



Whiteboard
Advisors

Education Insider

Assessment Trends, Higher Education, and the Presidential Campaigns

May 2016

Why Education Insider?

An Insider look at education policy from leaders in the field



SURVEY INSIDERS



ANALYZE RESULTS



REPORT INSIGHTS



DRIVE ACTION

About Education Insider

Launched in 2009, Education Insider is a monthly report that uses a proprietary survey model to cut through the noise and provide real-time insights on education policy trends from a small group of 50-75 Congressional staff, federal officials, and other Insiders close to the policymaking process. Our goal is to predict outcomes and demystify the policy and political environment that surrounds Pre-K-12 and postsecondary education. The views expressed by Insiders 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 policy, 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.

The Education Insider Team

Ben Wallerstein is the Co-founder of Whiteboard Advisors, a national education consulting firm and publisher of *Education Insider*. For more than a decade, Wallerstein has worked with the most transformative companies in education, and advised parties in dozens of Pre-K-12 and postsecondary transactions. Wallerstein is a frequent commentator about policy and educational innovation, and his writing has appeared in the *Huffington Post*, *Venture Beat*, *TechCrunch*, and *EdSurge*, among other publications.

Andy Rotherham is a Senior Advisor at Whiteboard Advisors and co-publisher of *Education Insider*. Rotherham is the Co-founder of Bellwether Education, a national non-profit dedicated to improving outcomes for high-need students. He serves as the executive editor of *Real Clear Education*, part of the *Real Clear Politics* family of news and analysis websites, and as a contributing editor to *U.S. News & World Report*. Andy also writes Eduwonk.com. A former White House aide and state board of education member, *Washingtonian Magazine* describes him as being "at the forefront of U.S. education policy."

Jeff Selingo is a Senior Advisor at Whiteboard Advisors and co-publisher of *Education Insider*. Selingo is the former Editor in Chief of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and is currently a special advisor and professor of practice at Arizona State University and a visiting scholar at Georgia Tech's Center for 21st Century Universities. His work has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Slate*. His book *College (Un)Bound* was a *New York Times* bestseller in 2013. He has also written *MOOC U* and *There Is Life After College*.

Deirdre Dlugoleski serves as a Research Associate for Whiteboard Advisors. Prior to joining Whiteboard, Deirdre taught English in India as a Fulbright scholar. A graduate of Yale University, Deirdre served as a President's Public Service Fellow in New Haven and taught with Breakthrough Collaborative.

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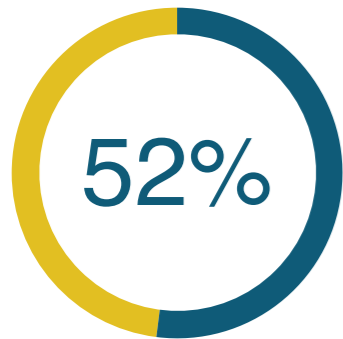
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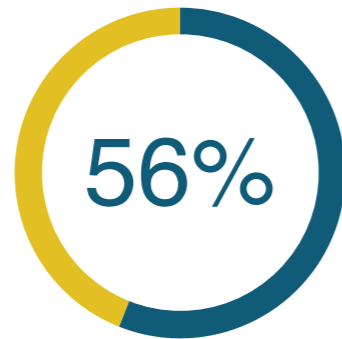
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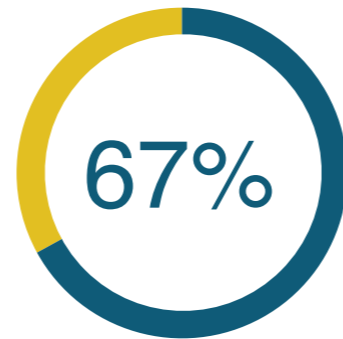
Executive Summary



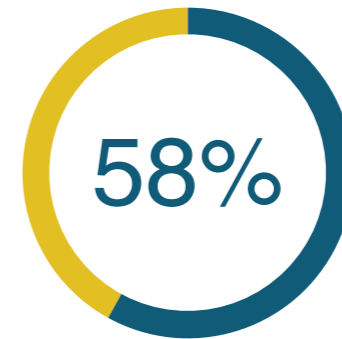
52% of Insiders believe that fewer states will participate in both federally funded assessment consortia over the next two years than do today.



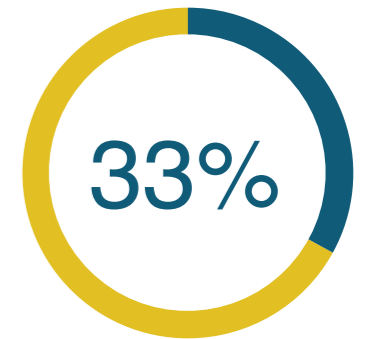
56% predict that education will get even less attention in the media over the next six months than it has so far.



67% are either moderately or extremely concerned that the rise in defense to repayment claims (resulting from the closure of Corinthian) will lead to a prolonged wave of similar loan forgiveness suits.



58% predict that the Higher Learning Commission's rejection of Grand Canyon's bid to become a non-profit signals a general unwillingness to approve such conversions.



33% believe the EQUIP experiment will lead to greater access to Title IV funds for non-accredited providers. 33% say that it won't, and 33% are unsure.

