

Penta Policy Insiders

Florida Insights Review Series

K-12 Education

SCHOOL BUS SERVICE

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Executive summary

We are excited to share our findings from this year's Florida Insights Review. From April to September 2022, we surveyed and spoke with over 250 state and local policymakers in Florida to understand their policy priorities and how the private and public sectors can collaborate to move forward on important issues.

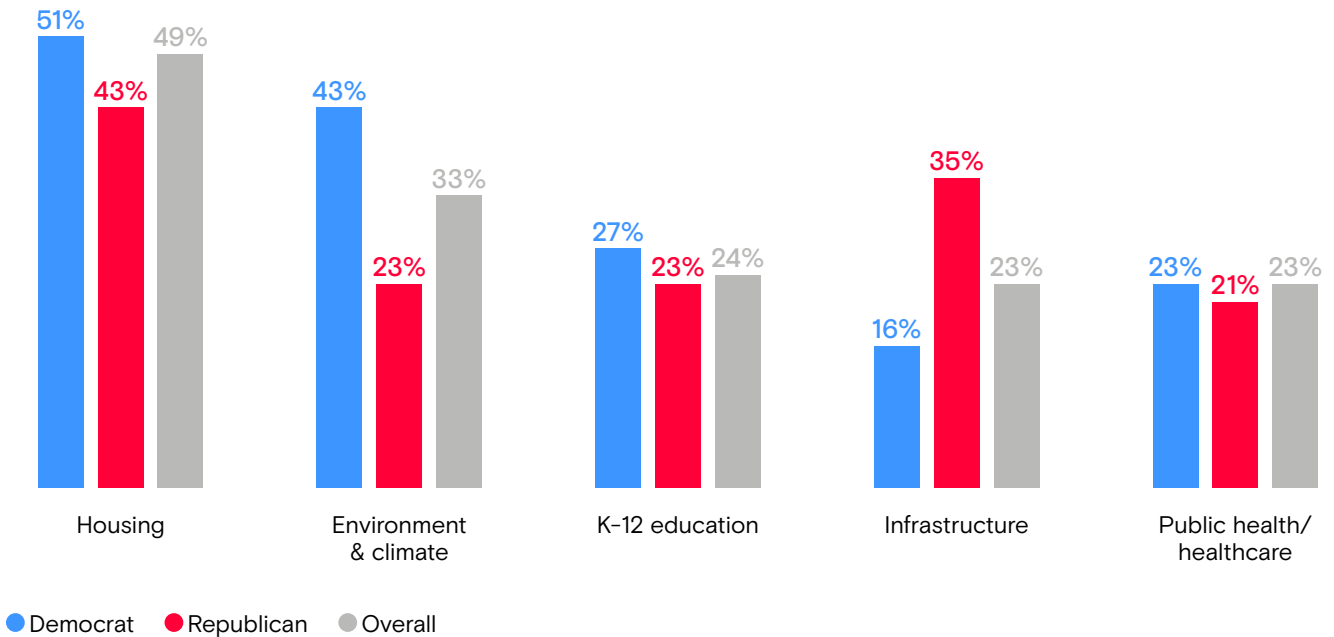
Last year was particularly noteworthy for the state of Florida, which was at the center of national discourse when its business community and political leadership found themselves misaligned over issues relating to corporate engagement on social issues, highlighted by the Parental Rights in Education legislation. Our research in Florida indicates that policymaker perceptions of corporate engagement on social issues vary significantly by party, with Republicans more critical of corporate engagement on these issues.

In fact, 40% of Republican policymakers believe that companies should avoid engaging on social issues, altogether. Those Republican policymakers that welcome private sector engagement tend to suggest that such engagement should be directly related to business functions and avoid overstepping into political issues.

In terms of policy priorities, both Democrats and Republicans report that the state's housing issues are top of mind, while education and healthcare remain in the top five priorities of Florida policymakers.

This report is the fourth in a series that examines Florida policymakers' top policy priorities of 2022. This review examines Education in the state.

