

The 31st Annual
Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup
POLL

Of the Public's Attitudes
Toward the Public Schools

By Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup



THE 1997 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools was the first in which an effort was made to determine whether the public wants to place its confidence in the public schools or to start looking for an alternative system. In that poll, the public clearly indicated its preference for the public schools. That 1997 question was repeated this year, along with a new one asking the public to choose between strengthening the public schools and providing vouchers for parents to use in choosing a private and/or church-related school. The results clearly affirm the public's belief that our national commitment to educating all our children through the public schools should be maintained.

In this year's response to the question first asked in 1997, 71% of Americans indicate that the focus in education should be on reforming the existing system. This compares to 27% opting for finding an alternative system. When presented with the specific choice of improving the existing public schools or providing vouchers for parents to use in selecting and paying for private and/or church-related schools, 70% opt for improving the existing public schools, while only 28% choose a voucher plan.

This year's poll also revisited the question of contracting for school services with private, profit-making corporations. Forty-five percent supported this option in 1994, when the question was first asked, and 47% were opposed. Support for this option has fallen to 41%, while opposition has increased to 54%.

The public's assessment of its schools. The public's preference for the public schools would seem to be related to its positive assessment of those schools. Although respondents continue to desire improvement, they are generally pleased with their schools. Forty-nine percent assign the public schools in the community a grade of A or B. Another 31% assign a C, bringing to 80% the number of respondents who give the local schools a passing grade. These numbers are up slightly since the 1998 poll.

The 1999 poll reaffirms what every Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll has shown. *The closer people are to the public schools, the better they like them.* The 49% assigning the public schools in the community an A or a B rises to 56% for public school parents and to 66% when those parents are asked to grade the school their oldest child attends. These percentages are all increases from last year's figures.

In a new question related to public school effectiveness, the poll explored the public's perception of how well the public schools handle preparation for the job market, an area in which the schools are often criticized. In a surprising result, 79% of public school parents indicate that the public schools in their community are either "very effective" or "somewhat effective" in preparing students for tomorrow's job market.

Choice. Public school advocates can derive satisfaction or feel alarm from the response of public school parents to a question asking where they would send their oldest child if tuition were paid by the government. Fifty-one percent would send their child to the school he or she now attends. Five percent would select another public school. Thirty-nine percent would choose a private or church-related school. That 39% would

leave the public schools if the government paid the tuition would appear, at first look, to be a negative. However, that 56% would stay with the public schools even with the cost factor eliminated can certainly be taken as a vote of confidence.

In a follow-up question designed to determine factors that might be used in selecting a school, four factors exceed all others in importance. The most important factor, chosen by 98% of the respondents, is the quality of the teaching staff. Following are student discipline and curriculum, each at 89%, and class size at 75%. The public's concern for discipline and for the quality of the teaching staff are threads that run throughout this year's poll.

Problems facing the public schools. The general satisfaction with the public schools should not cause one to lose sight of the fact that the public wants those schools improved. It would be logical for such improvement to focus on areas in which problems exist. A trend question in the poll offers the public the opportunity to identify the biggest problem faced by the schools in the community. Down through the years, the public has been consistent in this area. From 1969 to 1985, lack of discipline came up first in every poll but one. From that point forward, either drug abuse, lack of financial support, or lack of discipline has topped the list. This year, lack of discipline is identified as the top problem by 18% of the respondents. Fighting/violence/gangs follows at 11%, and lack of financial support/funding/money is third at 9%. These same three problems topped the list last year; however, fighting/violence/gangs was in the top spot.

Two questions regarding how safe the schools are indicate that the public feels the schools are generally safe and, once again, that parents have an even more favorable view of the school their oldest child attends. It is somewhat surprising, given the concern with student discipline and the recent shootings at Columbine High School, that 24% of the respondents still feel that the schools in their community are "very safe and orderly," while 62% believe they are "somewhat safe and orderly." When public school parents are asked about the school their oldest child attends, the percentage responding "very safe and orderly" rises to 42%.