Common Core

Since last summer, Insiders see improvements for PARCC and continue to think SBAC is on the right track. Insiders predict that fewer states will participate in the consortia over the next two years than do today, but believe at least 20 will be members.

Higher Education

Overall, Insiders are concerned about the rise in defense to repayment (DTR) claims resulting from the Corinthian closure. Two-thirds of Insiders believe Congress should re-write the "regular and substantive interaction" requirement for competency-based programs, such as those offered by Western Governors University, whose program is currently under audit. Insiders are evenly split, however, on whether the EQUIP program will allow non-accredited providers greater access to federal Title IV funds.

2016 Presidential Election

Insiders believe presidential candidates should focus on maintaining high academic standards and aligned assessments, ensuring strong accountability systems for student outcomes, and modernizing and elevating the teaching profession in K-12 education. On higher education policy, Insiders want to see FAFSA simplification and improved transparency and accountability through the accreditation process.

The Future Secretary of Education

Insiders weigh in on the options for the campaign frontrunners

President Hillary Clinton



Linda Darling-Hammond
(17.9%)



Randi Weingarten (14.3%)



Chris Edley (7.1%)

Also receiving votes: Howard Dean, John King, Dannel Malloy, Patty Murray, Bob Shireman, Freeman Hrabowski, Donna Shalala, Lily Eskelsen García

President Donald Trump



Ben Carson (28.6%)



Andreas Schleicher
(3.6%)



Tony Bennett
(3.6%)



Also receiving votes: Ted Nugent, Chris Christie, Mike Huckabee, Sarah Palin, Omarosa

Q: If she/he is elected President, who will Hillary Clinton's/Donald Trump's Secretary of Education be?

Common Core Tracking

Common Core Testing Consortia

Insiders evaluate the prospects of consortia membership over the next 24 months

Background

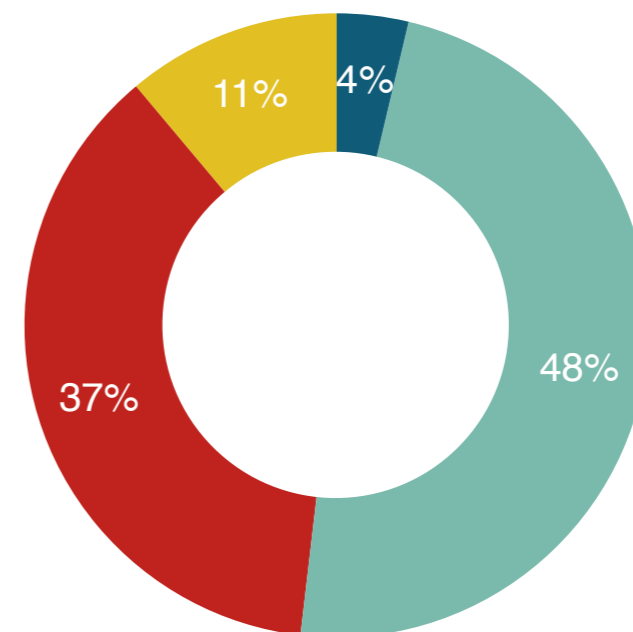
In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education awarded \$330 million in Race to the Top competitive grants to two assessment consortia, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) to develop assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards. With the new ESSA in place, however, states are now allowed a wider range of assessment options to choose from. State leaders remain under continuing pressure from the opt-out movement and state legislatures to create (or white-label) their own assessments, and in some cases to drop the Common Core Standards entirely. Several states are engaged in rewrites.

Insiders Weigh In

Overall, Insiders see states largely moving away from the assessment consortia due to consistent pressure to create their own assessments and the expanded freedom to do so. And, as one Insider notes, it is much harder for parents to justify opting out of the SAT or ACT.

By The Numbers

Almost half of Insiders believe at least 20 states will participate in one of the two consortia over the next two years. Just over a third believe only at least 10 will participate.



- Nearly all states will participate in one of the two consortia (0%).
- 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.

Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

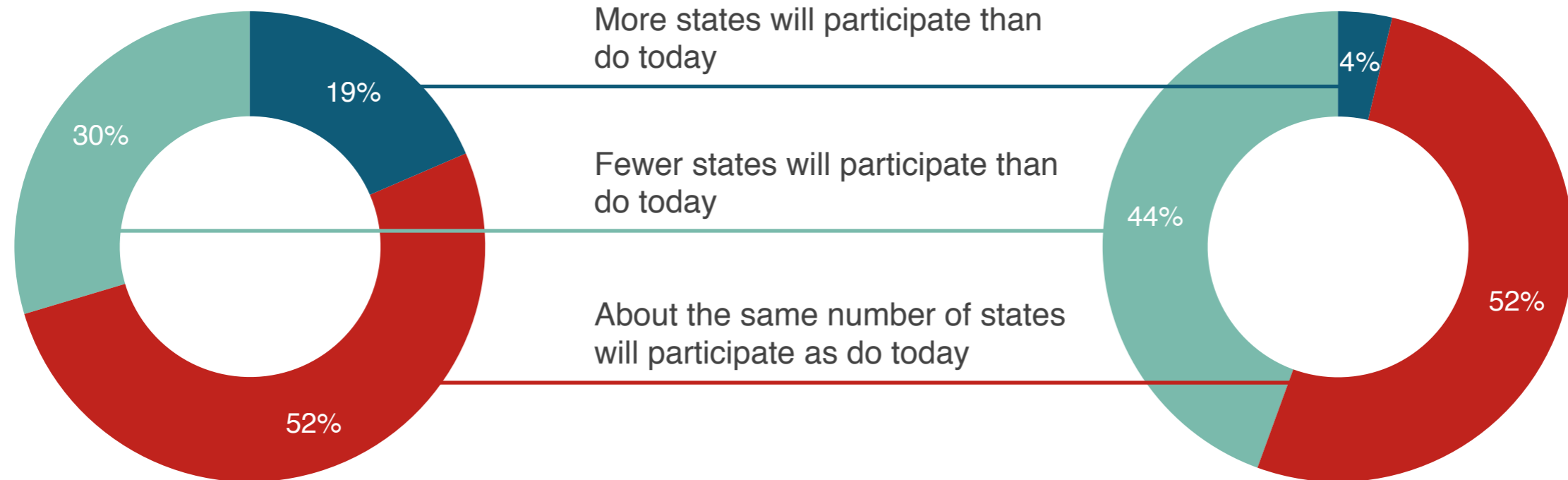
Q: What do you believe about the prospects for the two standardized testing consortia (SBAC and PARCC) over the next 24 months?

Common Core Testing Consortia

Insiders evaluate the outlook for each consortium over the next 24 months

PARCC

SBAC



Over the past year, both PARCC and SBAC have faced challenges and drops in their membership.

- Last spring, technology glitches in SBAC member states Nevada, North Dakota, and Montana halted testing for some time. Nevada and Montana failed to meet their federal mandates as a result.
- Ohio, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Massachusetts all dropped out of PARCC last year.
- PARCC testing in New Jersey this year has also seen problems.
- 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.

On the other hand, independently made tests have also caused trouble – Tennessee recently terminated its contract with Measurement Inc. after repeated delays on the TNReady test this spring. In the meantime, the opt-out movement, although less vocal than last year, continues to pressure state education leaders, and the push for less testing remains alive and well in state legislatures.

Q: What is the outlook for PARCC/SBAC over the next 24 months?

Common Core Testing Consortia

Insiders evaluate whether PARCC and SBAC are on the “right track”

Insiders Weigh In

When we last polled Insiders in July 2015, 36% believed that PARCC was on the right track. In contrast, 67% of Insiders reported that SBAC was on the right track. When polled this month, however, 56% of Insiders say that PARCC is on the right track. 64% now say SBAC is on the right track.

PARCC



↑ 20 percentage point increase in # of Insiders reporting “Right Track” since July 2015

SBAC



↓ 3 percentage point decrease in # of Insiders reporting “Right Track” since July 2015

Q: Is PARCC/SBAC on the right track or the wrong track?

Common Core Testing Consortia

Insiders offer comments on PARCC and SBAC

Odds Are Slim For PARCC...

“They've lost the communications battle...too little, too late.”

“Still – good test, bad politics. Outlook doesn't seem good for them to continue to exist.”

...But They May Still Be In The Game

“At this point the only way they can go is up. But they seem to be taking steps to address their problems and have actually added a new participant (DOD) when no one was looking.”

“Opening things up to allow states to just use items rather than the whole test was a smart move that will keep more states participating in at least some form.”

SBAC Has Been Fine So Far, But That May Change

“Good test. Good business model. Seems to have some staying power, though they will lose some members.”

“SBAC has been able to weather the political storm better than PARCC because of how it's structured but that will catch up with them, especially if the anti-testing winds continue to be fanned at the presidential level during and after the campaign.”

