those aged 18 to 29 gave excellent or good ratings to Internet news sites, compared to nine percent of those 65 and over). There were similar magnitudes of differences for Facebook sites (21 percent by the young versus four percent of older respondents), blogs (11 percent of young people and five percent among those 65 years or older), electronic news readers (13 percent versus four percent), and cellphone texts (10 percent versus two percent). Clearly young people are far more likely to use the newer technologies than older Americans, who are also less likely to have the immediate need for education news that students have.

| <b>Those Rating Education Coverage Excellent or Good by Age</b>                           |              |              |              |                    |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
|   | <b>18-29</b> | <b>30-49</b> | <b>50-64</b> | <b>65 or older</b> |
| Daily Newspaper   | 43           | 40           | 45           | 48                 |
| Radio   | 26           | 27           | 23           | 23                 |
| Local TV  | 34           | 39           | 39           | 37                 |
| National TV   | 27           | 24           | 21           | 26                 |
| Internet Sites  | 35           | 34           | 22           | 9                  |
| Blogs   | 11           | 13           | 6            | 5                  |
| School Publications   | 46           | 56           | 43           | 30                 |
| School Facebook Site  | 21           | 17           | 8            | 4                  |
| Specialty Publications  | 33           | 31           | 29           | 22                 |
| Electronic News Reader  | 13           | 12           | 6            | 4                  |
| Cellphone Texts   | 10           | 12           | 4            | 2                  |
| Family/Friends  | 62           | 70           | 63           | 49                 |
| Community Groups  | 27           | 36           | 29           | 33                 |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i> |              |              |              |                    |

There were few differences by gender, although women gave slightly higher ratings to school publications and information from community groups than did men.

| <b>Those Rating Education Coverage Excellent or Good by Gender</b> |             |               |
|--|-------------|---------------|
|  | <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b> |
| Daily Newspaper  | 43          | 44            |
| Radio  | 25          | 25            |
| Local TV   | 38          | 38            |
| National TV  | 23          | 25            |
| Internet Sites   | 24          | 26            |
| Blogs  | 9           | 9             |
| School Publications  | 41          | 50            |
| School Facebook Site   | 10          | 14            |
| Specialty Publications   | 27          | 29            |
| Electronic News Reader   | 10          | 7             |
| Cellphone Texts  | 6           | 8             |
| Family/Friends   | 62          | 62            |
| Community Groups   | 29          | 35            |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

Whites (46 percent) were more likely than non-whites (38 percent) to feel that newspaper coverage was excellent or good. However, non-whites (29 percent) were slightly more predisposed to feeling national television networks were doing a good job compared to whites (22 percent).

| <b>Those Rating Education Coverage Excellent or Good by Race</b> |               |                   |
|--|---------------|-------------------|
|  | <b>Whites</b> | <b>Non-Whites</b> |
| Daily Newspaper  | 46            | 38                |
| Radio  | 25            | 23                |
| Local TV   | 38            | 38                |
| National TV  | 22            | 29                |
| Internet Sites   | 24            | 29                |
| Blogs  | 8             | 12                |
| School Publications  | 48            | 40                |
| School Facebook Site   | 11            | 16                |
| Specialty Publications   | 28            | 31                |
| Electronic News Reader   | 6             | 15                |
| Cellphone Texts  | 6             | 11                |
| Family/Friends   | 62            | 65                |
| Community Groups   | 33            | 30                |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*



Parents (58 percent) were more likely than non-parents (43 percent) to say the coverage of school publications was excellent or good. They were also more likely to feel that way about information derived from family and friends (73 versus 60 percent). These results make sense, since parents have more access to school publications, and are more likely to discuss the schools with their friends and family members.

| <b>Those Rating Education Coverage Excellent or Good by Parental Status</b> |                    |                |
|---|--------------------|----------------|
|   | <b>Non-Parents</b> | <b>Parents</b> |
| Daily Newspaper   | 44                 | 42             |
| Radio   | 25                 | 24             |
| Local TV  | 37                 | 41             |
| National TV   | 24                 | 24             |
| Internet Sites  | 24                 | 29             |
| Blogs   | 9                  | 9              |
| School Publications   | 43                 | 58             |
| School Facebook Site  | 11                 | 13             |
| Specialty Publications  | 27                 | 35             |
| Electronic News Reader  | 7                  | 13             |
| Cellphone Texts   | 6                  | 11             |
| Family/Friends  | 60                 | 73             |
| Community Groups  | 31                 | 36             |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

