The 24th Annual GALLUP/ Phi Delta Kappa Poll

Of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

by Stanley M. Elam, Lowell C. Rose, and Alec M. Gallup

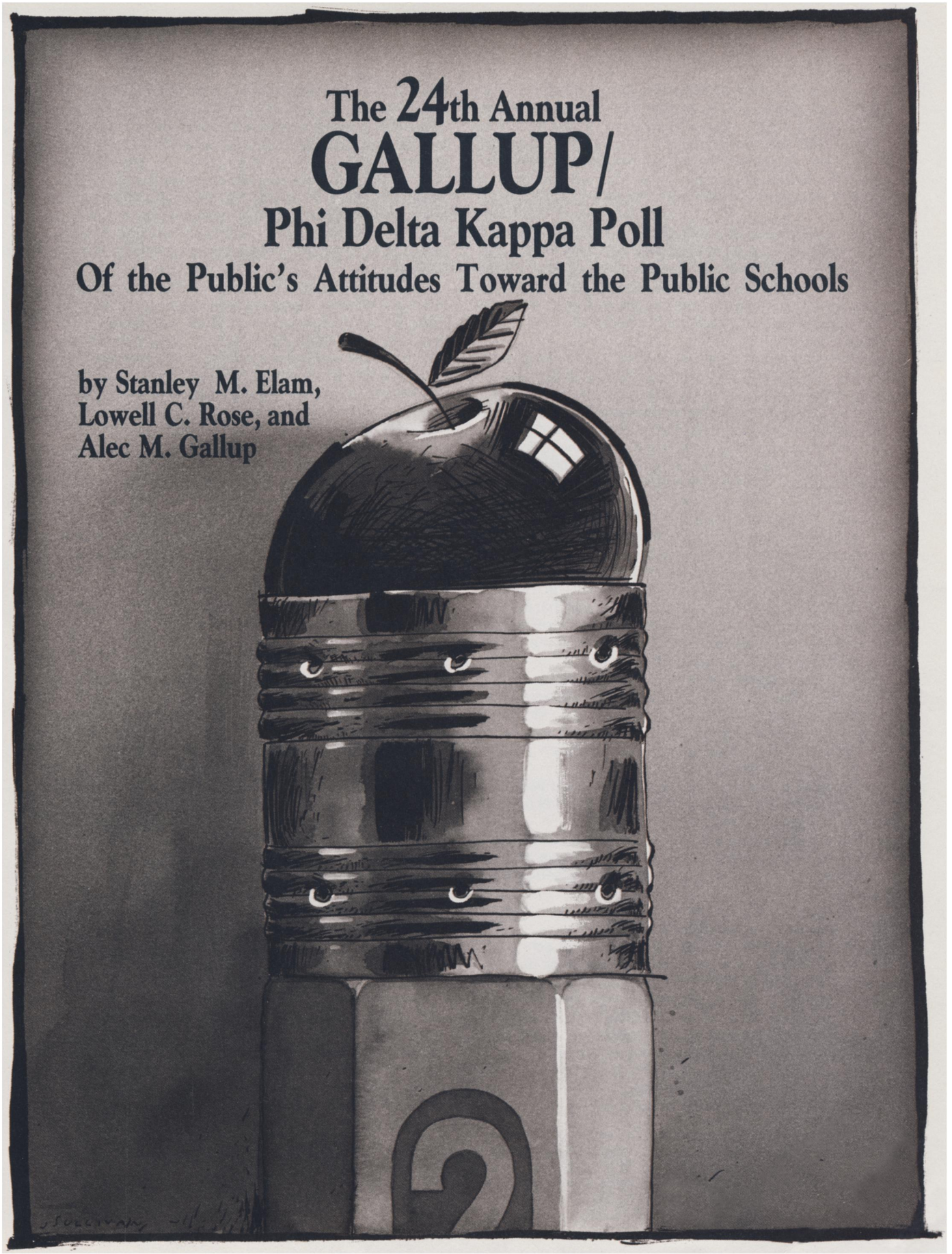


Illustration by Jem Sullivan

THE 24TH annual Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa education poll offers a picture of a public that wants improvement in its public schools and that has little faith in its elected leaders to bring this improvement about. However, a careful reading of the results of the poll will provide some comfort to those who believe the public schools are better than they are given credit for being.

When grading the public schools they know best, the ones in their own communities, 40% of Americans give the schools an A or a B, and only 17% assign the failing grades of D or F. The more familiar people are with the schools, the more the approval rating climbs, with grades of A or B given by 64% of parents grading the public school their oldest child attends.

As has been the case in previous polls, grades drop when respondents are asked to grade the schools outside their own communities — that is, schools in the nation as a whole. Here, the public's views reaffirm the conventional wisdom that the public schools are in bad shape. The proportion of respondents giving an A or a B to the schools across the nation falls to 18%, and the proportion assigning a D or an F rises to 22%.

The grades given the public schools are not, however, as negative — or as interesting and dramatic — as those the public assigns its elected leaders for their efforts to improve the schools. Only 15% of respondents give President Bush, the self-described Education President, an A or a B. This percentage falls to 7% for Congress and climbs back to only 19% for governors and to 14% for state legislators. The extent of the public's dissatisfaction is reflected in the fact that the percentage of respondents assigning a grade of D or F is 52% for Congress, 46% for President Bush, 41% for the governors, and 40% for state legislators.

That the public wants change and improvement in its public schools is reflected throughout the poll. There is even some indication that the public is willing to see basic structural changes aimed at improving the schools. For example:

- 71% favor the use of national standardized tests (as have large majorities for two decades).
- 74% believe that preschool programs would help children from low-income and poverty-level households perform better in school as teenagers.
- 55% support extending the school year to 210 days.
- 77% favor the use of public school buildings by nonschool agencies to provide social and welfare services for students.
- 68% favor the distribution of condoms in public schools.

The poll results suggest that the public is increasingly willing to provide additional funding to bring about school improvement. Respondents this year returned "lack of financial support" to the top of the list of problems facing the public schools, demonstrating an awareness of the fact that funding must be taken into account as the various problems affecting the schools are addressed. And, by a margin of 49% to 42%, respondents indicated a willingness to pay additional taxes to provide preschool programs for children from low-income and poverty-level households.