Higher Education

Defense to Repayment

Insiders gauge whether the increase in claims points to a wave of lawsuits

Background

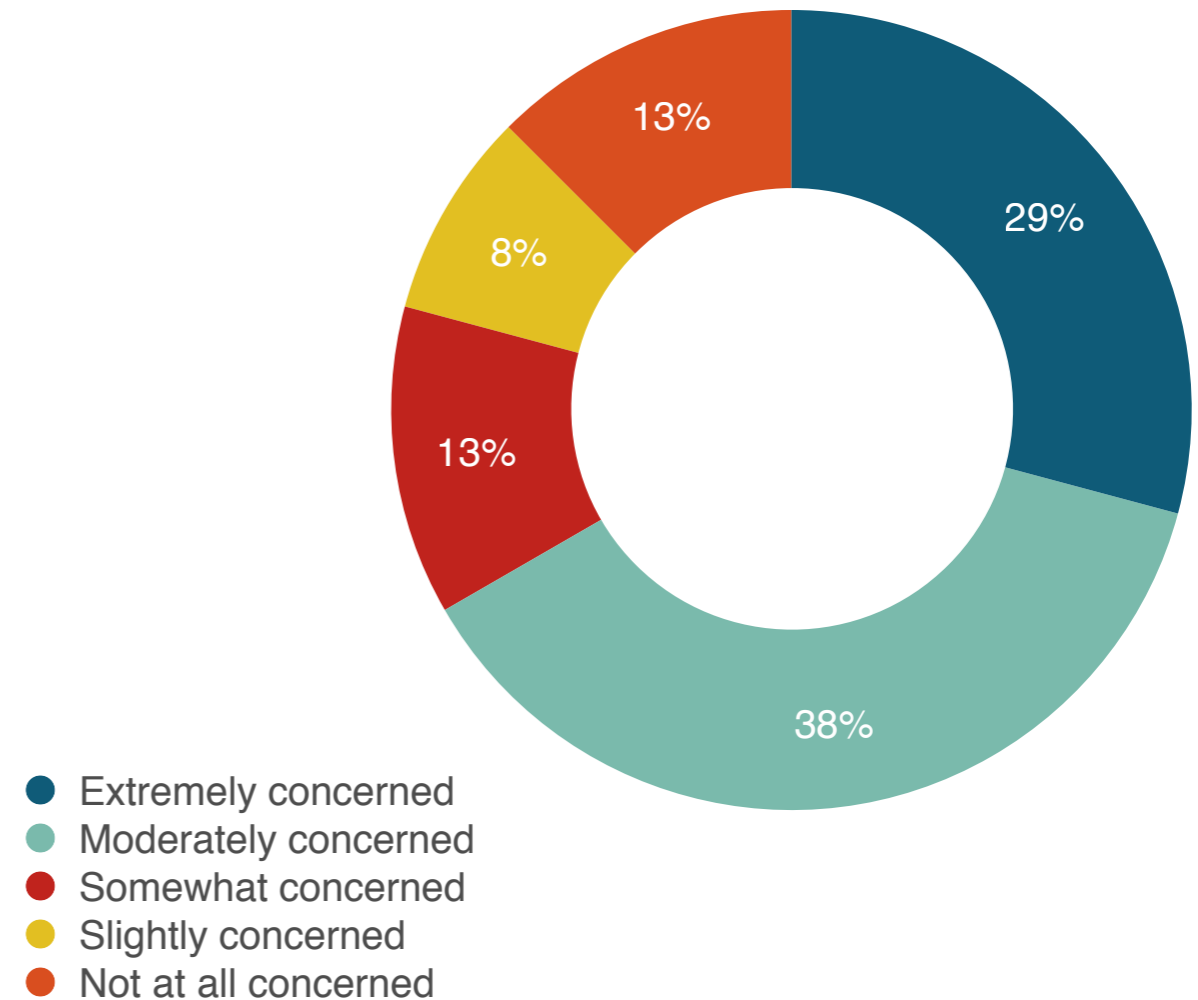
At the end of March, the U.S. Department of Education announced that thousands more students who attended campuses owned by Corinthian Colleges would be eligible to have their federal loans forgiven through the "borrower defense to repayment" (DTR) provision of the Higher Education Act. Since then, thousands of other students holding federal loans have also filed for their loans to be canceled.

Insiders Weigh In

Most Insiders are concerned that the recent rise in DTR claims has opened the floodgates. In their comments, however, they are divided on whether blame lies with the Obama administration or the students themselves.

By The Numbers

About 67% of Insiders are either extremely or moderately concerned about the rise in DTR claims. Only about 21% are slightly or not at all concerned.



Q: Rate your level of concern over whether this [the rise in DTR claims] indicates a prolonged wave of DTR claims against postsecondary institutions.

Defense to Repayment

Insiders offer comments on the rise in claims

It's The Government's Fault

“Totally irresponsible action by this feckless administration. Giving away money for free is the beginning of the end of bipartisan support for the student loan and Pell grant programs. Students who feel wronged should sue the failed schools, not seek a bailout from the taxpayers.”

It's The Schools' Fault

“[Extremely concerned,] given each of the schools failed to provide an appropriate education and misled the students as to what they would provide.”

It's All Because Millennials Are Spoiled

“Just go ahead and make the whole darn college experience free. It will at least free us from this moral handwringing about whether a student made a bad decision or was duped by a predatory college. The two aren't necessarily mutually exclusive.”

“Millennials think they should get everything they want and that someone else should pay for it. After all, their parents raised them to believe they are special and deserving of whatever they want ... Expanding DTR discharges will open the flood-gates and once this Pandora's Box is opened, it will be very difficult to close it. The real answer is to have a president who can actually restore economic growth so that college graduates can get college-level jobs that allow them to pay their bills.”