Turning to the problems posed by sexual harassment, the poll differentiates between student-to-student and teacher-to-student harassment. Twenty-two percent of the total sample feel student-to-student sexual harassment is "very serious," while 30% feel it is "somewhat serious." These percentages fall to 15% and 17% for teacher-to-student harassment.

Improvement strategies. How would the public improve its schools? The public continues to support zero tolerance policies with regard to drugs and alcohol. Ninety percent believe that violation of these policies should lead to automatic suspension.

This year's poll asks respondents an open-ended question as to what they would like to change in the public schools. Such questions provide "top of the mind" responses, and the figures for individual items are typically lower than if respondents were offered specific options. It is still interesting to note that 12% mention discipline, more control, and stricter rules. Another 10% mention more teachers and smaller classes.

In addition to being given the opportunity to suggest changes, respondents were asked to identify the obstacles preventing reform. This question also calls for a "top of the mind" response. The three categories mentioned most often are finances/funding, parents/lack of parental involvement, and gov-

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ernment — all obstacles that are beyond the schools' direct control.

The public's focus on high-quality teachers as the major component in improving schools is clear throughout this year's poll. The poll also sought to determine how the public would attract and retain good teachers. Among the five choices offered, the public believes the best way to attract and retain good teachers is to reward high performance. Ninety percent choose this option. Meanwhile, 86% favor loans and scholarships for prospective teachers, and 85% favor school-financed professional development opportunities.

Nothing in the poll suggests that the public lacks faith in its current public school teachers; however, the emphasis on "qualified" teachers is clear. Ninety-seven percent of those surveyed believe that, before they are hired, teachers should be required to prove their knowledge in the subjects they will teach. Given the emphasis on performance, it is surprising that 60% of respondents opt for the academic degree earned as the most important factor in setting teacher salaries, 52% cite years of teaching experience, and 47% would base salaries on scores a teacher's students receive on standardized tests.

Support for standards. In past polls, the public has consistently supported high standards, and that is the case in this poll as well. While 57% of respondents believe current achievement standards in the public schools of their community are "about right," 33% believe they are "too low." The support for high standards is also reflected in the fact that 72% of the respondents favor stricter standards for social promotion even if it means that "significantly more students would be held back."

In another question related to standards, the poll asks whether high school students should be required to take a standardized core curriculum. This kind of curriculum normally focuses on English, mathematics, science, and social studies and is regarded as one way of raising standards. Seventy-eight percent of respondents favor such a requirement.

Instructional issues. The teaching of values was last explored explicitly in the poll in 1993. Opinions have changed little in that period. Majorities of 90% or more believe that honesty, democracy, acceptance of people of different races and ethnic backgrounds, caring for friends and family, moral courage, and patriotism/love of country should be taught in public schools. The public is divided on two values: 55% believe acceptance of people with different sexual orientations (homosexuals and bisexuals) should be taught, and 48% support teaching acceptance of a woman's right to choose abortion.

In a finding some might regard as inconsistent with the focus on high standards, 46% of respondents indicate that the main emphasis in their local public schools should be on increasing the ability of students to take responsibility. Another 39% would place the main emphasis on increasing the academic skills of students.

And the public is divided with regard to which method of reporting student progress should be used. Thirty-three percent believe examples of a student's work would provide the most accurate picture, 27% prefer scores on standardized achievement tests, 23% prefer letter grades assigned by teachers, and 14% choose teachers' written observations.

Focus of government programs. The federal government and virtually every state government have declared education to be their number-one priority. The poll explores the public's views with regard to a variety of government efforts. Respondents were asked to assign a priority to five suggested strate-

gies at the federal level. The greatest number (72%) place the highest priority on updating instructional materials and books. School staff development and training is identified by 65% and technology, by 61%.