The poll results reflect some of the divisions in American society. Those who have had the greatest success in sharing in the American dream have the greatest faith in the public schools and are most willing to look to those schools for solutions. College graduates, professionals and businesspeople, those with incomes of $50,000 and up, and suburbanites tend to grade the schools more favorably than nonwhites, manual laborers, those with the lowest incomes, and inner-city residents. The proportion assigning an A or a B to the public schools in their own community falls to 32% for blacks and to 28% for inner-city residents, two groups that obviously overlap.

The data also indicate that the public favors changes in the public schools. Support for a longer school year, for curriculum changes to improve racial and ethnic tolerance and understanding, for the distribution of condoms in schools, and for the use of public school buildings by nonschool agencies to provide social and welfare programs for students from low-income and poverty-level households offers evidence that the public understands the problems of the schools.

Indeed, the public's view is encouragingly realistic. Many educators oppose the use of a national standardized test; however, few would disagree with the public in feeling that scores from such a test, if available, should be used to identify areas in which students need extra help and in which teachers need to improve their teaching skills. Public support for the distribution of condoms in schools — support that undoubtedly would have been lacking a few years ago — reflects not so much a shift in perceptions of morality as a belief that such a step will reduce the number of teen pregnancies and the likelihood that students will contract AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases.

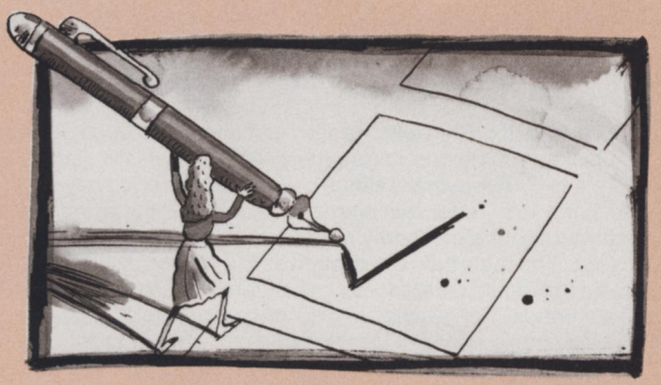
THE PURPOSE of a public opinion poll is to determine what the public thinks, not to judge the rightness or wrongness of the public's views. Those who use the poll determine the significance of the data. We read the results of this poll as showing that the public is reasonably well-informed about its schools, wants to see those schools improve, and is willing to provide the support to bring improvement about. This interpretation suggests that what American education faces today is not a failure of public will but a failure of leadership. The poll data support this view.

Biggest Problems Facing Local Public Schools in 1992

For the first time since 1971, lack of proper financial support headed the list of Americans' concerns about their public schools. But lack of financial support shared first place with people's continuing concern about drug use, a problem that until this year had been first in the public's perception since 1986, when it superseded another perennial problem: lack of student discipline. This year 22% of respondents mentioned inadequate finances as a major problem, and 22% mentioned drug use. Seventeen percent mentioned lack of discipline, and another 9% identified the closely related problems of fighting, violence, and gangs.

Typically, lack of adequate financing has been listed as a major problem for local schools by some 12% to 20% of poll respondents. Last year we noted that certain population

STANLEY M. ELAM (Indiana University Chapter) is contributing editor of the Phi Delta Kappan. *He was* Kappan *editor from 1956 through 1980 and has been coordinating Phi Delta Kappa's polling program since his retirement. LOWELL C. ROSE (Indiana University Chapter) is executive director of Phi Delta Kappa. ALEC M. GALLUP is co-chairman, with George Gallup, Jr., of the Gallup Organization, Princeton, N.J.*



groups in particular were concerned about finances: persons who have attended college, professionals and businesspeople, and public school parents (particularly those with a college education and those with children who receive above-average grades). In this year's poll, these groups were again most concerned about finances. Of particular interest is the large percentage of people living in the West who perceive the schools as underfinanced: 31%. By contrast, only 14% of respondents living in the South mentioned inadequate financing as a major problem.

The question:

What do you think are the biggest problems with which the public schools of this community must deal?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Lack of proper financial support	22	20	25	25
Use of drugs	22	26	17	18
Lack of discipline	17	18	15	19
Fighting/violence/gangs	9	9	9	6
Poor curriculum/ poor standards	9	9	8	15
Large schools/ overcrowding	9	6	13	16
Difficulty in getting good teachers	5	4	7	5
Parents' lack of interest	5	5	5	4
Moral standards	4	6	2	3
Integration/busing	4	4	4	5
Lack of family structure	3	4	2	3
Crime/vandalism	3	3	3	4
Lack of good, up-to-date equipment	3	2	4	4
Pupils' lack of interest/ truancy	3	3	2	2
Low teacher pay	3	2	3	2
Lack of dedicated teachers	2	*	5	4
Lack of attention to/understanding of students	2	1	4	3
Lack of needed teachers	2	2	3	1
Problems with administration	2	2	2	1
Mismanagement of funds/ programs	2	2	1	1
Drinking/alcoholism	2	2	1	1
Teachers' lack of interest	2	2	1	*
There are no problems	3	2	4	2
Miscellaneous	15	17	21	19
Don't know	8	11	5	7

*Less than one-half of 1%.
(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple answers.)

Distribution of Condoms by Schools

Ten years ago, free distribution of condoms in public high schools would have been unthinkable. Today, the fast-growing AIDS epidemic has moved a number of big-city school systems to adopt a policy of condom distribution. A trend is apparently in the making.*

Poll planners this year asked a series of questions to measure local support for the distribution of condoms in the schools. A majority of respondents (68%) would approve of condom distribution in their local public schools, although 25% of them would approve distribution only with parental consent. Majorities of the public believe that condom distribution in the schools would slow the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and, to a somewhat lesser extent, would reduce the number of pregnancies among students. The possibility that condom distribution would increase sexual promiscuity among students is seen as likely by a significant number of respondents; 40% say it would increase sexual promiscuity, 42% say it would make no difference, and 13% say it would actually decrease promiscuity.**

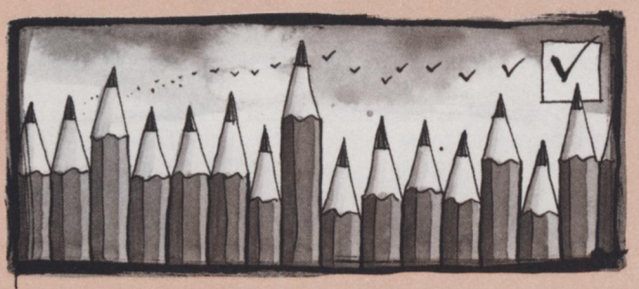
Several interesting, though perhaps predictable, demographic differences show up in the responses to these questions. For example, men are slightly less likely than women (39% to 45%) to approve of providing condoms without parental consent to all students who want them. Older and less-

*In the past year, school systems in several major cities have adopted programs to distribute condoms to high schoolers. New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle have policies in place, while Philadelphia, Chicago, and Baltimore have pilot programs. The legality of New York's program, which does not require parental consent, was upheld in a court case last summer. Interestingly, preliminary reports from cities with condom distribution plans show that only a small minority of students are taking advantage of them so far.

