



Whiteboard  
Advisors

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## Education Insider

ESEA Reauthorization, Common Core Testing Consortia and the College Ratings Proposal

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July 2015

# Why Education Insider?

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An Insider look at education policy from leaders across the country



Survey Insiders



Analyze Results



Report Insights



Drive Action

## About Education Insider

*Education Insider* is a monthly report that uses a proprietary model to cut through the noise and provide real-time insights on national education policy trends, debates, and issues—from a small group of approximately 50-75 Insiders who are close to the process. We conduct a survey of these influencers, which includes their candid opinions and insights, to provide a unique perspective on K-12 and higher education. The views expressed do not necessarily represent the viewpoints of Whiteboard Advisors or any of its employees.

## Who Are the Insiders?

Influential leaders who are shaping federal education reform, including individuals who have served or are currently serving as key policy and political “insiders,” such as:

- Current and former White House and U.S. Department of Education leaders;
- Current and former Congressional staff;
- State education leaders, including state school chiefs and former governors; and
- Leaders of major education organizations and think tanks, as well as other key influentials.

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# Executive Summary

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A snapshot of key insights from our July survey

## Data Snapshot

**43%** of Insiders believe that ESEA will be reauthorized by December 2015; **30%** believe this will happen after Obama's presidency.

**64%** of Insiders believe PARCC is on the wrong track; **67%** believe SBAC is on the right track.

**57%** of Insiders believe that, in the next 2-3 years, at least 20 states will participate in one of the consortia, but **74%** believe that fewer states will participate in PARCC than currently do.

**48%** of Insiders identify the difficulty of comparing diverse institutions of higher education as the main barrier to a college rating system; **45%** point to opposition from college leaders.

## ESEA Reauthorization

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Nearly 3 in 4 Insiders now believe ESEA will be reauthorized while Obama is still in office. A slight majority of Insiders believe that ESEA will be signed into law either by December 2015 or July 2016; an almost equal proportion believes that this will happen by December 2016 or after Obama's presidency. Insiders also believe that parental notification of opt-out rights, required state intervention for low-performing schools, and accountability language similar to Sen. Murphy's (D-CT) amendment are among the most likely proposals to be included in a final ESEA conference bill.

## Common Core Testing Consortia

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Most Insiders believe that PARCC is on the wrong track, while SBAC is on the right track, and that, over the next 2-3 years, at least 20 states will participate in one of the two. While Insiders are largely split over whether fewer or about the same number of states will participate in SBAC, most Insiders (74%) predict fewer members in PARCC.

## College Ratings Proposal

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Insiders are split nearly 50-50 on whether the biggest barrier to a college rating system is opposition from college leaders or the difficulty of comparing a diverse array of higher education institutions. When asked whether ED's idea of a consumer-oriented site with college performance data is necessary, a majority of Insiders said no.