There were some differences based on region. Those in the South (43 percent) and Midwest (41 percent) were more likely than those in the Northeast (31 percent) and West (32 percent) to rate education coverage by local television positively. Those in the Midwest also were more likely to rate school publications positively (58 percent excellent or good) compared to those in the Northeast (46 percent), West (41 percent), or South (40 percent). It's impossible to know from these findings whether these judgments reflect the quality of the information available, or are simply differences in subjective responses to similar sources of information.

| <b>Those Rating Education Coverage Excellent or Good by Region</b> |                  |                |              |             |
|--|------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
|  | <b>Northeast</b> | <b>Midwest</b> | <b>South</b> | <b>West</b> |
| Daily Newspaper  | 48               | 43             | 44           | 39          |
| Radio  | 22               | 28             | 27           | 20          |
| Local TV   | 31               | 41             | 43           | 32          |
| National TV  | 23               | 23             | 26           | 23          |
| Internet Sites   | 23               | 24             | 28           | 24          |

| <b>Those Rating Education Coverage Excellent or Good by Region (Continued)</b> |                  |                |              |             |
|--|------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
|  | <b>Northeast</b> | <b>Midwest</b> | <b>South</b> | <b>West</b> |
| Blogs  | 7                | 8              | 9            | 11          |
| School Publications  | 46               | 58             | 40           | 41          |
| School Facebook Site   | 10               | 14             | 13           | 10          |
| Specialty Publications   | 28               | 32             | 26           | 29          |
| Electronic News Reader   | 7                | 7              | 9            | 10          |
| Cellphone Texts  | 7                | 9              | 7            | 6           |
| Family/Friends   | 60               | 64             | 63           | 62          |
| Community Groups   | 32               | 33             | 33           | 30          |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

Low wage earners were more likely (33 percent) to rate national television coverage positively than high earners (17 percent). In contrast, those with high incomes (69 percent) were more likely to rate information from family and friends favorably than those earning low incomes (51 percent).

| <b>Those Rating Education Coverage Excellent or Good by Income</b> |                  |               |               |               |                |                       |
|--|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------|
|  | <b>Under 20K</b> | <b>20-35K</b> | <b>35-50K</b> | <b>50-75K</b> | <b>75-100K</b> | <b>More than 100K</b> |
| Daily Newspaper  | 44               | 43            | 44            | 40            | 45             | 43                    |
| Radio  | 27               | 29            | 26            | 28            | 21             | 22                    |
| Local TV   | 36               | 41            | 43            | 39            | 38             | 33                    |
| National TV  | 33               | 28            | 25            | 22            | 23             | 17                    |
| Internet Sites   | 27               | 23            | 24            | 19            | 30             | 31                    |
| Blogs  | 8                | 8             | 9             | 8             | 7              | 9                     |
| School Publications  | 39               | 40            | 47            | 45            | 50             | 48                    |
| School Facebook Site   | 22               | 15            | 9             | 11            | 14             | 8                     |
| Specialty Publications   | 30               | 30            | 31            | 25            | 31             | 23                    |
| Electronic News Reader   | 15               | 14            | 8             | 7             | 8              | 4                     |
| Cellphone Texts  | 9                | 11            | 10            | 7             | 7              | 5                     |
| Family/Friends   | 51               | 62            | 64            | 58            | 72             | 69                    |
| Community Groups   | 30               | 35            | 36            | 32            | 34             | 31                    |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

## Assessment of Education News Content

We have also noted problems with the both quantity and quality of education news coverage, some of them related to the well-documented problems of the news industry. There is, as well, the question of how well informed citizens are – and feel they are – about policy matters (McChesney and Nichols, 2010).

By way of exploring these questions, the survey asked respondents to evaluate news coverage of schools in their communities. Respondents were asked if they felt they received “too little,” “just about the right amount”, or “too much” information about their schools. Overall, 39 percent said they received too little information about elementary and secondary schools and 56 percent indicated “just about the right amount of information.” Only two percent said there was “too much” information.