Grand Canyon University

Insiders evaluate accreditors' willingness to approve conversions

Background

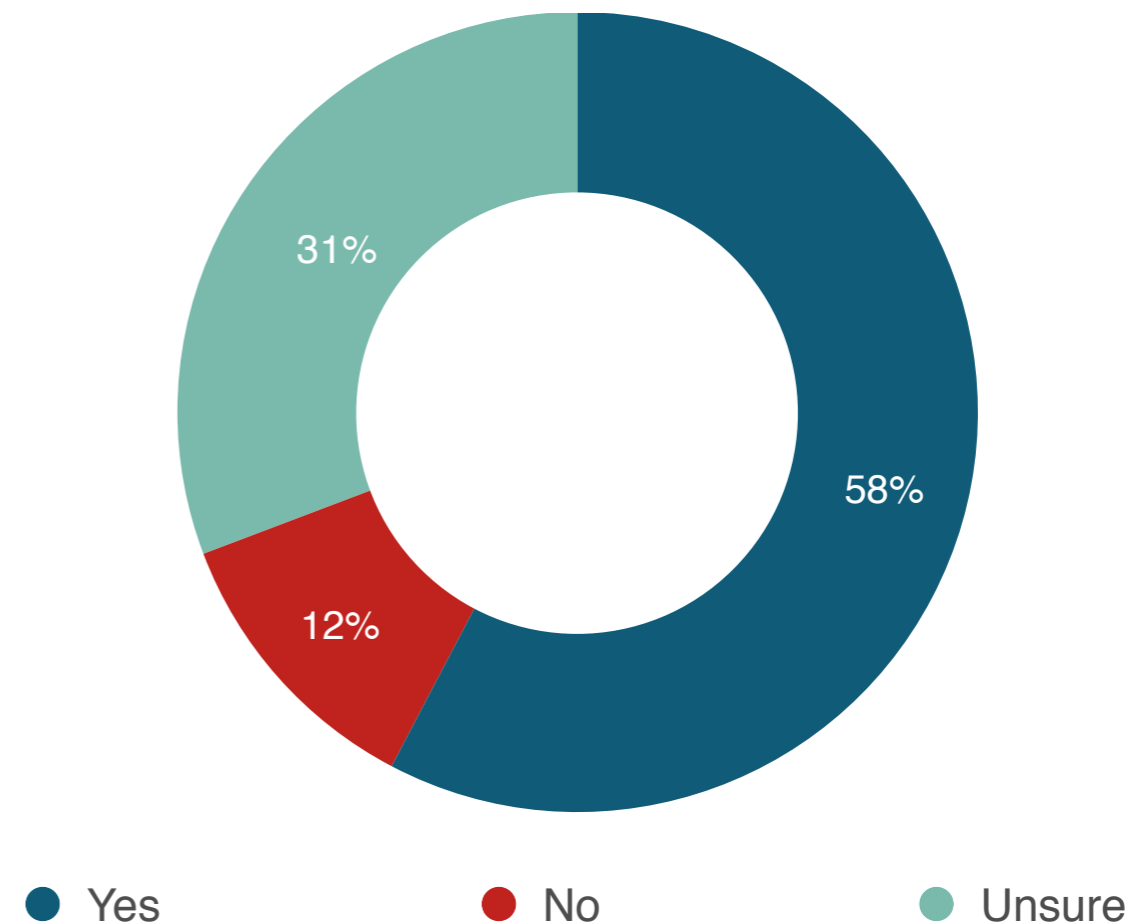
At the beginning of March, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) denied Grand Canyon University's attempt to become a non-profit. Grand Canyon had proposed creating a new non-profit "school corporation," while moving other company functions to an unaccredited for-profit "services corporation." The HLC decided that plan would move too many of the academic operations into the for-profit branch.

Insiders Weigh In

Insiders largely believe that the HLC's decision is indicative of a broader unwillingness to approve these conversions, but about 30% were unsure. While Grand Canyon explicitly sought to move away from the stigma that higher education for-profits face, this stigma may have been the main factor behind the rejection. Analysts note that the HLC's policy on academic outsourcing has not always been consistently applied.

By The Numbers

About 58% of Insiders believe the rejection signaled a general unwillingness among accreditors for similar conversions, but 31% are unsure.



Q: Does this rejection signal a general unwillingness among higher education accreditors to approve similar conversions?

The EQUIP Experiment

Insiders evaluate whether EQUIP signals greater access to aid

Background

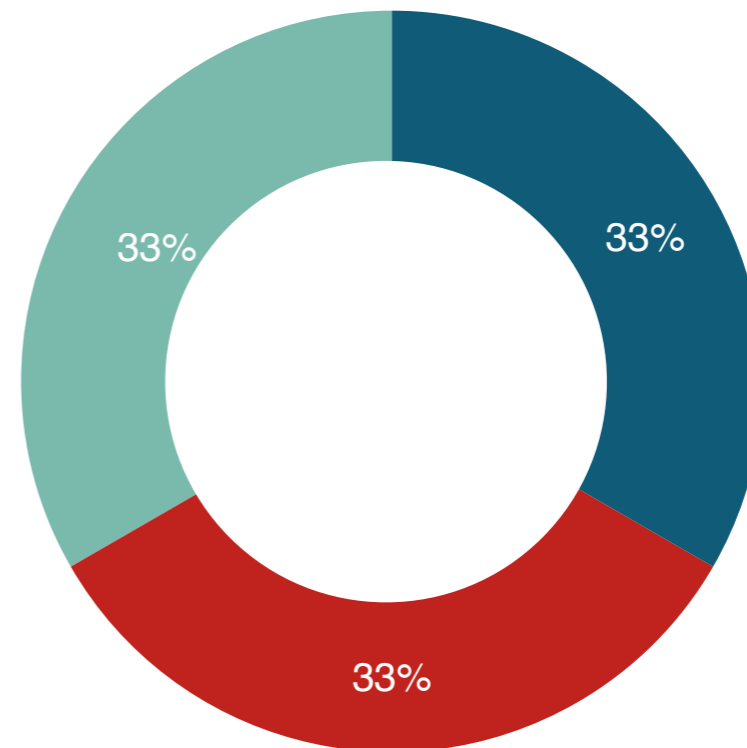
In October 2015, the Obama Administration launched the Educational Quality through Innovative Partnerships (EQUIP) Experiment. This program allows looser restrictions for participating schools that work with “alternative education providers,” including coding bootcamps, and enables students enrolled in these programs to access Title IV financial aid.

