

The 29th Annual
Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll
Of the Public's Attitudes
Toward the Public Schools

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PLACE A computer in every classroom. Move persistent "troublemakers" into alternative schools. Establish national standards for measuring the academic performance of the public schools. Let parents and students choose which public schools the students will attend. Group students in classes according to ability level. Establish a national curriculum. Use standardized national tests to measure the academic achievement of students. Provide health-care services in schools. These are all measures that the public believes would improve student achievement in the public schools. Probing attitudes about improving achievement was a major focus of the 1997 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, conducted by the George H. Gallup International Institute.

Why do some public schools achieve better academic results than others? The public believes that three factors are important: 1) strong support from parents, 2) the amount of money spent, and, to a lesser extent, 3) the kinds of students in attendance.

This year's poll data make it clear that public schools continue to enjoy strong public support. Most respondents give good grades to the schools in their own communities, and parents of public school students express even stronger satisfaction. While there is an obvious desire for improvement, almost three-fourths (71%) of those surveyed believe that this improvement should come through reforming the existing system rather than through seeking an alternative system.

At the same time, however, the public seems more willing than in earlier years to approve government financial support for students who wish to attend nonpublic schools. This continues a trend tracked by these polls for nearly three decades. As recently as 1993, only 24% of respondents favored "allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense." Seventy-four percent were opposed. In 1997, 44% favor this and 52% oppose it. When the words "public expense" are changed to "government expense," the public is exactly divided (48% in favor, 48% opposed).^{*} On the basic "voucher question," asking respondents to indicate whether they would support allowing parents and students to choose a public or nonpublic school to attend with the government paying "all or part of the tuition," this poll shows a virtual deadlock, for the first time, with 49% favoring and 48% opposing. While this is good news to advocates of nonpublic schools, the conditions the public would impose on such support suggest that proposals of this kind are certain to be controversial.

The public expresses the strong belief that any nonpublic school that accepts public funds should be required to enroll students from a wider range of backgrounds and academic ability than is now the case. This popular conviction would seem to invite the kind of government regulation that has led some proponents of nonpublic schools to oppose the voucher idea.

This year's poll reflects a strong public belief in the impor-

tant role parents can and should play in the education of their children. Respondents regard the amount of support provided by parents of public school students as a major factor in determining why some schools are better than others; they also believe strongly that parents should be notified if their children have a substance abuse problem or suffer from a sexually transmitted disease.

Other findings in the 1997 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll include the following.

- Majorities in all demographic groups believe that the problems faced by the public schools in urban areas are more serious than those affecting nonurban schools.

- Lack of discipline and inadequate financing are the local school problems most frequently mentioned by respondents. The use of drugs and "fighting, violence, and gangs" are not far behind.

- Forty-six percent of those surveyed give the public schools in their community an A or a B. Fifty-six percent of public school parents give them a grade of A or B, and almost two-thirds (64%) of public school parents give the school their eldest child attends an A or B.

- The public believes that, if given the opportunity, the students most likely to move from public schools to private schools under a voucher system would be the higher-achieving students. Furthermore, the public believes that the academic achievement of these students would *improve* as a result of the move, while the academic achievement of the students remaining in the public schools would stay about the same.

- The public believes the home school movement is a bad thing for the nation; however, fewer respondents hold this belief today than when this question was asked in 1988 and 1985. Moreover, the public feels strongly that home schools should be required to guarantee a minimum level of educational quality.

- The public does not believe that state takeover of failing schools will improve academic achievement. Indeed, a strong majority (69%) believes that achievement would remain the same or get worse.

- Do the public schools overemphasize achievement testing? Approximately half (48%) believe the current emphasis is appropriate; the remaining half are divided between "too much" (20%) and "not enough" (28%).

- There is no consensus regarding the effect on academic achievement of lowering a school's starting age for children. However, a majority (75%) of the public would have students start school at age 5 or under.

- People divide almost equally in assessing the way a part-time job outside of school affects students' academic performance: one-third say it lowers performance, one-third say it improves performance, and one-third say it has no effect.

- The public supports President Clinton's main education initiatives. The President would assess performance of the nation's public schools according to how well students score on achievement tests at two different grade levels; he proposes a five-year, two-billion-dollar program to place a computer with access to the Internet in every classroom; and he seeks a tax credit for each first-year college student in a family with an annual income of \$100,000 or less.

- Seven out of 10 respondents (71%) reject the idea that the local public schools are infringing on the right of parents to direct their children's education.

- Children today are getting more parental help with their homework than in earlier years, and Americans in general re-

^{*}Although on the borderline of statistical significance, this difference reminds us of the need for very careful wording of questions that assess opinion on sensitive issues.

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port an increased willingness to work as unpaid volunteers in their local public schools.

- A majority of public school parents (57%) say they would be more likely to take the school's side than their child's if a teacher or principal reported the child misbehaving or being disruptive in school.

- A majority of the public (60%) indicates that a C is the lowest grade a child of theirs could bring home on a report card without causing them to be upset or concerned.

- Fifty-four percent of Americans believe that the curriculum in their local schools needs to be changed to meet today's needs, while 39% believe it already does so.

- Majorities define curriculum "basics" as including mathematics and English. Pluralities would add history/U.S. government and science to the list.

- A small majority (52%) of the public believes that gifted and talented students should be placed in separate classes. Moreover, 66% believe that grouping students by ability in classrooms improves student achievement overall.

- Almost two-thirds of Americans (63%) believe that extracurricular activities are very important. Another 27% believe they are fairly important. The importance assigned to these activities is substantially greater today than when the question was last asked in 1985.

- A small majority (53%) of the public believes that the emphasis placed on sports such as football and basketball is about right. However, 39% believe there is too much emphasis.

- Ninety-six percent of respondents would require an average grade of C or better for interscholastic athletic eligibility.

- Americans are divided as to whether public schools should be financed through local property taxes, state taxes, or federal taxes. They are also divided as to whether local property taxes or local income taxes should be the main source of school funding.

- A small majority of the public (53%) is at least somewhat satisfied with the steps being taken to deal with the use of drugs in the local schools. Fifty-two percent of respondents believe an educational approach is the best way to deal with the problem; 42% believe severe penalties are best.