Although our earlier studies discussed a decline in the quantity of education news, only ten percent in the survey felt that coverage of education had decreased; 22 percent felt the coverage of education news had increased, while 60 percent felt it had stayed about the same.

To gauge information levels, the survey asked if respondents considered themselves well-informed, moderately informed, or poorly-informed about their schools. Thirty percent called themselves well-informed, 47 percent moderately informed and 22 percent indicated they were poorly-informed about elementary and secondary schools in their community.

There were some age differences in how people assessed their education news. Those aged 30 to 49 were most likely to consider themselves well-informed about their schools (36 percent), higher than 18 to 29 years olds (20 percent feeling well-informed), senior citizens (24 percent), or those between 50 and 64 years old (29 percent). This finding makes sense, since 30 to 49 year olds are typically in the middle of their child-rearing years and are likely to make more of an effort to stay current with news about the schools.

| <b>Assessment of Education News by Age</b>          |              |              |              |                    |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
|   | <b>18-29</b> | <b>30-49</b> | <b>50-64</b> | <b>65 or older</b> |
| Feel You Receive Too Little Information             | 45           | 40           | 37           | 38                 |
| Feel Quantity of School News Decreased in Last Year | 10           | 11           | 8            | 12                 |
| Consider Self Well-Informed About Schools           | 20           | 36           | 29           | 24                 |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

There were no noteworthy gender differences in how people assessed their education news, either in terms of information level, quantity changes over time, or perception of feeling well-informed.

| <b>Assessment of Education News by Gender</b>       |             |               |
|---|-------------|---------------|
|   | <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b> |
| Feel You Receive Too Little Information             | 38          | 40            |
| Feel Quantity of School News Decreased in Last Year | 11          | 9             |
| Consider Self Well-Informed About Schools           | 30          | 30            |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

A higher percentage of non-whites (47 percent) said they felt they received too little information about their schools, compared to whites (36 percent). But there were no substantial racial differences in views that school news had decreased over the last year or in self-assessments about information levels.

| <b>Assessment of Education News by Race</b>         |               |                   |
|---|---------------|-------------------|
|   | <b>Whites</b> | <b>Non-Whites</b> |
| Feel You Receive Too Little Information             | 36            | 47                |
| Feel Quantity of School News Decreased in Last Year | 9             | 13                |
| Consider Self Well-Informed About Schools           | 31            | 27                |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

Parents (35 percent) were a bit more likely than non-parents (28 percent) to say they felt well-informed, but parents and non-parents offered similar assessments of the availability of education news and information.

| <b>Assessment of Education News by Parental Status</b> |                   |               |
|--|-------------------|---------------|
|  | <b>Non-Parent</b> | <b>Parent</b> |
| Feel You Receive Too Little Information                | 39                | 39            |
| Feel Quantity of School News Decreased in Last Year    | 10                | 11            |
| Consider Self Well-Informed About Schools              | 28                | 35            |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

There were no significant regional differences in views about level of information, news quantity, or in self-assessments of information levels.

| <b>Assessment of Education News by Region</b>       |                  |                |              |             |
|---|------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
|   | <b>Northeast</b> | <b>Midwest</b> | <b>South</b> | <b>West</b> |
| Feel You Receive Too Little Information             | 40               | 38             | 38           | 41          |
| Feel Quantity of School News Decreased in Last Year | 11               | 9              | 10           | 11          |
| Consider Self Well-Informed About Schools           | 28               | 30             | 30           | 30          |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

Poor people (52 percent) were those most likely to feel they received too little information about elementary and secondary schools, compared with those earning over \$100,000 (34 percent) or \$75,000 to \$100,000 (35 percent). High earners (37 percent) were more likely to consider themselves well-informed about schools, compared to those making less than \$20,000 (19 percent). This suggests that the schools themselves may need to engage in greater outreach to the parents of poor children, since our other findings suggest they may also have fewer informal networks through family and friends.

| <b>Assessment of Education News by Income</b>   |              |               |               |               |                |                     |
|---|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------|
|   | <b>0-20K</b> | <b>20-35K</b> | <b>35-50K</b> | <b>50-75K</b> | <b>75-100K</b> | <b>100K or More</b> |
| Feel You Receive Too Little Information   | 52           | 48            | 37            | 38            | 35             | 34                  |
| Feel Quantity of School News Decreased in Last Year                                       | 16           | 11            | 10            | 8             | 10             | 9                   |
| Consider Self Well-Informed About Schools   | 19           | 23            | 35            | 27            | 33             | 37                  |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i> |              |               |               |               |                |                     |