Insiders Weigh In

There is no consensus on whether EQUIP signals the beginning of a trend or not. In their comments, Insiders stress the need for quality control and thorough evaluation before further expanding the program.

By The Numbers

Insiders are split evenly in thirds over whether non-accredited providers will gain increased access to Title IV aid as a result of EQUIP.



● Yes

● No

● Unsure

Q: Does the EQUIP experiment signal the likelihood that federal Title IV aid will be further expanded to non-accredited providers?

The EQUIP Experiment

Insiders share their thoughts on where EQUIP may lead

Cautious Optimism

“While I do like this idea, and believe it represents a good potential path forward, this is in the experimental stage. Hopefully, it will be adequately evaluated before permanently expanding Title IV.”

Likely Problems

“EQUIP is a good idea as long as there is some quality control. And, alas, there isn't always.”

Doomed To Failure

“This is a bizarre situation, it's unclear how many of these providers really want this but policymakers and thought leaders really want them to have it. Creates problems and abuse. Tomorrow's scandal.”

“This is a disaster in the making.”

Western Governors University Audit

Insiders evaluate the “regular and substantive interaction” requirements

Background

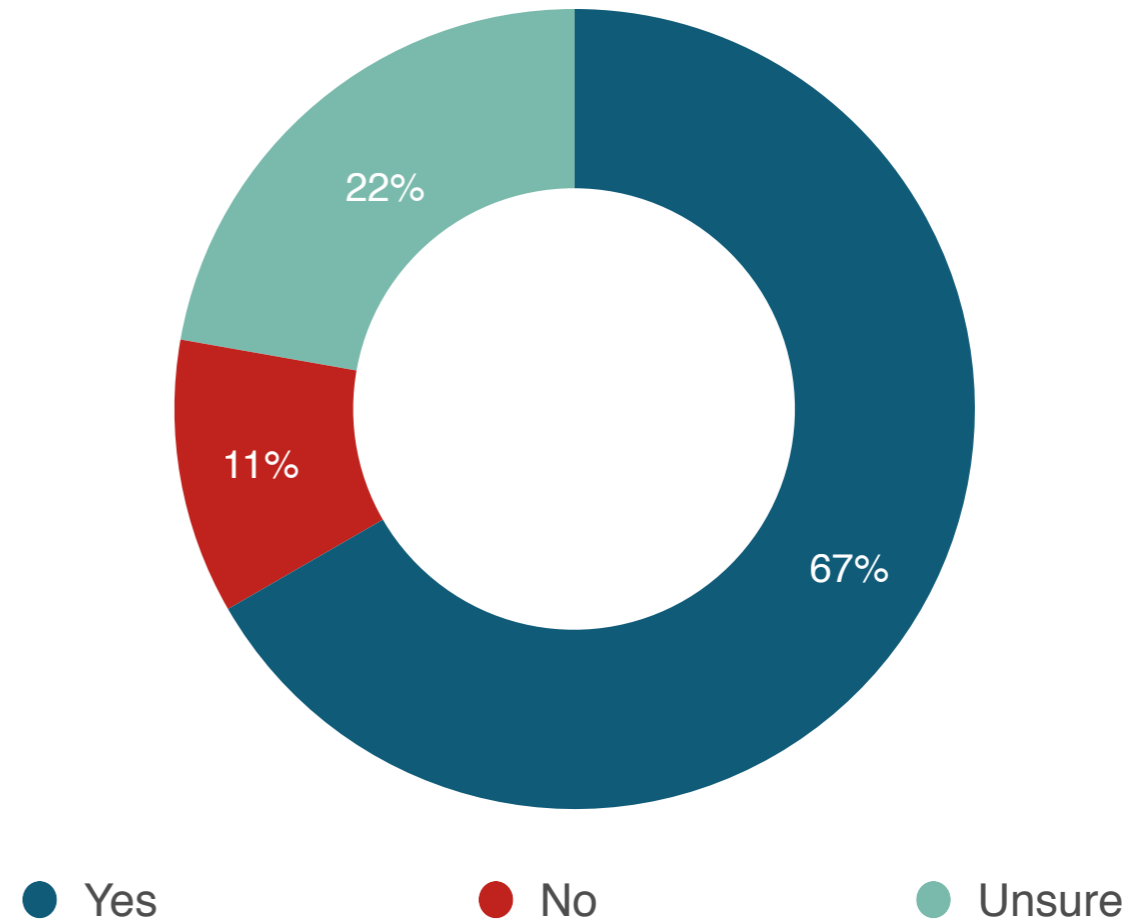
Almost three years ago, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) began an audit of Western Governors University (WGU) over whether the institution’s competency-based programs should be classified as correspondence courses – a different designation than distance education, which requires “regular and substantive interaction” between students and instructors. If the OIG decides that Western Governors is a correspondence-course provider, the university could incur a fine based on previously received federal funding.

Insiders Weigh In

Most Insiders believe that the requirements should be revised – in their comments, they note that competency-based education programs aren’t supposed to operate like traditional higher education, and so should have some flexibility.