- The public gives strong support to "zero tolerance" policies that call for automatic suspension for drug and alcohol possession in school and for carrying weapons of any kind into school.

Improving the Public Schools And Student Achievement

Since some of the proposals being considered for improving student achievement call for alternatives to the public schools, the initial question, in effect, asked whether people would prefer reform or revolution. The answer is clear: 71% of those responding believe that reform should come through the existing system. This response is uniform across demographic categories.

The question:

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 pub-

lic school system or finding an alternative to the existing public school system?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Reforming existing system	71	70	72	67
Finding alternative system	23	23	24	32
Don't know	6	7	4	1



Improving Student Achievement

The question most directly aimed at discovering what the public believes will improve student achievement offered respondents the opportunity to evaluate 10 proposals. A majority of the public assigns either a great deal or quite a lot of importance to eight of them. However, two frequently mentioned reform proposals — lengthening the school year and lengthening the school day — could garner support from only 38% and 25% of respondents respectively.

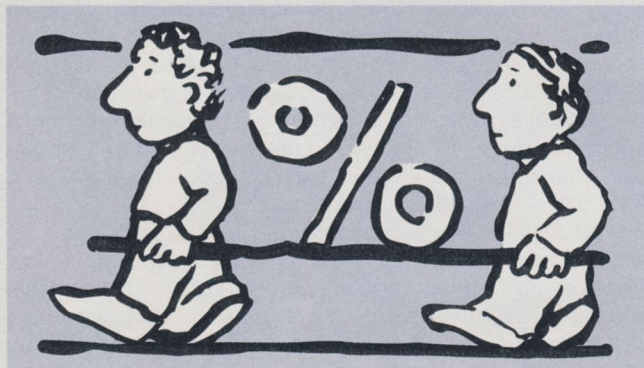
With relatively few exceptions, there is little difference in the way subgroups in the national population view these measures. However, 75% of blacks (compared to 50% for the national population) feel that placing a computer in every classroom would improve student achievement a great deal. In addition, 59% of blacks and 51% of nonwhites believe that allowing parents and children to attend the public school of their choice would improve student achievement a great deal; the corresponding figure for the nation as a whole is just 39%.

Indeed, blacks favor many of the national reforms proposed in recent years to a much greater extent than does the general population. For example, blacks are more likely to believe that student achievement will be improved a great deal by establishing national standards (58% to 41%), by establishing a national curriculum (58% to 35%), by using standardized tests to measure achievement (52% to 36%), and by providing health-care services in the public schools (65% to 35%).

The question:

Here is a list of measures that have been proposed for improving the academic achievement of public school students. As I read each one, would you tell me whether you believe that measure would improve the achievement of the students in the local public schools a great deal, quite a lot, not very much, or not at all?

	A Great Deal or Quite a Lot %	A Great Deal %	Quite A Lot %	Not Very Much %	Not Much At All %	Don't Know %
Placing a computer in every classroom	81	50	31	13	5	1
Establishing national standards for measuring the academic performance of the public schools	77	41	36	15	6	2
Moving persistent "troublemakers" into alternative schools	75	43	32	14	9	2
Allowing parents and students to attend the public school of their choice	73	39	34	18	7	2
Using standardized national tests to measure the academic achievement of students	67	36	31	23	8	2
Grouping students in classes according to ability level	66	34	32	19	13	2
Establishing a national curriculum	66	35	31	20	10	4
Providing health-care services in schools	61	35	26	25	12	2
Lengthening the school year	38	18	20	33	27	2
Lengthening the school day	25	12	13	38	35	2



State Takeovers

In some states the administration of faltering or failing schools is taken over by the state. People were asked what effect they thought such a move would have on student achievement in the schools in their community. The public is split on this question; 43% believe such a takeover would have no effect, and the rest are evenly divided on whether achievement would improve or get worse.

The question:

Some states have taken over the administration of schools in local school districts where the public schools were considered to be doing a poor job. What effect do you think takeover by the state would have on the academic achievement of students in a public school in your community? Do you think their academic achievement would improve, get worse, or do you think it wouldn't have much effect on their academic achievement?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Would improve	25	24	25	46
Would get worse	26	25	27	27
Wouldn't have much effect	43	45	42	25
Don't know	6	6	6	2



School-Starting Age and Part-Time Work

The current poll probed people's beliefs about the effect on student achievement of starting school a year earlier and of holding a part-time job. There is no consensus on either question. Thirty-seven percent of respondents believe that starting school a year earlier would improve student achievement, 24% disagree, and 37% believe it would make no difference. Blacks are more than twice as likely as whites (75% to 31%) to believe that starting school earlier would improve student achievement.

On the question of starting age, three-fourths of Americans would have students start school at age 5 or under. Twenty-six percent would have them start at age 4 or under. Groups in the national population that most strongly support having children start school at age 4 or under include blacks (64%), nonwhites (59%), 18- to 29-year-olds (40%), and urban residents (35%).

Data on public school parents reveal a pattern similar to that for the national population. Sixty-four percent of black parents would prefer a school starting age of 4 or under (compared to 30% for all parents), as would 57% of 18- to 29-year-old parents and 61% of nonwhite parents.

The first question:

In your opinion, what effect would starting a child a year younger than is now generally the case have on the child's academic achievement in elementary and in high school? Do you think starting a year younger would improve the child's achievement, make it worse, or wouldn't it make much difference?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Improve achievement	37	35	40	37
Make it worse	24	22	25	39
Not much difference	37	40	33	23
Don't know	2	3	2	1

The second question:

At what age do you think students should start school?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'97	'86	'97	'86	'97	'86	'97	'86
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
4 years (or under)	26	29	24	29	30	27	27	29
5 years	49	41	50	40	47	44	44	42
6 years	21	18	22	18	19	20	16	23
7 years (or over)	3	2	3	1	3	2	11	*
Don't know	1	10	1	12	1	7	2	6

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The third question:

What effect do you feel having a part-time job outside of school has on the academic achievement of students in the public schools in this community? Generally speaking, do you feel having a part-time job improves their academic achievement, hurts their academic achievement, or do you feel it does not affect their academic achievement one way or the other?