## **Assessment of Schools in their Own Communities**

The survey also probed how respondents felt about the elementary and secondary schools in their own communities. Overall, 31 percent said they were very satisfied, 36 percent were somewhat satisfied, 12 percent were somewhat dissatisfied, and 10 percent declared themselves very dissatisfied. Combining the “very” and “somewhat” satisfied responses found two-thirds of respondents satisfied with their elementary and secondary schools.

Women (64 percent) were a bit less likely than men (71 percent) to say they were very or somewhat satisfied with their schools. Parents (74 percent) were more likely than non-parents (66 percent) to say they were very or somewhat satisfied with their schools. There were rather sharp regional differences in satisfaction levels. Midwestern respondents (72 percent) expressed the highest satisfaction, followed by those in the South (70 percent), Northeast (68 percent), and West (58 percent). Those earning the least (71 percent) displayed similar levels of satisfaction compared to those making the most (72 percent). Non-whites (70 percent) had similar levels of satisfaction as whites (67 percent).

In comparing these views to other published survey data, we found related results. Education Next and the Harvard University Program on Education Policy and Governance undertook a 2009 survey asking a national



sample to rate the public schools in the nation as a whole (which is slightly different from our question asking people to rate the elementary and secondary schools in their local community). Eighteen percent gave the public schools a grade of A or B, 57 percent rated them a C, and 25 percent felt they were performing at the level of a D or F (Howell, Peterson, and West, 2009).

A 2007 Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of parents found that 59 percent indicated they were very satisfied with the school their child attended this year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). This level is higher than what we found, but probably reflects the focus on parents as opposed to Americans as a whole and the fact that the question wording focused on the school their child attended as opposed to all the schools in their local community.

### Suggestions for Better Education News Coverage

Respondents were offered a variety of suggestions on how to improve the information they received on the schools. These included having schools communicate with more through printed newsletters and publications, the Internet, blogs or forums, email, cellphone texts, or Facebook sites and having newspapers email news alerts about schools, send cellphone texts, or set up blogs or forums.

The most popular suggestion involved schools communicating through printed newsletters (82 percent), followed by schools communicating through the Internet (74 percent) and email (71 percent). Also popular was the idea of newspapers setting up blogs or forums (67 percent). This may be especially significant in light of the findings of our earlier reports that some of the best local coverage of education was not being carried out on blogs. The least popular ideas were newspapers sending cellphone texts (23 percent), schools communicating through cellphone texts (32 percent), and schools communicating through Facebook pages (38 percent).

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The most popular suggestion involved schools communicating through printed newsletters (82 percent), followed by schools communicating through the Internet (74 percent) and email (71 percent).

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| <b>Suggestions for Improving Education News (percent favoring)</b>                        |    |
|---|----|
| Schools Communicate thru Printed Newsletters  | 82 |
| Schools Communicate thru Internet   | 74 |
| Schools Communicate thru Blogs or Forums  | 57 |
| Schools Communicate thru Email  | 71 |
| Schools Communicate thru Cellphone Texts  | 32 |
| Schools Communicate thru Facebook   | 38 |
| Newspapers Email News Alerts about Schools  | 55 |
| Newspapers Send Cellphone Texts   | 23 |
| Newspapers Set Up Blogs or Forums   | 67 |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i> |    |

*Americans Want More Coverage of Teacher Performance and Student Achievement*

There were a number of differences by age. For example, young people were most interested in schools communicating through the Internet (76 percent versus 52 percent of respondents over 65). The young also favored schools communicating through blogs or forums (63 versus 42 percent for older respondents), school emails (80 versus 49 percent), cellphone texts (44 versus 22 percent), school Facebook pages (51 versus 30 percent), newspaper text alerts (70 versus 42 percent), newspaper cellphone texts (37 versus 18 percent), and newspaper blogs or forums (74 versus 56 percent).

