



Whiteboard  
Advisors

*Education Insider: Tracking Measures,  
Rural Education, and U.S. Department of  
Education Appointees*

November 2013

# Why Education Insider?

We harness the wisdom of well-connected influentials to provide insights and predict policy outcomes for stakeholders in the education debate.

## The Value

**Whiteboard Advisors** is a policy-oriented consulting practice. We provide proprietary research and strategic support to investors and philanthropic donors, government leaders, and entrepreneurs who seek unparalleled understanding of the education policy and business environments.

**Education Insider** helps those who need quality information to make high-stakes decisions about the direction of federal policy. Education Insider combines the wisdom of informed crowds with expert analysis to offer unparalleled information, analysis, and forecasting on a range of federal education policy issues and likely outcomes.

Education Insider conducts an anonymous survey of a **small group of key education influentials** (policymakers, thought leaders, and association heads) to get their thoughts and commentary about the context of the current debate and possible outcomes. This helps surface the underlying dynamics that can affect the trajectory of policies, positively or negatively, and go deeper than the conventional wisdom and rhetoric.

# Why Education Insider?



## The Process

**Education Insider** is a monthly report that cuts through the noise and provides real-time insights on national education policy trends, debates, and issues—from the handful of decision makers that are really driving the process. We combine a survey of key education influencers with our own analysis to provide a unique perspective on the current state of debate.

## Who Are The Insiders?

Influential leaders who are shaping federal education reform, including individuals who have 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, think tanks and other key influentials.

## Executive Summary

- **100%** of Insiders think that ESEA will not be reauthorized until January 2015 or later.
  - **72%** of Insiders think that the Higher Education Act will not be reauthorized before January 2015.
  - **78%** of Insiders agree or strongly agree that most education policies are primarily designed for urban and suburban school districts and are often poorly suited to rural districts.
  - **62%** of Insiders think that Ted Mitchell's nomination will neither speed up nor slow down the Administration's higher education agenda. **20%** think he will make things move more quickly.
- Insiders give the same approval ratings to the PARCC and SBAC Common Core assessment consortia, indicating a slight increase in PARCC approval and a steady rating for SBAC. For the first time ever, over 50% of Insiders think that both consortia are on the "right track."
  - Insiders do not think that the Higher Education Act will be reauthorized anytime soon, and they do not believe that the appointment of Ted Mitchell, a former professor and college university president, as Under Secretary for Education will have any impact on the timing of reauthorization.
  - Insiders feel that teacher recruitment and retention is the biggest challenge facing rural school districts. When asked "How important do you think the leadership at the Department of Education considers rural education?", the average Insider's score was 4, on a scale of 1 to 10.
  - Insiders generally do not think that U.S. Department of Education nominees Ted Mitchell, Jim Shelton, or Massie Ritsch will run into confirmation trouble. Those that do are divided as to whether the trouble will come from the left or the right.

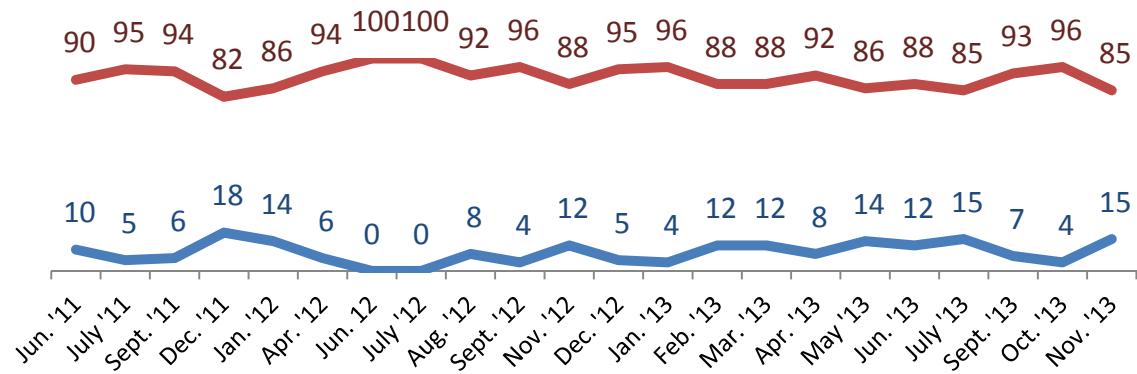
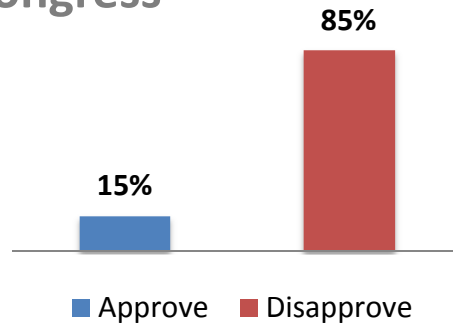
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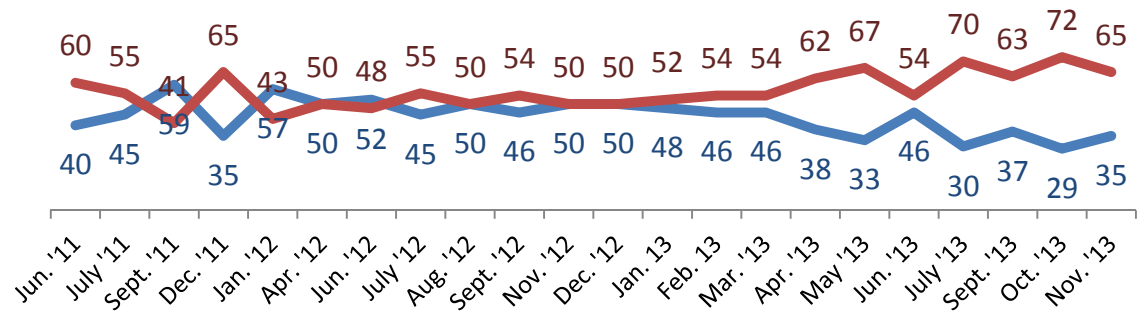
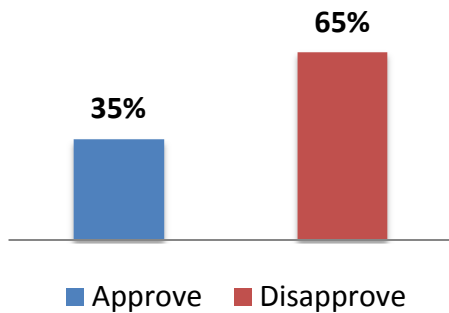
# Approval Ratings for Congress and Administration Improve Slightly

