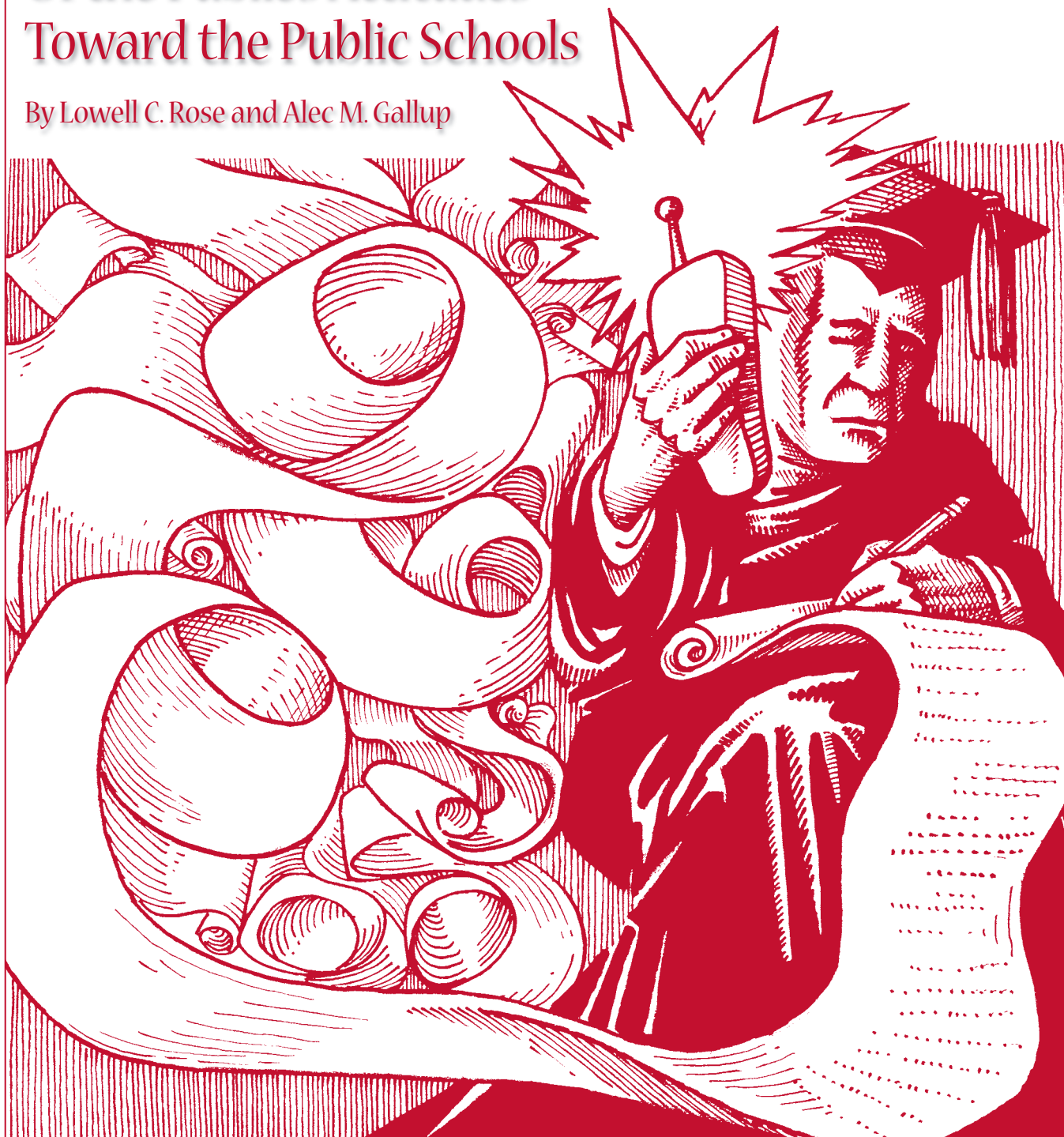


The 38th Annual
Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll
Of the Public's Attitudes
Toward the Public Schools

By Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup



AS THIS poll appears for its 38th consecutive year, it serves as a memorial and a continuing tribute to the work of George Gallup, Sr. He was one of the poll's founders, considered it his poll, picked the panel to select the questions, oversaw the surveying, analyzed the results, and wrote the report. He drew great satisfaction from the poll and watched over it closely until his death in 1984. The close relationship between the Gallup Organization and Phi Delta Kappa International continues today with Alec Gallup, Chairman of the Gallup Poll, replacing his father. Since 1992, I have had the pleasure of directing the poll for PDK. Alec and I share the belief that being true to the poll's heritage requires keeping it free from bias while operating at the cutting edge of issues facing K-12 schools. Alec controls the wording of the questions and is responsible for making sure that the findings and conclusions are supported by the data. We present the results here in a user-friendly fashion intended to permit readers to delve into the data to verify our interpretations or draw their own conclusions. — LCR



Major Findings and Conclusions

The results of this poll are released at a press conference held in August in the Gallup Building in Washington, D.C. The first question a reporter asked at a recent conference was, "What are the major story lines of this poll?" Opening by answering that question has now become standard practice for the press conference, and we replicate it here by starting with the findings and conclusions that we believe have the greatest significance. Our aim is not to minimize or downplay the remaining findings and conclusions. However, we believe that the findings and conclusions presented here provide a context for interpreting the remaining results.

The major findings center on how people want improvement to come about, on the way the public assesses the public schools, and on how it views some of the strategies used in current change efforts. (The tables pertaining to these questions are grouped at the end of this section.) Everything else in this poll builds to the final section, which deals with the change strategy dominating K-12 education today, the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

Source of School Improvement

We begin with a brief story. A reporter at the 2001 press conference suggested asking the public whether improve-

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ment in public education should be sought by reforming the existing system or by finding an alternative system. This question would provide a benchmark to use in weighing the responses to questions dealing with proposals for change. The suggestion was accepted, a question was framed and asked in 2002, and the question has been repeated in each subsequent poll. (See Table 1.)

Findings. The 2002 question found that 69% of the public expressed a preference for improvement through reforming the existing system. The number this year is 71%. By contrast, just 27% of respondents in 2002 preferred seeking an alternative system, and that figure is at 24% for 2006.

Conclusion I. The public's strong preference is to seek improvement through the existing public schools. Policies shaped with this fact in mind are most likely to gain public approval.

Rating of the Public Schools

Each year we ask the public to assess its schools using the familiar A to F scale. This practice started in 1974 with a question asking respondents to grade the schools in the local community. Grading of the nation's schools was added in 1981, and, beginning in 1985, parents were asked to grade the school their oldest child attends. Each question has been repeated every year since it was first asked. (See Tables 2, 3, and 4.)

Findings. In this year's poll, 49% give the schools in the community an A or a B. The percentage last year was 48%. The percentage of A's and B's climbs to 56% for public school parents and to 64% when parents grade the school their oldest child attends. The nation's schools continue to draw the lowest grades, with just 21% of the public awarding them an A or a B. Of course, the nation's schools must also be schools in someone's "community" and schools someone's "oldest child attends."

Conclusion II. Public ratings of the local schools are near the top of their 38-year range.

Conclusion III. The closer people get to the schools in the community, the higher the grades they give them.

Conclusion IV. Policies at the state and federal levels that build on the assumption that local schools have a high approval rating are likely to gain public support.

Conclusion V. Gaining public support for school improvement will be more likely if proposals are based on the schools in the community and not on the nation's schools.

