

The “Imagine Nation” in America: Identifying an Emerging Voting Constituency

A recent national poll conducted by Lake Research Partners has identified a new and growing constituency of voters in America who advocate building capacities of the imagination in public education.¹ This population of self-identified voters will readily and strongly support public education that answers the call for innovation and goes beyond its current focus on the “so-called” basics to meet the changing demands of the 21st century. Moreover, within the growing constituency is a more intensely committed group of very likely voters ripe for mobilization—an “imagine nation.”

- Almost 9 in 10 voters agree that the imagination is a key ingredient to innovation and student success.
- The “imagine nation” comprises 30% of likely voters—or 39 million people—who feel intensely about the issue. Within the “imagine nation” more than 50% are independent or swing voters.

These voters believe that in order to meet the demand for innovation in the marketplace we must teach skills of the imagination in the classroom. They are concerned that America, a historic leader in innovation, is falling behind as it devotes less attention to developing what they perceive to be essential skills of the imagination and innovation than do other nations.

- 79% of voters strongly believe that imagination is key to innovation.
- 56% of American voters believe that, when compared to other nations, America devotes less attention to developing the imagination and to innovation. Only 19% of respondents believe the United States is ahead.

Voters reject the notion that the basics and technology alone prepare students for success and push back against the notion of leaving imagination for outside the classroom. While voters recognize that building capacities of the imagination rests primarily with an education in and through music and the arts, they also believe that music and the arts are essential to invigorating the teaching of other fundamental school subjects and that incorporating imagination across the curriculum produces the strongest results. For instance, voters believe that music and the arts should be integrated with science, engineering, technology and math to provide students the skills and values necessary to be imaginative and innovative.

¹ **About the survey:** Lake Research Partners (LRP) designed and administered this survey, which was conducted by phone using professional interviewers. The survey reached a total of 1,000 likely registered voters nationwide. The survey was conducted December 15th to 20th, 2007. The margin of error for the sample is +/- 3.1%.

This nationwide survey was commissioned by the Arts Education Partnership with support from the National Education Association; NAMM, the International Music Products Association; The George Gund Foundation; and Marmillion + Company.

- 91% of voters indicate that music and the arts are essential to building capacities of the imagination.
- 73% of voters believe that building capacities of the imagination is just as important as the “so called” basics for all students in public schools.
- 82% of voters want to build imagination and creative skills in schools.

As education becomes an increasingly spotlighted issue, poll data suggests that a large group of Americans are planning to vote according to a candidate’s position on developing skills of the imagination in public schools. Independent voters prove especially reactive to a candidate’s decisions to fund imagination in education.

- 57% of voters say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who came out in support of more funding for development of skills of the imagination in schools.
- 57% of voters say they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who votes to cut funding for building capacities of the imagination in public education, and 36% percent of voters say they would be much less likely to do so.

For policy makers, the “imagine nation” constituency supports three specific points of action in order to prompt innovation with an education that develops the cognitive capacities of the imagination:

1. Build capacities of the imagination by supporting time and resources for an education in and through the arts.
2. Support integrated and interdisciplinary processes and approaches, which also save money and time in the school day.
3. Teach beyond assessment. Move beyond average performance and scoring that focuses on the minimum, which ultimately stifles students and educators alike.

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