Regarding the need for renovation and modernization of the nation's public schools, the public sees little difference in the seriousness of the three problems it was asked to assess. Forty-seven percent see overcrowding as the most serious problem, 41% identify school classrooms in poor physical condition, and 37% point to school buildings that are not wired for computers.

Alternatives to the public schools. That the vast majority of Americans would prefer to see the emphasis placed on improving the public schools does not take away from the fact that there are alternatives and that some would like to see greater emphasis placed on these alternatives. Past polls have shown that choice programs are popular and that those within the public schools stir little controversy. It is when the idea of choice is extended — through vouchers, tax credits, or some other means — to private or church-related schools that the controversy starts.

This year's poll shows that, while support for public funding for attendance at private schools has slipped slightly, the public remains divided on the issue. The main trend question in the poll asks, "Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense? Fifty-five percent oppose making such choice available. This is up from 50% last year, suggesting that the trend that saw opposition drop from 65% in 1995 to 50% in 1998 has reversed.

The second trend question in this area asks whether people favor allowing "parents to send their school-age children to public, private, or church-related" schools with the government paying all or part of the tuition. (Note that this option includes public schools.) Fifty-one percent favor this choice in this year's poll, with 47% opposing. This represents essentially no change since last year.

Two questions directly related to vouchers were added in last year's poll, with a distinction made between vouchers paying part of the tuition for attendance at a private or church-related school and vouchers paying all of the tuition. The sample was split, with half being asked about partial vouchers and half being asked about full vouchers. A comparison of the data from last year's poll and this year's poll suggests that support for vouchers may have peaked.

Last year 48% favored vouchers paying all of the tuition, and 46% were opposed. The percentages for this year are reversed, with 47% in favor and 48% opposed. These changes are too small to be significant. On vouchers paying part of the tuition, the percentages last year were 52% in favor and 41% opposed. This year the percentage in favor remains at 52%, while the percentage against has risen to 45%. It is clear that the public remains divided.

With voucher proposals at the state level enjoying limited success, some states have attempted to provide indirect aid to private or church-related schools by providing tuition tax credits to parents. This option may be less controversial because the aid goes directly to parents without the school's involvement. Most such proposals also include public school parents.

Questions regarding tax credits were also asked in 1998, using a split sample in which half were asked about a credit covering full tuition and half about a credit covering part of the

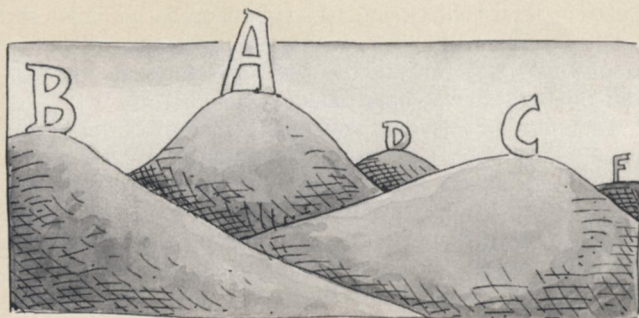
tuition. The public is more receptive to tax credits than to vouchers. Tax credits allowing parents to recover full tuition were favored last year by 56% and opposed by 42%. This year 57% favor tax credits for full tuition, and 41% oppose them. On the matter of partial tuition, 66% approved last year, and 30% opposed. The percentages this year are 65% in favor and 34% opposed. Once again, little change is evident.

It is interesting to note that, with regard to both vouchers and tax credits, the public more strongly supports plans that would cover *part* of the tuition rather than *all* of it. The public apparently feels that parents should bear at least part of the cost of tuition at private or church-related schools.

The responses that are most significant for policy makers relating to aid for private and church-related schools may be those involving the strings the public would attach to such aid. Seventy-seven percent of those surveyed say private and church-related schools that accept government tuition payments should be accountable to the state in the same way public schools are accountable. Seventy-four percent say such schools should be required to accept students from a wider range of backgrounds and academic ability than is now generally the case.