**A *Time*/CNN poll conducted by Yankelovich Clancy Shulman on 17-19 December 1991 showed that 56% of the public approved of having school health clinics provide students with contraceptives; 38% disapproved. (In the *Time*/CNN survey, the option "only with parental consent" was not included.) According to that poll, 41% of the public thought that distributing condoms in school would contribute to greater promiscuity; 54% thought that it would not.

"Wait! Is it too late for me to change my opinion?"

Illustration by Jem Sullivan



well-educated respondents and those who live in small communities or in the South are also less likely to approve of the practice. Catholics and Protestants are equally likely to approve of the idea (40% in favor).

The first question:

Which one of the following plans regarding condoms would you prefer in the public schools in this community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Provide condoms for all students who want them	43	44	41	38
Provide condoms only to students who have parental consent	25	24	27	24
Don't provide condoms to any student	25	23	27	29
Don't know	7	9	5	9

The second question:

In your opinion, which of the following would happen if condoms were provided in the local public schools?

	Increase %	Decrease %	No Effect %	Don't Know %
Increase or decrease sexual promiscuity among students	40	13	42*	5
Increase or decrease the number of pregnancies among students	14	64	17*	5
Increase or decrease the likelihood of contracting AIDS	12	71	12*	5
Increase or decrease the likelihood of contracting other sexually transmitted diseases	13	71	11*	5

*Volunteered answer.

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Think would increase:				
Sexual promiscuity	40	37	43	48
Number of student pregnancies	14	13	14	17
Likelihood of contracting AIDS	12	11	13	15
Likelihood of contracting other sexually transmitted diseases	13	12	13	16

Grading the Public Schools

Every Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa education poll since 1974 has asked Americans to rate the public schools on a scale from A to F. The overall ratings have remained relatively stable since 1984, after reaching a low point in 1983, when the poll was conducted shortly after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. The table below summarizes the ratings since 1982. Some significant differences can be identified among respondent groups. For example, 49% of college graduates and 46% of people with high incomes (but only 33% of those with some high school but less than a high school diploma and 34% of those in the lowest income category) give their public schools a grade of A or B. Given the great differences in per-pupil expenditures from district to district, it is logical to assume that wealthy college graduates choose to live in areas that can afford better schools. Meanwhile, only 28% of people living in the inner city, where per-pupil expenditures tend to be low despite serious needs, award their schools a grade of A or B, whereas 46% of those who live in the suburbs do so.

Some other differences also deserve mention. As has always been the case in these surveys, respondents with children in public schools tend to award higher grades to the public schools than do people with no children in school or with children in nonpublic schools. Respondents in western and southern states tend to give lower grades to the public schools (34% A's and B's in the West, 36% A's and B's in the South) than do respondents in the other two major regions. In the Midwest, 46% give their public schools top grades, as do 44% in the East.

The question:

Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and FAIL to denote the quality of their work. Sup-

"Please don't offer an opinion until I've asked for one."

pose the *public* schools themselves, in this community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

Ratings Given the Local Public Schools

	1992 %	1991 %	1990 %	1989 %	1988 %	1987 %	1986 %	1985 %	1984 %	1983 %	1982 %
A & B	40	42	41	43	40	43	41	43	42	31	37
A	9	10	8	8	9	12	11	9	10	6	8
B	31	32	33	35	31	31	30	34	32	25	29
C	33	33	34	33	34	30	28	30	35	32	33
D	12	10	12	11	10	9	11	10	11	13	14
FAIL	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	4	4	7	5
Don't know	10	10	8	9	12	14	15	13	8	17	11

Respondents were also asked to rate the *nation's* public schools. As has been true in past years, the nation's schools came off a poor second to local schools. Whereas 40% of the public think their own schools merit either an A or a B, only 18% award these grades to the nation's public schools. This two-to-one difference is typical.

The second question:

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 % '92	No Children In School % '92	Public School Parents % '92	Nonpublic School Parents % '92
A & B	18	18	19	16
A	2	2	2	3
B	16	16	17	13
C	48	47	48	49
D	18	19	18	16
FAIL	4	4	4	8
Don't know	12	12	11	11

Finally, public school parents were again asked to rate the public school attended by their oldest child. Sixty-four percent of these parents gave the school their oldest child attends an A or a B. The differences between these rankings and the national rankings suggest that the better people know the public schools, the higher their opinion of school quality.

The third question (asked of parents with children in the public schools):

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

	1992 %	1991 %	1990 %	1989 %	1988 %	1987 %	1986 %	1985 %
A & B	64	73	72	71	70	69	65	71
A	22	29	27	25	22	28	28	23
B	42	44	45	46	48	41	37	48
C	24	21	19	19	22	20	26	19
D	6	2	5	5	3	5	4	5
FAIL	4	4	2	1	2	2	2	2
Don't know	2	*	2	4	3	4	3	3

*Less than one half of 1%.

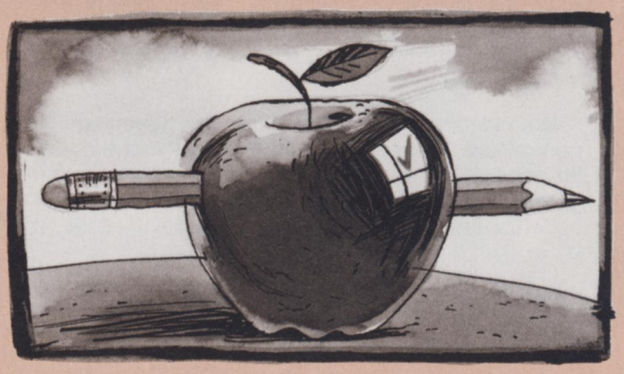
Rating Progress Reports to Parents

Because parents are sometimes critical of the information they receive from the public schools about their children's academic progress, a question asking parents to grade the information they receive on their oldest child's progress was added to this year's poll. Parents who say their eldest child's academic standing is average or below are much more critical of the information they receive than are parents whose eldest child's standing is above average. Also, parents are much less satisfied with the information received about children at the high school level (16% A's) than at the elementary level (42% A's).