	National Totals	No Children In School	Public School Parents	Nonpublic School Parents
	%	%	%	%
Improves achievement	29	31	28	16
Hurts achievement	32	32	30	44
Does not affect achievement	35	34	37	37
Don't know	4	3	5	3

Improving Schools

People frequently ask, "Why are some schools better than others?" This year poll respondents were asked to rate the importance of three factors sometimes offered to explain such differences. The public considers the amount of support from parents of students in the local public schools to be the most important factor in making a school better. However, the amount of money spent on the local public schools is a close second. The kinds of students attending the local public schools is regarded as either quite important or very important by two-thirds of the public but is not considered as important as the other two factors.

The question:

Here are some factors that are sometimes mentioned to explain why the public schools in some places are better than those in others. As I read off each one, would you tell me whether you think that factor is very important, quite important, not very important, or not at all important in determining the quality of the local public schools?

	Very Important %	Quite Important %	Not Very Important %	Not at All Important %	Don't Know %
Amount of support from parents of students in the local public schools	86	11	3	*	*
Amount of money spent on the local public schools	62	29	6	2	1
Kinds of students attending the local public schools	41	26	20	9	4

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Percent Responding "Very Important"

	National Totals	No Children In School	Public School Parents	Nonpublic School Parents
	%	%	%	%
Amount of support from parents of students in the local public schools	86	84	88	92
Amount of money spent on the local public schools	62	59	67	63
Kinds of students attending the local public schools	41	39	45	52

President Clinton's Proposals

President Clinton has offered three proposals designed to improve schools, enhance student achievement, or provide incentives for students to succeed in school. These proposals are currently before Congress and may or may not become law.

While all the proposals made by President Clinton attract majority support, the strongest support (82%) is for the proposed tax credit for the parents of first-year college students. This proposal has already been debated in Congress, with the Administration indicating a willingness to compromise on the need for a B average as a condition for second-year aid. Support for the proposal is strong among all groups in the poll.

Two-thirds of the public (66%) favor the proposal for placing a computer with access to the Internet in every public school classroom. Groups strongly in favor of the proposal include blacks (85%), nonwhites (83%), 18- to 29-year-olds (78%), and those in the \$50,000 and over income range (78%).

The President's testing proposal has the least support and, based on past experience, is likely to generate the most controversy.

The first question:

President Clinton has proposed a tax credit for families with an annual income of \$100,000 or less for each first-year college student. The \$1,500 tax credit would also apply to the second year if the student maintained a B average and had no conviction for drugs. In general, do you favor or oppose this proposal?

	National Totals	No Children In School	Public School Parents	Nonpublic School Parents
	%	%	%	%
Favor	82	79	87	88
Oppose	17	20	12	12
Don't know	1	1	1	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The second question:

President Clinton has proposed a five-year, two-billion-dollar program that would place a computer with access to the Internet in every public school classroom in the nation. In general, do you favor or oppose this proposal?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	66	64	70	73
Oppose	32	34	29	26
Don't know	2	2	1	1

The third question:

President Clinton has proposed that the performance of the nation's public schools be assessed according to how well students score on achievement tests at two different grade levels. In general, do you favor or oppose this proposal?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	57	56	59	53
Oppose	37	37	37	42
Don't know	6	7	4	5

Achievement Testing

Testing and its role in school improvement is a frequent subject of debate. Respondents this year were asked their opinion of the level of emphasis on testing in their local public schools. Forty-eight percent responded that the emphasis is about right. The rest were divided between too much and too little. These responses were consistent among all demographic groups.

The question:

In your opinion, is there too much emphasis on achievement testing in the public schools in this community, not enough emphasis on testing, or about the right amount?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Too much emphasis	20	20	19	24
Not enough emphasis	28	28	26	42
About the right amount	48	46	54	32
Don't know	4	6	1	2

Biggest Problems Facing Local Schools

Efforts at school improvement must, of course, address the problems the public schools face. In all recent polls the public

has been asked to indicate the biggest problem facing the local public schools. This year a follow-up question was asked to determine whether the public feels the problems faced by urban schools are more serious than those faced by their nonurban counterparts. Sixty-nine percent said they believe the problems that urban schools face are either much more serious or somewhat more serious.

This year "lack of discipline" and "lack of financial support" were mentioned by 15% of the respondents respectively as the most serious problems facing local public schools. Use of drugs, designated the number-one problem in last year's poll, was mentioned by 14% of respondents this year, and fighting/violence/gangs was mentioned by 12%. These four problems were the only ones to reach double figures.

One caution needs to be offered relative to the findings reported. The question requires respondents to identify a problem, and they do not have a list from which to choose. That is undoubtedly why so many different problems are mentioned and why the percentage of mentions is so small. (Eleven other problems were mentioned by 2% of respondents.)



The first question:

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

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'97	'96	'97	'96	'97	'96	'97	'96
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Lack of discipline/ more control	15	15	15	16	12	12	22	18
Lack of financial support/funding/ money	15	13	15	14	14	13	4	7
Use of drugs/dope	14	16	14	17	14	14	9	12
Fighting/violence/ gangs	12	14	12	14	12	15	16	17
Overcrowded schools	8	8	6	6	10	11	17	15
Concern about standards/quality of education	8	4	7	4	8	4	10	9
Pupils' lack of in- terest/poor atti- tudes/truancy	6	5	6	5	6	6	3	4
Difficulty getting good teachers/ quality teachers	3	3	3	3	4	3	*	3
No problems	2	3	2	2	3	7	*	3
Miscellaneous	9	9	9	8	8	10	13	11
Don't know	10	13	13	15	6	9	4	10

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The second question:

Just your impression, are the problems faced by the public schools in urban areas much more serious, somewhat more serious, somewhat less serious, or much less serious than those faced by the public schools in nonurban areas?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Much more serious	40	40	40	43
Somewhat more serious	29	29	30	32
Somewhat less serious	16	16	17	16
Much less serious	7	6	7	5
Don't know	8	9	6	4

The question:

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

	National Totals '97 '96 % %		No Children In School '97 '96 % %		Public School Parents '97 '96 % %		Nonpublic School Parents '97 '96 % %	
A & B	46	43	42	38	56	57	26	24
A	10	8	8	6	15	15	9	2
B	36	35	34	32	41	42	17	22
C	32	34	33	36	30	29	35	43
D	11	11	11	12	10	9	21	13
FAIL	6	6	7	6	3	4	13	13
Don't know	5	6	7	8	1	1	5	7

Grading the Schools

Since 1974 respondents to the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup education polls have been asked to grade the public schools in their communities on a scale of A to F. In 1981, people were first asked to rate the "nation's public schools" on the same scale. Then, beginning in 1985, parents were asked to grade the public school their oldest child was attending.