Top policy priorities in Florida

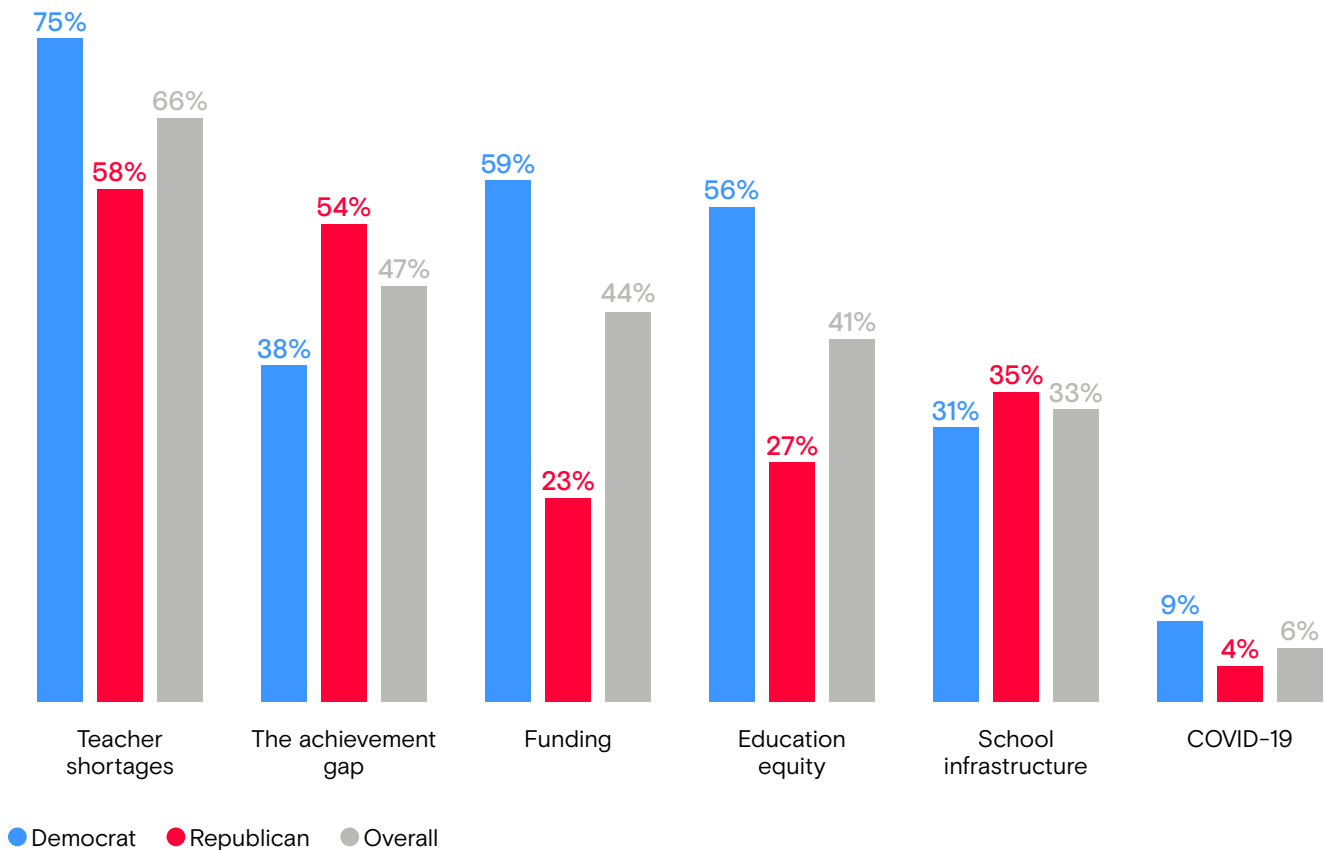


K-12 Education

Florida’s policymakers on both sides of the aisle recognize K-12 education to be a top issue in the state, with **66 percent** of policymakers citing a growing teacher shortage as a top concern.¹ Additionally, **47 percent** of respondents, including **54 percent** of Republicans and **38 percent** of democrats, say the increasing achievement gap is also a pressing issue. In addition to these issues, government involvement in teachers’ curriculums became a source of division across parties after the passage of the Parental Rights in Education bill last March.²

Most pressing issues in education

Multiple selections permitted



A growing teacher shortage

Sixty-six percent of Florida policymakers cite the ongoing teacher shortage to be a tremendous obstacle for the state. The need for teachers increased in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, with so many teachers leaving education that the state is looking for new methods of incentivizing individuals to become educators.^{3,4}



The teacher shortages [are an immediate] issue. People are leaving the profession left and right because they're not supported, because they're not paid, because they're not given the tools they need to succeed.