The question (asked of parents with children in the public schools):

What grade would you give the information you receive from your oldest child's teachers regarding his or her academic progress — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

		Academic Standing Of Oldest Child		Grade Level Of Oldest Child	
	National Totals %	Above Average %	Average or Below %	High School %	Elementary %
A&B	61	72	51	49	71
A	31	40	22	16	42
B	30	32	29	33	29
C	23	19	28	28	20
D	7	4	11	9	6
FAIL	6	3	9	12	2
Don't know	3	2	1	2	1

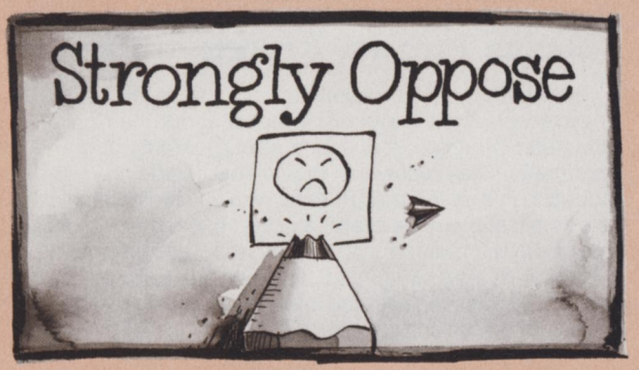


Progress Toward School Improvement By the Year 2000

With great fanfare and many brave words, President George Bush and the 50 state governors launched a program of public school improvement following a national conference in February 1990. They announced six national goals for education and began work on a strategy for achieving them by the year 2000.

The 1990 and 1991 Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa polls asked Americans how high a priority each of the national goals should be given and how likely they thought the achievement of each goal would be by the year 2000. Not surprisingly, each goal was awarded very high priority, but there was considerable pessimism about the likelihood of attaining any one of the goals by the end of the century.

Illustrations by Jem Sullivan



This year poll planners framed a series of questions designed to reveal public attitudes concerning the effectiveness of government officials' efforts to improve schools, the level of public awareness of the national goals, and the effectiveness of governmental efforts to achieve them to date. To put it mildly, the public is dissatisfied. People don't believe that much progress has been made, and they award government officials extremely low grades for their efforts to improve the schools.

The federal government — especially Congress — is a target of public disapproval. The 102nd Congress, immobilized and ridiculed on many other counts, is rated lower than the President, the state governors, and the state legislators. Only 7% of poll respondents gave Congress a rating of A or B for its efforts on behalf of public education, and 52% assigned Congress a D or an F. President Bush, the self-styled Education President, fared about the same (15% A's and B's) as state governors (19%) and state legislators (14%). But the President received 46% D's and F's, state governors received 41%, and state legislators received 40%. Clearly, the public gives government officials at all levels failing marks.

The first question:

Government officials at all levels have publicly committed themselves to improvement of the public schools by the year 2000. At this point, what grade would you give the following government officials for improving the public schools — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

	Grades Assigned							
	A&B %	A %	B %	C %	D %	FAIL %	D&F %	Don't Know %
President Bush	15	3	12	30	25	21	46	9
U.S. Congress	7	1	6	30	30	22	52	11
Your state governor	19	4	15	30	22	19	41	10
Your state legislators	14	2	12	33	24	16	40	13

As indicated in the table below, public school parents grade officials just as negatively as does the public at large.

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A&B				
President Bush	15	14	15	16
U.S. Congress	7	7	7	5
Your state governor	19	19	19	15
Your state legislators	14	14	14	8

The second question, asked to measure the level of public awareness of the six national goals announced by the President and the governors, was:

This card describes several national education goals that have been recommended for attainment by the year 2000. Would you tell me which of these goals you have heard of?

	Awareness of Goals			
	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
NATIONAL GOALS				
A. By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.	28	25	33	31
B. By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%.	27	24	31	26
C. By the year 2000, American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography.	26	22	31	36
D. By the year 2000, American students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.	23	23	22	32
E. By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the skills necessary to compete in a global economy and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.	25	21	30	28
F. By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.	24	21	28	22

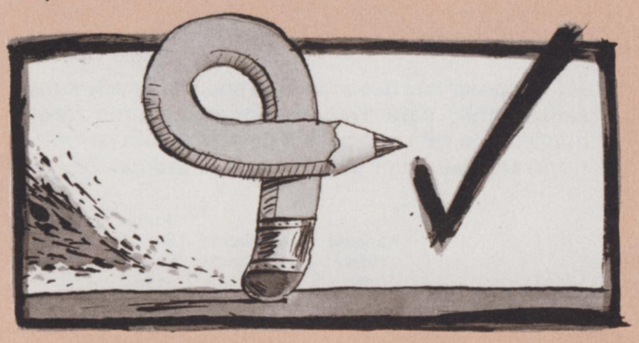
Responses to the final question in this series, asking Americans what progress has been made toward achieving each of the national goals, reveal negative perceptions of progress to date. For most of the goals, more than twice as many people believe that little or no progress has been made as believe that there has been a great deal or quite a bit of progress. However, readers should note that a large number of respondents — nearly one-fourth for each goal — did not answer this question or held no opinion.

The third question:

Now, as I read off each goal, would you tell me how much progress you feel has been made toward achieving that goal — a great deal, quite a lot, not too much, or none at all?

Goal	Amount of Progress: A Great Deal %	Quite A Lot %	Not Too Much %	None at All %	Don't Know %
A	5	15	45	13	22
B	3	13	46	15	23
C	3	13	41	18	25
D	2	9	36	28	25
E	3	13	40	21	23
F	4	10	34	31	21

The pessimism implied in these findings was generally shared among population groups without regard to sex, race, age, politics, education, region, occupation of the chief wage earners in households, occupation of the respondents themselves, religion, income, community size, number of children under 18, and whether the children attend public schools or nonpublic schools.