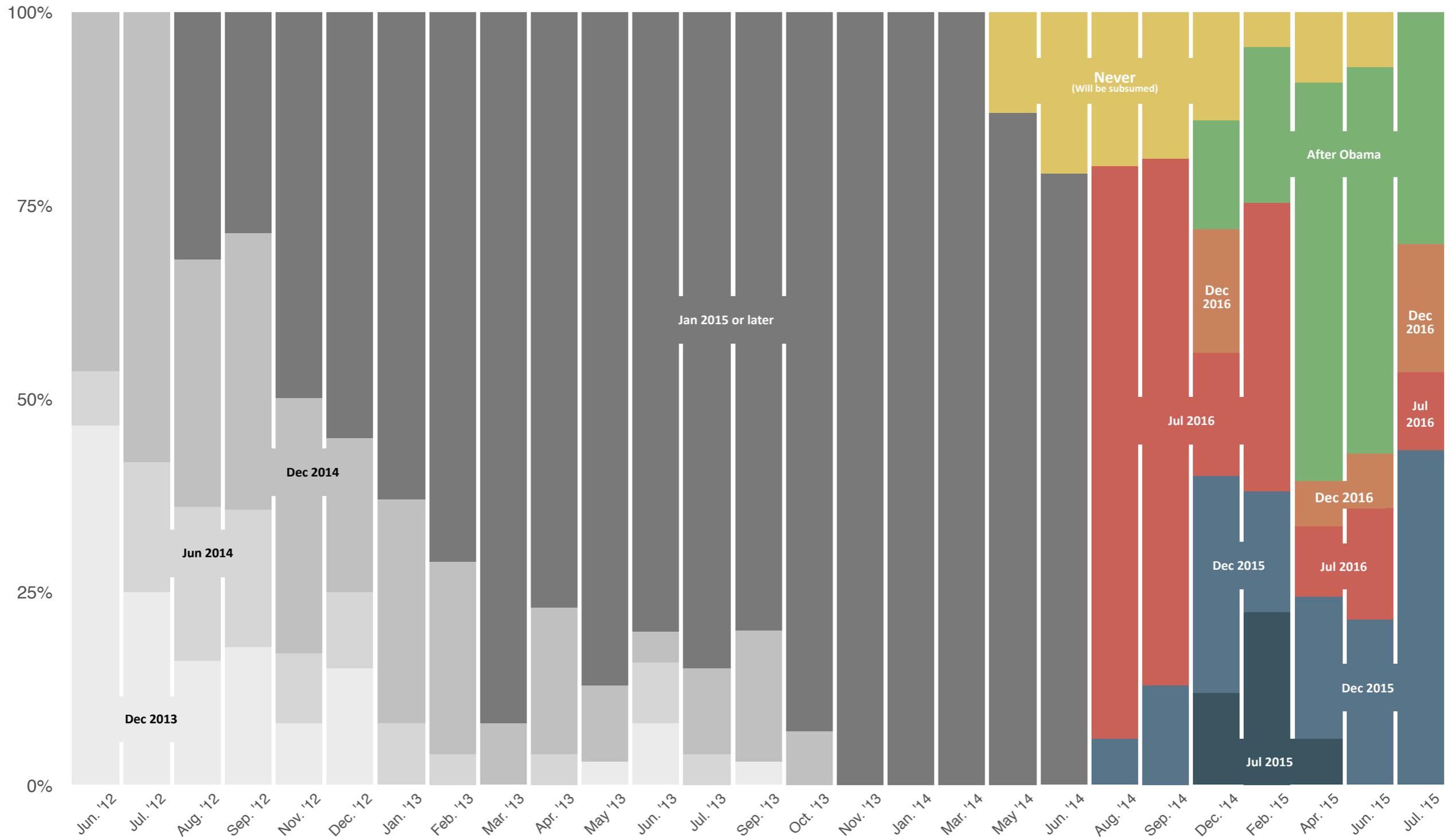
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# ESEA Reauthorization

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# ESEA Reauthorization Timing

70% of Insiders now believe ESEA will be reauthorized by December 2016



# ESEA Reauthorization Timing

## Insiders offer comments on the timing for ESEA reauthorization

### Light At The End Of The Tunnel

“Huge change for me. I had thought never. But 80 votes in the Senate sends a big signal.”

“The stars are aligning.”

“Lamar Alexander and Patty Murray.”

### Conference Will Be Difficult

“One word: conference.”

“Even with the House and Senate passing their own bills, I'm not convinced there's a conference bill that can get through both chambers and be signed by the President, unless Boehner is willing to pass something without a majority of his caucus.”

“I'm not entirely certain it will get done - it is a difficult path to navigate between the House and Senate.”