## Job Approval on Education

### Congress



### Administration

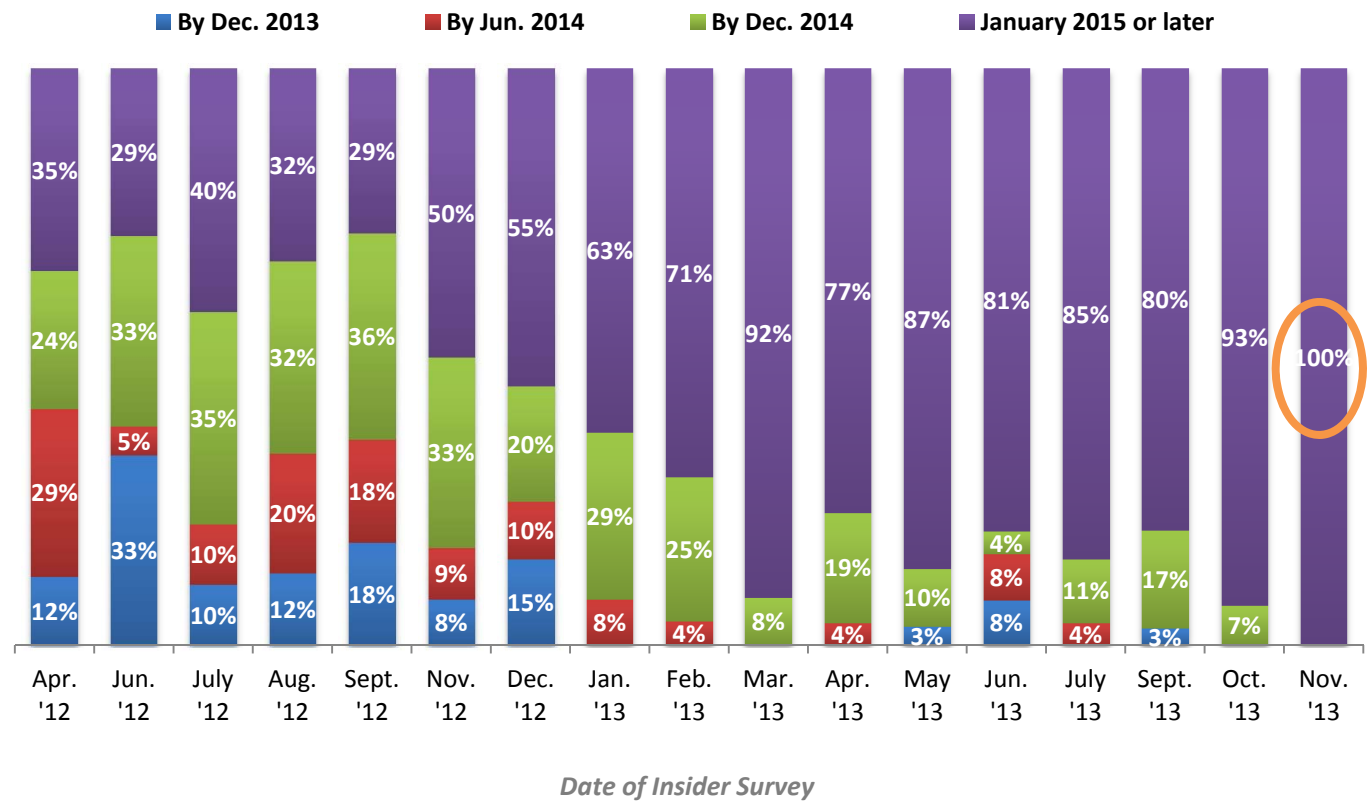


Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress/the Administration is handling education?

# Timing of ESEA Reauthorization

For the first time, 100% of Insiders do not think ESEA will be reauthorized until January 2015 or later.

Timing of ESEA Reauthorization



Question: About when do you believe a final ESEA bill will be signed into law?

## Insider Insight: ESEA Reauthorization Timing

### Why?

- “Harkin won’t be gone from the Senate until 2015.”
- “No one really cares, do they? Is anyone looking to invest the political capital to get the job done?”
- “Requires getting members of Congress in a room and actually talking. Not any time soon.”
- “Mid-term elections and no one is budging not even to give Harkin a legacy piece of legislation.”
- “Higher education will be the focus of the next session; there is no political will to move ESEA.”
- “Is never an option?”
- “No path to consensus with Harkin and Duncan in the picture. They can’t let go of Washington mandates and controls.”
- “Because the Senate is the Senate.”
- “Cubs could win a World Series first.”

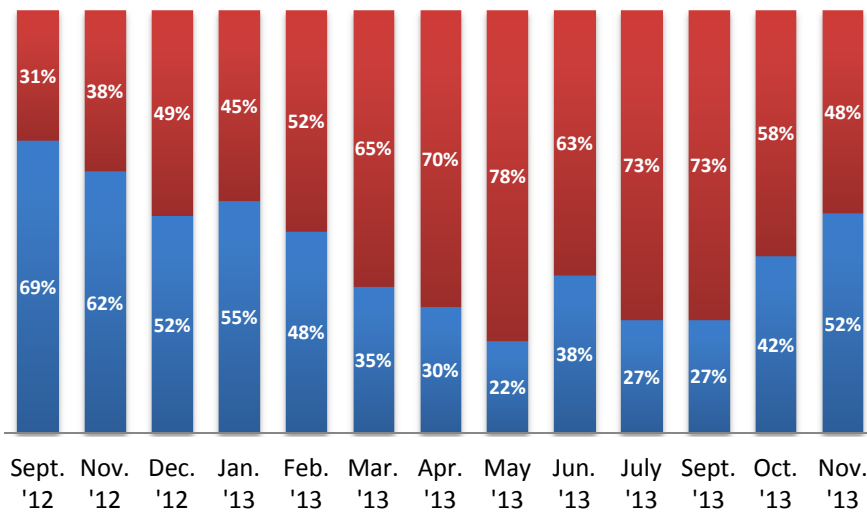


# Common Core Assessments – Right Track or Wrong Track?

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

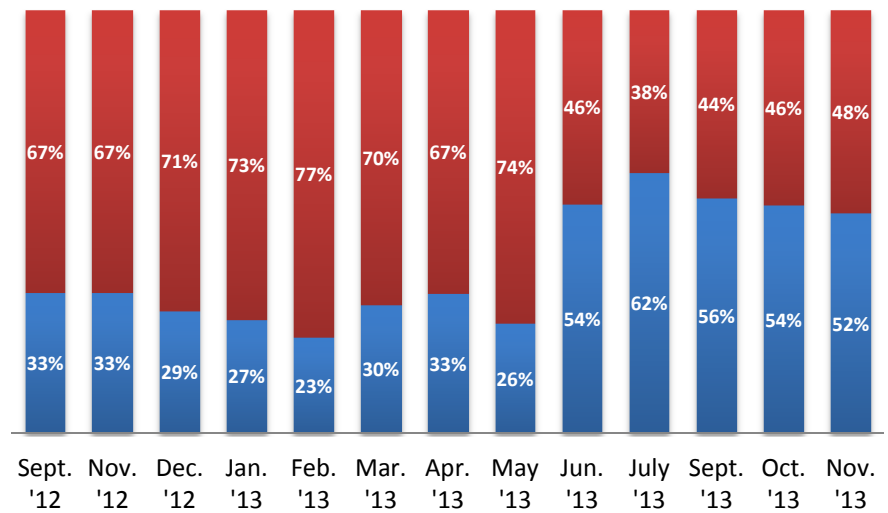
## PARCC

■ Right Track ■ Wrong Track



## SBAC

■ Right Track ■ Wrong Track



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

## Insider Insight: Right Track / Wrong Track

Why do you believe PARCC and SBAC are on the right or wrong track?

### Right Track:

- “Two heavy Common Core states saw huge gains on NAEP. That can only be good for the consortia and encourages states to stay the course.”
- “On track for the field test. That’s encouraging. Let’s see if they survive that....”

### Wrong track:

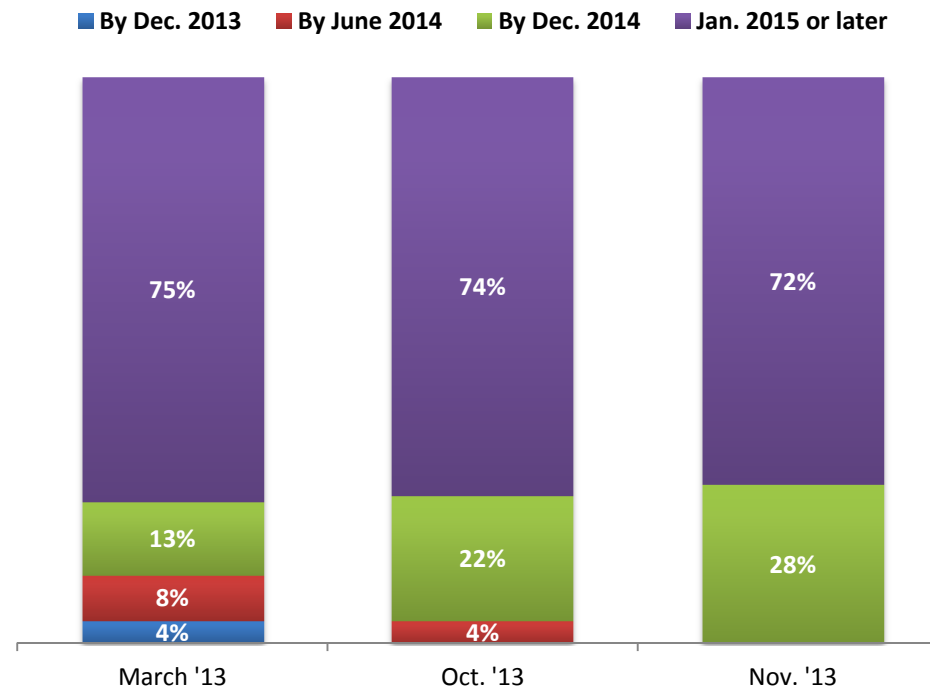
- “They are but they are not. I think you need to provide a third option.”
- “Smarter Balanced has their act together more but neither consortium is really set up to deliver what they need to. A lot of bumps ahead.”
- “PARCC is swirling in management problems.”

# Higher Education Act

Survey responses remain largely unchanged from last time we asked this question, although for the first time, no Insiders think that HEA will be reauthorized by June 2014.

The majority believe reauthorization will take place in January 2015 or later.

## Timing of HEA Reauthorization



Question: By about when do you believe a final Higher Education Act (HEA) bill will be signed into law?