In stories reported about the public schools, declining public support for the schools is taken almost as a given. The grades assigned the schools in this poll since 1974 demonstrate clearly that such is not the case.

Findings:

- In 1974, 48% of the public gave schools in the community a grade of A or B. In 2006, the percentage awarding local schools an A or a B is 49%.
- In 1994, 66% of parents gave the school their oldest child attends a grade of A or B. This year's figure is 64%.

Conclusion VI. There has been no decline in public support for public schools. Approval ratings remain high and remarkably stable.

Choice Through Vouchers

Vouchers that parents can use to send their children to private, church-related, or public schools of their choice are an alternative that first received public notice after a 1955 address by economist Milton Friedman. He saw vouchers as a way of providing competition for the public schools. However, vouchers remain controversial because they touch on the line involving separation of church and state and because they are seen as diverting money from the public schools. Since 1991, the PDK/Gallup polls have approached this issue with a question that measures approval of the voucher concept — “allowing parents and students to choose a private school to attend at public expense” — without using the politically charged word “vouchers.” Table 5 provides this year’s results. In considering the results, it is useful to keep in mind that choice, independent of a specific program, is popular with the public.

Findings. The percentage favoring vouchers dropped from 38% a year ago to 36% this year, while opposition grew from 57% to 60%. Support for vouchers started at 24% in 1993, fluctuated up and down for years, and peaked at 46% in 2002. It is now at the mid-Nineties level.

Conclusion VII. Support for vouchers is declining and stands in the mid-30% range.

Choice Through Charters

Although charter schools are public schools, many people do not think of them as such, because they operate outside the traditional K-12 structure. The two charter questions in this year’s poll explore public support for the idea of charter schools and public understanding of the nature of such schools. The second question is new and was asked because public comments on charters often reflect a lack of understanding of the concept. (See Tables 6 and 7.)

Findings. Public approval of charter schools has climbed from 42% in 2000 to 53% in 2006. This finding must be weighed against responses indicating that the concept is not clearly understood. Here are some comparisons:

- 39% of respondents say charter schools are public schools; 53% say they are not (fact: they are public schools).
- 50% say charters are free to teach religion; 34% say they are not (fact: they are not).
- 60% say charters can charge tuition; 29% say they cannot (fact: they cannot).
- 58% say charters can base student selection on ability; 29% say they cannot (fact: they cannot).

Conclusion VIII. Those who would implement the charter school concept should ensure that the public has a clear understanding of the nature of such schools.

The Source of K-12 Problems

We are often asked why grades for the local schools remain so high in the face of such negative factors as the per-

sistent achievement gap and unacceptably high dropout rates. The answer may lie in the responses to two questions — one first asked in 1990, the other first asked in 2002. The first asked whether the fault for the problems of schools lay primarily with the schools or should be attributed to problems of the larger society. The second asked whether the achievement gap was mostly related to the quality of schooling received or to other factors. (See Tables 8 and 9.)

Findings. In 1990, 73% faulted the effect of societal problems and 16% the performance of schools. The corresponding figures this year are 70% and 22%. When asked in 2002 about the achievement gap, 66% attributed it to other factors, and 29% to the quality of schooling received. The corresponding figures this year are 77% and 19%.

Conclusion IX. There is near-consensus support for the belief that the problems the public schools face result from societal issues and not from the quality of schooling.



Tables for the Major Findings And Conclusions

TABLE 1. In order to improve public education in America, some people think the focus should be on reforming the existing public school system. Others believe the focus should be on finding an alternative to the existing public school system. Which approach do you think is preferable — reforming the existing public school system or finding an alternative to the existing public school system?

	National Totals					No Children In School					Public School Parents				
	'06	'05	'04	'03	'02	'06	'05	'04	'03	'02	'06	'05	'04	'03	'02
Reforming existing system	71	68	66	73	69	72	67	63	73	69	69	72	72	73	69
Finding alternative system	24	23	26	25	27	23	23	28	24	26	25	22	21	25	27
Don't know	5	9	8	2	4	5	10	9	3	5	6	6	7	2	4

TABLE 2. Students are often given the grades of A, B, C, D, and FAIL to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves, in your community, were graded in the same way. What grade

would you give the public schools here — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'06 %	'05 %	'06 %	'05 %	'06 %	'05 %
A & B	49	48	47	45	56	57
A	13	12	11	9	20	20
B	36	36	36	36	36	37
C	32	29	33	29	30	29
D	9	9	9	9	9	8
FAIL	5	5	5	4	4	5
Don't know	5	9	6	13	1	1

TABLE 3. Using the A, B, C, D, and FAIL scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?

	Public School Parents	
	'06 %	'05 %
A & B	64	69
A	26	31
B	38	38
C	24	21
D	5	6
FAIL	4	4
Don't know	3	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

TABLE 4. How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'06 %	'05 %	'06 %	'05 %	'06 %	'05 %
A & B	21	24	21	24	22	26
A	2	2	1	2	3	3
B	19	22	20	22	19	23
C	51	46	50	47	51	42
D	14	13	14	14	13	8
FAIL	3	4	4	3	3	6
Don't know	11	13	11	12	11	18

TABLE 5. Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?

	National Totals							
	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'02 %	'01 %	'97 %	'93 %
Favor	36	38	42	38	46	34	44	24
Oppose	60	57	54	60	52	64	52	74
Don't know	4	5	4	2	2	2	4	2

TABLE 6. As you may know, charter schools operate under a charter or contract that frees them from many of the state regulations imposed on public schools and permits them to operate independently. Do you favor or oppose the idea of charter schools?

	National Totals				No Children In School				Public School Parents			
	'06 %	'05 %	'02 %	'00 %	'06 %	'05 %	'02 %	'00 %	'06 %	'05 %	'02 %	'00 %
Favor	53	49	44	42	50	49	44	42	59	48	44	40
Oppose	34	41	43	47	37	40	43	47	31	43	44	47
Don't know	13	10	13	11	13	11	13	11	10	9	12	13

TABLE 7. Just from what you know or have heard about charter schools, please tell me whether each of the following statements is true or false.

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	True %	False %	Don't Know %	True %	False %	Don't Know %	True %	False %	Don't Know %
	A charter school is a public school	39	53	8	40	53	7	36	55
Charter schools are free to teach religion	50	34	16	48	35	17	57	31	12
Charter schools can charge tuition	60	29	11	63	27	10	54	33	13
Charter schools can select students on the basis of ability	58	29	13	59	28	13	57	31	12

TABLE 8. In your opinion, which is most at fault for the problems currently facing public education in this community — the performance of the local schools or the effect of societal problems?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'06 %	'90 %	'06 %	'90 %	'06 %	'90 %
Performance of schools	22	16	22	14	23	18
Effect of societal problems	70	73	71	73	68	75
Don't know	8	11	7	13	9	7

TABLE 9. In your opinion, is the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students mostly related to the quality of schooling received or mostly related to other factors?

	National Totals				No Children In School				Public School Parents			
	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'02 %	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'02 %	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'02 %
Mostly related to quality of schooling received	19	17	19	29	19	17	19	31	17	17	20	22
Mostly related to other factors	77	75	74	66	76	75	73	64	79	75	76	75
Don't know	4	8	7	5	5	8	8	5	4	8	4	3



Further 2006 Results

Biggest Problem

This is the one question that has been asked in each of the 38 polls. Respondents are free to mention any problem that

comes to mind, and Table 10 displays the percentage of respondents who mentioned a given problem. Discipline was the top problem for the poll's first 16 years. Drugs then took over and occupied the top position alone until financial support drew into a tie in 1991. Frequent changes occurred in the Nineties until lack of financial support came back to the top in 2000. It has held that position in each poll since.