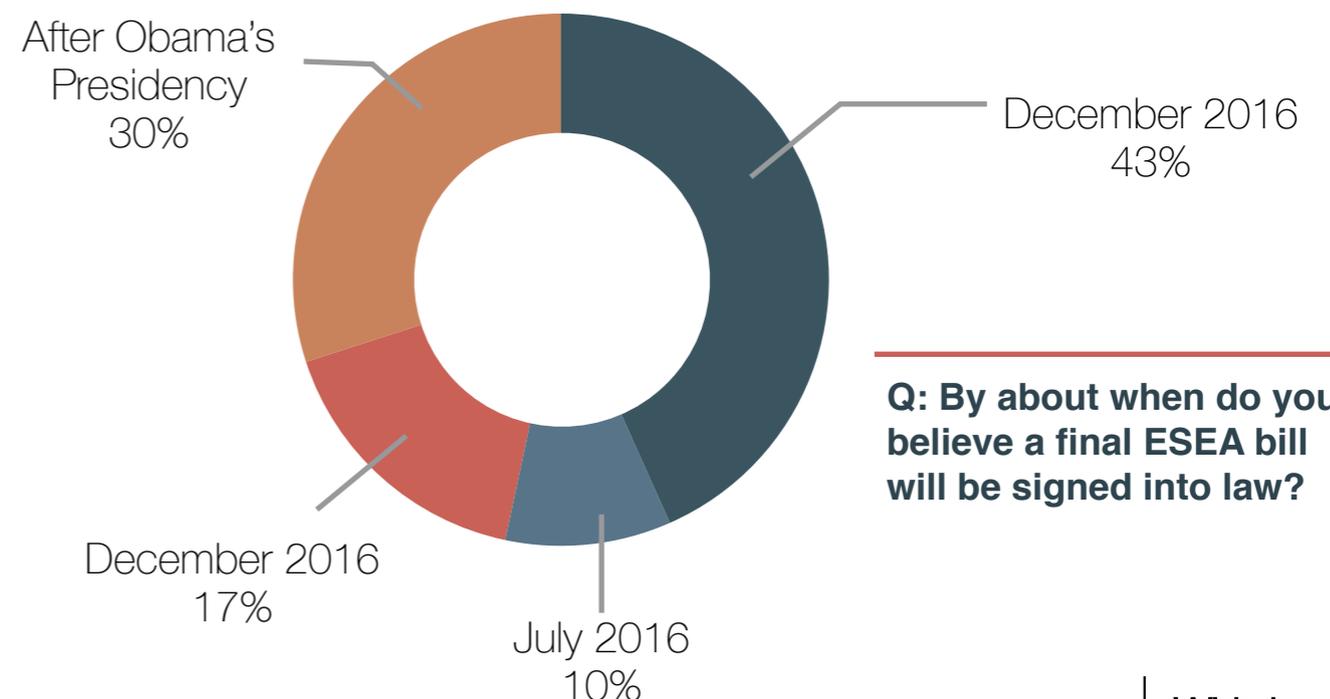
*Note: Some comments have been edited for clarity.*

### Now Or Never

“If it doesn't get done by Christmas [2015], it won't get done 'til after Obama's presidency.”

### Not So Fast

“How can the President sign a law that will be a hybrid of the House and the Senate (where Democrats got rolled)? Is he just to ignore half of the Democratic base and sign it?”