Another alternative to public schools is home schooling. Previous polls have established that the public is becoming more receptive to the idea of home schooling. The percentage of those feeling that home schooling is a "bad thing" dropped from 73% in 1985 to 57% in 1997. This year's poll asked about the services that public schools should make available to children who are schooled at home. The findings indicate that the public generally approves of the concept of providing such services. The percentages in favor in the five services proposed range from a high of 92% for special education courses for disabled or handicapped children to a low of 53% for transportation services.

As is the case with vouchers and tuition tax credits, the public is not willing to endorse home schooling without some strings attached. Ninety-two percent believe children schooled at home should be required to take all the state and national assessments required of public school students.



Attitudes Regarding the Public Schools

The Public Schools Versus Other Systems

Three questions in this year's poll offer the public the opportunity to evaluate the public schools as compared to other educational alternatives. The first question offers a choice between reforming the public school system and finding an al-

ternative to the system. This question was first asked in 1997 with 71% in favor of reforming the existing system and 23% favoring an alternative system. The respective percentages this year are 71% and 27%. The group expressing the strongest preference for finding an alternative system is nonwhites (36%). The group expressing the strongest preference for reforming the existing system is public school parents with college degrees (77%).

The first 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 public school system or finding an alternative to the existing public school system?

| | National Totals | | No Children In School | | Public School Parents* | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|------------------------|-----|
| | '99 | '97 | '99 | '97 | '99 | '97 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Reforming existing system | 71 | 71 | 73 | 70 | 68 | 72 |
| Finding alternative system | 27 | 23 | 24 | 23 | 30 | 24 |
| Don't know | 2 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 4 |

*Previous polls have also reported the views of nonpublic school parents. However, the number of such respondents in this year's poll, 23, is too small to be used for analysis.

A question new to the poll this year asks respondents to choose between two plans, one calling for improving and strengthening the existing public schools and one for providing vouchers that parents could use to send their children to private or church-related schools. Seventy percent express a preference for the public school option. There is little difference among demographic groups.

The second question:

Which one of these two plans would you prefer — improving and strengthening the existing public schools or providing vouchers for parents to use in selecting and paying for private and/or church-related schools?

| | National Totals | No Children In School | Public School Parents |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | % | % | % |
| Improving existing public schools | 70 | 72 | 68 |
| Providing vouchers | 28 | 26 | 30 |
| Neither | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Don't know | 1 | 1 | 1 |

This year's poll repeated a question first asked in 1994 that deals with school districts' contracting school operation with private, profit-making corporations. Support for this option has declined slightly, from 45% in 1994 to 41% this year. The group most likely to favor this option is blacks at 54%.

The third question:

Do you favor or oppose an idea now being tested



in a few cities in which private, profit-making corporations contract to operate schools within certain jurisdictions?

| | National Totals | | No Children In School | | Public School Parents | |
|------------|-----------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| | '99 | '94 | '99 | '94 | '99 | '94 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Favor | 41 | 45 | 40 | 46 | 44 | 43 |
| Oppose | 54 | 47 | 55 | 46 | 51 | 49 |
| Don't know | 5 | 8 | 5 | 8 | 5 | 8 |

Grading the Public Schools

These polls have traditionally featured three questions in which respondents are asked to grade the public schools. The first deals with the schools in the community. This year 49% assign the schools in the community a grade of A or B. This is up from 46% last year. As is the case in every poll, public school parents grade the schools higher. Other groups assigning the highest percentage of A's or B's include college graduates (56%), those in the East (57%), those public school parents with children achieving at above-average levels (62%), public elementary school parents (60%), and public school parents aged 40 and above (58%). Those assigning the lowest number of A's or B's include blacks (41%), those in the West (42%), and those who earn between \$30,000 and \$40,000 a year (41%).