TABLE 10. What do you think are the biggest problems the public schools of your community must deal with?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %
Lack of financial support/funding/money	24	20	21	25	19	22	21	21	20
Overcrowded schools	13	11	10	12	9	9	16	15	13
Lack of discipline, more control	11	10	10	12	12	10	7	8	8
Use of drugs/dope	8	9	7	8	9	7	7	8	7
Pupils' lack of interest	6	*	3	6	*	4	6	*	2
Parents' lack of support	5	12	4	5	2	5	6	3	3
Fighting/violence/gangs	5	8	6	6	7	6	4	10	6

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Findings. Lack of financial support tops the poll, with 24% of mentions.

Conclusion X. The public is aware of the link between adequate funding and effective schooling and understands that current funding levels are a challenge for schools.

Governance

Given the increasing role played by those at the state level and the growth in federal influence through NCLB, it seemed timely to repeat a 1980 question regarding the influence of the levels of government on what is taught in local schools. The remaining two questions deal with recent directions in the governance of some schools.

TABLE 11. In your opinion, who should have the greatest influence in deciding what is taught in the public schools here — the federal government, the state government, or the local school board?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'06 %	'80 %	'06 %	'80 %	'06 %	'80 %
The federal government	14	9	13	9	15	8
The state government	26	15	26	16	28	15
The local school board	58	68	59	66	55	70
Don't know	2	8	2	9	2	7

TABLE 12. Would you favor or oppose a plan in which your local school board would contract with private profit-making corporations to run the entire operations of the public schools in your community?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'06 %	'02 %	'06 %	'02 %	'06 %	'02 %
Favor	24	31	24	31	25	30
Oppose	69	65	70	64	68	67
Don't know	7	4	6	5	7	3

TABLE 13. In some communities that have a large percentage of low-performing public school students, the mayors have taken control of the entire public school system to attempt to correct the situation. If the public schools in your community had a large percentage of low-performing students, would you favor or oppose having the mayor take control of the schools?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Favor	29	28	33
Oppose	67	69	63
Don't know	4	3	4

Findings. While 58% still prefer that the local school board make decisions as to what is taught in local schools, that percentage is down from 68% in 1980. The shift has been in the direction of the state level, where the percentage has grown from 15% to 26%. The percentage saying the federal government should have the greatest influence has gone up from 9% to 14%. Contracting out the operation of entire public school systems is now approved by 24% of respondents, down from 31% in 2002. Having the mayor take over control of schools with a large number of low-performing students is favored by only 29%.

Conclusion XI. The public's preference is that the local school board make decisions about what the schools teach. Of those favoring decisions at the state or federal level, two-thirds opt for the state. True to its preference for change through the ex-

COMMENTARY

AMERICANS WANT SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Peeking through the pro-establishment phrasing of these survey questions are millions of Americans who want something very different from what the current public school system is delivering. Not just higher standards, more course requirements, and testing as a precondition for graduation, but also lots more options. More than half of those surveyed favor charter schools, for example, and nearly two in five endorse vouchers (despite a hostile question about them). One in four would welcome an "alternative to the existing public school system." And all of this despite the fact that about one-third of U.S. school kids already attend something *other than* their district-operated neighborhood schools and the families of many millions more exercised choice by moving into their neighborhood on account of its schools.

Sure, these data also reveal lots of complacent folks — perhaps unaware that their kids' jobs could be outsourced to Bangalore or Beijing — and plenty who have been swayed by constructivist slogans (e.g., "teaching to the test" is evil). But anybody who spins these survey results as showing a nation that's content with its present education arrangements is guilty of self-deception. — *Chester E. Finn, Jr.*, senior fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and president, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, Washington, D.C.

isting school system, the public opposes contracting with private firms for the operation of schools and having mayors take over schools with large numbers of low-performing students.

Testing

Federal and state accountability efforts have brought about a significant increase in the amount of testing. Public reaction to the increase has been tracked in the first of the following questions. The next two questions deal with whether the emphasis on testing promotes “teaching to the test” and whether or not that would be a good thing. The final question is new and seeks the public’s reaction to the use of a qualifying exam to determine whether a diploma should be given.

TABLE 14. Now, here are some questions about testing. In your opinion, is there too much emphasis on achievement testing in the public schools in your community, not enough emphasis on testing, or about the right amount?

	National Totals					No Children In School					Public School Parents				
	'06	'05	'04	'02	'00	'06	'05	'04	'02	'00	'06	'05	'04	'02	'00
Too much	39	36	32	31	30	36	35	30	30	28	45	39	36	32	34
Not enough	25	17	22	19	23	28	17	23	20	26	17	17	20	14	19
About the right amount	33	40	40	47	43	32	39	40	46	41	37	43	43	54	46
Don't know	3	7	6	3	4	4	9	7	4	5	1	1	1	*	1

*Less than one-half of 1%.

TABLE 15. In your opinion, will the current emphasis on standardized tests encourage teachers to “teach to the tests,” that is, concentrate on teaching their students to pass the tests rather than teaching the subject, or don’t you think it will have this effect?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'06	'05	'03	'06	'05	'03	'06	'05	'03
Will encourage teachers to teach to the tests	67	58	66	64	57	64	74	60	68
Will not have this effect	26	33	30	28	32	32	20	35	27
Don't know	7	9	4	8	11	4	6	5	5

TABLE 16. (Asked of those who said yes.) If the current emphasis on results is encouraging teachers to teach to the tests, do you think this will be a good thing or a bad thing?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'06	'05	'03	'06	'05	'03	'06	'05	'03
Good thing	22	39	39	20	36	38	25	45	40
Bad thing	75	54	60	77	55	61	72	51	58
Don't know	3	7	1	3	9	1	3	4	2

TABLE 17. Some states are requiring high school students to pass a graduate qualifying exam in order to graduate from high school. Would you favor or oppose having such a requirement for all the high schools in your community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Favor having required exam	63	64	61
Oppose having required exam	36	35	38
Don't know	1	1	1

Findings. Since 2000, the percentage of respondents saying that there is too much emphasis on testing is up 9% to 39%. Overall, the numbers saying not enough and just about the right amount still make up a majority of 58% of respondents who support at least the current level of testing. That the public is not rejecting testing is also indicated by the fact that 63% favor requiring students to pass a qualifying exam in order to graduate from high school. Some of the move away from testing may be explained by the fact that the percentage saying the current emphasis on testing will mean “teaching to the test” is up by 9% in one year and now stands at 67%, while the percentage regarding this as a “bad thing” is up 21% to 75%.

Conclusion XII. There is still majority support for at least the current level of testing, although there has been a shift toward the belief that there is “too much testing.”

Conclusion XIII. Large and growing numbers see the emphasis on testing translating into “teaching to the test,” and those saying that doing so is a “bad thing” are nearing consensus.

Conclusion XIV. The support for using a graduate qualifying exam to determine whether a student receives a diploma is strong.

The Achievement Gap

The test referred to as the Nation’s Report Card, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, shows blacks trailing whites in grade-8 reading by 30%, Hispanics trailing whites by 26%, and children from homes where students are eligible for free lunches trailing those whose lunches are not subsidized by 24%. The percentages are comparable for math. Five questions in this year’s poll deal with this problem. The first three deal with the importance of closing the gap, the impact of high standards on the gap, and the responsibility for closing it. The final two deal with using preschool programs to try to close the gap and the funding for such programs.