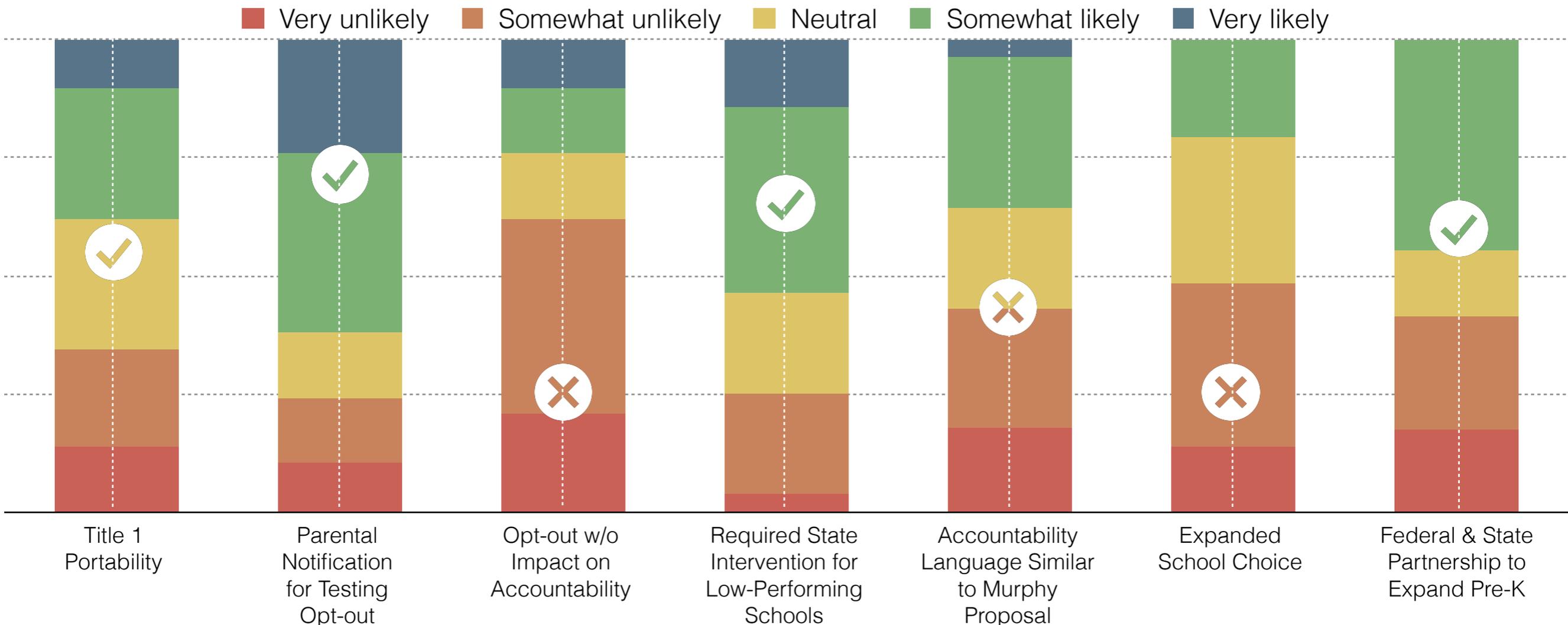


# Possible ESEA Provisions

Insiders evaluate the likelihood that key proposals will make it into a final ESEA conference bill

## Insiders Weigh In

Insiders believe parental notification regarding the right to opt-out of testing and requirements for states to intervene with low-performing schools are the most likely to make it into a final conference bill. On the other hand, Insiders believe it is unlikely that opt-outs would not impact accountability measures or that we will see an expansion of school choice.



**Q: Please evaluate the likelihood that the following proposals will be included in a final ESEA conference bill during this Congress.**

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# Common Core Testing Consortia

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# Common Core Testing Consortia

Insiders evaluate PARCC and SBAC and whether or not they are on the “right track”

## Insiders Weigh In

64% of Insiders believe that PARCC is on the wrong track, while 36% believe that it is on the right track. This is a 25 percentage point decrease in approval since May, as the consortium has continued to lose member states over the past several months. 67% of Insiders also responded that SBAC is on the right track (33% believe that it is on the wrong track, most citing technical glitches), a 2 percentage point increase from May.



Q: Are the assessment consortia on the right track or wrong track?