One significant generalization derived from responses to these questions over the years is the fact that the closer respondents are to the public schools, the higher the grades they give them. Thus people give the schools in their own community much higher grades than they give the nation's schools. Parents give the schools in the community much higher grades than do those who do not have children in the public schools. By the same token, public school parents, when asked to grade the school their oldest child attends, give that school higher grades than they give to schools in the community as a whole. Current poll findings reinforce the basic generalization: familiarity with the public schools breeds respect for them.

The differences are impressive. Over the last nine years the differences between the percentage of A's and B's given to the nation's public schools and to the local schools have averaged about 23 points. Even more startling is the difference between the percentage of A's and B's parents give to the school their oldest child attends and the percentage of A's and B's given to the nation's schools. Here the difference over the last nine years has averaged 47 percentage points.

Taken together, these items suggest a second generalization: the low grades given the nation's public schools are primarily media-induced. Whereas people learn firsthand about their *children's* schools, they learn about the *nation's* schools primarily from the media.

Local Public Schools

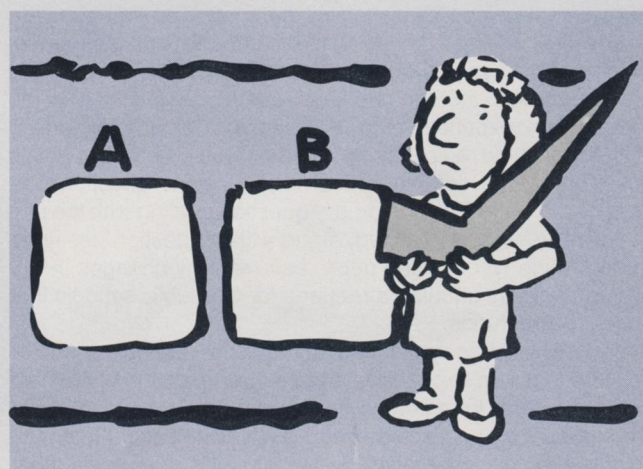
As has been the case for two decades, over four Americans in 10 — 46% this year — award a grade of A or B to the public schools in their own communities. And almost eight in 10 — 78% this year — award them at least a grade of C. An even higher percentage of public school parents (56%) assign an A or a B to the schools in their community.

Public Schools Nationally

As has been the case since this question was first asked in 1981, about half as many Americans give a grade of A or B to the nation's public schools as give these grades to the local public schools. This year the figures are 22% and 46% respectively. The groups assigning unusually high percentages of A's and B's to the nation's public schools include blacks (44%) and nonwhites (35%).

The 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 '97 '96 % %		No Children In School '97 '96 % %		Public School Parents '97 '96 % %		Nonpublic School Parents '97 '96 % %	
A & B	22	21	23	20	23	26	24	8
A	2	1	3	1	2	2	2	1
B	20	20	20	19	21	24	22	7
C	48	46	49	47	46	43	38	57
D	15	18	15	19	16	14	15	21
FAIL	6	5	6	5	4	7	6	3
Don't know	9	10	7	9	11	10	17	11

Public School Oldest Child Attends

The parents of public school children are likely to be among the best-informed citizens about the public schools. Since 1985, this poll has asked parents to grade the school their oldest child attends. This year almost two-thirds (64%) of public school parents assign the school their oldest child attends an A or a B. Another 23% assign this school a C, bringing to 87% the proportion of parents giving the school their oldest child attends at least a passing grade of C. The parents who are most likely to give the school their oldest child attends an A or a B include college graduates (75%), parents who live in the East (74%), and those parents whose children are at the top of their class or above-average academically (74%).

The question:

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

	Public School Parents	
	'97 %	'96 %
A & B	64	66
A	26	23
B	38	43
C	23	22
D	7	6
FAIL	4	5
Don't know	2	1

Public Versus Nonpublic Schools

The current poll featured the usual questions regarding attendance at public, private, or church-related schools with the government paying all or part of the costs. The first question dealt with choosing a private school to attend at public expense. In the past, when this question has been asked, some critics have suggested that the results would be different if the words "government expense" were used in place of "public expense." With this in mind, a split-sample design was used in this year's poll. That is, the sample was divided, and the question was asked both ways. The customary question dealing with the use of vouchers was also asked, along with a question designed to determine whether the public believes any changes in admission policies should be required for nonpublic schools that accept public funds.

Providing for parents and students to attend nonpublic schools at public expense has been strongly opposed in past years. In 1993, for example, the percentage opposing allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense was 74%, with only 24% in favor. In 1994 allowing parents to send their school-age children to any public, private, or church-related school of their choice with the government paying "all or part of the tuition" was opposed 54% to 45%. However, with each succeeding year, the opposition has lessened. This year the public can be described as almost equally divided on this issue.

Choosing Private Schools at Public Expense

The current poll is the fourth (starting in 1993) to ask the public its attitude toward allowing parents to choose a private

school to attend at public expense. The opposition has been consistent, though it dropped from 74% in 1993 to 65% in 1995 to 61% in 1996. This year the poll shows that 52% oppose such choice while 44% approve it.

The group most likely to oppose this form of choice is the 18- to 29-year-olds (62% opposed, 38% in favor). Groups most likely to support this form of choice include nonwhites (51% in favor, 46% opposed) and urban residents (53% in favor, 45% opposed).

A second form of the question was also asked this year with the words "government expense" substituted for "public expense." When asked in this way, the public is equally divided, with 48% in favor and 48% opposed. Those most likely to support this choice include blacks (72%), nonwhites (68%), 18- to 29-year-olds (70%), professional and business persons (53%), and urban residents (59%).