Director of Communications, Legislative, D



There's a shortage of teachers, as was reported in the public domain because they are either underpaid or not funded adequately. We've heard of stories where our teachers have to dip into their pockets to buy supplies for their class.

Director, Municipal, I



The teacher shortage is going to get worse. I mean, right now there are a lot of job opportunities, and teachers do have skills. They can pretty much mold themselves into other industries...they have an opportunity to do something different, maybe even make a little more money and grow for their family. And I think it's going to get worse. It's scary.

Manager, Executive, R

Bridging the achievement gap

Both Democrat and Republican policymakers – 47 percent – are concerned about K-12 education outcomes in the state and want to see students learn skills that will prepare them for a successful future.



I think it's important we focus on the graduation rate, which really trickles down or up, if you will, from everything from early learning to English, math, science, sort of things, and keeping kids in school.

Vice Chairman, Executive, R



I think we still are teaching to a test. We don't learn skills on how to live. There's no financial education taught.

Legislative Staff, Florida State Senate, D



Students need to go to school and learn things that will help them in life again like the STEM curriculum, including languages, proper grammar, the English, and history, all those subjects that we have done forever.

Government Operations Consultant, Executive, R

Tensions over government intervention in classrooms

Republican policymakers in the state are concerned about what is being taught in classrooms, particularly with regard to Critical Race Theory and gender identity, while Democratic decision-makers expressed increased concern amidst the state's efforts to adopt new teaching standards that ban the teaching of Critical Race Theory, gender identity, and other topics deemed to be "woke indoctrination."⁵



The problem is government intervention in our classrooms is that it's so frightening, and the penalties are severe. So it's a complete chilling effect. There's a huge chilling effect on teachers where **they feel very much like they cannot have a conversation about any social issue that's happening in the state or in anybody's life.**

Representative, Florida House of Representatives, D



I think what's even more important right now is leaving teachers alone and not meddling in what they're allowed to teach, what they're allowed to say, and what they're allowed to put out there. That would be the biggest gift of all. **We should let teachers teach and not be dictating things because you're trying to pursue a particular ideology.**

Legislative Analyst, Florida House of Representatives, D



The polling on that indicates that even Democrat primary voters, which are among the most progressive - 68% - supported and still support the Parental Bill of Rights in Florida [a bill that among other provisions, prohibits instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity in kindergarten through grade three or in a manner that the state deems is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students]. So, that's really telling me that there's a wide swath of the American electorate that supports this once they learn what the bill is.

Representative, Florida House of Representatives, R



I think the teacher should keep their political desires to themselves and not be allowed to discuss that in schools.

Supervisor, Executive, R

Conclusion

Florida policymakers detail several challenges regarding K-12 education, with the teacher shortage being top of mind. Florida policymakers are focused on helping schools to equip students with the skills needed to improve learning outcomes in the state.

About Penta Policy Insiders

Penta Policy Insiders provides direct feedback from policymakers to government relations professionals, improving advocates' ability to understand, validate, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their engagement.

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Citations

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3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/amid-us-teacher-shortage-florida-turns-military-veterans-2022-09-13/>
4. <https://flgov.com/2022/08/16/governor-ron-desantis-announces-three-new-initiatives-to-elevate-teachers-and-students-learning/>
5. <https://www.flgov.com/2021/12/15/governor-desantis-announces-legislative-proposal-to-stop-w-o-k-e-activism-and-critical-race-theory-in-schools-and-corporations/>

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