# The Future of Common Core Testing

## Insiders evaluate the prospects of consortia membership over the next 2-3 years

### Background

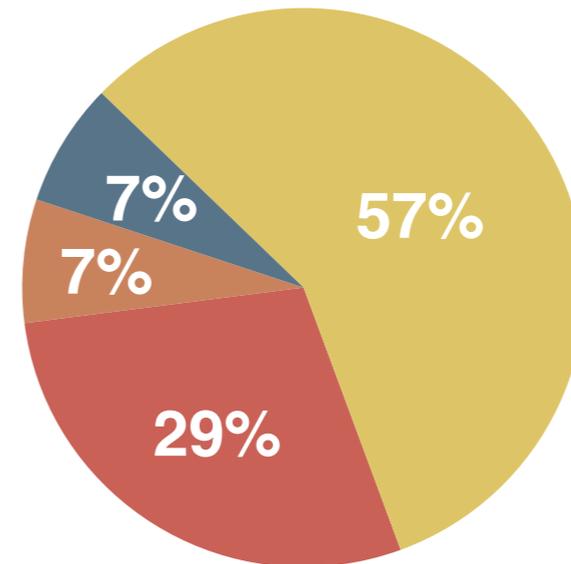
Facing pressure from state legislatures, the opt-out movement, and parents and educators who seek to cut the amount of time students spend taking standardized tests, several state governors and boards of education have left their respective testing consortia this year even while keeping the Common Core State Standards. The issue of consortium membership, however, is contentious – when Arkansas Governor Hutchinson ended the state’s contract with PARCC at the end of June, the State Board of Education in response voted against the action. In Louisiana, an appeals court ruled that Governor Jindal’s attempts to suspend the state’s contract with PARCC was “unconstitutional interference.”

### Insiders Weigh In

We asked Insiders to predict whether the two testing consortia would gain or lose membership over the next few years. Over half of Insiders responded that at least 20 states would participate in one of the two. The second largest group of Insiders (28.6%) believes that at least ten states will participate. No Insiders, however, predict that nearly all states will belong to one of the testing consortia in the near future.

### By The Numbers

Nearly 3 in 5 Insiders, 57%, believe that at least 20 states will participate in one of the two consortia. Another 29% believe that at least ten states will participate. Only 7% predict either 30 states or more will participate, and the same number see fewer than ten.



- Nearly all states will participate in one of the two consortia
- At least 30 states will participate in one of the two consortia
- At least 20 states will participate in one of the two consortia
- At least 10 states will participate in one of the two consortia
- Fewer than 10 states will participate in one of the two consortia

**Q: What do you believe about the prospects for the consortia over the next 2-3 years?**

# The Future of Common Core Testing

Insiders predict whether states will leave or join PARCC and SBAC over the next 2-3 years

## Background

Both PARCC and SBAC have seen drops in their membership. Recently, Missouri, Ohio, and Mississippi have all dropped PARCC, and Maine, Missouri, and Wisconsin are on track to drop SBAC next year. SBAC, however, has seen high-profile system malfunctions in Nevada, North Dakota, and Montana this spring, halting testing for some time and causing both Nevada and Montana to fail to meet their federal mandates. Meanwhile, although nominally a member of PARCC, the New York State Department of Education has indicated that the state has no current plans to give the test.