The first 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 | | No Children In School | | Public School Parents | |
|------------|-----------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| A & B | 49 | 46 | 47 | 43 | 56 | 52 |
| A | 11 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 15 | 15 |
| B | 38 | 36 | 37 | 35 | 41 | 37 |
| C | 31 | 31 | 31 | 31 | 31 | 33 |
| D | 9 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 9 |
| FAIL | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| Don't know | 6 | 9 | 8 | 12 | 1 | 2 |

The second question in this series shifts the attention to the nation's public schools. As is always the case, the grades are

much lower than those given the local public schools. While the percentages of A's and B's are up this year, the difference between the grades respondents assign these schools and their local schools is startling. It is interesting to note that the "nation's schools" do not, in a very real sense, exist. These are someone else's schools, and they are the same schools that are being given high grades by local residents. It is also interesting that 32% of nonwhites give the nation's schools a grade of A or B. The other group assigning higher grades to these schools is the 18-29 age group (37% A or B).

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 | | No Children In School | | Public School Parents | |
|------------|-----------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| A & B | 24 | 18 | 26 | 19 | 21 | 16 |
| A | 2 | 1 | 1 | * | 3 | 2 |
| B | 22 | 17 | 25 | 19 | 18 | 14 |
| C | 46 | 49 | 43 | 48 | 50 | 52 |
| D | 16 | 15 | 16 | 15 | 17 | 13 |
| FAIL | 4 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 4 |
| Don't know | 10 | 13 | 11 | 12 | 7 | 15 |

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The third question asks public school parents to grade the school their oldest child attends. Sixty-six percent of public school parents give their child's school grades of A or B. Groups grading their child's school the highest include college graduates (78% A or B), those in the Midwest (76%), and parents of public school children whose academic achievement is above average (77%). Groups assigning the lowest grades include those in the West (57%) and parents of public school children whose academic achievement is average or below (54%).

The third question:

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

| | Public School Parents | |
|------------|-----------------------|-----|
| | '99 | '98 |
| | % | % |
| A & B | 66 | 62 |
| A | 24 | 22 |
| B | 42 | 40 |
| C | 21 | 25 |
| D | 7 | 8 |
| FAIL | 5 | 3 |
| Don't know | 1 | 2 |

This year a new question asked parents to assess the degree to which their oldest child is being prepared for tomorrow's job market. A somewhat surprising 81% believe the education their child is receiving is either very effective (29%) or quite effective (52%). Groups giving the schools the highest "very effective" rating include nonwhites (38%) and those in the Midwest (38%). Groups giving the schools the lowest "very effective" rating include those in the West (20%) and parents of public school students whose academic achievement is average or below (19%).

The question:

In your opinion, how effectively is the education that your oldest child now in school is receiving preparing him or her for tomorrow's job market — very effectively, somewhat effectively, not very effectively, or not at all effectively?

| | Total Parents % | Public School Parents % |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Very effectively | 29 | 27 |
| Somewhat effectively | 52 | 52 |
| Not very effectively | 10 | 11 |
| Not at all effectively | 6 | 7 |
| Don't know | 3 | 3 |

Choice

This poll is the third to ask public school parents where they would send their oldest child if tuition was paid by the government. The responses have been consistent in those three polls. This year, 51% say they would send their child to the same school the child now attends. Forty-six percent would choose a different school. In a follow-up question, asked of those who would choose a "different school," a group representing 5% of the original sample would choose another public school, bringing the total number who would keep their child in a public school to 56%. Twenty-two percent of the total sample of public school parents would send their child to a private school, and 17% would choose a church-related school. The responses suggest that a part of the public accepts the idea that a private school education is superior. In a third question, respondents were asked to select the factors that they would consider most important in choosing a public or private school.