## Biggest Issues Facing Rural School Districts

When asked to rank the following issues by their relevance for rural school districts, insiders concluded that teacher recruitment and retention are the biggest issues.

1. Difficulty recruiting teachers

2. Difficulty retaining teachers

3. Lack of school and classroom technology

4. Lack of “full federal funding” for special education

5. Lack of access to broadband Internet

6. “Risk” of high-cost/low-incidence special education students

7. Lack of flexibility about how federal dollars can be spent

8. Difficulty competing for federal grant dollars

9. Paperwork and compliance requirements

10. Poor information on federal grant opportunities

Question: Please rank the following issues, in order of relevance (1 to 10) for rural school districts. The image above is based on weighted average rankings.

## Insider Insight: The Most Burdensome Federal Policy, Programs, and Initiatives and Rural School Districts

Which federal policy, programs, or initiatives are the most burdensome for rural school districts, either in terms of restricting possible action or in requiring administrative resources?

- “The paperwork requirements for major federal programs are unbelievably burdensome for rural districts (and small districts in general), and the amount of funding these small/rural districts get is relatively so little that justifying such burden is near impossible. This leads to hiring personnel to administer federal grants (instead of curriculum/instruction) OR requiring an existing person to take on additional administrative responsibility. In addition, many federal program directives (like SES for example) do not take into account rural educational markets and the lack of competition/diversity in those markets—which make them nearly impossible to administer.”
- “E-Rate—by far the most complicated program in terms of paperwork, process, and complexity. GAO has pointed out how the complexity keeps schools from applying.”
- “IDEA.”

## Insider Insight: The Most Burdensome Federal Policy, Programs, and Initiatives and Rural School Districts (continued)

Which federal policy, programs, or initiatives are the most burdensome for rural school districts, either in terms of restricting possible action or in requiring administrative resources?

- “Rural districts—all districts—need greater flexibility to do what they need to do.”
- “For years, the HQT requirement has been the toughest to deal with.”
- “Any program that has very strict requirements which make it very difficult for districts to meet such as AYP.”
- “IDEA.”
- “IDEA, Title I (especially supplement not supplant) and teacher evaluation (to the degree that teacher evaluation was incentivized by Race to the Top and ESEA waivers).”
- “No Child Left Behind. All of it. And Arne’s illegal waivers; they suck.”
- “Not the most burdensome, but people should look into how federal transportation regulations add to what are already significant costs for rural districts.”

## Insider Insight: How Can the Federal Government Improve Education for Rural Students?

If the federal government could do one thing to improve the quality of education for rural students, what would you suggest they do?

- “Fully fund Enhancing Education Through Technology and provide more funding flexibility.”
- “Help them better access and leverage technology through E-Rate reform to realize cost savings on instructional delivery and bring high-quality delivery options that aren’t otherwise available.”
- “Fewer strings on money flowing through the states to rural districts. Money should go directly to students/families and not the system.”
- “More flexibility in the use of federal funding.”
- “Reduce federal rules and regulations. Fund IDEA and Title I instead of shiny new programs like RTT.”

## Insider Insight: How Can the Federal Government Improve Education for Rural Students? (continued)

If the federal government could do one thing to improve the quality of education for rural students, what would you suggest they do?

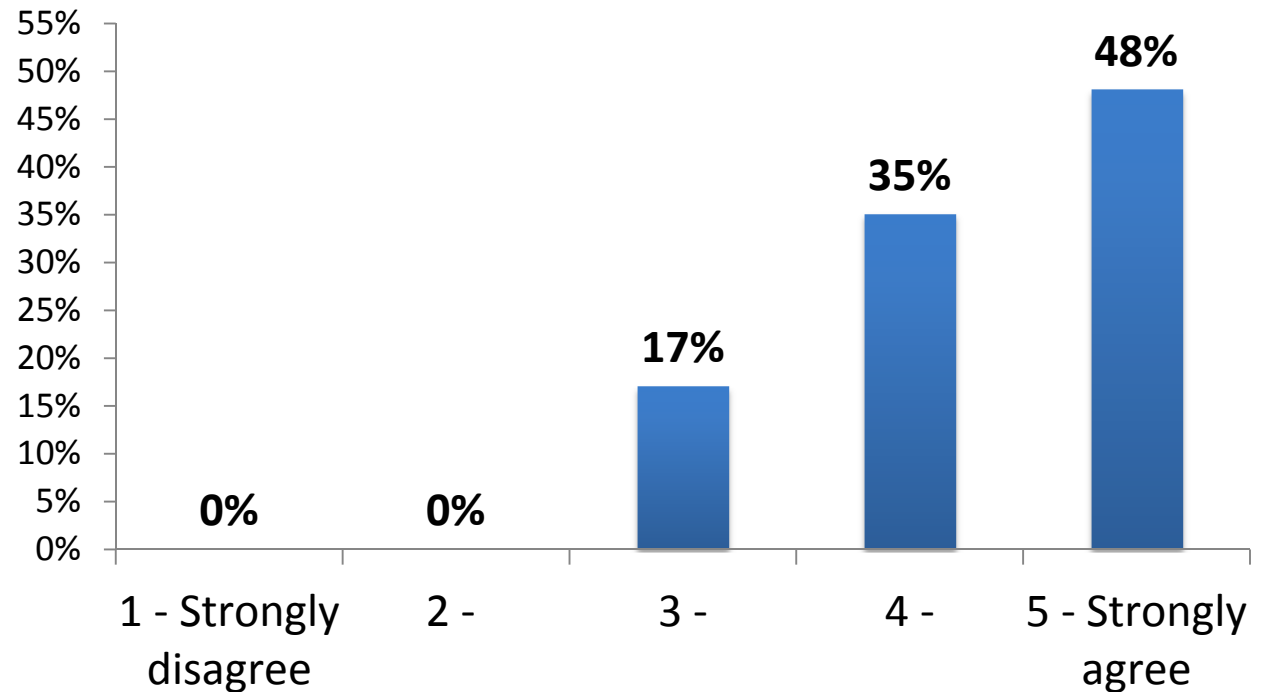
- “Assist with broadband for technology to enable more courses to be offered. Assistance with professional development. Resources to help them be competitive when they don’t have the staff to write grant applications.”
- “Expand and modernize E-Rate, encourage small rural districts to create consortia for procurement purposes and to reduce administrative burden.”
- “One word: Scale. Help them collaborate better and create incentives for them to do so. Scale doesn’t have to mean consolidation but today’s redundancies are bad for kids and taxpayers.”
- “Promote rigorous expectations and college-ready standards for all students, and ensure that rural students are exposed to high standards and good information about college opportunities.”



# Rural Education

Insiders agree that life in rural America is significantly different than life in the suburbs or cities.

Life in rural America is significantly different from life in urban/suburban America

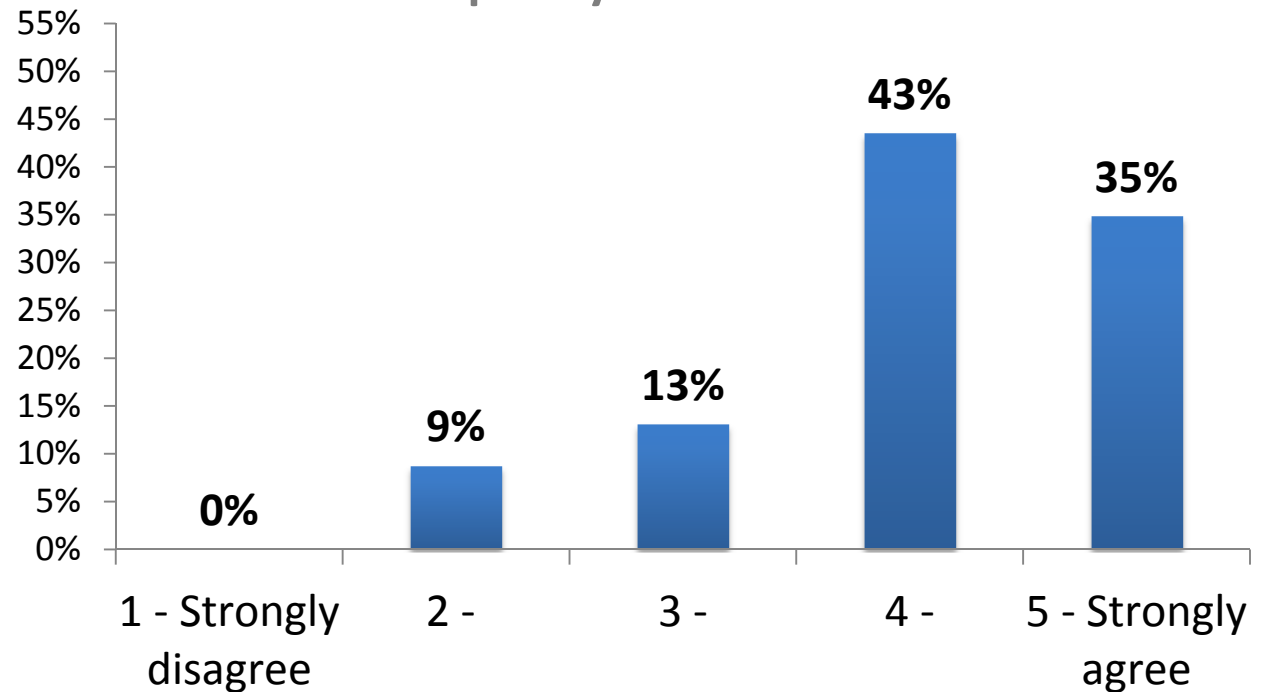


Question: Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement...