By The Numbers

Two-thirds of Insiders believe that the “regular and substantive interaction” requirements should be revised to allow cases like this one. Only 11% believe that the requirements should be maintained.



Q: Do you believe that the "regular and substantive interaction" requirements should be revised or clarified by Congress to reflect new models of higher education?

Western Governors University Audit

Insiders offer comments on whether the requirements should be revised

Competency-Based Education Needs The Leeway

“Competency-based models of education have the capacity to dramatically change how higher education is delivered. This includes the type of interaction between students and institutions. If the programs prove effective, they can't be penalized for not operating like traditional higher ed.”

“WGU has made serious efforts to provide a solid, competency-based program and it should be allowed to continue in that effort. It is like the Department's decision to let Southern New Hampshire University move ahead with competency-based testing – so far they're the only one, and they are serving as a learning lab. This could help the field.”

The Requirement Doesn't Fit This Model Anyway

“Adult learners don't need routine and regular correspondence with the theorists who serve as their professors when they have daily contact with people who are in the workplace and actually know how to do the jobs that students are preparing for.”

Political Pushback

“But the Democrats won't be likely to support it because they hate anything that moves away from the status quo of brick and mortar schools.”

The 2016 Presidential Election

Education in the Media

Insiders predict whether education will get more attention in the media

Background

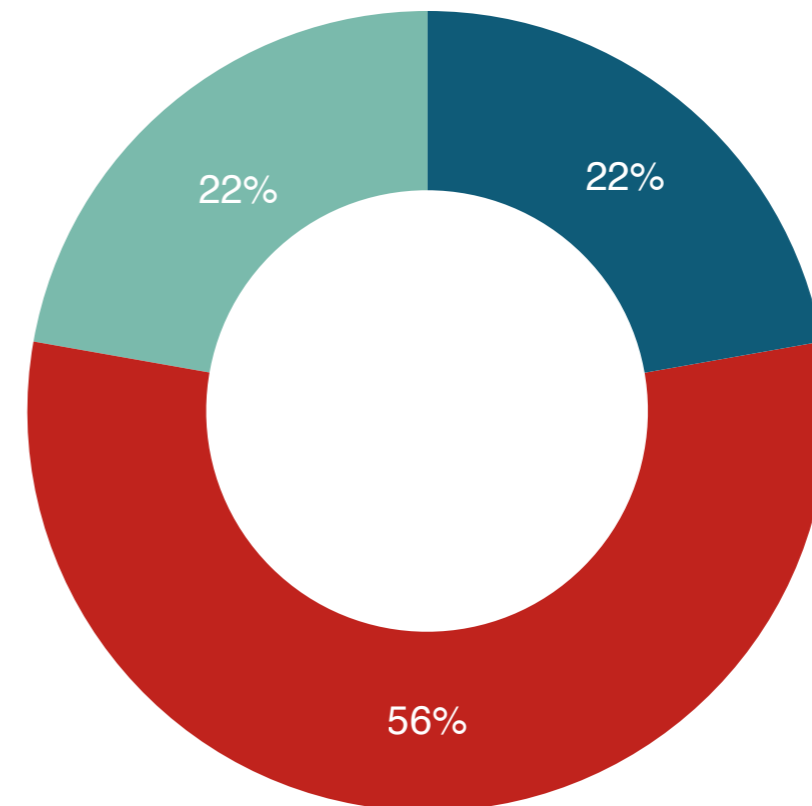
Educators and advocates have bemoaned the lack of any substantial conversation on education so far this year, especially in the context of the upcoming presidential election.

Insiders Weigh In

Unfortunately, most Insiders agree that education is not currently a serious priority for the media. Some, however, believe that while K-12 will be largely absent from the national conversation, higher education will likely get more attention. No matter the response, Insiders all note that the coverage of education will be closely tied to that of the presidential campaigns.

By The Numbers

More than half of Insiders believe education will get less attention in the media than it has so far. The remainder are split evenly between those who believe it will get more attention, and those who are unsure.



● More ● Less ● Unsure

Q: Over the next six months, do you expect education to get more or less attention in the media than it has so far?

Education in the Media

Insiders offer comments on the coverage, or lack thereof

Depends On The Election & ESSA Regulations

“That depends on what happens in the election, and it is more at the state and local level than the national. Unless the Department's draft ESSA regulations create a furor.”

“From a K-12 perspective, I think a lot of it will depend on how creative USED is in its drafting of ESSA regulations. If they are super creative and reach beyond scope/intent, I think it lays the ground work for a broader conversation at the federal level and in elections.”

Higher Ed Steals The Show

“I believe that higher education will get more attention because the Department and state AG's will continue their crusade against the for-profit sector until the Obamas leave town. I'm not sure if K-12 will get much attention because the recent reauthorization of ESEA probably means that the next president won't have an opportunity to influence K-12 education (at least not legislatively) unless he or she gets a second term.”

It's A Low Bar To Clear

“Other than testing and student loan soundbites the election, which will be the story, will turn on other issues.”

“Though it's hard to imagine how much less it can be than very low!”

K-12 Policy Priorities

Insiders weigh in on where presidential candidates and national leaders should focus

Background

Republicans have largely focused on reducing the federal role in public education. Donald Trump and Ted Cruz both oppose Common Core (while John Kasich supports it), and both Cruz and Trump have called for eliminating, or at least drastically reducing, the Department of Education. Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, meanwhile, have debated charter schools, and Sanders has proposed improving K-12 education funding by taxing Wall Street investors.