The first question:

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

	National Totals				No Children In School				Public School Parents				Nonpublic School Parents			
	'97 %	'96 %	'95 %	'93 %	'97 %	'96 %	'95 %	'93 %	'97 %	'96 %	'95 %	'93 %	'97 %	'96 %	'95 %	'93 %
Favor	44	36	33	24	44	33	30	21	45	39	38	27	52	60	44	45
Oppose	52	61	65	74	54	63	68	76	50	59	59	72	44	38	51	55
Don't know	4	3	2	2	2	4	2	3	5	2	3	1	4	2	5	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The second question:

Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at government expense?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	Gov't Exp. %	Public Exp. %	Gov't Exp. %	Public Exp. %	Gov't Exp. %	Public Exp. %	Gov't Exp. %	Public Exp. %
Favor	48	44	51	44	43	45	50	52
Oppose	48	52	45	54	54	50	44	44
Don't know	4	4	4	2	3	5	6	4

The question most directly associated with vouchers was asked in 1994 and repeated in 1996. When it was first asked in 1994, 45% favored the idea. Support was virtually the same (43%) in 1996; however, this year's poll shows the public equally divided, with 49% in favor and 48% opposed. Both public school parents (55%) and nonpublic school parents (68%) favor allowing parents to send their school-age children to any public, private, or church-related school they choose, with the government paying part or all of the cost.

This issue divides men and women. Women favor permitting the choice by 52% to 45%; men oppose it by 51% to 47%. Other groups in support include blacks (62% to 34%), nonwhites (61% to 36%), 18- to 29-year-olds (55% to 43%), 30- to

49-year-olds (53% to 45%), those who live in the South (56% to 42%), those in the \$20,000 to \$30,000 income group (55% to 43%), those in the \$10,000 to \$20,000 income group (53% to 42%), and manual laborers (53% to 44%). Groups in opposition include those 50 years of age and older (56% to 40%), those living in the West (54% to 45%), those in the \$50,000 and over income group (57% to 41%), and suburban residents (51% to 45%).

The question:

A proposal has been made that would allow parents to send their school-age children to any public, private, or church-related school they choose. For those parents choosing nonpublic schools, the government would pay all or part of the tuition. Would you favor or oppose this proposal in your state?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents			Nonpublic School Parents		
	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Favor	49	43	45	46	38	42	55	49	48	68	70	69
Oppose	48	54	54	51	59	57	43	49	51	31	28	29
Don't know	3	3	1	3	3	1	2	2	1	1	2	2

Obligations of Private Schools Accepting Public Funds

One of the issues that comes up in any debate over public funds going to nonpublic schools is the extent to which those schools should be bound by the same obligations that fall on public schools. This year's poll asked whether such schools should be required to accept students from a wider range of backgrounds and levels of academic ability than is now generally the case. The public is strongly in agreement that they should. Seventy-eight percent of the public holds this view. This response is consistent across all demographic groups.

The question:

Do you think nonpublic schools that receive public funding should or should not be required to accept students from a wider range of backgrounds and academic ability than is now generally the case?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents			Nonpublic School Parents		
	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Should be required to accept a wider range	78	78	78	78	78	78	80	76	76	76	76	76
Should not	18	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	22	22	22
Don't know	4	5	5	5	5	5	3	7	7	2	2	2

Effects of a Shift to Nonpublic Schools

Another concern raised by those opposing the use of public funds for nonpublic schools is that the students and parents with the financial means to do so might opt for private schools, leaving the public schools to serve the poor and underprivileged. Three of the questions in this year's poll addressed this concern. The responses offer some indication that the concern is warranted.

Almost two-thirds of those surveyed (65%) believe that it would be the higher-achieving students who would take the opportunity to attend private schools. The same percentage believes the result for these students would be improved academic achievement. As for the students remaining in the public schools, 70% of the public believes that their achievement would remain about the same.

Responses to these three questions vary little across the subgroups in the poll.

The first question:

Suppose a large number of students in your local public schools moved to private schools. Just your opinion, who would be most likely to move to the private schools — the higher-achieving students, the lower-achieving students, or the average-achieving students?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents			Nonpublic School Parents		
	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Higher-achieving students	65	67	62	65	67	62	62	67	56	56	56	56
Lower-achieving students	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	10	10	10	10
Average-achieving students	20	19	21	20	19	21	21	21	28	28	28	28
No difference	3	3	5	3	3	5	5	5	2	2	2	2
Don't know	4	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

The second question:

Again, just your opinion, how would the academic achievement of those public school students who had moved to the private schools be affected? Do you think their academic achievement would improve, get worse, or remain about the same after moving to private schools?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents			Nonpublic School Parents		
	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Improve	65	68	58	65	68	58	58	68	80	80	80	80
Get worse	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	*	*	*	*
Remain about the same	28	25	35	28	25	35	35	35	19	19	19	19
Don't know	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	1

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The third question:

How about the students who remained in the local public schools? Do you think their academic achievement would improve, get worse, or remain about the same?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents			Nonpublic School Parents		
	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94	'97	'96	'94
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Improve	17	16	19	17	16	19	19	19	10	10	10	10
Get worse	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	10	10	10	10
Remain about the same	70	70	68	70	70	68	68	68	80	80	80	80
Don't know	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	*	*	*	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Home Schooling

The Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll first addressed the home-school movement in 1985, asking respondents whether the fledgling move toward home schooling was a good thing or a bad thing for the nation. At that time, 73% said they thought it was a bad thing, while 16% said they thought it was a good thing. When the question was repeated in 1988, the proportion who said it was a bad thing had fallen to 59%, and the proportion who said it was a good thing had risen to 28%. Given a continuing increase in the number of students being schooled at home, poll planners deemed it important to revisit the issue this year. While the public still feels that the home-school movement is a bad thing, the margin has now shrunk to just 21 percentage points.

It is interesting to note that nonpublic school parents, who thought the home-school movement was a bad thing in 1985 (by a margin of 71% to 22%), now favor it by 52% to 41%. This is the only group sampled that believes the movement to home schooling is a good thing.

This year's poll also asked respondents whether home schools should or should not be required to guarantee a minimum level of educational quality. Almost nine in 10 respondents (88%) felt that they should. This response is consistent among all groups.

The first question:

Recently, there has been a movement toward home schools — that is, situations in which parents keep their children at home to teach the children themselves. Do you think this movement is a good thing or a bad thing for the nation?