National Testing and Its Purposes

Despite America's long tradition of local control of public schools, the Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa poll for 1989 revealed overwhelming support for a national public school curriculum, for national goals and standards, and for a national testing program to measure progress toward these goals and standards. In that poll, Americans favored standardized national tests by a margin of 77% to 14%, with only 9% undecided. Parents of school-age children favored such a program even more than nonparents.

The current poll produced similar results. Seventy-one percent of the respondents favored requiring the public schools in their communities to use standardized national tests to measure the academic achievement of students; 20% opposed the requirement. There were no significant differences in opinion among population groups.

The first question:

Would you favor or oppose requiring the public schools in this community to use standardized national tests to measure the academic achievement of students?

	National Totals 1992 %	No Children In School 1992 %	Public School Parents 1992 %	Nonpublic School Parents 1992 %
Favor	71	72	71	67
Oppose	20	17	23	26
Don't know	9	11	6	7

Since the issue was first investigated in these polls in 1970, the public has favored the use of national tests to permit comparisons of student achievement in the local schools with achievement in schools elsewhere. The following table summarizes findings for the years when the question was stated in this fashion: Would you like to see students in the local schools given national tests so that their educational achievement could be compared with that of students in other communities?

	National Totals 1988 %	1986 %	1983 %	1971 %	1970 %
Yes	81	77	75	70	75
No	14	16	17	21	16
Don't know	5	7	8	9	9

This year's poll took the issue a step further, offering six possible uses for the results of national testing and asking respondents which uses they favor. The big winners were "to identify areas in which students need extra help" and "to identify areas in which teachers should improve their teaching skills." Even respondents who opposed the idea of national tests generally agreed that, if the tests are required, these are acceptable uses for them. Two other uses were supported by smaller majorities: "to rank the local public schools in terms of student achievement" and "to determine if a student advances to the next level of schooling." A majority of respondents opposed the final two suggested uses: "to determine how much teachers should be paid" and "to determine the level of funding each local school should receive."

The second question:

In addition to measuring the academic achievement of students, do you think these standardized national tests should be used or should not be used for the following purposes?

	National Totals %			Those Who Favor National Tests %			Those Who Oppose National Tests %		
	Should	Should Not	Don't Know	Should	Should Not	Don't Know	Should	Should Not	Don't Know
Possible Uses									
To rank the local public schools in terms of student achievement	65	26	9	81	16	3	25	72	3
To determine if a student advances to the next grade level of schooling	60	32	8	73	24	3	26	72	2
To determine how much teachers should be paid	38	52	10	44	48	8	16	81	3
To determine the level of funding each local school should receive	36	54	10	43	50	7	16	81	3
To identify areas in which teachers need to improve their teaching skills	79	14	7	90	8	2	59	38	3
To identify areas in which students need extra help	85	9	6	96	3	1	65	34	1

Illustrations by Jem Sullivan

Early Childhood Care and Education

A series of questions in this poll probed public attitudes on issues having to do with child care and early childhood education. The first national education goal announced by President Bush and the governors states that, by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn. But social trends make reaching this goal increasingly difficult without massive intervention of some kind. For example, the number of single-parent families continues to grow, and more than 75% of American women now work outside the home — nearly double the 1970 rate. One-third of these women have children younger than 6. The number of children living in homes where income is below the poverty level is growing as well, and today the federal Head Start program and state-funded preschool programs serve fewer than half of the nation's 3- and 4-year-olds living in poverty.

How valuable does the public consider early care and education to be? If efforts should be expanded in this area, who should pay? (David Clark of the University of North Carolina estimates that providing access to high-quality preschool programs in order to achieve the announced goal would cost approximately $30 billion annually.)

Responses to the series of questions on this topic suggest that the public is well aware of the need for and the value of greatly expanding the scope and improving the quality of early care and education. Moreover, a majority of poll respondents say they are willing to pay higher taxes in order to reap the benefits of expanding these programs.

The first question:

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 %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A great deal	39	33	46	43
Quite a lot	35	38	31	33
Not much	16	16	16	16
Not at all	5	5	5	4
Don't know	5	8	2	4

People were asked if they would be willing to pay more taxes to fund free preschool programs for children from low-income or poverty-level households. A plurality of respondents said yes; the vote was 49% willing, 42% unwilling, and 9% undecided. A contrary vote showed up in only a few population groups, notably people living in the East and people with incomes near or below the poverty level. Interestingly, the highest percentages of favorable response came from college graduates, the 18-29 age group, and the highest-income group (over $50,000).

The second question:

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

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Willing	49	46	54	54
Not willing	42	43	40	39
Don't know	9	11	6	7

The third question:

A proposal has been made to make federally subsidized child care available for all children from households with one parent or where both parents work. Do you favor or oppose this proposal?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	64	58	73	68
Oppose	26	28	22	25
Don't know	10	14	5	7

Responses to this question differed considerably among different population groups. Of the categories into which the Gallup Organization broke down responses, we have selected six that show some significant differences.

	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
NATIONAL TOTALS	**64**	**26**	**10**
Selected Demographic Groups			
Sex			
Men	61	29	10
Women	66	23	11
Race			
White	63	28	9
Nonwhite	70	14	16
Age			
18 - 29 years	69	18	13
30 - 49 years	69	23	8
50 and older	53	35	12
Politics			
Republican	59	33	8
Democrat	70	19	11
Independent	61	29	10
Number of Children Under 18			
One child	66	25	9
Two children	70	24	6
Three or more children	72	22	6
Children in School			
No children in school	58	28	14
Public school parents	73	22	5
Nonpublic school parents	68	25	7

The fourth question (asked of those who said they favor federally subsidized child care):

How do you think such a child-care program [one that would subsidize child care for all children from households with one parent or in which both parents work] should be paid for — entirely by taxes or with both parents paying part of the cost, depending on their ability to pay?

	National Totals %	Sex		Race	
		Men %	Women %	White %	Nonwhite %
Entirely by taxes	12	14	10	10	22
Parents pay part	85	82	88	87	73
Don't know	3	4	2	3	5

The fifth question (asked of those who said they favor federally subsidized child care):

Where do you think this child-care program should be provided — in the public schools, at parents' place of work, or at special child-care facilities?

There was considerable divergence of opinion on this question. A plurality of respondents (38%) preferred "special facilities" for child care, but 29% preferred the public schools, and 24% thought that care should be provided at the parents' place of work. Nine percent had no opinion on the question.

There were few significant differences across demographic categories. Two categories (sex and politics of respondents) in which differences were more pronounced are reported below.