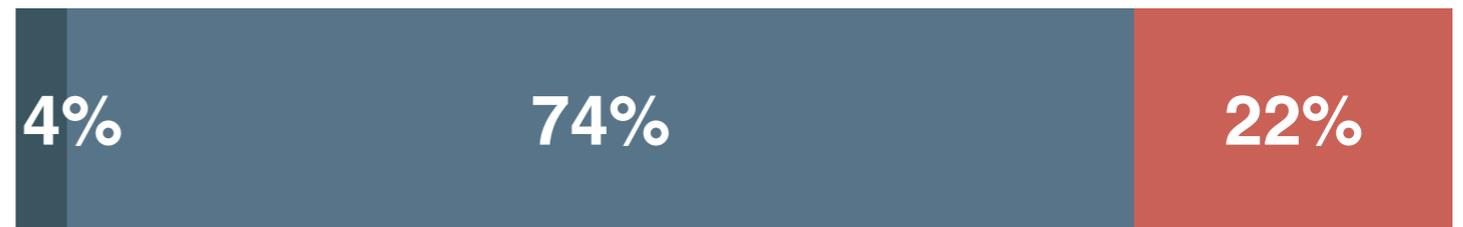
## Insiders Weigh In

Most Insiders believe that membership in both consortia will shrink, but show more optimism for SBAC than for PARCC. Insiders are split in almost equal numbers between whether SBAC will lose members or hold steady. Almost three quarters of Insiders, however, predict that fewer states will participate in PARCC, while only about a fifth believe that the consortium will keep the same number of states. Very few – just over 10% for SBAC and only 4% for PARCC – think that either consortium will gain members.

## By The Numbers

46% of Insiders believe that fewer states will participate in SBAC, while 42% predict that the consortium will maintain the same number of states. In contrast, 74% of Insiders believe that PARCC will have fewer members in the next few years.

### PARCC



### SBAC



- More states will participate than are today
- Fewer states will participate than are today
- About the same number of states will participate as are today

Q: What is the outlook for PARCC/SBAC over the next 2-3 years?