	National Totals %			No Children In School %			Public School Parents %			Nonpublic School Parents %		
	'97	'88	'85	'97	'88	'85	'97	'88	'85	'97	'88	'85
Good thing	36	28	16	34	27	16	38	29	14	52	29	22
Bad thing	57	59	73	59	59	72	56	61	75	41	56	71
Don't know	7	13	11	7	14	12	6	10	11	7	15	7

The second question:

Do you think that home schools should or should not be required to guarantee a minimum level of educational quality?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Should be required	88	88	91	80
Should not be required	10	10	8	19
Don't know	2	2	1	1

Parents and Their Relationship To the Public Schools

This poll went further than most recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup polls in exploring the relationship between the public schools and the parents who send students to those schools.

That seems to have been an appropriate decision, given the fact that 86% of the public cites the amount of support from parents of students in the local public schools as the most important factor in determining why schools in some places are better than others.

Infringing on Rights of Parents

One of the charges heard from some critics is that the public schools are infringing on the right of parents to direct their children's education. This seems to be part of a more general feeling among some Americans that the government has too much control over their lives. However, more than seven in 10 respondents (71%) said they do not believe that the public schools are infringing on the rights of parents. Only nonpublic school parents differ.

The question:

People in some communities say the local public schools are infringing on the rights of parents to direct their children's education. In your opinion, are the public schools in your community infringing on the rights of local parents to direct their children's education?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes, infringing	24	20	28	50
No, not infringing	71	73	70	44
Don't know	5	7	2	6

Help with Homework

The 1986 poll asked parents how much help they gave their oldest child with his or her homework. At that time, 34% said that they provided no help — a figure that fell to 13% when the question was repeated in this year's poll. It also appears that parents who help their children are spending more hours doing so than they did in 1986. Forty-seven percent of this year's respondents say that they help with homework four or more hours a week, compared to 14% who said they spent that much time in the earlier poll. Thirty-nine percent of all public school parents report that they help their children five or more hours per week.

The question:

During the school year, on average, about how many hours a week do you help your oldest child with his or her homework?

	'97 %	'86 %
None	13	34
Up to 1 hour	5	13
1 – 1:59 hours	12	17
2 – 2:59 hours	12	10
3 – 3:59 hours	9	7
4 – 4:59 hours	8	5
5 – 5:59 hours	14	4
6 hours or more	25	5
Undesignated	2	5

Willingness to Volunteer

Much has been made recently of the importance of persons being willing to serve as unpaid volunteers in addressing problems the nation faces. Television recently featured pictures of past U.S. Presidents working at sprucing up inner-city areas. Gen. Colin Powell heads up a Presidential task force to promote volunteerism. Given this backdrop, poll planners thought it important to repeat the 1992 question in which participants were asked about their willingness to serve as unpaid volunteers in the public schools. At that time 59% said that they would be willing to do so. In this year's poll that figure rose to 69%.



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	
	'97 %	'92 %
NATIONAL TOTALS	69	59
Sex		
Men	64	54
Women	73	64
Race		
White	68	61
Nonwhite	74	49
Age		
18-29 years	72	65
30-49 years	76	65
50-64 years	56	54
65 and over	57	36
Education		
College graduate	73	70
High school graduate	63	57
High school incomplete	63	45
Children in School		
No children in school	65	51
Public school parents	78	72
Nonpublic school parents	60	49

Parental Support for Teachers and Principals

One of the complaints heard from teachers and principals is that they no longer have the parental support they once enjoyed. Two questions were asked in this poll to explore the support parents give to school personnel.

The first question:

Suppose a teacher or principal reported that your oldest child was misbehaving and being disruptive in school. Whose side do you think you would be more likely to take — the school's or your child's?

	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
The school's side	57	73
Your child's side	25	16
Don't know	18	11

The second question:

What if a teacher or principal reported that your oldest child was not working hard enough at school-work? Whose side do you think you would be more likely to take — the school's or your child's?

	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
The school's side	70	70
Your child's side	22	25
Don't know	8	5

Parental Expectations Regarding Achievement

By a 2-1 margin (60% to 28%) respondents in the 1996 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll said that, if forced to choose, they would prefer their sons or daughters to make C grades and be active in extracurricular activities rather than make A grades and not be active. This response led poll planners to ask on this year's poll about the lowest grade a student could bring home without causing the parent to be upset or concerned. A majority (60%) said their child could bring home a report card with a C without raising concern. This response is consistent among all groups in the poll.

The question:

Regardless of whether you have children in public school, what would be the lowest grade a child of yours could bring home on a report card without upsetting or concerning you?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A	1	1	*	2
B	21	20	21	22
C	60	58	63	64
D	13	15	11	9
FAIL	3	3	4	1
Don't know	2	3	1	2

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Parental Expectations on Communication

Given today's concern for privacy, one of the important dilemmas for school personnel is how much information regarding student problems should be reported to parents. This is an area, however, where parental expectations are quite

clear. Ninety-eight percent of all respondents believe that public schools should be required to notify the parents if their child is found to have a substance abuse problem, and 90% feel that parents should be notified if their child is found to have a sexually transmitted disease. These responses are consistent across all groups surveyed.

The first question:

Do you think that the public schools in your community should or should not be required to notify the parents of a student who is found by school authorities to have a substance abuse problem?

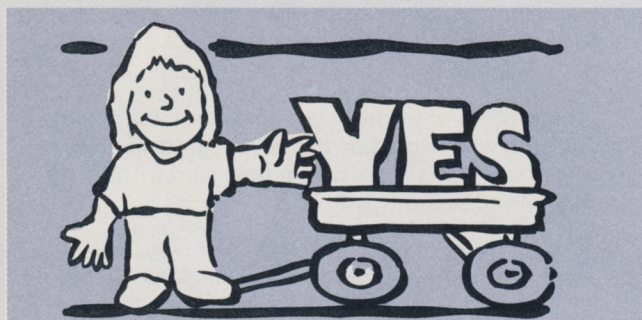
	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Should be required	98	98	98	100
Should not be required	1	1	2	*
Don't know	1	1	*	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The second question:

How about a sexually transmitted disease? Do you think the public schools in your community should or should not be required to notify the parents of a student who is found by school authorities to have a sexually transmitted disease?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Should be required	90	89	92	89
Should not be required	9	10	7	10
Don't know	1	1	1	1



The Curriculum

One question that quickly surfaces in any discussion of school reform is the extent to which the curriculum needs to be changed to meet today's needs. This question was explored in the 1982 poll. At that time a plurality (42%) expressed the view that the curriculum did meet the needs of the day. Fifty percent of public school parents agreed. In this year's poll, however, 54% of respondents say they think the curriculum needs to be changed. Public school parents now call for change by a 53% to 46% margin. Groups most likely to feel the need for change include nonwhites (65%), 18- to 29-year-olds (64%), and clerical and sales personnel (65%).