# Rural Education

Insiders also generally think that most education policies are designed for urban and suburban districts, and are poorly suited for rural districts.

**Most education policies are primarily designed for urban and suburban districts and are often poorly suited to rural districts**

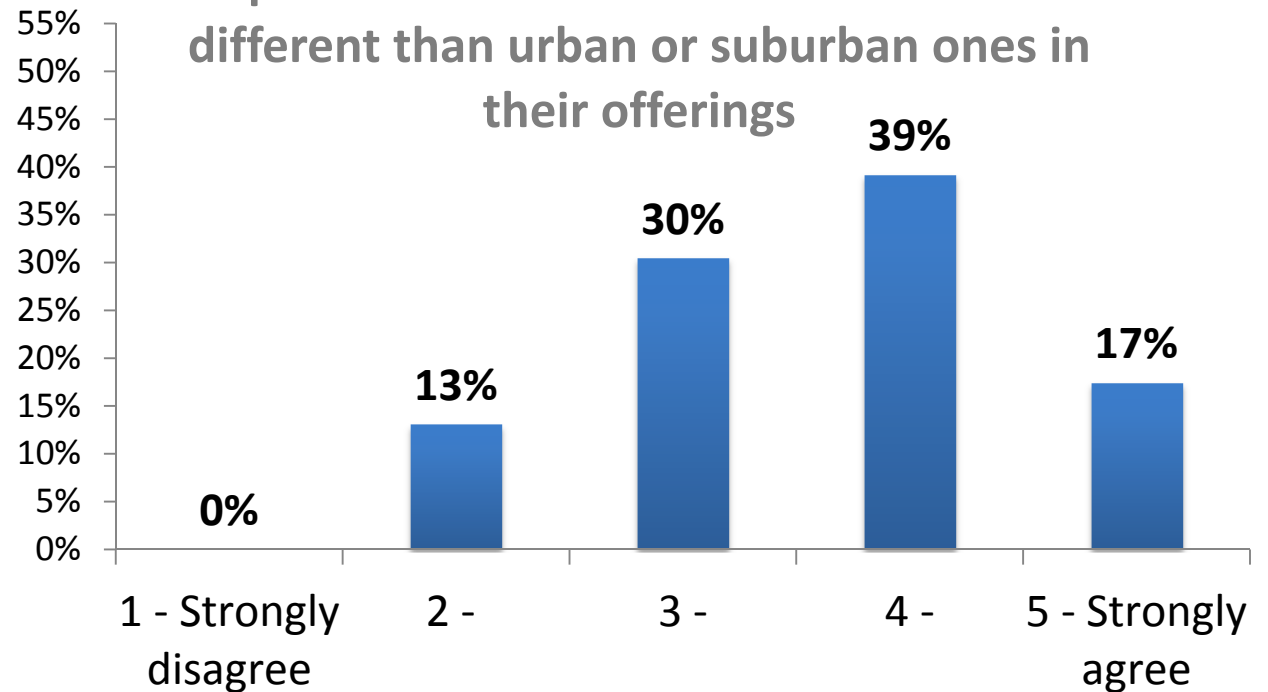


Question: Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement...

# Rural Education

Insiders are more divided as to whether people should realize that rural schools provide different offerings than their urban and suburban counterparts.

Choosing to live in a rural community means gaining some benefits but losing others. People should realize that rural schools are different than urban or suburban ones in their offerings

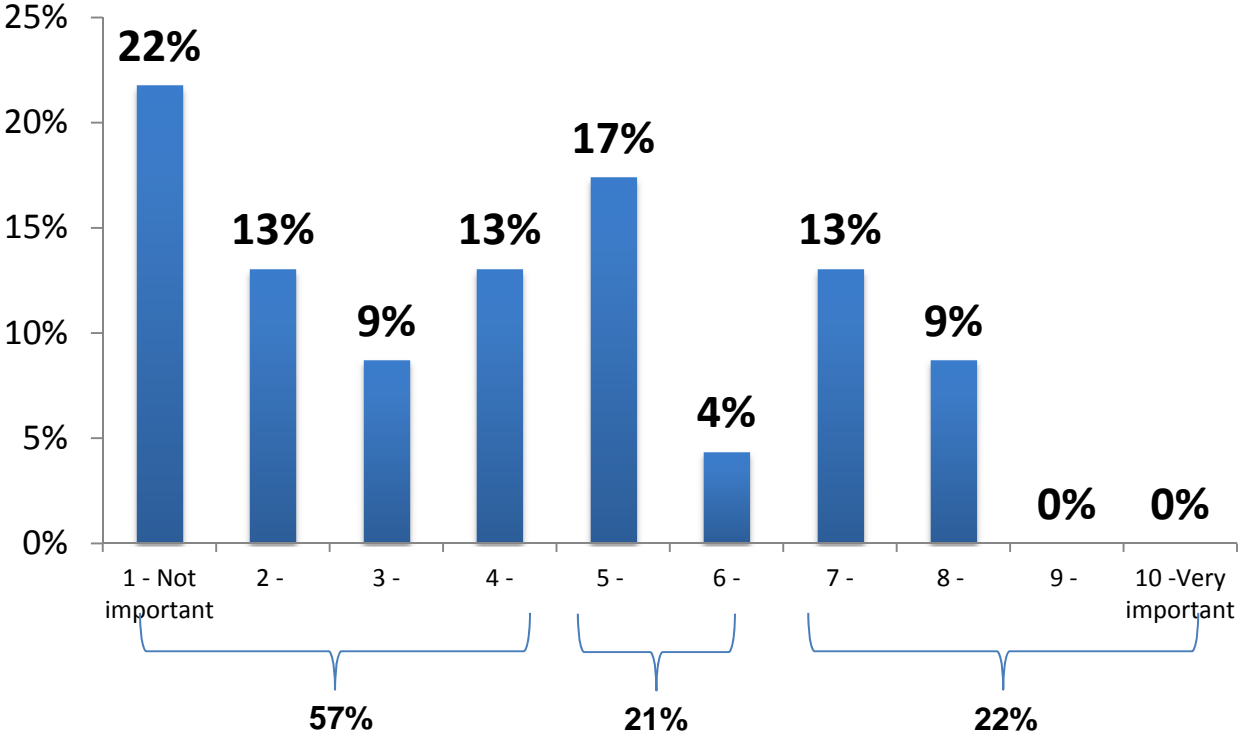


Question: Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement...

# Rural Education

Most Insiders do not believe the U.S. Department of Education considers rural education to be important.

How important do you think the leadership at the Department of Education considers rural education?