TABLE 18. Black and Hispanic students generally score lower on standardized tests than white students. In your opinion, how important do you think it is to close this academic achievement gap between these groups of students?

	National Totals				No Children In School				Public School Parents			
	'06	'05	'04	'02	'06	'05	'04	'02	'06	'05	'04	'02
Very + somewhat important	88	90	88	94	89	89	89	93	85	89	89	96
Very important	67	63	64	80	68	63	65	80	63	62	63	80
Somewhat important	21	27	24	14	21	26	24	13	22	27	26	16
Not too important	5	3	5	2	4	2	4	2	7	5	3	2
Not at all important	5	5	5	3	4	6	5	4	6	4	7	1
Don't know	2	2	2	1	3	3	2	1	2	2	1	1

TABLE 19. Do you believe that the achievement gap can be narrowed substantially while maintaining high standards for all children or not?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'06 %	'05 %	'06 %	'05 %	'06 %	'05 %
Yes	81	81	82	83	78	78
No	17	15	15	13	20	19
Don't know	2	4	3	4	2	3

TABLE 20. In your opinion, is it the responsibility of the public schools to close the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students or not?

	National Totals				No Children In School				Public School Parents			
	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'01 %	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'01 %	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'01 %
Yes, it is	57	58	56	55	60	58	56	56	49	56	56	53
No, it is not	39	37	40	41	36	36	39	39	46	42	41	45
Don't know	4	5	4	4	4	6	5	5	5	2	3	2

Findings. Eighty-eight percent of respondents say that closing the achievement gap is either very important or somewhat important, and 81% believe the goal can be accomplished while maintaining high standards for all students. Although only 19% of respondents say that the gap is related to the quality of schooling (Table 9), 57% say that it is the responsibility of the public schools to close the gap.

Conclusion XV. There is near consensus that closing the achievement gap is of great importance and that it is unnecessary to sacrifice high standards to do it.

Conclusion XVI. The public attributes the gap to factors other than the quality of schooling but still concludes that it is the responsibility of the schools to close it.

TABLE 21. Do you think that preschool programs for children from low-income and poverty-level households would help them perform better in school in their teenage years — a great deal, quite a lot, not much, or not at all?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'06 %	'92 %	'06 %	'92 %	'06 %	'92 %
Great deal	49	39	47	33	52	46
Quite a lot	32	35	36	38	25	31
Not much	13	16	11	16	17	16
Not at all	5	5	5	5	5	5
Don't know	1	5	1	8	1	2

TABLE 22. Would you be willing to pay more taxes for funding preschool programs for children from low-income or poverty-level households?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'06 %	'92 %	'06 %	'92 %	'06 %	'92 %
Yes	66	49	71	46	58	54
No	33	42	28	43	41	40
Don't know	1	9	1	11	1	6

Findings. The 1992 question brought responses indicating that preschool programs for low-income children would help improve their school performance and that the public would be willing to pay more taxes to provide the programs. The responses in the current poll say the same, but the percentages have climbed. The percentage who say that such programs will help a great deal has gone from 39% to 49%, and the percentage who say a great deal or quite a lot has gone from 74% to 81%. The percentage of respondents willing to pay taxes to fund the programs has jumped dramatically, from 49% to 66%.

Conclusion XVII. The public belief that preschool programs for children from poverty-level homes will help them to perform better in school when they are teens is apparently so strong that the public expresses a willingness to pay higher taxes to support such programs.

Curriculum

The first curriculum question is a trend question asking if the curriculum needs to be changed to meet today's needs. The second asks whether the curriculum should include a broad variety of courses or fewer but more basic courses. The final two questions ask whether the public supports two growing practices: requiring all students to pursue a curriculum that prepares them to attend a four-year college and requiring four years of math for all students, beginning with algebra in the eighth or ninth grade.

TABLE 23. Do you think the school curriculum in your community needs to be changed to meet today's needs, or do you think it already meets today's needs?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'06 %	'82 %	'70 %	'06 %	'82 %	'70 %	'06 %	'82 %	'70 %
Needs to be changed	47	36	31	46	33	31	50	42	33
Already meets needs	44	42	46	43	38	36	48	50	59
Don't know	9	22	23	11	29	33	2	8	8

TABLE 24. Public high schools can offer students a wide variety of courses, or they can concentrate on fewer basic courses, such as English, mathematics, history, and science. Which of these two policies do you think the local high schools should follow in planning their curricula — a wide variety of courses or fewer but more basic courses?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'06 %	'01 %	'79 %	'06 %	'01 %	'79 %	'06 %	'01 %	'79 %
Wide variety of courses	58	54	44	56	50	44	63	64	44
Basic courses	41	44	49	44	48	47	35	35	53
Don't know	1	2	7	*	2	9	2	1	3

*Less than one-half of 1%.

	National Totals				
	2006 %	2002 %	2001 %	1993 %	1979 %
Wide variety of courses	58	57	54	48	44
Basic courses	41	41	44	51	49
Don't know	1	2	2	1	7

TABLE 25. Some high school districts are now requiring *all* high school graduates to complete a curriculum that prepares them to attend a four-year college whether or not they plan to attend college. Would you favor or oppose such a requirement for *all* of the students in the high schools in your community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Favor	56	54	62
Oppose	42	45	37
Don't know	2	1	1

TABLE 26. Some high schools now require that all students complete four years of mathematics. This includes two years of algebra beginning with the eighth or ninth grade. Would you be in favor of or opposed to making this a requirement in the public schools in your community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Favor	73	72	76
Oppose	26	27	23
Don't know	1	1	1

Findings:

- The 47% who say that the curriculum needs to be changed is a significant increase over the 31% who thought so in 1970.
- That a majority of 58% choose a curriculum with a wide variety of courses is a reversal from 1979, when a plurality of 49% opted for more basic courses.
- The public favors a college-preparatory curriculum for every student by a margin of 56% to 42%. The support for four years of mathematics with at least two years of algebra beginning in the eighth or ninth grade is even stronger.

Conclusion XVIII. The public is divided on the question of revising the curriculum to meet today's needs.

Conclusion XIX. There is majority support for a curriculum that includes a broad range of courses.

Conclusion XX. There is majority support for a college-preparatory program for all students.

Conclusion XXI. There is strong support for a curriculum that requires all students to take four years of math, with at least two years of algebra.

Teachers and Teaching

The anticipation of large numbers of retirements among teachers in the near future, combined with the tendency of new teachers to leave the profession after only a few years, has sparked fears of a teacher shortage. And this wave of retirements comes at a time when having highly qualified teach-

ers in the classrooms is a top priority. The following question deals with why so many who become teachers leave the profession in a short time.

TABLE 27. During their first five years of employment, almost half of new public school teachers leave the profession. As I read off some possible reasons for this, would you tell me how important you think each reason is for leaving the teaching profession — is it very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important?

	How Important					
	Very + Somewhat %	Very %	Somewhat %	Not Very %	Not at All %	Don't Know %
Lack of parental support	96	79	17	2	2	*
Lack of administrative support	93	66	27	5	1	1
Working conditions in the public schools	92	65	27	6	1	1
Lack of respect for the teaching profession	89	68	21	9	2	*
Low teacher salaries	88	61	27	7	4	1
Lack of appropriate teacher training	84	58	26	10	4	2

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Findings. Lack of support from parents (96%), lack of support from administrators (93%), and working conditions in the public schools (92%) top the list of reasons why the public believes teachers leave the profession. However, the percentages for lack of respect for the teaching profession (89%), low teacher salaries (88%), and lack of appropriate teacher training (84%) are so close that it is reasonable to consider the six items as a package.