	National Totals %	Sex		Politics		
		Men %	Women %	Rep. %	Dem. %	Ind. %
Where Provided						
Public schools	29	32	26	36	26	27
Parents' place of work	24	18	29	25	22	27
Special facilities	38	40	37	32	42	38
Don't know	9	10	8	7	10	8

Only a small minority of those who favor a federally subsidized child-care program would like to see taxpayers bear the entire cost. By a wide margin (85% to 12%), respondents who favor federally subsidized child care think parents should share the load, depending on their ability to pay. This sentiment is characteristic of every population group sampled, but twice as many nonwhites as whites (22% to 10%) favor full taxpayer support.

Longer School Year

In 1982 these polls began gathering opinion on the idea of lengthening the school year, and the question has been asked repeatedly since then. The 1982 poll showed the public opposed to the measure by a margin of 53% to 37%. Over the years there has been a gradual trend toward approval of this change, but not until 1991 did a bare majority emerge (51% in favor, 42% opposed). In the current poll 55% of respondents favor a longer school year. Leading the way are people in the West (72% in favor) and college graduates (61% in favor). High-income respondents and business and professional people are also more strongly in favor of a longer school year than is the public as a whole. Media attention to the longer school year in nations that Americans see as economic competitors, such as Japan, no doubt has played a role in the growing support for this idea. Interestingly, younger adults (those 18 to 29 years of age) are less strongly behind the idea than people who are 50 or older (48% to 57%). Six in 10 public school parents (58%) support a longer school year.

The question:

In some nations, students attend school as many as 240 days a year as compared to about 180 days in the U.S. How do you feel about extending the public school year in this community by 30 days, making the school year about 210 days or 10 months long? Do you favor or oppose this idea?

	Extend School Year 30 Days				
	1992 %	1991 %	1984 %	1983 %	1982 %
Favor	55	51	44	40	37
Oppose	35	42	50	49	53
Don't know	10	7	6	11	10

This year, respondents who favored a longer school year were also asked if they would prefer to see a change in the way school vacations are scheduled. The choices were four or five three-week vacation breaks evenly distributed throughout a school year or the current long summer break. This change-oriented group resoundingly approved shorter, more frequent vacations. Interestingly, many more women than men (63% to 54%) liked the idea.

The question (asked of those who favor a longer school year):

Let's assume that the school year is increased from 180 to 210 days. Which would you prefer: keeping the school year as it is now with a long summer vacation — or dividing the school year into four or five segments with three-week vacation breaks evenly distributed throughout the year?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Breaks distributed	59	58	60	57
Keep as now	39	39	40	40
Don't know	2	3	*	3

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Illustrations by Jem Sullivan

Analysis of the findings from the two questions above shows that only a quarter (24%) of Americans would vote for the existing 180-day school year and vacation schedule over the new options. The most popular plan, favored by 32%, would be the extended school year with multiple vacations; another 28% would opt for the lengthened school year but with the current vacation system.

People who oppose the longer school year or have no opinion on the subject were also asked about their preference in the scheduling of school vacations. Unsurprisingly, they overwhelmingly preferred the status quo.

The question (asked of those who oppose or have no opinion on the longer school year):

Let's assume that the school year stays at about 180 days, as it is now. Which would you prefer: keeping the school year as it is now with a long summer vacation — or dividing the school year into four or five segments with three-week vacation breaks evenly distributed throughout the year?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Breaks distributed	16	17	15	16
Keep as now	73	69	78	76
Don't know	11	14	7	8

Promoting Racial/Ethnic Tolerance

In general, people believe that the public schools are taking the necessary steps to promote understanding and tolerance among students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Fifty percent of respondents say that schools are taking the necessary steps, while 28% disagree.

The first question:

In your opinion, are the public schools in this community taking the necessary steps to promote understanding and tolerance among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds or not?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes	50	44	59	47
No	28	26	30	31
Don't know	22	30	11	22

However, these percentages conceal strong dissatisfaction among racial minorities. By a margin of approximately 5 to 3, blacks don't believe their local public schools are doing enough in this area. Nonwhites have similar, though somewhat less negative views. It should be noted that a large number of poll respondents — indeed, 30% of people with no children in school — had no opinion on this question, which is not frequently discussed in the mass media.

	National Totals %	Race			Age	
		White %	Non-White %	Black %	18-29 %	50 and Over %
Yes	50	52	37	33	39	48
No	28	25	45	52	40	23
Don't know	22	23	18	15	21	29

A large majority of respondents in all demographic categories expressed the opinion that their local public schools should increase coursework, counseling, and school activities of a kind that will promote racial and ethnic understanding and tolerance. Minority groups favored these actions more strongly than whites. Respondents in the younger age groups were more likely than older people to doubt that schools are taking the necessary steps to promote tolerance.

The second question:

Do you favor or oppose increasing the amount of coursework, counseling, and school activities in the local schools to promote understanding and tolerance among students of different races and ethnic backgrounds?

	National Totals %	Race			Age	
		White %	Non-White %	Black %	18-29 %	50 and Over %
Favor	71	69	84	82	74	64
Oppose	16	18	8	11	12	17
Don't know	13	13	8	7	14	19

The table below shows public school parents to be more in favor than the public at large of increasing coursework, counseling, and activities to promote racial and ethnic tolerance in the public schools.

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	71	68	76	70
Oppose	16	15	18	15
Don't know	13	17	6	15

Placement of Handicapped Children

Educators have argued issues related to the education of mentally and physically handicapped children for generations. The debate in the U.S. was exacerbated, not settled, by passage of the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. The act was intended to insure that handicapped children are given an appropriate education in the "least restrictive environment." That is, they should be integrated into regular classrooms where possible.

The public is of two minds on this question, but a majority took the "commonsense" view that physically handicapped children can be successfully integrated with nonhandicapped peers, whereas mentally handicapped children often cannot. (For obvious reasons, this poll made no attempt to identify the kinds and degrees of handicapping conditions within the

two large categories, although these factors inevitably influence every placement decision.)

The first question:

In your opinion, should mentally handicapped children be put in the same classrooms with other students, or should they be put in special classes of their own?

