



## STUDENTS FOR EDUCATION REFORM POLL SUMMARY

Students for Education Reform's *First-Generation College Student Survey* is an unprecedented national poll that asked 1,000 first-generation college students – ages 18-25 – about their experiences with and opinions of K-12 education. Students for Education Reform is able to present evidence-based facts on what students want.

If we want to provide public education worthy of our students' dignity, talents, and limitless potential, we must allow students – and organizations that represent them – to have a seat at the table. Below are key findings and highlights of the poll.

### DETAILS OF WHO WE POLLED

- 40% are white, 29% Hispanic, 20% black, 10% Asian
- 37% live in non-English speaking homes
- 62% received free lunch (a federal benchmark for poverty)
- 19% are LGBT
- 82% attended traditional schools, 12% charter schools, 6% private schools
- 55% depend on federal grants to pay for college; 42% rely on loans
- 55% found it challenging to get to college
- 57% took a remedial course when in college
- 36% felt academically unprepared

**The first-of-its-kind national poll provided unique insights into what students want, need, and expect from their schools, including:**

### **Teachers and faculty should be rewarded and penalized based on performance**

- The majority of first-generation college students (FGCS) believe that teachers are important and should be paid more (63%), and believe in performance-based pay (58%).
- The majority (58%) of FGCS agree that ineffective teachers should be fired based on their performance as judged by: student evaluations (74%); student growth as measured by testing (64%); and peer evaluations (54%).

### **Many FGCS support school choice**

- The vast majority (75%) of FGCS favor school choice.
- Nearly half (44%) of all FGCS who did not have the option of school choice would have chosen a different school.



### **A sizable minority of FGCS feel unprepared for college, and a majority want life skills curriculum taught in high school**

- A sizable minority of first-generation college students (36%) feel that high school did not prepare them for college.
- Most first-generation college students wanted life skills curriculum taught in high school including: financial literacy (61%); job interviewing (56%); resume building (54%); stress management (52%).

### **Serious discipline is rare among FGCS, but a sizable minority of FGCS who were suspended did not receive any intervention**

- 17% of FGCS were suspended from school – the majority of whom (71%) were suspended for non-violent offenses.
- A sizable minority (35%) did not receive any intervention prior to suspension. Of those who received intervention, the most common interventions were a warning (48%), alternative disciplinary action (26%), and counseling (3%).

### **First-generation college students understand the importance of testing but think there is too much of it.**

- 55% say testing is important, although 61% say too much time is spent focused on standardized testing.  
64% think teachers should be evaluated based on how their students perform on tests.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Interviews were stratified geographically, and demographics were based on the population of college students as estimated by census data. The survey was conducted September 5-16, 2016.

## **STUDENTS FOR EDUCATION REFORM**

Students for Education Reform (SFER) develops college students into grassroots organizers who fight for educational justice in their communities. Our experiences and stories of overcoming educational inequality are undeniable and validate the demand for transformative change in our K-12 system. We fight for high academic standards, access to quality teachers and the right for families to choose the best school for their child, especially in communities that have historically been left behind.

## **MERCURY**

Mercury is a high-stakes public strategy firm. We provide results for the world's most successful companies, leading advocacy groups, governments, political parties, NGOs, and prominent public and political figures.