Insiders Weigh In

Insiders largely favor maintaining high academic standards and aligned assessments, ensuring strong accountability systems for student outcomes, and modernizing and elevating the teaching profession. Supporting investment in school infrastructure, creating stronger prohibitions on federal incentives for academic standards, and reducing standardized testing all get short shrift.

By The Numbers

- 1 Ensuring strong accountability systems for student outcomes
- 2 Maintaining high academic standards and aligned assessments
- 3 Modernizing and elevating the teaching profession
- 4 Expanding federal support for school choice options
- 5 Changing funding formulas
- 6 Increasing accountability for teacher preparation programs
- 7 Improving teacher evaluation systems
- *8 Reducing standardized testing
- *8 Expanding federal support for edtech
- 10 Other
- *11 Supporting investment in school infrastructure
- *11 Creating stronger prohibitions on federal incentives for adoption of academic standards such as Common Core

*Denotes a tie

Q: In your own view, what should be the top K-12 education policy priorities for 2016 presidential candidates and national leaders?
(Please rank.)

K-12 Policy Priorities

Insiders offer comments on what presidential candidates and national leaders should prioritize

More Resources Where They're Needed

“There must be more equity in education support, *i.e.* greater resources for schools with large concentrations of low-income students.”

“Other is focusing on CTE.”

Teachers And School Leaders Need More Support

“Probably should also think about improving principal training before increasing accountability for teachers.”

“The only way to improve higher education is to make teaching more attractive so that the best and brightest individuals become teachers. The best way to keep good teachers in the classroom is to give them more autonomy and respect. No amount of testing or accountability or professional development can ever solve our current problem, which is that the people with the lowest academic abilities (on average) tend to find their way to schools of education where they are brainwashed and forced to embrace theories that are nice ideas, but lack an empirical basis.”

But It Doesn't Matter, Because The Government Shouldn't Be Involved

“All of these presume a continuation of the failed Bush-Obama top-down federal micromanagement. How about we try a novel idea and get the heck out of the way for a few years???”

“The federal role in education is to strengthen and support, not prescribe and dictate to. There is room for the government in many of these 'buckets,' but it is in a role that supports state and local leadership.”

“Other: Ensuring that stakeholders have the data they need to make decisions (parents, teachers, public, taxpayers); this is a challenging question to answer if you believe there should be a limited role of the federal government in education!”

Higher Education Policy Priorities

Insiders weigh in on where presidential candidates and national leaders should focus

Background

Clinton and Sanders have sparred over college cost proposals and student debt, with Hillary advocating for debt-free college and Bernie pushing a \$700 billion plan to make public universities tuition-free. The current Republican frontrunners have yet to outline a higher education policy, although Donald Trump has criticized the Department of Education for profiting from the student loan program.

Insiders Weigh In

Most Insiders point to simplifying the FAFSA and improving transparency and accountability through the accreditation process. In their comments, Insiders also highlight reining in the loan programs, building a better linkage with K-12, and creating a better system of inter-state transfer for college credit.

By The Numbers

- 1 Simplifying the FAFSA
- 2 Increasing accountability and transparency through the accreditation process
- 3 Expanding options for student loan finance/repayment
- 4 Expanding the Gainful Employment rule to all colleges and universities that receive federal funding
- 5 Allowing colleges and universities to partner with non-accredited providers
- 6 Undoing the Gainful Employment rule for for-profit higher education
- 7 Improving campus safety
- 8 Making community college free
- 9 Expanding restrictions on for-profit institutions
- 10 Other

Q: In your own view, what should be the top higher education policy priorities for 2016 presidential candidates and national leaders? (Please rank.)

The Republican Higher Education Platform

Insiders evaluate Jeb Bush's plan, and whether it might outlive his candidacy

Background

Although Jeb Bush suspended his campaign, he was unusual among GOP candidates for outlining a higher education platform. Before he left the race, he outlined a platform that involved eliminating the federal student loan program (to be replaced with a \$50,000 line of credit tied to graduates' income), requiring colleges to repay the share of federal loans their former students are unable to repay, and creating state databases that track student outcomes in higher education.

Insiders Weigh In

On the whole, Insiders find it very unlikely that the Republican party will adopt any of Jeb Bush's proposals for the fall campaign. Of those ideas, though, Insiders think that forcing colleges to have more "skin in the game" by making them repay a share of former students' federal loans (if the students are unable to repay completely) and creating state databases to track student outcomes in higher education have the best shot.

By The Numbers

1 Force colleges to have more "skin in the game" by mandating that they repay a share of the federal loans their former students are unable to repay

2 Create state databases that track student outcomes in higher education, including unemployment rate, post-college earnings, graduation rates, and debt repayment rates

*3 Change federal bankruptcy law to allow private student loan borrowers to more easily discharge their debt in bankruptcy

*3 Eliminate the federal student loan program and replace it with a \$50,000 line of credit to pay for college or career training that is tied to graduates' income

*"None of the above" received more votes than any of the proposals listed.

Q: Rate the likelihood that the following of Bush's higher education proposals will be adopted by the party for the fall campaign.



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