

Our Vision

The Schott Foundation envisions a U.S. public education model capable of instructing, shaping, and developing the nation's young people equitably and efficiently. The foundation's goal is to position the country's education model as a global example, demonstrating no matter how divergent the opinions and positions of political and economic actors, one shared objective is unwavering – an excellent public education for the nation's youth.

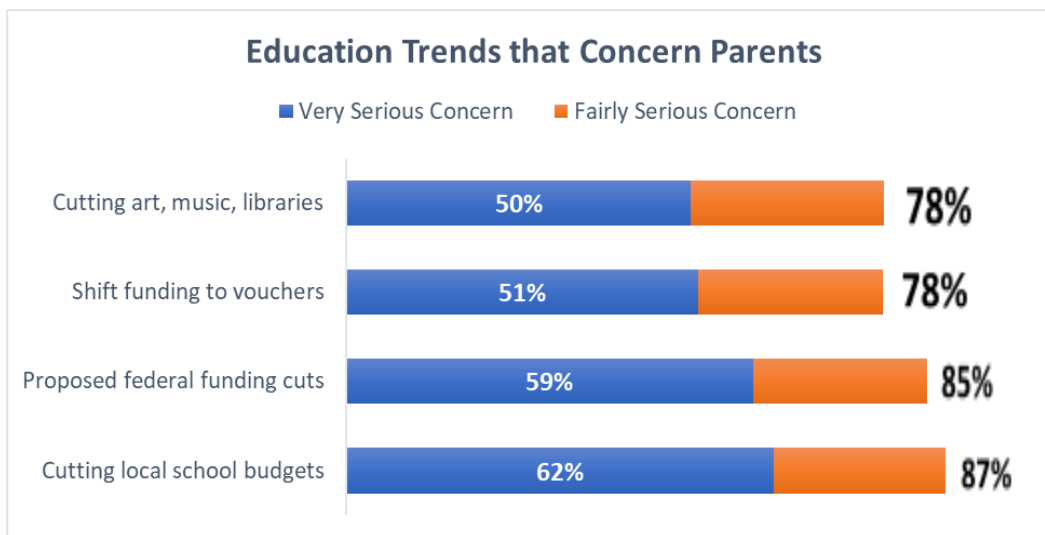
Problem

The existence of a free public system as a platform for opportunity has been a key component in maintaining the strength of America's democracy. Since before World War II, more than 90 percent of Americans and immigrants to America have been educated in our nation's public education system. This system has been the launching pad for U.S. presidents, legislators, doctors, clergy, scientists, judges, business leaders, entrepreneurs, musicians, artists, and athletes.

Yet today, we live in a moment where burgeoning, negative narratives frame the public education system as a "failure." Years of declining public investments have resulted in cuts to support systems and curricula leaving families and students at a critical crossroads. At the core of any school, public or private, lie the families, and their desires and feelings for their children's education matter deeply.

The National Survey of Public School Parents, conducted by Hart Research Associates, provides fundamental insight from over 1,200 public school parents. Interviews stretched across racial and demographic backgrounds through major urban cities – Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia, Phoenix, San Antonio, San Diego, and San Francisco. Widely regarded as one of the key, public sector opinion surveys, the findings serve as a bellwether surrounding public education sentiment.

Four critical areas stood out as points of concern for public school parents. Cuts to local school budgets have been debilitating, and it is no surprise that 87 percent are very or fairly concerned about the impact of these cuts.



Post-Great Recession, states nationwide began slashing school funding. According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau data, more than half of states counted on less total school funding (per pupil) than they did seven years earlier. Roughly 61 million students are being educated by our public school system, and these cuts have directly impacted anywhere from 30 to 40 million children.

Project Proposal

The Schott Foundation has launched the #PublicSchoolGrad initiative to elevate and reinforce positive narratives about America’s public education system. A strategic national effort aimed at strengthening public and political support for critical investments into public education, #PublicSchoolGrad highlights the extraordinary talent that exists among our diverse public school students and the enormous contributions public schools and their dedicated teachers have made to every sector in American society.