The question:

Do you think the curriculum in the public schools in your community needs to be changed to meet today's needs, or do you think it already meets today's needs?

	National Totals '97 '82 % %		No Children In School '97 '82 % %		Public School Parents '97 '82 % %		Nonpublic School Parents '97 '82 % %	
Needs to be changed	54	36	54	33	53	42	65	46
Already meets needs	39	42	36	38	46	50	30	44
Don't know	7	22	10	29	1	8	5	10

Curriculum 'Basics'

In every public school forum conducted by Phi Delta Kappa during the 1996-97 academic year, there was agreement that the schools should teach the "basics." The ensuing discussions, however, suggested that there might be a difference of opinion as to what the "basics" included. This year's poll asked respondents to define the term. The responses indicate that mathematics (named by 90%) and English (named by 84%) constitute the heart of the "basics." This seems close to the traditional three R's. Large percentages of respondents would also add science (44%) and history/U.S. government (38%).

A word of caution is required here. The fact that the public wants the basics taught and defines them narrowly should not be interpreted to mean that people do not value other subjects and other parts of the curriculum. In fact, the public assigns great importance even to extracurricular activities (as a later question shows). What seems clear is that, while the public sees teaching the so-called basics as a central mission, it has many other expectations of its public schools as well.

The question:

People have different ideas as to what constitutes the so-called basic subjects in school. Would you name the school subjects that you consider to be the basics?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Mathematics	90	89	91	93
English	84	84	84	91
Science	44	41	49	53
History/U.S. government	38	36	40	50
Geography	8	9	8	4
Computer training	8	8	8	12
Physical education	7	7	9	11
Art	5	6	5	8
Social studies	5	4	7	4
Foreign language	5	4	6	13
Music	3	3	3	1
Health education	2	2	4	4
Vocational training	1	2	1	*
Career education	1	1	1	*
Business	1	1	1	2
Other	8	8	7	7
Don't know	1	2	1	2

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Placement of the Gifted and Talented

Whether students who are judged to be gifted and talented should be placed in separate classes is an issue that has implications beyond what is good for gifted and talented students. There are those who argue that removing the gifted and talented from the regular classroom eliminates important role models and results in lower performance on the part of those remaining in the regular classroom. With this in mind, poll planners included a question on the topic in this year's poll. A small majority (52%) of the public supports the placement of gifted and talented students in separate classes. This response takes added significance from the fact that 66% of poll respondents also said they believe that grouping students according to ability will improve student achievement a great deal or quite a lot (see pages 43-44).

The question:

How do you feel about the placement of gifted and talented students in the local public schools? In your opinion, should gifted and talented students be placed in the same classes as other students, or should they be placed in separate classes?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Placed in the same classes	44	44	44	44
Placed in separate classes	52	51	52	51
Don't know	4	5	4	5

Importance of Extracurricular Activities

The importance of extracurricular activities has been explored in previous polls. In 1978, 45% of the public judged extracurricular activities to be very important. That figure fell to 31% in 1984, rose to 39% in 1985, and then jumped to 63% in this year's poll. Percentages vary only a little among the groups sampled.

The question:

I'd like your opinion about extracurricular activities such as the school band, dramatics, sports, and the school newspaper. How important are these to a young person's education — very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Very important	63	64	62	58
Fairly important	27	26	29	37
Not too important	8	8	7	5
Not at all important	2	2	2	*
Don't know	*	*	*	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

National Totals	1997 %	1985 %	1984 %	1978 %
Very important	63	39	31	45
Fairly important	27	41	46	40
Not too important	8	14	18	9
Not at all important	2	3	4	4
Don't know	*	3	1	2

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The Role of Interscholastic Sports

Previous polls have not dealt extensively with the role of interscholastic sports in the school program. However, this year's poll included three questions. The first asked about the emphasis placed on such sports as football and basketball. A small majority (53%) of the public believes that the current emphasis is about right. However, 39% feel there is too much emphasis. Public school parents (58%) are a little more inclined than the average to think the present emphasis is appropriate.

In a follow-up question, there was virtual unanimity (96%) on the question of requiring minimum grades and school attendance for participation in sports. When asked how high that minimum should be, 96% would require a grade-point average of C or higher. Men and women tend to take a slightly different view, with only 35% of men suggesting a minimum of an A or a B while 51% of women would require these higher grades.

The first question:

What is your opinion about the way sports, such as football and basketball, are handled in the public schools in your community? Do you feel that there is too much emphasis on sports, not enough emphasis on sports, or about the right amount of emphasis in the local schools?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Too much emphasis	39	43	33	36
Not enough emphasis	5	4	7	8
About right amount	53	50	58	54
Don't know	3	3	2	2

The second question:

Do you feel that high school students who participate in sports should or should not be required to maintain a minimum grade-point average and school attendance record in order to participate in interscholastic sports?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Should be required	96	96	96	99
Should not be required	3	3	4	1
Don't know	1	1	*	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The third question:

What average grade do you think should be required for participation in interscholastic sports?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A	3	3	2	4
B	41	42	41	30
C	52	51	55	59
D	2	2	1	5
FAIL	*	*	*	*
Don't know	2	2	1	2

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Dealing with Drugs and Weapons in School

The public continues to believe that drugs and weapons in school are major problems for the public schools. Although school personnel in most situations do not believe these problems are as severe as the public does, schoolpeople must nonetheless deal with the public's concern. The first of three drug-related questions in this poll sought to find out how satisfied people are with steps being taken to deal with the drug problem in their local schools. Perhaps surprisingly, 53% indicate they are either very or somewhat satisfied. The level of satisfaction rises to 65% for public school parents and to 60% for rural residents. However, it falls to 45% for urban residents.

