Eroding Public Trust in Education

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Public trust in the U.S. education system has been a topic of concern for decades, as schools grapple with disparities in funding, quality, and outcomes. Recent surveys indicate a significant decline in confidence in the education system. A Gallup poll revealed that in 2024, only 29% of Americans expressed a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in public schools, marking a near-record low (Gallup, n.d.). This decline is part of a broader trend of diminishing trust in major institutions across the country. Furthermore, a 2024 survey by The Pew Charitable Trusts found that nearly half of U.S. public school teachers feel that most Americans don't trust them much or at all (Deane, 2024). Meanwhile, a historically small slice of U.S. adults—37 %—say they want their children to become teachers, according to the 54th Annual PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, marking the slimmest recorded percentage since the poll launched in 1969 (Natanson, 2022). Natanson (2022) sums up the findings about public trust with these words:

> Fierce debates over what educators should be allowed to do and say in classrooms, an ascendant parents' rights movement seeking control of what children learn at school, recent criticism of teachers from lawmakers and news outlets, and the lingering aftershocks from the pandemic have all sapped public confidence in the teaching profession.

Perspectives of Parents on Education

These concerns reflect a broader shift in how parents view their role in their children's development—not just academically, but holistically. A survey conducted by Presence found that two-thirds of parents worry their child is not reaching their full potential, with concerns spanning positive mental health, social development, future preparedness, and behavioral issues (Presence, 2024). When asked to indicate their top concerns, parents shared the following:

- **Positive Mental Health:** 37% of parents identified emotional well-being, reflecting widespread anxiety about children's mental health.
- **Social Development:** 28% of parents are worried about their child's social skills and interactions, indicating apprehension about socialization following the pandemic.
- **Future Preparedness:** 24% of parents express concern about their child's readiness for future challenges, including academic and career prospects.
- **Behavioral Issues:** 23% of parents are concerned about behavioral problems, which can impede academic success and social integration.

As parents' worries extend beyond test scores to positive mental health, social development, future preparedness, and behavioral issues, many parents are increasingly turning to schools not only for education but also for support services that address these broader developmental needs. However, the path to accessing such services is often fraught with challenges that further erode trust in education:

- **Financial Constraints:** 28% of parents cite financial concerns as a barrier to accessing resources.
- **Lack of Information:** 21% of parents do not know where to obtain help, highlighting a need for better dissemination of information regarding available services.
- **Stigma:** 72% of parents acknowledge that others' opinions impact their willingness to have their child assessed for learning disabilities, indicating that social stigma remains a significant hurdle.

Bridging the Trust Gap

While part of the erosion of trust in the education system is due to culture wars about what content should be taught, a significant portion of the erosion in trust stems from teachers not being equipped with adequate resources to meet the needs of students. The lack of resources stems in part from a fragmented education system that does not rely on research-based and proven practices.

How a Knowledge Management System Aligns with Public and Parental Concerns

By standardizing practices and ensuring accountability, a knowledge management system (KMS) can directly tackle the factors contributing to declining public trust (Carnine, n.d.):

- **Promoting Positive Mental Health:** A KMS provides established research-based resources and practices that support mental health initiatives to meet students' emotional health.
- **Enhancing Social Development:** By sharing proven practices and guidance to improve social interactions, such as peer mentoring, a KMS fosters environments where children thrive socially.
- **Future Preparedness:** A KMS can standardize best practices for ensuring that students at all levels are being prepared for higher education, a career, or both.
- **Addressing Behavioral Challenges:** Schools can use a KMS to access proven behavioral intervention programs, equipping teachers and administrators with tools to create disciplined yet supportive learning environments.

Additional Benefits of an Accessible KMS

- **Improved Access to Information:** A centralized repository of resources that houses standardized practices and protocols ensures that educators are able to provide guidance aligned to research-based proven practices and then to communicate the information to parents.
- **Building Trust Through Transparency and Reducing Barriers:** Based on the use of an education KMS, states and schools will be able to provide standardized student performance reports and resource allocation data aligned to evidence, enabling families to trust their schools but also make decisions about and advocate for the needs of their children.

Conclusion

The concerns of parents about their children's development are pervasive and multifaceted. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort to provide accessible support services, disseminate information effectively, and reduce the stigma associated with seeking help. The integration of a KMS offers a transformative solution to these challenges, fostering transparency and research-based practices. By adopting research-based reforms and committing to these efforts, the education system will be more able to provide every child with the opportunity to reach their full potential and restore public trust.

References

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