| <b>Suggestions for Improving Education News by Age</b>                                    |              |              |              |                    |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
|   | <b>18-29</b> | <b>30-49</b> | <b>50-64</b> | <b>65 or older</b> |
| School Communicate thru Printed Newsletters   | 82           | 88           | 79           | 77                 |
| School Communicate thru Internet  | 76           | 83           | 78           | 52                 |
| Schools Communicate thru Blogs or Forums  | 63           | 64           | 58           | 42                 |
| Schools Communicate thru Email  | 80           | 82           | 72           | 49                 |
| Schools Communicate thru Cellphone Texts  | 44           | 42           | 25           | 22                 |
| School Communicate thru Facebook  | 51           | 42           | 34           | 30                 |
| Newspaper Email Text Alerts about Schools   | 70           | 62           | 50           | 42                 |
| Newspapers Send Cellphone Texts   | 37           | 29           | 16           | 18                 |
| Newspapers Setup Blogs or Forums  | 74           | 70           | 71           | 56                 |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i> |              |              |              |                    |

There were no meaningful gender differences on any of the questions related to improving education news coverage.

| <b>Suggestions for Improving Education News by Gender</b>                                 |             |               |
|---|-------------|---------------|
|   | <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b> |
| Schools Communicate thru Printed Newsletters  | 81          | 83            |
| Schools Communicate thru Internet   | 74          | 73            |
| Schools Communicate thru Blogs or Forums  | 57          | 57            |
| Schools Communicate thru Email  | 71          | 70            |
| Schools Communicate thru Cellphone Texts  | 30          | 35            |
| Schools Communicate thru Facebook   | 37          | 39            |
| Newspapers Email News Alerts about Schools  | 52          | 57            |
| Newspapers Send Cellphone Texts   | 21          | 26            |
| Newspapers Set Up Blogs or Forums   | 66          | 68            |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i> |             |               |

*Americans Want More Coverage of Teacher Performance and Student Achievement*

There were noticeable differences across racial lines. Non-whites were more interested in improving access to education news through the use of cell phone texts by school (42 versus 30 percent), Facebook (46 versus 35 percent), newspapers sending email alerts (65 versus 52 percent), and cellphone messages (40 versus 18 percent).

| <b>Suggestions for Improving Education News by Race</b>                                   |               |                   |
|---|---------------|-------------------|
|   | <b>Whites</b> | <b>Non-Whites</b> |
| Schools Communicate thru Printed Newsletters  | 83            | 81                |
| Schools Communicate thru Internet   | 74            | 74                |
| Schools Communicate thru Blogs or Forums  | 56            | 62                |
| Schools Communicate thru Email  | 71            | 72                |
| Schools Communicate thru Cellphone Texts  | 30            | 42                |
| Schools Communicate thru Facebook   | 35            | 46                |
| Newspapers Email News Alerts about Schools  | 52            | 65                |
| Newspapers Send Cellphone Texts   | 18            | 40                |
| Newspapers Set Up Blogs or Forums   | 66            | 72                |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i> |               |                   |

Parental status made a substantial difference in suggestions for improving coverage. In general – and not surprisingly – parents were more likely than non-parents to say the wanted expanded communication in all areas. There were especially large variations on newer technologies with parents more likely to want the schools to communicate though the Internet (84 of parents versus 71 percent of non-parents), school emailing (85 versus 68 percent), and newspapers sending news alerts about schools (68 versus 52 percent).

| <b>Suggestions for Improving Education News by Parental Status</b>                        |                    |                |
|---|--------------------|----------------|
|   | <b>Non-Parents</b> | <b>Parents</b> |
| Schools Communicate thru Printed Newsletters  | 81                 | 87             |
| Schools Communicate thru Internet   | 71                 | 84             |
| Schools Communicate thru Blogs or Forums  | 56                 | 61             |
| Schools Communicate thru Email  | 68                 | 85             |
| Schools Communicate thru Cellphone Texts  | 30                 | 42             |
| Schools Communicate thru Facebook   | 36                 | 45             |
| Newspapers Email News Alerts about Schools  | 52                 | 68             |
| Newspapers Send Cellphone Texts   | 22                 | 32             |
| Newspapers Set Up Blogs or Forums   | 66                 | 75             |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i> |                    |                |

There were some differences by region, but these were neither robust nor systematic.