The first question:

Suppose you could send your oldest child to any public, private, or church-related school of your choice, with tuition paid by the government. Would you send your oldest child to the school he or she now attends, or to a different school?

| | Public School Parents | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|----------|----------|
| | '99 % | '98 % | '96 % |
| School now attends | 51 | 51 | 55 |
| Different school | 46 | 46 | 44 |
| Don't know | 3 | 3 | 1 |

The second question:

Would you send your child to a private school, a church-related school, or to another public school?

| | Public School Parents | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------|----------|
| | '99 % | '98 % | '96 % |
| Private school | 22 | 22 | 19 |
| Church-related school | 17 | 17 | 17 |
| Another public school | 5 | 6 | 8 |
| Don't know | 1 | 1 | — |

Regarding the factors respondents would use in choosing a school, 98% select the quality of the teaching staff; 89%, the

maintenance of student discipline; 89%, the curriculum or courses offered; and 75%, the size of classes. The top four factors are the same as in 1991, when the question was restricted to choice among public schools. Beneath the top four, the two factors that have increased in importance are extracurricular activities other than athletics (from 19% to 51%) and close proximity to home (from 29% to 47%). There is little variation across demographic groups.

The third question:

Here are different factors that might be considered in choosing a public school for a child, assuming free choice of public and private schools were allowed in this community. As I read off each of these factors, would you tell me whether you consider it very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important in choosing a local school?

| | Very Important % | Fairly Important % | Not Too Important % | Not at All Important % | Don't Know % |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Quality of the teaching staff | 98 | 2 | * | * | * |
| Maintenance of student discipline | 89 | 10 | 1 | * | * |
| Curriculum (i.e., the courses offered) | 89 | 10 | 1 | * | * |
| Size of classes | 75 | 19 | 4 | 2 | * |
| Extracurricular activities, such as band/orchestra, theater, clubs | 51 | 40 | 7 | 2 | * |
| Proximity to home | 47 | 40 | 10 | 2 | 1 |
| Size of the school (number of students) | 46 | 33 | 15 | 6 | * |
| Reputation or prestige of school | 45 | 35 | 12 | 7 | 1 |
| Having your child exposed to a more diverse student body | 41 | 38 | 12 | 4 | 5 |
| Athletic program | 34 | 46 | 13 | 7 | * |
| Proximity to the parent's workplace | 22 | 38 | 26 | 12 | 2 |
| Having your child exposed to a less diverse student body | 17 | 28 | 28 | 21 | 6 |

*Less than one-half of 1%.



Problems Facing the Public Schools

Each of the previous Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup polls has given respondents an open-ended opportunity to identify the biggest problems facing their public schools. This section of the report looks at those responses and also explores the areas of school safety and sexual harassment in the schools.

Biggest Problems Facing the Public Schools

The top three problems identified in this year's poll — lack of discipline/more control (18%), fighting/violence/gangs (11%), and lack of financial support/funding/money (9%) — are the same three identified last year. But lack of discipline/more control has moved to the top of the list this year, while fighting/violence/gangs has moved into second place. Lack of financial support remains in third place. The concern with student control and safety in the schools is enhanced by the fact that use of drugs/dope is tied for fourth place with overcrowded schools (8%), while crime/vandalism (5%) is sixth. It is interesting that seemingly important issues such as difficulty in getting good teachers/quality teachers is mentioned by only 4% of the respondents and concern about standards/quality by only 2%. With regard to demographic groups, only 4% in the 18- to 29-year-old age group list lack of discipline/more control as the top problem. This age group's top problem is fighting/violence/gangs (16%). The age group expressing the strongest concern about lack of discipline/more control (28%) is those 50 and older.