The second question:

In your opinion, should physically handicapped children be put in the same classrooms with other students, or should they be put in special classes of their own?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Mentally Handicapped				
Same classroom	22	19	26	24
Special classes	67	70	63	68
Don't know	11	11	11	8
Physically Handicapped				
Same classroom	65	64	66	61
Special classes	27	26	29	29
Don't know	8	10	5	10

New Uses for School Buildings

Individual educators and certain education associations, such as the National Community Education Association, have long advocated making the public schools centers for the delivery of a variety of social services in addition to teaching. The proponents cite many opportunities for increased efficiency and point to the fact that school buildings are closed during much of the day and during as much as half of the year.

Luvern Cunningham, professor of educational administration at Ohio State University, has gone so far as to suggest that, over the next generation, communities need to phase out local school districts, school boards, and superintendents and replace them with a reconstituted form of local government. The new entity would be responsible for governing all activities related to the well-being of the community, including K-12 education, mental and physical health, public safety, early childhood education, adult education, libraries, museums, child day care, adult day care, job retraining, employment counseling and placement, literacy, and community development.*

Two questions were framed to sample opinion on the expanded use of school buildings for the delivery of health and welfare services by various government agencies. The idea itself was welcomed by a great majority of this year's poll respondents. Of the national sample, 77% say they favor expanded use, and only 16% say they oppose it. Support was consistent throughout the sample. The second question proposed specific times when school buildings might be kept open for unspecified uses by students. The public overwhelmingly favored keeping public school buildings open after school hours on school days; in somewhat smaller numbers respondents also approved keeping them open on weekends and during traditional vacation periods.

The first question:

Would you favor or oppose using the public school buildings in this community to provide health and social welfare services to students? These services would be administered and coordinated by various government agencies using local school buildings as youth service or support centers.

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	77	78	77	74
Oppose	16	13	19	22
Don't know	7	9	4	4

The second question:

Would you favor or oppose keeping public school buildings in this community open, with adult supervision, for use by schoolchildren at the following times: 1) after regular school hours on school days, 2) during weekends, 3) during vacation periods?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor:				
After school hours	87	85	90	86
During weekends	67	66	68	66
During vacations	72	69	75	72

*For further details, see *Education Week*, Special Report, 29 April 1992, p. 27.

Willingness to Volunteer

The volunteer spirit is strong in almost every segment of society, according to the responses to a question in the current poll asking respondents if they would be willing to help in their local schools without pay if needed. The overall response was 59% yes, 34% no, and 7% don't know. Significant differences show up in certain population categories, however. For example, women express greater willingness to volunteer than do men (64% to 54%). More whites than

Illustration by Jem Sullivan

nonwhites say they would be willing to volunteer. The best-educated respondents say they are more willing to volunteer than do the least educated. Somewhat surprisingly, people over age 65 say they are less willing to volunteer than do people in their middle years.

Although public school parents are, not surprisingly, somewhat more likely to state that they would be willing to volunteer (72% willing) than are those with no children in school or with children in private schools, about half of both of these groups say they would be agreeable to serving as unpaid volunteers in the public schools.

These findings suggest that school authorities may have failed to take full advantage of a rich resource in troubled financial times. However, the administration of a volunteer program presents problems, and much information would have to be gathered with respect to what kinds of service volunteers could provide and with respect to its quality before a program could be implemented.

The question:

If you were asked, would you be willing to work as an unpaid volunteer in any of the public schools in this community or not?

	Willing to work as unpaid volunteer %
TOTAL	**59**
Sex	
Men	54
Women	64
Race	
White	61
Nonwhite	49
Age	
18 - 29 years	65
30 - 49 years	65
50 - 64 years	54
65 and over	36
Education	
College graduate	70
High school graduate	57
Grade school	45
Community Size	
1 million and over	53
2,500 - 49,999	71
Children in School	
No children in school	51
Public school parents	72
Nonpublic school parents	49

Research Procedure

The Sample. The sample used in this survey embraced a total of 1,306 adults (18 years of age and older). It is described as a modified probability sample of the nation. Personal, in-home interviewing was conducted in all areas of the nation and in all types of communities.

Time of Interviewing. The fieldwork for this study was carried out during the periods of 23 April to 14 May 1992.

The Report. In the tables used in this report, "Nonpublic School Parents" includes parents of students who attend parochial schools and parents of students who attend private or independent schools.

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

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.

Composition of the Sample

Adults	**%**
No children in school	71
Public school parents	26*
Nonpublic school parents	6*

*Total exceeds 29% because some parents have children attending more than one kind of school.

Sex	**%**
Men	48
Women	52
Race	**%**
White	88
Nonwhite	12
Age	**%**
18-29 years	24
30-49 years	40
50 and over	36
Occupation (Chief Wage Earner)	**%**
Business and professional	30
Clerical and sales	8
Manual labor	37
Nonlabor force	17
Farm	3
Undesignated	5
Income	**%**
$40,000 and over	29
$30,000-$39,999	20
$20,000-$29,999	17
$10,000-$19,999	18
Under $10,000	11
Undesignated	5
Region	**%**
East	24
Midwest	25
South	31
West	20
Community Size	**%**
1 million and over	37
500,000-999,999	8
50,000-499,999	18
2,500-49,999	11
Under 2,500	26
Education	**%**
College	47
High school	46
Grade school	7

Design of the Sample

The sampling procedure is designed to produce an approximation of the adult civilian population, age 18 and older, living in the U.S., except for persons in institutions such as prisons or hospitals.

A replicated probability sample is used, down to the block level in urban areas and down to segments of townships in rural areas. More than 300 sampling locations are used in each survey.

The sample design included stratification by these seven size-of-community strata, using 1980 census data: 1) incorporated cities of population 1,000,000 and over, 2) incorporated cities of population 250,000 to 999,999, 3) incorporated cities of population 50,000 to 249,999, 4) urbanized places not included in 1 and 2, 5) cities over 2,500 population outside of urbanized areas, 6) towns and villages with populations less than 2,500, and 7) rural places not included within town boundaries. Each of these strata was further stratified into four geographic regions: East, Midwest, South, and West. Within each city-size/regional stratum, the population was arrayed in geographic order and zoned into equal-sized groups of sampling units. Pairs of localities were selected in each zone, with probability of selection of each locality proportional to its population size in the 1980 census, producing two replicated samples of localities.

For each survey, within each subdivision for which block statistics are available, a sample of blocks or block clusters is drawn with probability of selection proportional to the number of dwelling units. In all other subdivisions or areas, blocks or segments are drawn at random or with equal probability.

