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## Communities of Oppose Punitive School Reform

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New research on communities of color and public school reform shows that African-American and Latino parents support much of the AFT's agenda for improving schools. In particular, the parents and other caregivers surveyed want to fix public schools rather than close them down, to help teachers improve rather than weeding them out of the profession, and to provide rigorous college-prep courses for far more students.

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The research, commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and conducted by Brossard Research, Insights Marketing Group and Hart Research Associates, also included Southeast Asian and Native American communities, but those samples were more limited. The findings illustrate some challenges in engaging a broader section of the community in reform efforts. "Parents in communities of color have a tremendously high level of individual commitment to ensure the educational success of their children," the researchers say'. "But, they are unaware of the larger public school reform movement and face a reality that is in stark contrast to what they want for their children." These findings provide a "marked opening to engage parents in a collective, coordinated education reform effort."

Among the highlights from the research:

When asked if it is important that their child graduates from college, 91 percent of Latino and 86 percent of African-American parents said it is quite or extremely important. Parents of color want their children to take rigorous college-prep courses, even if they struggle. When asked what kind of math course parents would prefer their child to take, for example, the majority (85 percent of Latinos and 77 percent of African-Americans) said the "more challenging college-prep math course, even if it is far more difficult to pass," compared with the "less challenging math course that teaches basic skills but does not prepare them for college math." When asked what to do about poorly performing schools, the parents surveyed said the first option should be to try to fix them rather than close them. Parents want districts to

redouble their efforts to improve the quality of teaching in these schools as well as provide more learning resources. To improve the quality of public education children in their community receive, vast majorities of parents emphasized more parent involvement in schools (95 percent of African-Americans and 88 percent of Latinos). In addition, nine out of 10 parents said that more support to help teachers improve would help a lot in improving the quality of education. The vast majority of parents and caregivers surveyed were not aware that there is an education reform movement for them to support or that is seeking their support. When it comes to assigning responsibility for shortcomings in the education system, such as high dropout and low college completion rates, more than two-thirds of respondents primarily blamed parents and home life rather than the school system, teachers and the government.

"The new research shows that parents and caregivers in these communities are committed to doing their part-and then some-to help prepare their children for postsecondary education," the researchers note. That, in turn, they add, offers a great point of intersection for the individual efforts of these parents and the larger reform movement.

More information about the research is available online, including the [executive summary](http://publiceducation.org/pdf/2011_national_conference/communities_executive_summary) ,  
([http://publiceducation.org/pdf/2011\\_national\\_conference/communities](http://publiceducation.org/pdf/2011_national_conference/communities)  
and slides outlining the [research findings](http://publiceducation.org/pdf/2011_national_conference/communities_research_findings)  
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[Dan Gursky, the Public Education Network]

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