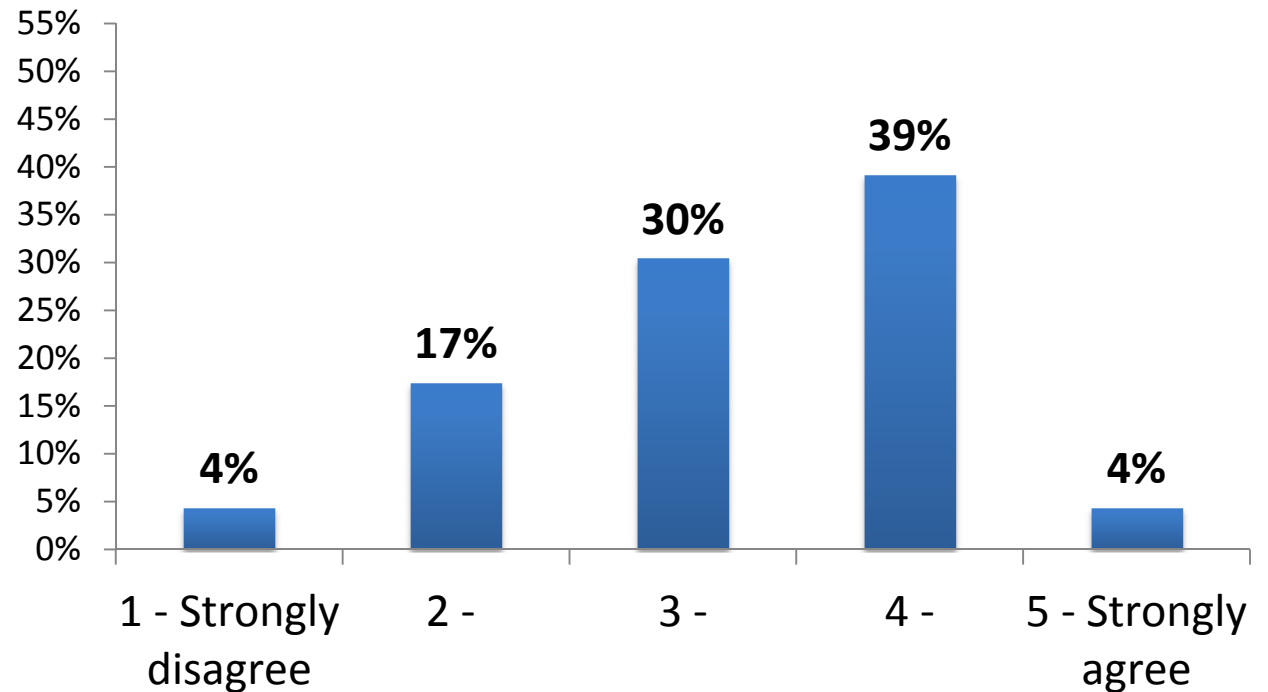


Question: Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement...

# Rural Education

Most Insiders think that lack of technology is a barrier to effective education in rural America.

Lack of computers, tablets, and/or software is a barrier to effectively delivering general education in rural America.

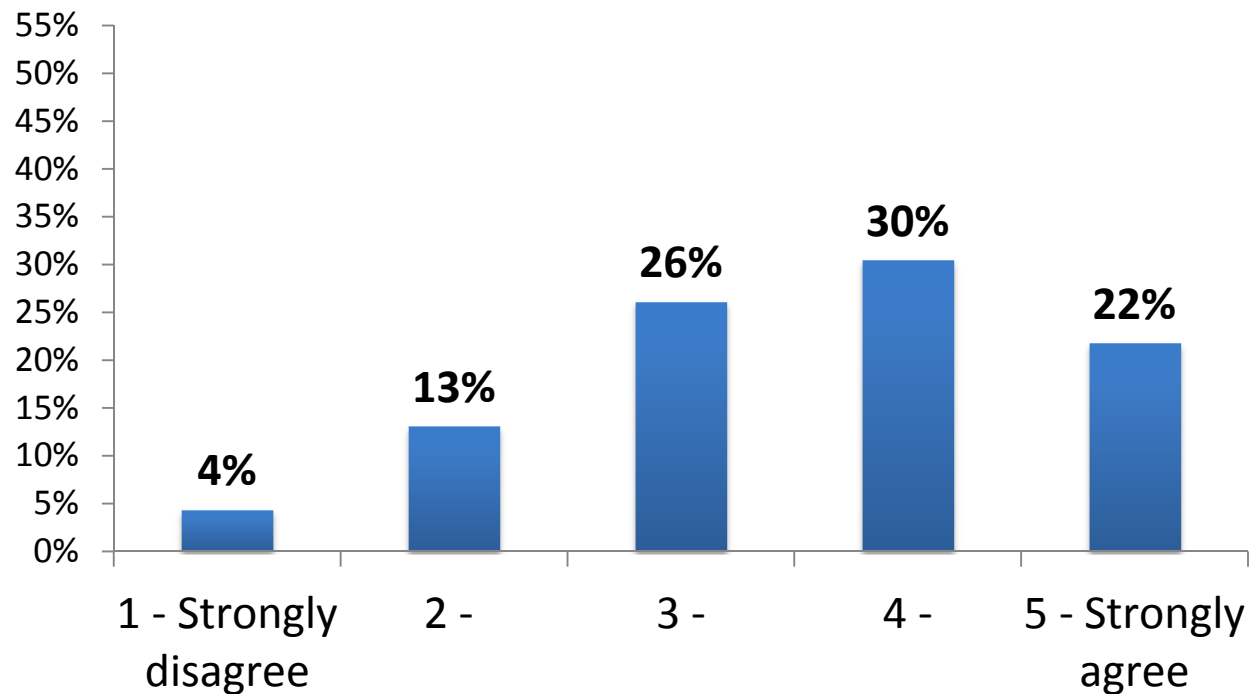


Question: Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement...

# Rural Education

Insiders also generally feel that lack of high-speed Internet connectivity is a barrier in rural America, although a small percentage disagrees.

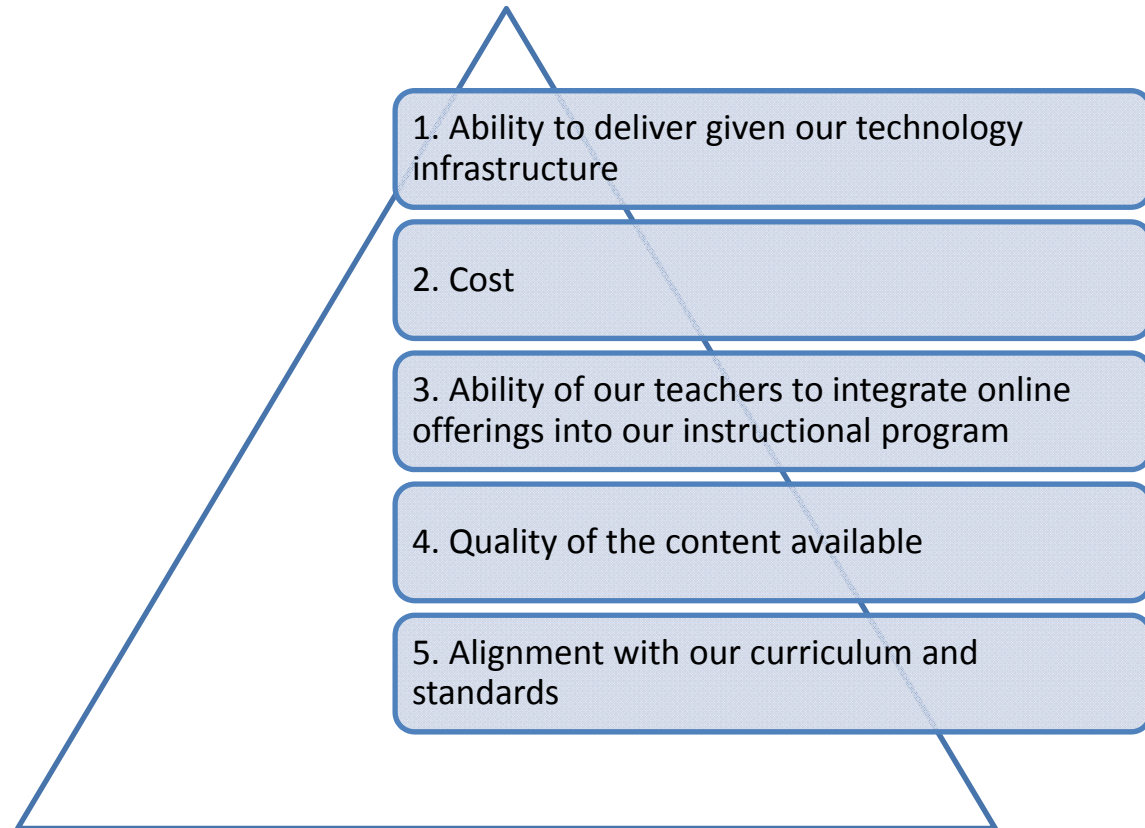
**Lack of high-speed Internet connectivity is a barrier to effectively delivering general education in rural America.**



Question: Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement...

## Insiders Rank District Concerns Regarding Online Learning Options

Insiders feel that districts' biggest concern when thinking about online learning options is the ability to deliver given existing technology infrastructure.