In each cluster of blocks and each segment, a randomly selected starting point is designated on the interviewer's map of the area. Starting at this point, interviewers are required to follow a given direction in the selection of households until their assignment is completed.

Interviewing is conducted at times when adults, in general, are most likely to be at home, which means on weekends, or, if on weekdays, after 4 p.m. for women and after 6 p.m. for men.

Allowance for persons not at home is made by a "times-at-home" weighting* procedure rather than by "callbacks." This procedure is a method for reducing the sample bias that would otherwise result from underrepresentation in the sample of persons who are difficult to find at home.

The prestratification by regions is routinely supplemented by fitting each obtained sample to the latest available Census Bureau estimates of the regional distribution of the population. Also, minor adjustments of the sample are made by educational attainment by men and women separately, based on the annual estimates of the Census Bureau (derived from its Current Population Survey) and by age.

*A. Politz and W. Simmons, "An Attempt to Get the 'Not at Homes' into the Sample Without Callbacks," *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, March 1949, pp. 9-31.

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 errors depends largely on the number of interviews.

The following tables may be used in estimating the sampling error of any percentage in this report. The computed allowances have taken into account the effect of the sample design upon sampling error. They may be interpreted as indicating the range (plus or minus the figure shown) within which the results of repeated samplings in the same time period could be expected to vary 95% of the time, assuming the same sampling procedure, the same interviewers, and the same questionnaire.

The first table shows how much allowance should be made for the sampling error of a percentage:

Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of a Percentage

	In Percentage Points (at 95 in 100 confidence level)* Sample Size						
	1,500	1,000	750	600	400	200	100
Percentages near 10	2	2	3	3	4	5	8
Percentages near 20	3	3	4	4	5	7	10
Percentages near 30	3	4	4	5	6	8	12
Percentages near 40	3	4	5	5	6	9	12
Percentages near 50	3	4	5	5	6	9	13
Percentages near 60	3	4	5	5	6	9	12
Percentages near 70	3	4	4	5	6	8	12
Percentages near 80	3	3	4	4	5	7	10
Percentages near 90	2	2	3	3	4	5	8

*The chances are 95 in 100 that the sampling error is not larger than the figures shown.

The table would be used in the following manner: Let us say that a reported percentage is 33 for a group that includes 1,000 respondents. We go to the row for "percentages near 30" in the table and across to the column headed "1,000."

The number at this point is 4, which means that the 33% obtained in the sample is subject to a sampling error of plus or minus four points. In other words, it is very probable (95 chances out of 100) that the true figure would be somewhere between 29% and 37%, with the most likely figure the 33% obtained.

In comparing survey results in two samples, such as, for example, men and women, the question arises as to how large a difference between them must be before one can be reasonably sure that it reflects a real difference. In the tables below, the number of points that must be allowed for in such comparisons is indicated.

Two tables are provided. One is for percentages near 20 or 80; the other, for percentages near 50. For percentages in between, the error to be allowed for lies between those shown in the two tables.

Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of the Difference

	In Percentage Points (at 95 in 100 confidence level)*					
TABLE A	**Percentages near 20 or percentages near 80**					
Size of Sample	**1,500**	**1,000**	**750**	**600**	**400**	**200**
1,500	4					
1,000	4	5				
750	5	5	5			
600	5	5	6	6		
400	6	6	6	7	7	
200	8	8	8	8	9	10
TABLE B	**Percentages near 50**					
Size of Sample	**1,500**	**1,000**	**750**	**600**	**400**	**200**
1,500	5					
1,000	5	6				
750	6	6	7			
600	6	7	7	7		
400	7	8	8	8	9	
200	10	10	10	10	11	13

*The chances are 95 in 100 that the sampling error is not larger than the figures shown.

Here is an example of how the tables would be used: Let us say that 50% of men respond a certain way and 40% of women respond that way also, for a difference of 10 percentage points between them. Can we say with any assurance that the 10-point difference reflects a real difference between men and women on the question? Let us consider a sample that contains approximately 750 men and 750 women.

Since the percentages are near 50, we consult Table B, and, since the two samples are about 750 persons each, we look for the number in the column headed "750," which is also in the row designated "750." We find the number 7 here. This means that the allowance for error should be seven points and that, in concluding that the percentage among men is somewhere between three and 17 points higher than the percentage among women, we should be wrong only about 5% of the time. In other words, we can conclude with considerable confidence that a difference exists in the direction observed and that it amounts to at least three percentage points.

If, in another case, men's responses amount to 22%, say, and women's to 24%, we consult Table A, because these percentages are near 20. We look in the column headed "750" and see that the number is 5. Obviously, then, the two-point difference is inconclusive.

Conducting Your Own Poll

The Phi Delta Kappa Center for Dissemination of Innovative Programs makes available PACE (Polling Attitudes of the Community on Education) materials to enable nonspecialists to conduct scientific polls of attitudes and opinion in 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.

For information about using PACE materials, write or phone Neville Robertson at Phi Delta Kappa, 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 Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa education poll is 25 copies for $10. Additional copies are 25 cents each. This price includes postage for parcel post delivery. Where possible, enclose a check or money order.

If faster delivery is desired, do not include a remittance with your order. You will be billed at the above rates plus any additional cost involved in the method of delivery.

Persons who wish to order the 300-page document that is the basis for this report should write to the Gallup Organization (47 Hulfish St., Princeton, NJ 08542) or phone 609/924-9600. The price is $95 per copy, postage included.

Acknowledgments

A 10-member panel of distinguished educators and others interested in education helped frame questions for the 1992 Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. Each of them submitted a number of ideas for questions. After editing and compilation, these questions were rated for appropriateness by the panel and by several members of the Phi Delta Kappa professional staff. The Gallup Organization put the top 30 questions into final form for use in the poll.

Panelists: Gerald Bracey, a research psychologist and education consultant in Alexandria, Va.; David Clark, professor of education, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Luvern Cunningham, professor of education, Ohio State University, Columbus; Constance Clayton, superintendent of the Philadelphia public schools; Forbis Jordan, professor of education, Arizona State University, Tempe; George Kaplan, an education writer and consultant, Bethesda, Md.; Jack Kosoy, an adult education administrator in the Los Angeles schools and president of Phi Delta Kappa; Lawrence J. Schweinhart, chairman, Research Division, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, Ypsilanti, Mich.; Harold Shane, professor of education emeritus, Indiana University, Bloomington; and Suzanne Wilson, professor of education, Michigan State University, East Lansing. — SME