Conclusion XXII. The fact that the public assigns such high importance to each of the six reasons why teachers leave the profession in the first five years suggests that the initial step in attracting more high-quality teachers should be an effort to make the job more attractive to those who have already entered the profession.

Conclusion XXIII. Based on years of data from this poll, it would be a mistake to interpret the public's assessment as indicating dissatisfaction with the current teacher corps. On the contrary, whenever polled, the public expresses great confidence in our teachers.



Time in School

The questions regarding time spent in school were framed in the context of two opening questions asking the public's views on students' workloads. The remaining questions address the issue of time spent in school.

TABLE 28. In general, do you think elementary school children in the public schools here are made to work too hard in school or on homework or not hard enough?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Too hard	30	29	33
Not hard enough	57	58	54
Don't know	13	13	13

TABLE 29. What about students in the public high schools here — in general, are they required to work too hard or not hard enough?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Too hard	15	14	18
Not hard enough	73	75	67
Don't know	12	11	15

Findings. Fifty-seven percent of respondents say elementary school children in the public schools do not work hard enough, while 73% say the same for high school students. Both are clear majorities.

Conclusion XXIV. The public does not believe that students in their local schools work hard enough in school or on homework outside of school.

TABLE 30. Some public schools in the nation have increased the amount of time students spend in school by extending the school year or the school day. Do you favor or oppose increasing the amount of time students spend in the public schools in your community?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'06 %	'93 %	'06 %	'93 %	'06 %	'93 %
Favor	48	52	49	53	46	50
Oppose	49	47	48	45	53	49
Don't know	3	1	3	2	1	1

TABLE 31. (Asked of those who favor increasing time in schools.) Which plan would you prefer for increasing the amount of time students spend in school — increasing the school day or increasing the school year?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Increasing the school day	31	31	33
Increasing the school year	66	67	64
Don't know	3	2	3

TABLE 32. How do you feel about extending the school day in the public schools in this community by one hour?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'06 %	'84 %	'82 %	'06 %	'84 %	'82 %	'06 %	'84 %	'82 %
Favor	67	42	37	67	42	38	68	41	36
Oppose	31	52	55	31	51	52	29	56	61
Don't know	2	6	8	2	7	10	3	3	3

Findings. The public is evenly divided over whether to extend the time students spend in school, with 48% in favor and 49% opposed. But among those who favor extending time in school, the strong preference is for extending the school year (66% favor extending the year; 31% favor extending the day). In a question asked of the entire group, 67% favored extending the school day by one hour. This figure compares to 42% in 1984 and 37% in 1982.

Conclusion XXV. The public is divided on the matter of extending the time spent in school.

Conclusion XXVI. Extending the school day by one hour draws impressive support, although one must wonder if it is based on the need for more schooling or the desire to have kids supervised for an additional hour.

COMMENTARY

SUPPORT FOR LOCAL SCHOOLS STILL STRONG

Thomas Jefferson had a vision that democracy would survive only “with the general diffusion of knowledge.” It is reassuring to know that the public still supports our public schools: 49% give the schools in their community a grade of A or B. Parents of children who attend public schools are even more supportive: 64% give the school their oldest child attends a grade of A or B. Concurrently, support for vouchers has declined.

Our schools reflect conditions in the general society, say 70% of the poll respondents. Only 22% attribute the problems facing public education to the performance of schools rather than to societal problems. Further, a majority of respondents favor decision making at the local level. There seems to be little understanding of or support for No Child Left Behind.

The democratic ideal of equal opportunity is also supported by poll results. The public believes that the achievement gap between whites and minorities can and should be narrowed and that it should be done by schools. The public also supports adequate funding and school-based reform of public education.

Despite extensive criticism of public schools in general, support for public education at the local level continues to remain strong. Jefferson would be pleased to know these poll results. So is the Public Education Support Group. — *M. Donald Thomas*, executive director, Public Education Support Group, Salt Lake City, Utah, mariothomas1@yahoo.com

NCLB Questions

This poll began to track NCLB in 2003, one year after the law was signed. Twelve questions in this year's poll are focused on this topic. The first two are benchmark questions exploring how much the public knows about NCLB and, based on what it knows, whether it views the law favorably or unfavorably. The third question is a new one asking respondents to say whether NCLB is helping or hurting schools in the community. The next eight deal with the strategies used in implementing NCLB, and the final question asks how the public will react if a large number of schools fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In addition to our usual categories of respondents, we have separated out the responses of those who say they know a great deal or fair amount about the law. This self-identified group consists of 504 respondents.

Benchmarks

TABLE 33. Now, here are a few questions about the No Child Left Behind Act. How much, if anything, would you say you know about the No Child Left Behind Act — the federal education bill that was passed by Congress in 2001 — a great deal, a fair amount, very little, or nothing at all?

	National Totals				No Children In School				Public School Parents			
	'06	'05	'04	'03	'06	'05	'04	'03	'06	'05	'04	'03
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Great deal + fair amount	45	40	31	24	42	39	28	25	49	45	37	22
A great deal	8	8	7	6	6	8	6	5	11	10	8	7
A fair amount	37	32	24	18	36	31	22	20	38	35	29	15
Very little	40	43	40	40	41	44	41	37	37	40	38	44
Nothing at all	15	16	28	36	17	16	30	38	13	14	24	34
Don't know	*	1	1	*	*	1	1	*	1	1	1	*
Very little + nothing at all	55	59	68	76	58	60	71	75	50	54	62	78

*Less than one-half of 1%.

TABLE 34. From what you know or have heard or read about the No Child Left Behind Act, do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of the act — or don't you know enough about it to say?

	National Totals				Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount
	'06	'05	'04	'03	'06
	%	%	%	%	%
Very favorable + somewhat favorable	32	28	24	18	42
Very favorable	9	7	7	5	12
Somewhat favorable	23	21	17	13	30
Somewhat unfavorable	18	15	12	7	24
Very unfavorable	13	12	8	6	23
Don't know enough to say	37	45	55	69	10
Don't know	*	*	1	*	1
Somewhat unfavorable + very unfavorable	31	27	20	13	47

*Less than one-half of 1%.

COMMENTARY

A STRONG MESSAGE

This year's PDK/Gallup poll delivers a strong message about the importance of local communities and local governance. We continue to see that the closer the public is to its schools, the higher it rates them. Interestingly, we see that a majority of the public prefers that local school boards have the greatest influence over what is taught in the public schools. School boards need to set high academic goals for local schools that reflect state and national standards and that incorporate the needs and desires of their local communities.

Further, this year's poll shows the public's distaste for mayoral interference, as nearly 70% of respondents oppose having a mayor take over the public schools even as part of an effort to turn around low-performing schools. This public sentiment aligns beautifully with a recent policy adopted by the NSBA governing body that strongly opposes mayoral takeovers. Instead, mayors should work on other factors that affect academics, such as crime, housing costs, and health care.

The public continues to see funding as the biggest problem for public schools, and funding remains a concern for all of us as Congress backs away from its promise to fully fund programs that can make a difference for children who desperately need help. — *Anne L. Bryant*, executive director, National School Boards Association, Alexandria, Va.