| <b>Interest in Hearing More News About Various Topics by Region</b> |                  |                |              |             |
|---|------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
|   | <b>Northeast</b> | <b>Midwest</b> | <b>South</b> | <b>West</b> |
| Schools Communicate thru Printed Newsletters                        | 84               | 86             | 79           | 79          |
| Schools Communicate thru Internet                                   | 69               | 78             | 74           | 72          |
| Schools Communicate thru Blogs or Forums                            | 59               | 56             | 56           | 58          |
| Schools Communicate thru Email                                      | 73               | 73             | 70           | 68          |
| Schools Communicate thru Cellphone Texts                            | 34               | 31             | 34           | 29          |
| Schools Communicate thru Facebook                                   | 34               | 35             | 42           | 38          |
| Newspapers Email News Alerts about Schools                          | 56               | 53             | 57           | 51          |
| Newspapers Send Cellphone Texts                                     | 21               | 22             | 27           | 21          |
| Newspapers Set Up Blogs or Forums                                   | 66               | 64             | 69           | 69          |

*Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010*

High income earners were more favorable to schools communicating through the Internet (85 percent), than poorer respondents (65 percent). Those with higher incomes were also more likely to favor schools communicating through emails (81 percent versus 61 percent). However, while 38 percent of poorer respondents said they wanted newspapers to communicate by sending cellphone text messages, only 17 percent of wealthy respondents said this. The sharp difference suggested both different levels of internet access between the better off and the poor and the widespread use of cell phones as a primary form of communication among poorer Americans.

| <b>Interest in Hearing More News About Various Topics by Income</b> |                  |               |               |               |                |                       |
|---|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------|
|   | <b>Under 20K</b> | <b>20-35K</b> | <b>35-50K</b> | <b>50-75K</b> | <b>75-100K</b> | <b>More than 100K</b> |
| Schools Communicate thru Printed Newsletters                        | 78               | 86            | 83            | 92            | 88             | 81                    |
| Schools Communicate thru Internet                                   | 65               | 72            | 74            | 76            | 83             | 85                    |

To a remarkable degree, [Americans] still rely on daily newspapers for educational information, and that is true even among young Americans who are more open to newer technologies.

| <b>Interest in Hearing More News About Various Topics by Income (Continued)</b>           |                  |               |               |               |                |                       |
|---|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------|
|   | <b>Under 20K</b> | <b>20-35K</b> | <b>35-50K</b> | <b>50-75K</b> | <b>75-100K</b> | <b>More than 100K</b> |
| Schools Communicate thru Blogs or Forums  | 54               | 61            | 57            | 58            | 56             | 63                    |
| Schools Communicate thru Email  | 61               | 70            | 75            | 78            | 72             | 81                    |
| Schools Communicate thru Cellphone Texts  | 40               | 39            | 36            | 32            | 31             | 30                    |
| Schools Communicate thru Facebook   | 40               | 46            | 42            | 39            | 33             | 38                    |
| Newspapers Email News Alerts about Schools  | 57               | 59            | 59            | 67            | 53             | 52                    |
| Newspapers Send Cellphone Texts   | 38               | 31            | 27            | 21            | 15             | 17                    |
| Newspapers Set Up Blogs or Forums   | 70               | 68            | 69            | 66            | 67             | 76                    |
| <i>Source: National Education News Survey, Brookings Institution, December 6-19, 2010</i> |                  |               |               |               |                |                       |

## Conclusion

Although Americans feel reasonably well-informed about schools and do not sense a decline in the amount of information available to them, they do want more information than they are getting, especially on the most basic educational questions: teacher performance, student academic achievement, curricula, finances, and reform efforts. They are also concerned about violence in the schools. To a remarkable degree, they still rely on daily newspapers for educational information, and that is true even among young Americans who are more open to newer technologies. This points to an opportunity for newspapers eager to expand their readership among the young. Education blogs on newspaper websites are a growing and vital source of education news. Expanding and building on them would be helpful to the education policy debate, and good for newspapers.

And there is a great desire, especially among parents, for more information from the schools themselves. Parents want schools to keep in touch with them. Schools need to communicate not only on day-to-day issues, as they do now, but also on thornier policy questions related to curriculum, teacher performance and student achievement.