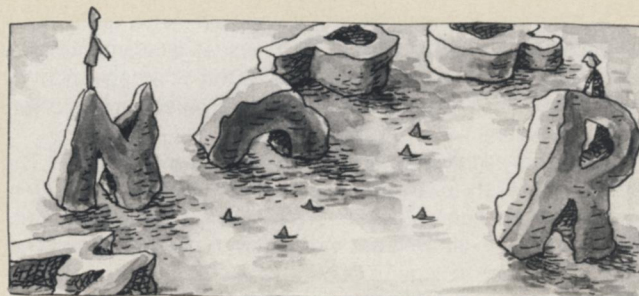
The question:

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

| | National Totals | | No Children In School | | Public School Parents | |
|---|-----------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Lack of discipline/more control | 18 | 14 | 18 | 15 | 15 | 9 |
| Fighting/violence/gangs | 11 | 15 | 10 | 14 | 12 | 20 |
| Lack of financial support/funding/money | 9 | 12 | 9 | 13 | 9 | 11 |
| Use of drugs/dope | 8 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 6 | 12 |
| Overcrowded schools | 8 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 12 | 11 |
| Crime/vandalism | 5 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| Difficulty getting good teachers/quality teachers | 4 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 4 |
| Parents' lack of support/interest | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 1 |
| Concern about standards/quality | 2 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 5 |
| Low pay for teachers | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Religious education | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Poor curriculum/low standards | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Busing | 2 | * | 2 | * | * | * |
| Pupils' lack of interest/attitudes/truancy | 2 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Lack of respect | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Peer pressure | 2 | 1 | 2 | * | 2 | 1 |
| Moral standards/dress code/sex/pregnancy | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

*Less than one-half of 1%.

(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple answers.)



How Safe Are Schools?

Given the public's concern with such issues as discipline, violence, gangs, and drugs, it seemed appropriate to ask respondents how safe and orderly they think the schools are. The first question inquired about school safety directly. Twenty-four percent feel their schools are "very safe and orderly," while 62% believe they are "somewhat safe and orderly." Only 10% select one of the two options indicating that the schools are not safe and orderly. Once again, a follow-up question asked only of public school parents reveals the phenomenon whereby people assess the schools they are closest to more positively. The percentage of public school parents choosing "very safe and orderly" to describe the school their oldest child attends jumps to 42%.

The first question:

Thinking about the public schools in your community, how would you describe the learning environment for students in those schools — very safe and orderly, somewhat safe and orderly, not very safe and orderly, or not at all safe and orderly?

| | National Totals % | No Children In School % | Public School Parents % |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Very safe and orderly | 24 | 22 | 30 |
| Somewhat safe and orderly | 62 | 62 | 62 |
| Not very safe and orderly | 7 | 8 | 5 |
| Not at all safe and orderly | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Don't know | 4 | 5 | 1 |

The second question:

How about the learning environment in the public school your oldest child attends — would you say it was very safe and orderly, somewhat safe and orderly, not very safe and orderly, or not at all safe and orderly?

| | Public School Parents % |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Very safe and orderly | 42 |
| Somewhat safe and orderly | 50 |
| Not very safe and orderly | 5 |
| Not at all safe and orderly | 2 |
| Don't know | 1 |

Sexual Harassment

The issue of sexual harassment in the public schools is especially relevant in light of the recent Supreme Court decision increasing school liability in this area. Responses to a question designed to gauge how serious a problem the public believes sex-

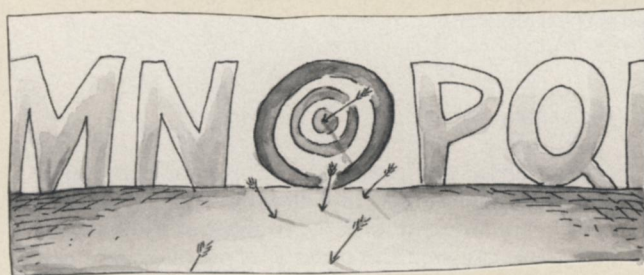
ual harassment to be suggest that approximately half (52%) of the public believes student-to-student sexual harassment is very serious (22%) or somewhat serious (30%). A smaller number (15%) believe that teacher-to-student sexual harassment is a very serious problem.