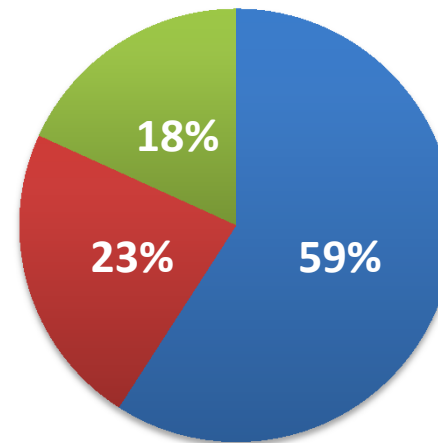


Question: Please rank the following issues (in order, 1 through 5) as to how much of a concern they are for rural school districts when thinking about online learning options. The image above is based on weighted average rankings.

## Rural School Districts and Distance Learning

Most Insiders think that rural districts likely view distance learning as an opportunity to provide offerings they otherwise could not provide.

### Perceptions of rural school districts' attitudes toward distance learning



- Rural districts likely see distance learning as an opportunity to provide offerings that they otherwise couldn't.
- Rural districts are likely neutral; distance learning doesn't and won't have a strong impact on rural districts.
- Rural districts are likely worried that online schools will compete for an already shrinking number of students, further forcing them to eliminate offerings.

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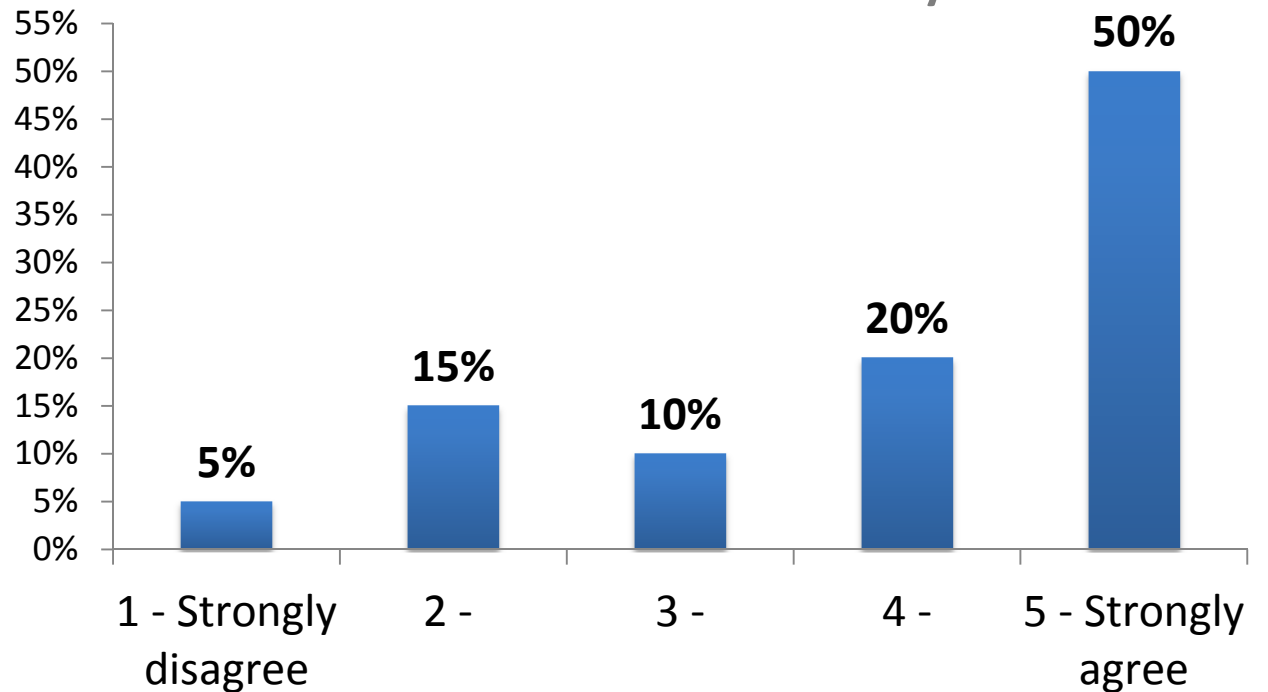
Question: Describe your perceptions of rural school districts' attitudes toward distance learning.



# Rural School District Consolidation

The majority of Insiders think rural school districts feel that closing a community's school through consolidation should be avoided at any cost.

Closing a community's school through consolidation damages the community and should be avoided at almost any cost

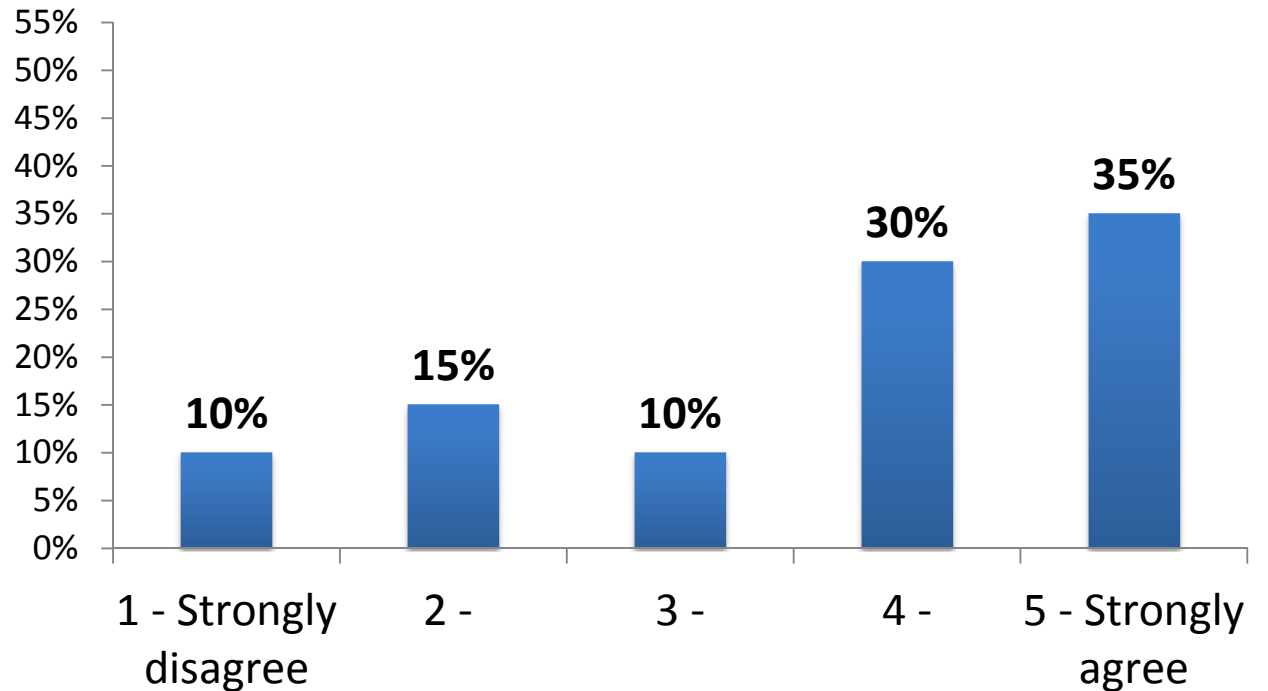


Question: Describe your perceptions of rural school districts' attitudes towards rural district consolidation:

# Rural School District Consolidation

Similarly, the majority of Insiders think that rural school districts feel that compensatory revenue should be provided to small districts to help them avoid consolidations.

Compensatory revenue should be provided to small districts to help them avoid consolidations