TABLE 35. Just your impression, how would you rate the overall impact of the No Child Left Behind program on the public schools in your community? Would you say it was helping, hurting, or making no difference in the performance of the local public schools?

	National Totals %	Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount %
Helping	26	29
Hurting	21	31
Making no difference	37	37
Don't know	16	3

Findings:

- The proportion of respondents who say that they know a great deal or a fair amount about NCLB has now reached 45%, while the number saying they have very little or no knowledge has dropped each year and now stands at 55%.
- As people are gaining knowledge of the law, the percentage saying they do not know enough to express an opinion about NCLB has dropped from 69% in 2003 to 37%.
- As more people have become willing to express an opinion, the 18% expressing a favorable view in 2003 and the 13% expressing an unfavorable view have both risen to nearly one-third. For those professing knowledge of NCLB, 42% have a favorable opinion; 47% an unfavorable opinion.
- Perhaps the most significant finding is that 37% say NCLB has made no difference in the performance of schools in the community. Twenty-one percent say the law has hurt schools, and 26% say it has helped.

Conclusion XXVII. Almost half of the respondents believe they are knowledgeable about NCLB, while just over half believe they know little or nothing about the law. Those who believe they know enough to express an opinion are also divided between viewing the law favorably and unfavorably.

Conclusion XXVIII. That seven out of 10 of those professing knowledge of NCLB believe it is either making no difference in the local schools or hurting them is troubling. Because the effort to comply with NCLB is driving instruction in most schools and dominating efforts to improve achievement, the concerns of such a large proportion of the public need to be addressed.

Strategies Used in NCLB

TABLE 36. According to the NCLB Act, determining whether a public school is or is not in need of improvement will be based on the performance of its students on a single statewide test. In your opinion, will a single test provide a fair picture of whether or not a school needs improvement?

	National Totals				Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount
	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'06 %
Yes, would	28	29	31	32	26
No, would not	69	68	67	66	72
Don't know	3	3	2	2	2

TABLE 37. According to the NCLB Act, the statewide tests of student performance will be devoted to English and math only. Do you think a test covering only English and math would provide a fair picture of whether a public school is or is not in need of improvement, or should the test be based on other subjects also?

	National Totals				Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount
	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'06 %
Yes, would provide fair picture	18	17	16	15	20
No, test should be based on other subjects also	81	80	83	83	79
Don't know	1	3	1	2	1

TABLE 38. How much, if at all, are you concerned that relying on testing for English and math only to judge a school's performance will mean less emphasis on art, music, history, and other subjects?

	National Totals				Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount
	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'06 %
A great deal + a fair amount	78	82	81	80	82
A great deal	35	39	37	40	42
A fair amount	43	43	44	40	40
Not much	16	12	13	14	13
Not at all	5	5	4	6	5
Don't know	1	1	2	*	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

TABLE 39. Assume you had a child attending a school identified as in need of improvement by the NCLB Act. Which would you prefer, to transfer your child to a school identified as NOT in need of improvement or to have additional efforts made in your child's present school to help him or her achieve?

	National Totals				Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount
	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'06 %
To transfer child to school identified as not in need of improvement	17	16	16	25	20
To have additional efforts made in child's present school	80	79	80	74	78
Don't know	3	5	4	1	2

TABLE 40. The No Child Left Behind Act requires that test scores be reported separately by students' race and ethnicity, disability status, English-speaking ability, and poverty level. Do you favor or oppose reporting test scores in this way in your community?

	National Totals			Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount
	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'06 %
Favor	43	44	42	44
Oppose	54	48	52	55
Don't know	3	8	6	1

TABLE 41. In your opinion, should the standardized test scores of special education students be included with the test scores of all other students in determining whether a school is in need of improvement under the NCLB Act or not?

	National Totals			Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount
	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'06 %
Yes, should	33	34	39	29
No, should not	62	62	57	68
Don't know	5	4	4	3

TABLE 42. In your opinion, should students enrolled in special education in a public school be required to meet the same academic standards as all other students in that school?

	National Totals		Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount
	'06 %	'05 %	'06 %
Yes, should	21	28	18
No, should not	75	68	79
Don't know	4	4	3

TABLE 43. One way to measure a school's performance is to look at the percentage of students passing the test mandated by the state at the end of the school year. Another way is to measure the improvement students in the school make during the year. In your opinion, which is the best way to measure the school's performance — the percentage passing the test or the improvement shown by the students?

	National Totals		Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount
	'06 %	'05 %	'06 %
Percentage passing the test	17	13	18
Improvement shown by the students	81	85	80
Don't know	2	2	2

Findings:

- Two out of three respondents (69%) this year and a similar proportion in 2005 say that the use of a single state test as NCLB requires cannot provide a fair picture of whether or not a school needs improvement.
- NCLB bases performance on testing in English/language arts and math only. Four out of five respondents (81%) say that this will not give a fair picture of a school and that other subjects should be included.
- Nearly four out of five respondents (78%) say they are concerned that the focus on English/language arts and math will mean less emphasis on art, music, history, and other subjects. This is down 4% since 2005.
- Four out of five respondents (80%) prefer offering help to students in schools in need of improvement. Only 17% prefer transferring those students to a different school.
- NCLB requires that test scores be broken out by race and ethnicity, English-speaking ability, and poverty level. A majority of respondents (54%) oppose this strategy, up 6% from 2005.
- The test scores of special education students are included in determining whether a school is in need of improvement. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (62%) say the scores of special education students should not be included. This percentage is unchanged since 2005.
- NCLB requires that nearly all special education students be tested against grade-level standards. Three-fourths of respondents (75%) believe these students should not be tested against the same standards as other students. This figure is up 7% since 2005.
- Four-fifths of respondents (81%) say the proper measure of performance is the improvement made by students during the school year. This figure is down 4% from last year.
- The half of the respondents who claim to know a great deal or fair amount about NCLB disagree with the strategies of the law with percentages slightly higher than those of the total group.

Conclusion XXIX. A public that rejects the strategies used to implement NCLB is unlikely to provide the support needed if the law is to work. Common sense would call for changes to align NCLB more closely with the public's views.

Conclusion XXX. Given that half of the public still considers itself uninformed on NCLB and one-third are unwilling to express an opinion, there is still time to make the changes that might bring support for the law.

Conclusion XXXI. The responses of those who claim knowledge of the law bear out this poll's 2003 conclusion that greater familiarity with NCLB was unlikely to increase public support.

Public's View of Failures

TABLE 44. Let's say that large numbers of public schools fail to meet the requirements established by the NCLB law. In your opinion, which would be more to blame for this — the public schools themselves or the NCLB law?

	National Totals		Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount
	'06 %	'05 %	'06 %
The public schools	48	45	46
The law itself	41	43	48
Don't know	11	12	6

Findings. Nearly half of respondents (48%) say they would fault the public schools for large numbers of failing schools, but a substantial fraction (41%) say they would blame the failings on the law. Among those claiming knowledge of NCLB, 48% would blame the law and 46% the schools.

Conclusion XXXII. Public uncertainty about NCLB and, in particular, its strategies, has created a situation in which those who blame the schools for failing to make AYP hold only a small margin over those who would blame the law. Among those professing knowledge of the law, the assignment of blame is still more evenly split.