The #PublicSchoolGrad strategy is advanced over three areas:

1. High-visibility local events that highlight the brilliant talent and accomplishments of existing public-school students and educators in target cities.
2. Celebrity public school graduates—leaders in diverse sectors and fields—share their narratives and proclaim pride in their public school education and its contributions to their lives and careers.
3. A multimedia, multi-platform communications effort to create an echo chamber that amplifies positive messages and connects local voices across a national campaign platform.

1. High-Visibility Local Events Highlighting Talented Public-School Students

Local arts, music, and skills events—a centerpiece of the initiative—will focus attention on the brilliance exhibited by the diverse talent of public school students and community leaders who are products of a public school education. Each event spotlights students as “works of art” to be treasured and supported through investment in public schools, and as graduates who will contribute to society at large, illustrating the significant return on this public investment.

2. Engaging Celebrity Public School Graduates in High-Profile Online Campaigns

The U.S. is replete with exceptional talent and brilliant minds, all graduates of public schools. Celebrities within pop culture can play an essential role in raising the profile of a campaign or issue via key online and social media platforms. Having educated more than 80 percent of our nation's students, the American public school system has one of the largest pools of celebrity ambassadors able to elevate its track record of success.

In its preliminary stages, #PublicSchoolGrad has already garnered the support of award-winning celebrities Matt Damon, Danny Glover, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Anthony Anderson, Lamman Rucker, Cynthia Nixon, Laila Ali, Regina King, Anthony Hamilton and more than 50 others.

3. Multimedia, Multi-Platform Communications Effort

The third component of the #PublicSchoolGrad initiative includes leveraging both celebrity engagement and local showcase events through a promotional ad strategy and public service campaign to counter the damaging, destructive narrative of failure and instead spotlight the success of America's public education system and its critical importance to our democracy.

Why now?

We are living in a time when communication platforms are the most open, accessible, and powerful in human history. If previous political outcomes have demonstrated anything, smart, effective use of said platforms can radically change the course of just about anything.

The #PublicSchoolGrad initiative is strategically positioned to take advantage and capitalize on these platforms. After decades of robust debates on education standards, assessments, accountability, labor contracts, and traditional versus charter public schools, one fact remains true - the public school system remains the primary institution of education for over 80 percent of students in America.

A parallel endeavor from the Schott Foundation, the *Healthy Living & Learning Communities Initiative* is a unique undertaking focused on creating loving systems across communities thereby engendering positive, academic outcomes. Research has quantified the connection between economic and racial opportunity and achievement gaps. Nationally, 42.6 percent of students of color in the United States attend a high-poverty school (where at least 75 percent of the population qualify as poor or low-income), while only 7.6 percent of white students are in high-poverty schools. The difference in outcomes between high-poverty schools and low-poverty schools is stark. A Stanford University analysis of reading and math test scores from across the country found that "children in the school districts with the highest concentrations of poverty score an average of more than four grade levels below children in the richest districts."

Oprah Winfrey, Steve Jobs, Meg Whitman, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Warren Buffet, Jeff Bezos, Jay Z, Marissa Mayer, Larry Page, Katie Couric, Sheryl Sandberg, Tim Cook, Michael Bloomberg, Spike Lee, Diane Sawyer all graduated from public schools. The system is far from broken, it simply needs fresh and timely messaging that the #PublicSchoolGrad initiative can provide here and now.

New York Times journalist Amanda Ripley authored a provocative piece, "What America Can Learn From Smart Schools in Other Countries." The wheel has been invented and public education works fantastically in many nations. To return to the top of the leaderboard, the direction is clear ...

"Generally speaking, the smartest countries tend to be those that have acted to make teaching more prestigious and selective; directed more resources to their neediest children; enrolled most children in high-quality preschools; helped schools establish cultures of constant improvement; and applied rigorous, consistent standards across all classrooms."

We're at a crossroads, but the road leading to recapturing those same democratic ideals, the bedrock of America, could not be clearer. The time to act is now.