There are substantial differences in access to information across the lines

of race and class. As schools consider how to communicate with parents, they need to take into account different levels of access to the new technologies between the affluent and the less well-off. The extent to which poorer Americans rely on cell phones for basic information was striking. The family-and-friends networks on school issues seem stronger among the more affluent than the less affluent. Schools should consider working with community organizations and religious congregations to strengthen these informal networks of information among parents of their poorer students – especially since these informal networks, as our survey found, are vital and trusted sources of knowledge about the schools.

There is an enormous opportunity for more extensive and constructive engagement among citizens, our educational system, and the media. Education responds to our thirst for knowledge. The news media respond to our thirst for information. Greater interaction between these two spheres is natural. It's also essential.

**Governance Studies**

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## Appendix

### I. Survey Methodology

The National Education Survey was fielded for the Brookings Institution by Abt SRBI. It includes telephone interviews with a representative sample of 1,211 adults living in the United States. About 750 adults were interviewed in the landline random digit dial (RDD) sample and 251 were interviewed in the cellular phone RDD sample. An oversample of 210 parents of children in grades Kindergarten through grade 12 was fielded. The oversample was based on re-contact interviews with parents who responded to a previous nationally representative poll. Interviewing was conducted from December 6 to 19, 2010.

For the sample (n=750 landline RDD, n=251 cell RDD, and n=210 parent oversample), the margin of error incorporating the design effect is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. Estimates based on subgroups will have larger margins of error. It is important to remember that random sampling error is only one possible source of error in a survey estimate. Other sources, such as question wording and reporting inaccuracy, may contribute additional error.

Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. The combined sample is weighted to match demographic benchmarks from the 2010 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement and telephone service benchmarks modeled from National Health Interview Survey and American Community Survey data. The weighting procedure accounts for the fact that respondents with both a landline and cell phone have a greater probability of selection than those with only one type of phone.

The target population for the study is non-institutionalized persons age 18 and over, living in the United States. Samples were drawn from both the landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) frames to represent people with access to either a landline or cell phone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC according to Abt SRBI specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were drawn with equal probabilities from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained one or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was drawn through a systematic sampling from 1000-blocks dedicated to cellular service according to the Telcordia database.

Landline and cell phone numbers were called as many as seven times. Refusal conversion was attempted on soft refusal cases in the landline sample only. Calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chance of making contact with potential respondents. The sample was released for interviewing in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger sample. Using replicates to control the release of sample ensures that complete call procedures are followed for the entire

sample.

For the landline sample, youngest male/youngest female method was used to select a respondent. For the cell sample, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone. Interviewers verified that the person was an adult and in a safe place before administering the survey. Cell sample respondents were offered a post-paid reimbursement of \$5 for their participation.

## II. Survey Questions

Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the elementary and secondary schools in your community?

- 1) very satisfied
- 2) somewhat satisfied
- 3) somewhat dissatisfied
- 4) very dissatisfied
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

We are interested in where you get information about elementary and secondary schools in your community. How much information about local schools do you get from (insert item):

- 1) a great deal
- 2) some
- 3) not much
- 4) none at all:
  - a) a daily newspaper?
  - b) radio?
  - c) local television?
  - d) national television?
  - e) Internet news sites?
  - f) blogs?
  - g) school publications, such as newsletters or reports?
  - h) a school's Facebook or MySpace site?
  - i) a specialty publication devoted to education?
  - j) a publication you read through a Kindle, iPad, or other electronic news reader?
  - k) a cellphone text message?
  - l) family members or friends?
  - m) community groups?

Regardless of where you get your news, do you feel you receive:

- 1) too little information about elementary and secondary schools in your community
- 2) just about the right amount of information
- 3) too much information
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

How would you rate the job each of the following sources is doing in providing information about elementary and secondary schools in your community:

a) a daily newspaper?

- 1) excellent
- 2) good
- 3) only fair
- 4) poor
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

b)radio?

- 1) excellent
- 2) good
- 3) only fair
- 4) poor
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

c)local television?

- 1) excellent
- 2) good
- 3) only fair
- 4) poor
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

d)national television?

- 1) excellent
- 2) good
- 3) only fair
- 4) poor
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

e)Internet news sites?

- 1) excellent
- 2) good
- 3) only fair
- 4) poor
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

f)blogs?