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# College Ratings Plan

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# College Ratings Plan

## Insiders cite complexity, push back from leaders as key barriers to college ratings plan

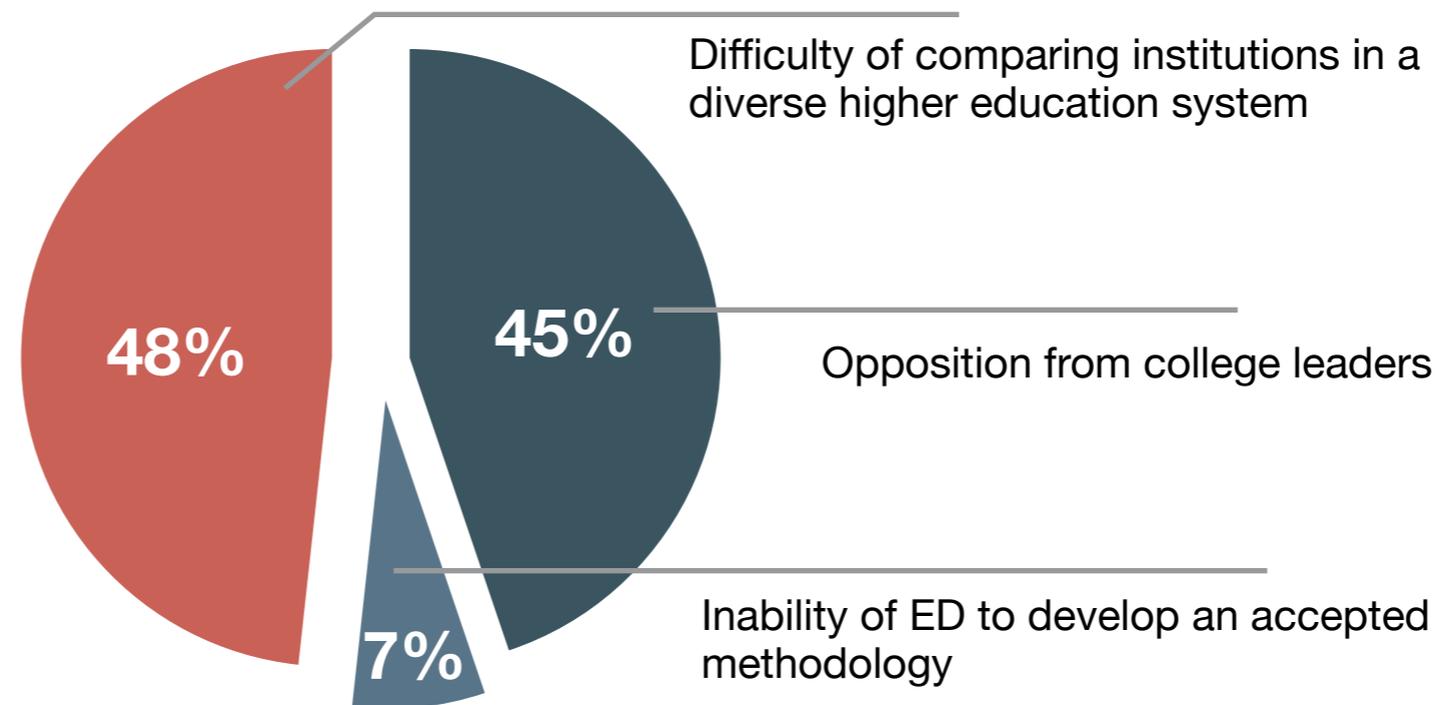
### Insiders Weigh In

In mid-July, it was announced that President Obama's plan for a college ratings system would be scrapped. The plan, originally set forth two years ago, was met with opposition from a number of stakeholders in the higher education community. The White House said that the difficulty of creating a useful rating system for students, parents and counselors was the leading reason for pulling back. Many policy watchers, however, point to the vocal opposition to the ratings as the leading reason the proposal was scrapped.

Our numbers show that Insiders disagree with the White House's narrative. They also indicate that the existential complexity of comparing unique institutions with varying missions in diverse higher education landscape is a key barrier.

### By The Numbers

Insiders are split on the leading cause for the failure of the college ratings plan. About the same number—48% and 45%—say that the complexity of the task and opposition from school leaders are to blame, respectively. Less than 1 in 10 say that the challenge of creating a methodology is the culprit, despite ED's assertion that this was the primary barrier.



**Q: In your opinion, which of the following has been the biggest barrier to a college rating system?**

# College Ratings Plan

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## Insiders offer comments on Senator Vitter's recent legislative proposal

### College Leaders To Blame

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“Although the technical challenge of comparing institutions of higher education systems [is real], and although ED has demonstrated that those challenges are difficult, neither would be the story if college leaders were taking responsibility for developing the rating system. Their opposition, which is motivated in part by the fact that future funding could be tied to ratings, is the first and the most durable reason why creating college ratings is difficult.”

### A Data Challenge

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“Decent underlying data is the biggest barrier. No matter how good the methodology or ways of capturing diversity, they are meaningless (or worse, harmful) if the data are junk.”

“College leaders strongly oppose [the plan] and are the ones pushing the narrative that it is too difficult to compare different types of institutions.”

### A Confluence of Factors

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“Should be all three. Higher ed [leaders don't] want it, ED can't [develop] it, and [the higher ed system] is too complex to boil down like they want to. Students look at higher ed [options] for way too many different things. We can require smart reporting systems, but let people decide what information they use to determine what they want.”

# Consumer Site For College Performance Data

A majority of Insiders do not think a consumer site, as propose by ED, is necessary