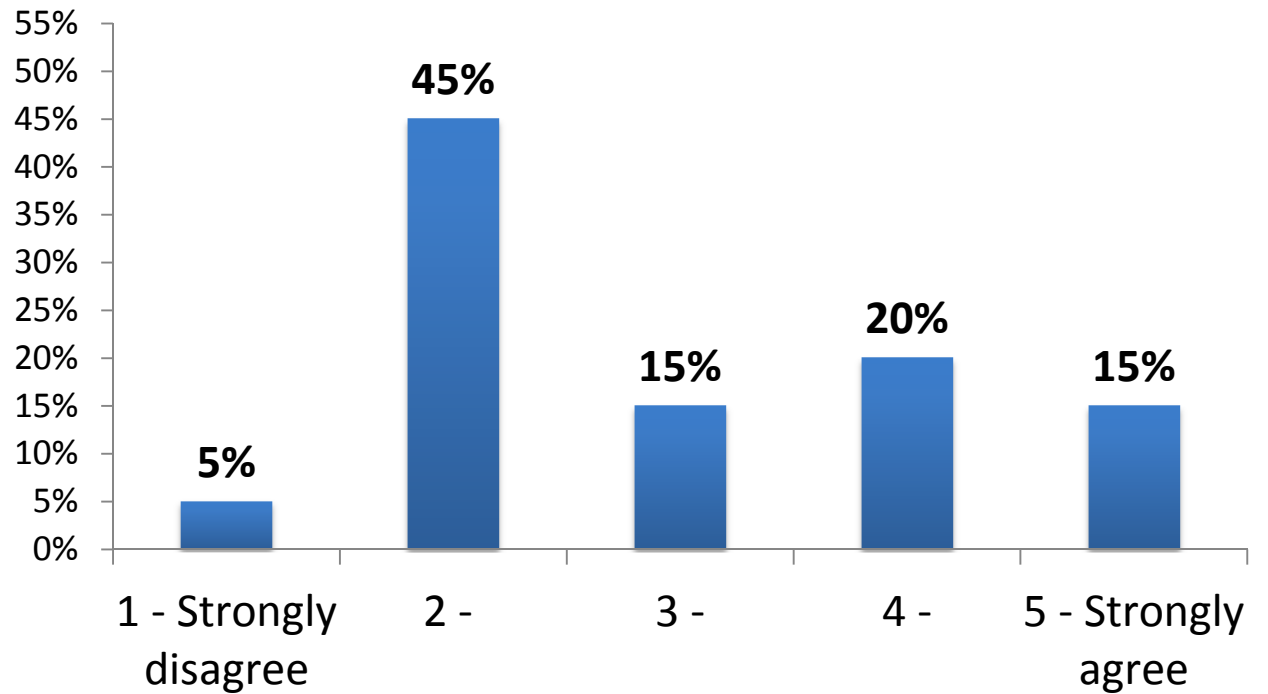


Question: Describe your perceptions of rural school districts' attitudes towards rural district consolidation:

# Rural School District Consolidation

Most Insiders believe that rural school districts would disagree or are neutral when asked whether consolidation is an unavoidable reality in places with declining populations.

Consolidation is an unavoidable reality in places with declining student populations

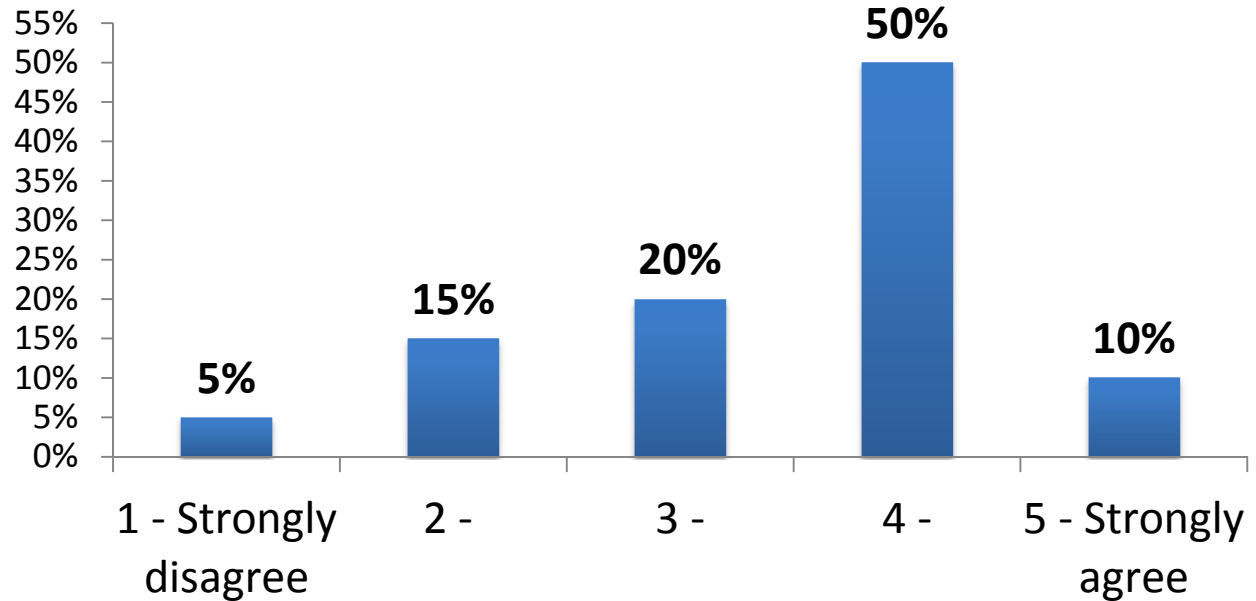


Question: Describe your perceptions of rural school districts' attitudes towards rural district consolidation:

# Rural School District Consolidation

Most Insiders think that rural school districts would agree with the statement that rural districts should do more to coordinate across districts and pool their resources.

Rural districts should do more to avoid wholesale consolidation by coordinating across districts and pooling resources wherever possible, such as through formal service sharing agreements (e.g., BOCES)

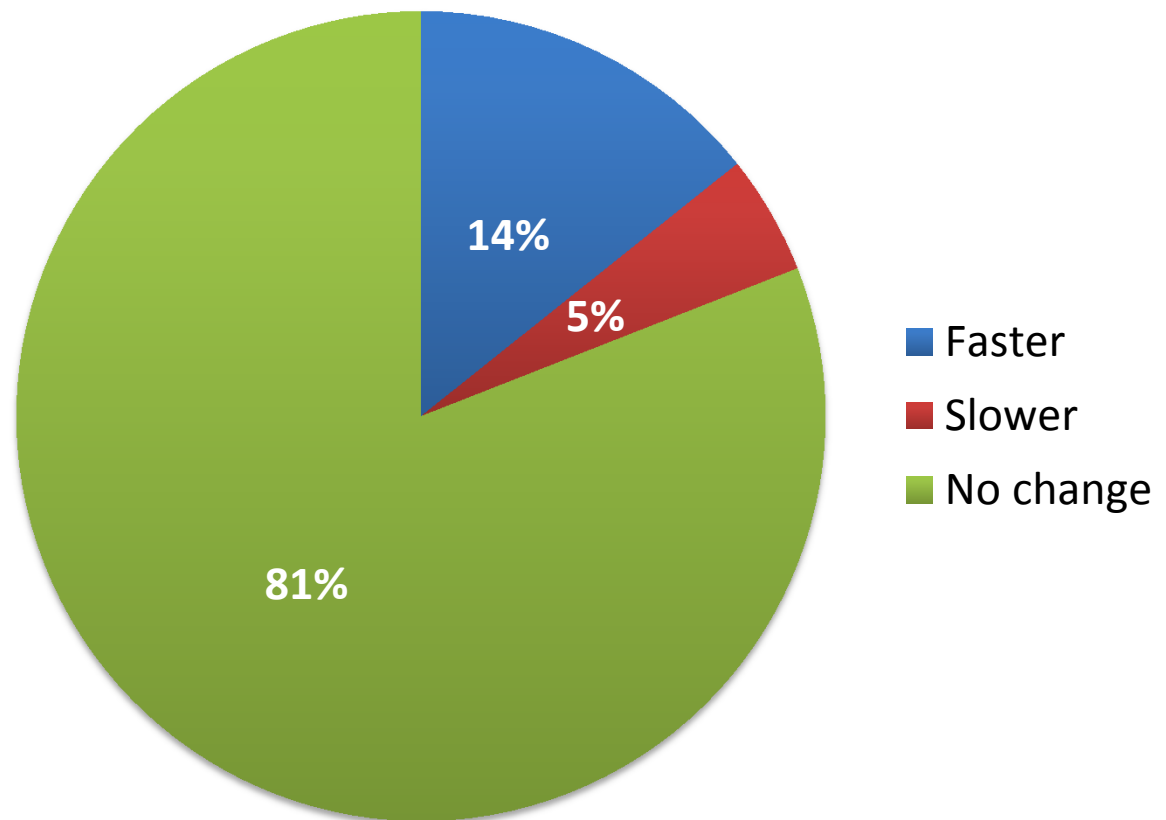


Question: Describe your perceptions of rural school districts' attitudes towards rural district consolidation:

# Impact of Ted Mitchell's Appointment at the U.S. Department of Education

A significant majority of Insiders think that higher education veteran Ted Mitchell's appointment will not have any impact on the timing of reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