- 1) excellent
- 2) good
- 3) only fair
- 4) poor
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

g)school publications, such as newsletters or reports?

- 1) excellent
- 2) good
- 3) only fair
- 4) poor
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

h)a school's Facebook or MySpace site?

- 1) excellent
- 2) good
- 3) only fair
- 4) poor
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

i)a specialty publication devoted to education?

- 1) excellent
- 2) good
- 3) only fair
- 4) poor
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

j) a publication you read through a Kindle, iPad, or other electronic news reader?

- 1) excellent
- 2) good
- 3) only fair
- 4) poor
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

k) a cellphone text message?

- 1) excellent
- 2) good
- 3) only fair
- 4) poor
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

l) family members or friends?

- 1) excellent
- 2) good
- 3) only fair
- 4) poor
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

m) community groups?

- 1) excellent
- 2) good
- 3) only fair
- 4) poor
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

In the last year, do you feel that the quantity of information about your local elementary and secondary schools has

- 1) increased
- 2) stayed about the same
- 3) decreased
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

Do you consider yourself

- 1) well-informed
- 2) moderately-informed
- 3) poorly-informed about elementary and secondary schools in your community?
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

Would you be interested in hearing more information about any of the following school topics in your community?

a) school finances:

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

b) school curricula:

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

c) teacher performance:

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

d) new instructional methods:

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

e) student academic performance:

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

f) school reform initiatives:

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

g) school health matters:

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

h) school athletic team performance:

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

i) school art and music programs:

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

j) crime or violence taking place in schools:

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

k) scandals and news about undesirable activities:

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

There have been several suggestions for increasing the quantity and quality of information about elementary and secondary schools. Would you favor or oppose having schools communicate with people through printed newsletters and publications?

- 1) favor
- 2) oppose
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer



Would you favor or oppose having schools communicate through Internet websites?

- 1) favor
- 2) oppose
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

Would you favor or oppose having schools communicate with people through Internet blogs or forums?

- 1) favor
- 2) oppose
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

Would you favor or oppose having schools communicate with people through email?

- 1) favor
- 2) oppose
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

Would you favor or oppose having schools communicate with people through cellphone text messages?

- 1) favor
- 2) oppose
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

Would you favor or oppose having schools communicate with people through Facebook or MySpace sites?

- 1) favor
- 2) oppose
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

Would you favor or oppose having your local newspaper email you news alerts with the latest information about your local school?

- 1) favor
- 2) oppose
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

Would you favor or oppose having your local newspaper send you cellphone text messages with the latest information about your local school?

- 1) favor
- 2) oppose
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

Would you favor or oppose having your local newspaper set up a Internet blog or forum with the latest information about your local school?

- 1) favor
- 2) oppose
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

Generally thinking, do you usually think of yourself as a

- 1) Democrat
- 2) Independent
- 3) Republican
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

Would you say that your views on most political matters are

- 1) very liberal
- 2) somewhat liberal
- 3) moderate
- 4) somewhat conservative
- 5) very conservative
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

What is your age? Is it

- 1) 18-29
- 2) 30-49
- 3) 50-64
- 4) 65 years or older
- 9) no answer

Gender:

- 1) male
- 2) female

Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican or Cuban:

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

What is your race, are you:

- 1) white
- 2) African-American
- 3) Asian-American
- 4) something else?

What was the highest grade of school that you completed?

- 1) 8<sup>th</sup> grade or less
- 2) some high school
- 3) graduated high school
- 4) some college
- 5) graduated college
- 6) post-graduate training or professional schooling
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer

Are you:


- 1) married
- 2) living as married
- 3) widowed
- 4) divorced
- 5) separated
- 6) never been married

How many people, including yourself live in your household?

How many of these are children under the age of 18?

Does this child attend a:

- 1) public school
- 2) private school
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer



How many attend a public school?

How many attend a private school?

Which of the following apply best to you:

- 1) my children are grown
- 2) I am planning on starting a family
- 3) I have no plans to have children

Which of the following categories describes your total annual household income before taxes last year?

- 1) less than \$20,000
- 2) \$20,000 to \$35,000
- 3) \$35,000 to \$50,000
- 4) \$50,000 to \$75,000
- 5) \$75,000 to \$100,000
- 6) more than \$100,000
- 8) don't know
- 9) no answer