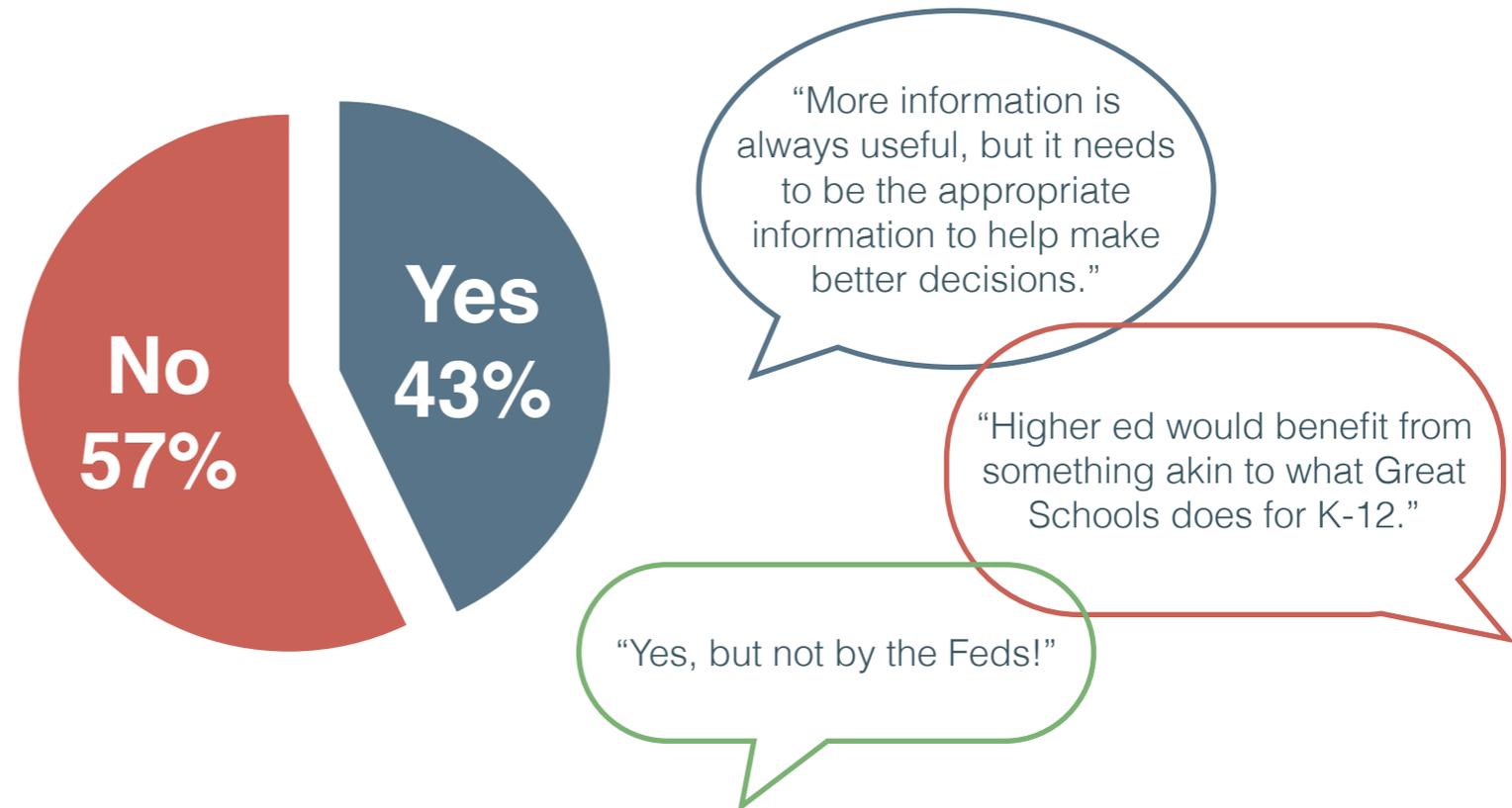
## Insiders Weigh In

Following the Department of Education's decision to no longer pursue a college ratings system, it was announced that the department would instead look to develop "a new website that will enable families to research and compare the records and outcomes of colleges and make their own judgments without being offered a composite score," according to the *L.A. Times*.<sup>1</sup>

We asked Insiders if they believed such a site was needed. A light majority indicate that they believe it is not necessary. In the comments, a number of Insiders say they believe more information is better, but that it is not the federal government's role to provide this type of information through a consumer-facing site.

## By The Numbers

A slight majority of Insiders (57%) do not believe a consumer-facing site with data on the performance of higher education institutions is needed.



**Q: After pulling back from a ratings system, the Department of Education said it would instead create a consumer-oriented website featuring college performance data. Is such a site needed?**

<sup>1</sup>College ratings system proposed by Obama is scrapped. 22 July 2015. [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com)



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