Closing Statement

This annual experience with the PDK/Gallup Poll reminds me once again how impressed I am at the public's ability to sort through the information and misinformation and emerge with an accurate assessment of our public schools. My conclusion is that the public makes its decisions about the public schools based on those it knows best, its local schools. People out there in the communities like their schools. They

Conducting Your Own Poll

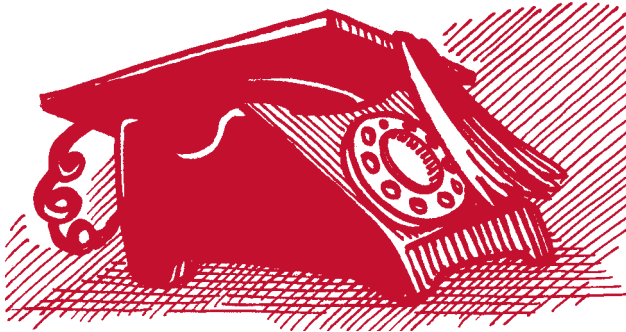
Phi Delta Kappa International makes available PACE (Polling Attitudes of the Community on Education) materials to enable nonspecialists to conduct scientific polls of attitudes and opinions on education. The PACE manual provides detailed information on constructing questionnaires, sampling, interviewing, and analyzing data. It also includes updated census figures and new material on conducting a telephone survey. The price is \$60. For information about using PACE materials, write or phone David Ruetschlin at Phi Delta Kappa International, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. Ph. 800/766-1156.

How to Order the Poll

The minimum order for reprints of the published version of the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup education poll is 25 copies for \$15. (Institutional purchase orders, cash, or MasterCard or VISA number required.) Additional copies are 50 cents each. This price includes postage for delivery (at the library rate). Where possible, enclose a check or money order. Address your order to Phi Delta Kappa International, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. Ph. 800/766-1156.

If faster delivery is desired, phone the Shipping Department at the number listed below. Persons who wish to order the 229-page document that is the basis of this report should contact Phi Delta Kappa International, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. Ph. 800/766-1156. The price is \$95, postage included.

hear the criticism leveled at public schools in general but are unaffected because those are someone else's schools. They care in the abstract, but it is their local schools that draw their interest and can evoke their support. In closing, and at the risk of hearing that I always say so, I believe this year's poll may be the best yet in terms of overall content and cutting-edge significance. Policy makers at all levels would be well advised to study the data, if not the words interpreting the data, to see where the public stands. Public opinion as expressed in polls should never be allowed to shape policy. It can, however, inform policy decisions, identify possible pitfalls, and point to strategies that would be likely to have public support. This poll is timely for those purposes.



Research Procedure

The Sample. The sample used in this survey embraced a total of 1,007 adults (18 years of age and older). A description of the sample and methodology can be found at the end of this report.

Time of Interviewing. The fieldwork for this study was conducted during the period of 11 June through 5 July 2006.

Due allowance must be made for statistical variation, especially in the case of findings for groups consisting of relatively few respondents.

The findings of this report apply only to the U.S. as a whole and not to individual communities. Local surveys, using the same questions, can be conducted to determine how local areas compare with the national norm.

Sampling Tolerances

In interpreting survey results, it should be borne in mind that all sample surveys are subject to sampling error, i.e., the extent to which the results may differ from what would be obtained if the whole population surveyed had been interviewed. The size of such sampling error depends largely on the number of interviews. For details and tables showing the confidence intervals for the data cited in this poll, please visit the Phi Delta Kappa website at <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kpollsample.htm>.

Design of the Sample

For the 2006 survey, the Gallup Organization used its standard national telephone sample, i.e., an unclustered, directory-assisted, random-digit telephone sample, based on a proportionate stratified sampling design.

The random-digit aspect of the sample was used to avoid "listing" bias. Numerous studies have shown that households with unlisted telephone numbers are different in important ways from listed households. "Unlistedness" is due to household mobility or to customer requests to prevent publication of the telephone number.

To avoid this source of bias, a random-digit procedure designed to provide representation of both listed and unlisted (including not-yet-listed) numbers was used.

Telephone numbers for the continental United States were stratified into four regions of the country and, within each region, further stratified into three size-of-community strata.

Only working banks of telephone numbers were selected. Eliminating non-working banks from the sample increased the likelihood that any sample telephone number would be associated with a residence.

The sample of telephone numbers produced by the described method is representative of all telephone households within the continental United States.

Within each contacted household, an interview was sought with the household member who had the most recent birthday. This frequently used method of respondent selection provides an excellent approximation of statistical randomness in that it gives all members of the household an opportunity to be selected.

Up to three calls were made to each selected telephone number to complete an interview. The time of day and the day of the week for callbacks were varied so as to maximize the chances of finding a respondent at home. All interviews were conducted on weekends or weekday evenings in order to contact potential respondents among the working population.

The final sample was weighted so that the distribution of the sample matched current estimates derived from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) for the adult population living in telephone households in the continental U.S.

Composition of the Sample

Adults	%	Education (continued)	%
No children in school	68	Total high school	39
Public school parents	28	High school graduate	33
Nonpublic school parents	4	High school incomplete	6
Gender	%	Income	%
Men	45	\$50,000 and over	43
Women	55	\$40,000 and over	54
Race	%	\$30,000-\$39,999	11
White	83	\$20,000-\$29,999	10
Nonwhite	14	Under \$20,000	16
Black	10	Undesignated	9
Age	%	Region	%
18-29 years	18	East	23
30-49 years	37	Midwest	23
50 and over	44	South	32
Undesignated	1	West	22
Education	%	Community Size	%
Total college	61	Urban	26
College graduate	27	Suburban	48
College incomplete	34	Rural	26

PDK/GALLUP POLL ADVISORY PANEL

The following individuals worked with Alec Gallup and the Gallup Organization to select and frame the questions asked in the 38th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools.

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Paul Houston, Executive Director, American Association of School Administrators, Washington, D.C.

Jack Jennings, President and CEO, Center on Education Policy, Washington, D.C.

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Bruce Smith, Editor, *Phi Delta Kappan*.

Sandra Weith, Associate Executive Director, Phi Delta Kappa International.

Policy Implications

Of the 38th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll

A PUBLIC opinion poll is a tool that enables policy makers to measure the impact of current policies and programs, point to needed changes, and identify areas where program efforts should be preceded by a systematic effort to build public support. Public opinion is no substitute for professional judgment and should not, by itself, drive public policy. The goal in formulating school policy should be to provide an education system that can meet the diverse needs of students. The intent should be to maximize student achievement. Students should leave our schools prepared to live productive and satisfying lives in a democratic society. To do so, they will need to be prepared to contribute to the economic and social well-being of this nation. It is this dual emphasis on personal and public goals that creates the rationale for a system of public schools free and open to all. And it is this system that has fueled the remarkable progress this nation has made. What follows is not a summary of the poll's findings. It is, instead, an attempt to draw from those findings a number of implications for policy makers at all levels.

Public Support for the Public Schools

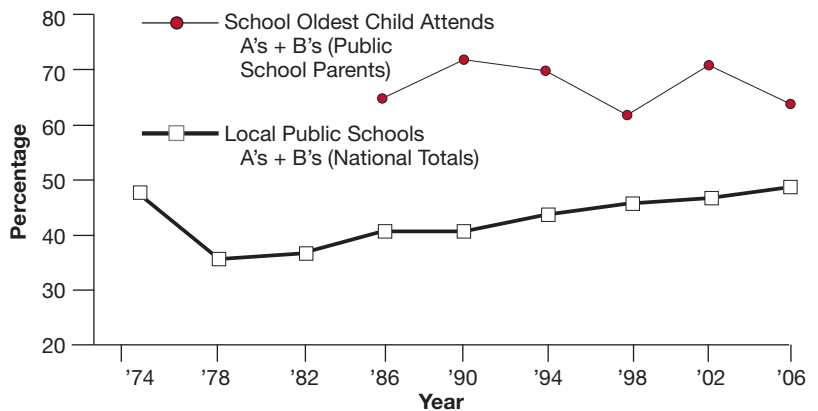
Fact. The public schools in the community get high marks. These marks go higher the closer people are to the schools.