### Mitchell's Impact on Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act

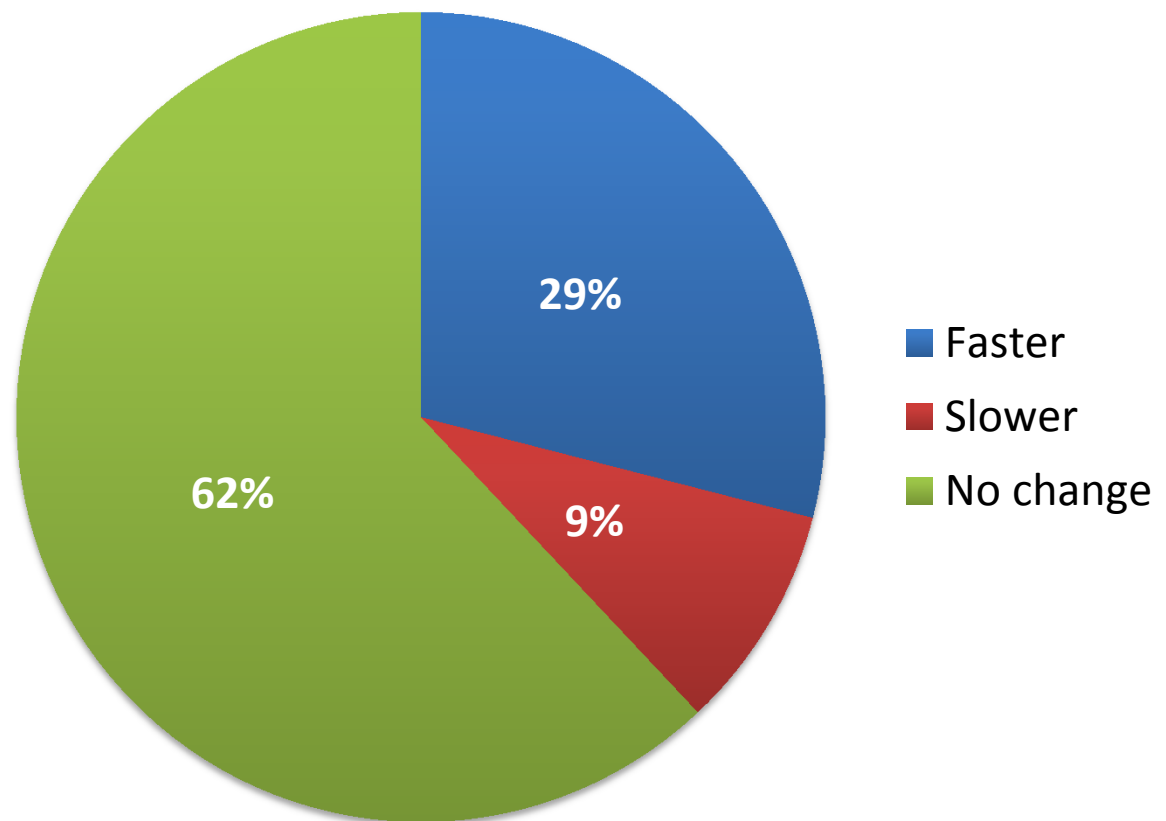


Question: Ted Mitchell has been selected for Under Secretary for Education. Will his appointment make reauthorization of the HEA move faster, slower, or no change?

# Impact of Ted Mitchell's Appointment at the U.S. Department of Education

While 29% of Insiders think that Mitchell's appointment may speed up the Administration's higher ed agenda, the majority of Insiders think his appointment will have impact.

### Mitchell's Impact on the Administration's Higher Education Agenda



Question: Ted Mitchell has been selected for Under Secretary for Education. Will his appointment make the Administration's higher education agenda move faster, slower, or no change?

## Insider Insights: Impact of Ted Mitchell's Appointment at the U.S. Department of Education

- “[Faster for both.] That’s a hope more than an actual belief.”
- “He has no appreciation for Congress so he will not help in moving an agenda and will potentially slow things down. And with the nomination of a woman to OPE who knows absolutely nothing about higher ed, this does not send a strong signal that this Administration really cares about any substantive changes to HEA.”
- “He’ll get swallowed by bureaucracy and regret it within 2 months.”
- “‘Who’s Ted Mitchell?’ said just about everyone in Washington, DC.”
- “The larger political and structural problems are the issue, not any one person.”

## Insider Insights: What, if anything, does Mitchell's selection mean for the gainful employment regulation process?

- “Hopefully he will moderate it and be more supportive of private providers.”
- “Nothing good.”
- “Nothing—the policy is fully baked and will be soon headed right back to Court.”
- “Maybe a little more flexible if he can influence the policy, if not, none.”
- “The gainful employment regulation process is already underway and seems to be leading to a tighter rule. Mitchell may bring more urgency, but is unlikely to change the rule.”



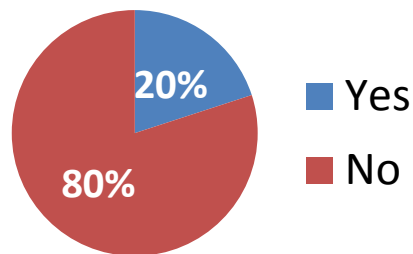
## Insider Insights: What, if anything, does Mitchell's selection mean for the gainful employment regulation process? (continued)

- “Nothing. It’s DOA either way.”
- “Nothing, that’s controlled by James Kvaal, period. That Ted doesn’t think for-profit providers should be summarily executed means he's not going to be included in conversations.”
- “Very little. Ted’s a nice guy but not going to change minds on this and he's not inclined to break kneecaps to get people in line.”
- “Mitchell is smart and knows how to bring people to agreement. That said, gainful employment regs are crazy complicated and crazy contentious. I do not want to overestimate Mitchell just because he’s smart and skillful at deal making.”

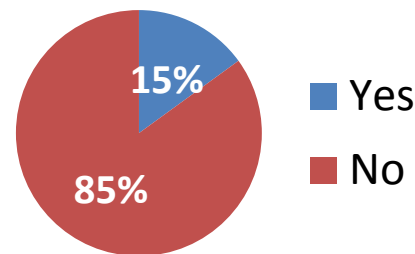
# U.S. Department of Education Appointees

When asked whether they think Mitchell, Deputy Secretary nominee Jim Shelton, or Assistant Secretary for Outreach and Communications nominee Massie Ritsch will face confirmation trouble in Congress, most Insiders said no.

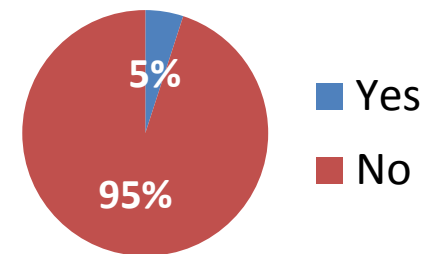
### Mitchell



### Shelton

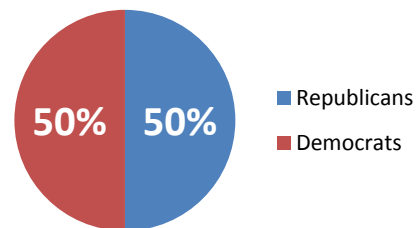


### Ritsch

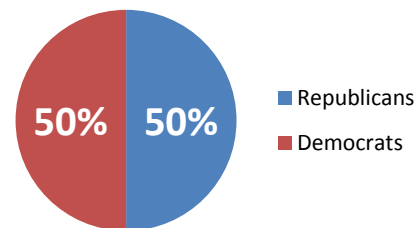


Of those who said yes, they were split as to whether it would be Republicans or Democrats causing the trouble for Mitchell and Shelton.

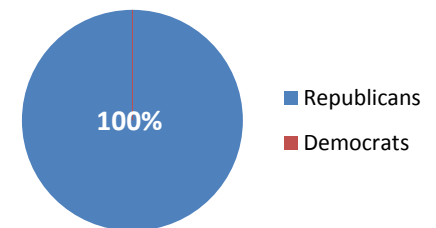
### Mitchell



### Shelton



### Ritsch



Question: In addition to Mitchell, Jim Shelton has been nominated as Deputy Secretary and Massie Ritsch has been nominated as Assistant Secretary for Outreach and Communications. Will any of these three nominees run into confirmation trouble? [Note: Survey closed November 18, 2013]

## Insider Insights: Confirmation Trouble

- “I don’t think so, but at this point the Senate is so broken that they could probably find that the 12 Apostles had some character flaw that would prevent them from being confirmed.”
- “Mitchell has some enemies probably and will be the proxy for people who are unhappy with the Administration.”
- “No one in the Senate cares about these inconsequential nominations.”
- “It won’t be about [the nominees], they’ll just be used as bargaining chips for some other issue.”
- “I said no, but given the polarization it’s not out of the question that a Senator uses one of them to make a point about Common Core (Cruz, Rubio, Grassley) or ed reform (Warren).”
- “...Mitchell and Shelton are centrists, so both sides have reasons not to like them. Ritsch isn’t especially political but could be a target on Common Core.”

# Whiteboard Advisors



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