The second question dealt with "zero tolerance" policies calling for automatic suspension of students carrying drugs or alcohol into school. Support for such policies is strong. Eighty-six percent say they support such policies, and this level of support is consistent among all groups.

Respondents were also asked whether they feel an educational approach or severe penalties offer the best means of



dealing with the drug problem. A small majority (52%) prefers an educational approach, while 42% favor severe penalties. These percentages vary little across groups.

Many schools also have "zero tolerance" policies that call for automatic suspension of students who bring weapons to school. Such policies garnered media attention when authorities suspended a student for bring a nail file to school. Regardless of difficulties in application, support for such policies is very strong. Ninety-three percent of poll respondents express support, and that support is consistent among all groups.

The first question:

How satisfied are you yourself with the steps being taken to deal with the use of drugs in the public schools in your community — very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Very satisfied	17	13	25	11
Somewhat satisfied	36	35	40	35
Not very satisfied	22	24	17	32
Not at all satisfied	20	21	17	17
Don't know	5	7	1	5

The second question:

Some public schools have a so-called zero-tolerance drug and alcohol policy, which means that possession of any illegal drugs or alcohol by students will result in automatic suspension. Would you favor or oppose such a policy in the public schools in your community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	86	84	89	93
Oppose	13	15	10	7
Don't know	1	1	1	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The third question:

In your opinion, which is more effective for dealing with a drug problem in the public schools in your community — an educational approach, pointing out the consequences of drug use, or severe penalties for those violating the school drug policy?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Educational approach	52	52	53	44
Severe penalties	42	41	43	49
Don't know	6	7	4	7

The fourth question:

Some public schools have a so-called zero tolerance weapons policy, which means that students found carrying weapons of any kind in school will be automatically suspended. Would you favor or oppose such a policy in the public schools in your community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	93	92	95	91
Oppose	5	6	4	9
Don't know	2	2	1	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Financing the Public Schools

From time to time, the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup polls have surveyed public attitudes regarding school finance. The first question on that topic this year repeated one asked in 1986 concerning the source of taxes used to finance the public schools. In findings remarkably similar to those in the 1986 poll, 27% expressed a preference for local property taxes, 34% for state taxes, and 30% for taxes from the federal government. There is certainly no consensus. The two groups that do take a majority position in favor of federal funding are blacks (56%)

and nonwhites (54%).

In a second question respondents were reminded that the local property tax is the main source for financing the public schools and were asked whether they would prefer to change to a local income tax system as the principal source of public school funds in their community. Once again, there is no consensus: 43% favor changing to a local income tax system, while 48% oppose it. This lack of consensus characterizes all groups surveyed.

The first question:

There is always a lot of discussion about the best way to finance the public schools. Which do you think is the best way to finance the public schools — by means of local property taxes, by state taxes, or by taxes from the federal government in Washington?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'97	'86	'97	'86	'97	'86	'97	'86
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Local property taxes	27	24	30	22	22	28	32	22
State taxes	34	33	35	34	32	32	28	36
Federal taxes	30	24	26	23	37	28	36	22
Don't know	9	19	9	21	9	12	4	20

The second question:

At the present time, local property taxes are the main source for financing the public schools in most states. Thinking about your own community, would you favor or oppose changing the local property tax system to a local income tax system as the principal way to finance the local public schools?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'97	'86	'97	'86	'97	'86	'97	'86
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Favor	43	42	47	39	47	39	47	39
Oppose	48	49	44	51	44	51	44	51
Don't know	9	9	9	10	9	10	9	10

Research Procedure

The Sample. The sample used in this survey embraced a total of 1,517 adults (18 years of age and older), including 1,017 parents of public school children. The sample of public school parents was increased to 1,017 interviews this year from the 500 interviews customarily used. The increased sample size permits analysis and reporting of findings for subgroups within the national public school parent population. 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 3 June to 22 June 1997.

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	64
Public school parents	33*
Nonpublic school parents	7*

*Total exceeds 100% because some parents have children attending more than one kind of school.

	National	Public School Parents
Gender	%	%
Men	46	43
Women	54	57
Race		
White	85	83
Nonwhite	13	15
Black	9	11
Undesignated	2	2
Age		
18-29 years	22	12
30-49 years	44	75
50 and over	33	12
Undesignated	1	1
Education		
Total college	56	47
College graduate	23	16
College incomplete	33	31
Total high school	44	53
High school graduate	31	33
High school incomplete	13	20
Undesignated	*	*
Income		
\$50,000 and over	30	32
\$40,000 and over	42	48
\$30,000-\$39,999	14	14
\$20,000-\$29,999	16	13
Under \$20,000	20	20
Undesignated	8	5
Region		
East	24	22
Midwest	25	20
South	30	38
West	21	20
Community Size		
Urban	28	26
Suburban	48	49
Rural	24	25
Undesignated	*	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Design of the Sample

For the 1997 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 tele-

phone 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 youngest man 18 years of age or older who was at home. If no man was home, an interview was sought with the oldest woman at home. This method of respondent selection within households produced an age distribution by sex that closely approximates the age distribution by sex of the total population.

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.

As has been the case in recent years in the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll series, parents of public school children were oversampled in the 1997 poll. This procedure produced a large enough sample to ensure that findings reported for "public school parents" are statistically significant (see Research Procedure).

Conducting Your Own Poll

The Phi Delta Kappa Center for Professional Development and Services makes available PACE (Polling Attitudes of the Community on Education) materials to enable nonspecialists to conduct scientific polls of attitude and opinion 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 \$55. For information about using PACE materials, write or phone Phillip Harris at Phi Delta Kappa, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. Ph. 800/766-1156.

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.

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

TABLE A Size of Sample	In Percentage Points (at 95 in 100 confidence level)* Percentages near 20 or percentages near 80					
	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 Size of Sample	Percentages near 50					
	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.

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 \$10. Additional copies are 25 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, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402. Ph. 800/766-1156.

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 664-page document that is the basis of this report should contact Phi Delta Kappa, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402. Ph. 800/766-1156. The price is \$95, postage included.