Conclusion. The oft-repeated claim that public support for the public schools has declined or is declining is a myth.

Implications

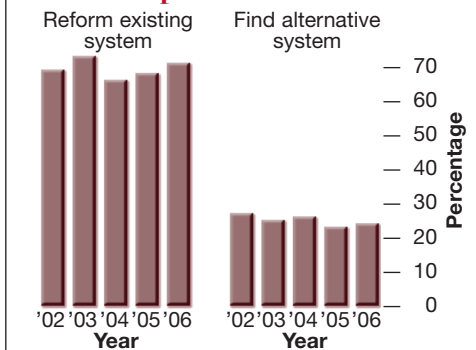
- Local schools are the ones people care about and will support. People like their schools.
- Policy makers can build support for proposals for change by grounding them in the support local public schools enjoy.
- Change proposals requiring the public to believe its local schools are failing are unlikely to gain support. "Failure" is not a word the public associates with its local schools.
- Local school leaders are in the best position to initiate proposals for improving student achievement and can gain support by linking such proposals to community benefits.
- Local schools can maintain and build public support by fostering ongoing two-way communication and by creating opportunities to bring the public closer to its schools.

Percentage Awarding A's and B's to the Public Schools



Attitudes Toward Change

School Improvement Preference



Fact. The public embraces improvement through the existing public school system and generally rejects initiatives to seek an alternative to the public schools.

Conclusion. Combine the public's preference for change through the existing public school system with the public's favorable view of the local public schools and we have the foundation on which to build a system of public schools that will provide every child the opportunity to reach his or her full potential.

Fact. In this poll, 36% favor and 60% oppose allowing parents to use public funds to send students to private and parochial schools, 69% oppose contracting out the operation of local school systems, and 67% oppose permitting mayors to take over schools in communities with a large number of low-performing students.

Conclusion. The public preference for improving schools through the existing public school system is reflected in the fact that alternatives outside the public schools fail to gain public support.

Implications

- The chances for the success of school improvement efforts will be maximized if policy makers use the high levels of support for local schools as a springboard for seeking change.
- The support local schools enjoy is good news for public school advocates and bad news for those interested in privatizing public schools or providing public funding for private and parochial schools.
- The satisfaction that those at the local level can legitimately draw from the high grades the local schools receive should be tempered by the realization that with those higher grades comes the responsibility for moving aggressively to improve our schools.

Factors Affecting Success in School

Fact. The public believes that preschool programs for students from low-income families will help them perform better in their later school years and is willing to pay more taxes to fund those programs.

Percentage agreeing that preschool programs for students from low-income homes will help them perform better in school in their teenage years



Percentage willing to pay more taxes for funding preschool programs for children from low-income households



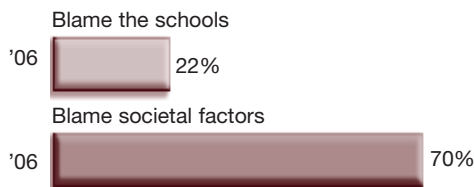
Conclusion. The public is aware of the financial problems schools are facing and has, since 2000, identified funding as the major problem facing local schools. The public's willingness to invest more in programs it believes will improve the chances of success for students from low-income homes shows that it understands the link between funding and success in school.

Fact. Twenty-two percent of Americans blame the schools for the problems facing education in their community; 70% lay the blame on societal problems.

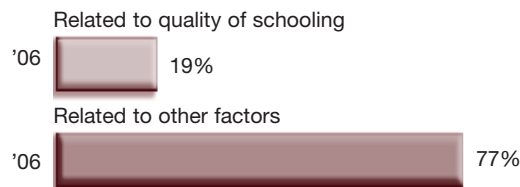
Fact. Nineteen percent of Americans say the gap between the achievement of white students and the achievement of black and Hispanic students is mostly related to the quality of schooling; 77% point to other factors.

Percentage Relating Problems to Schools or Other Factors

General Problems Facing Schools



The Achievement Gap



Conclusion. The public relates most of the challenges schools face to societal problems over which the schools have no control, holds the schools almost blameless, but expects the schools to be the agent for change.

Implications

- If the public is right in believing that so many of the factors that affect success in schools are beyond the control of the schools, a major investment on the part of government and action by all agencies with a stake in rearing our children is required.
- For the local schools to be successful in meeting the public's expectation that the schools will deal with the achievement gap, additional funding will be necessary.
- Public schools must take on the responsibility for closing the achievement gap because, for those already in school, the public schools offer the last chance they have to succeed.

Views of NCLB Strategies

Fact. The public overwhelmingly rejects the strategies used in NCLB. This has been the case since 2003, when this poll first asked respondents to assess those strategies.

Fact. Of those saying they have knowledge of NCLB, 47% view it unfavorably; 42% view it favorably.

Fact. Asked about the effect on schools in the community, 37% say NCLB is making no difference, 21% say it is hurting, and only 26% say it is helping.

Conclusion. The public finds the NCLB goals praiseworthy but rejects the strategies NCLB uses in measuring Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and the sanctions that are imposed on schools that fail to make AYP for two or more years. While a significant number still profess lack of knowledge about NCLB, those who claim familiarity are inclined to view the law unfavorably. Most disturbing of all is that a majority believe that NCLB is making no difference at all or harming schools in the community.

Implications

- **Current approval levels for NCLB and the extent to which the public rejects the strategies used combine to make it almost impossible for NCLB to succeed without significant changes.**
- **That so much of the public remains uninformed about NCLB suggests there is still time to fix the law if the leadership has the will to do so.**
- **If the true purpose of those sponsoring NCLB is to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap, they will move quickly to fix the flaws in the law.**
- **If the public's view is accurate, then the nation's schools are spending virtually all of their available money and resources on an effort to meet the demands of a law that is, at best, making no difference in local schools and, at worst, hurting them.**
- **For those operating K-12 schools, the most significant implication of the problems with NCLB is that the only way the public will get an accurate picture of the schools is for those in charge of the local schools to provide it.**

Final Statement

The conclusion and implication of greatest importance from this poll is that there remains a strong base of support for the local public schools. The data show clearly that local schools continue to be viewed favorably by the public. Local leaders need to be aware of that fact, use it as a source of strength, and nurture it carefully. One of the national associations has embraced the slogan "Stand Up for the Public Schools." The best way to do that is by tightening the ties between the schools and the community. National leaders need to be aware that the best and possibly only avenue to significant improvement is to start with the assumption that we have good schools that must become even better and then to go forward building on the base of support that already exists.

The Public's Attitudes Toward NCLB Strategies

Does not believe a single state test can give a fair picture of a school



Does not believe a test in English and math only can give a fair picture of a school



Prefers helping students in their own schools rather than offering them transfers if their schools fail to make AYP



Opposes including special education students' scores in AYP findings



Opposes requiring all but a few special education students to meet same standards as other students



Is concerned that NCLB's focus on English and math will mean less emphasis on other subjects



Prefers measuring AYP on improvement shown instead of students passing the test



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