There are significant differences here among groups. The groups most likely to see student-to-student harassment as very serious include nonwhites (35%) and public school parents under 40 (28%). Those who are more likely to see it as a "not very serious" problem include Republicans (38%), college graduates (37%), public school parents over 40 (37%), and public school parents whose children are above average in academic achievement (37%). The groups most likely to see teacher-to-student harassment as very serious include nonwhites (32%), those with some high school education (29%), and public school parents under age 40 (25%). Those more likely to see it as a "not very serious" problem include those earning \$50,000 or more (42%), college graduates (42%), and public school parents whose children are above average in academic ability (41%).

The question:

How serious a problem would you say each of the following problems is in the public schools in your community — very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious, or not at all serious?

| | Very Serious % | Some- what Serious % | Not Very Serious % | Not At All Serious % | Don't Know % |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Sexual harassment of students by other students | 22 | 30 | 30 | 10 | 8 |
| Sexual harassment of students by teachers and school staff | 15 | 17 | 35 | 23 | 10 |



Improvement Strategies

While Americans are generally satisfied with the public schools, they want them to be even more effective. A number of questions directed at improvement strategies were included in this year's poll. One deals with zero tolerance policies with regard to violations related to drugs and alcohol. This is followed by two open-ended questions, the first offering respondents the opportunity to indicate desired changes and the second asking them what they perceive to be the greatest obstacle to change. There are also a number of questions dealing with ways to get and keep good teachers and to improve teaching, always central strategies for school improvement.

Zero Tolerance Policies

The question related to zero tolerance policies asked respondents whether violations involving alcohol and drugs should bring automatic suspension. This question was first posed in 1997 and was repeated because some incidents involving zero tolerance policies have attracted attention when they resulted in suspensions for what seemed to be trivial reasons. The public is not swayed. Eighty-six percent supported a zero tolerance policy for drugs and alcohol when the question was asked in 1997, and 90% support it now. That support is uniform across all groups.

The 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 | |
|------------|--------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|
| | '99 % | '97 % | '99 % | '97 % | '99 % | '97 % |
| Favor | 90 | 86 | 89 | 84 | 92 | 89 |
| Oppose | 10 | 13 | 11 | 15 | 8 | 10 |
| Don't know | * | 1 | * | 1 | * | 1 |

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Desired Changes and Obstacles to Change

This poll gave respondents the opportunity to indicate the changes they would like to see the public schools make. Given the earlier finding that the public places discipline at the top of the list of problems, it is no surprise that discipline/more control/stricter rules (mentioned by 12%) tops the list of desired changes. This change is followed by more teachers/smaller class size (mentioned by 10%) and better/more qualified teachers (mentioned by 7%).

The first question:

If there was one thing you could change to improve the public schools in your community, what would that be?

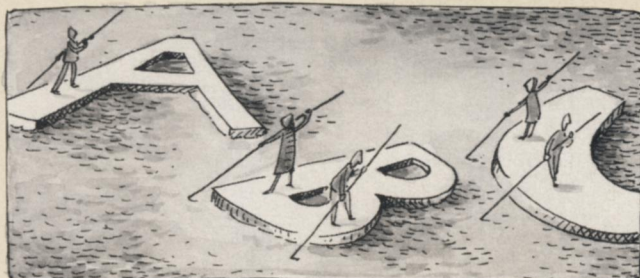
| | National Totals % | No Children In School % | Public School Parents % |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Discipline/more control/stricter rules | 12 | 13 | 9 |
| More teachers/smaller class size | 10 | 8 | 14 |
| Better/more qualified teachers | 7 | 8 | 5 |
| Funding | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| Security | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| Prayer/God back in the schools | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| Dress code/uniforms | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| Higher pay for teachers | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| More parent involvement | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Academic standards/better education | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Curriculum/more offered | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| More/updated equipment/books/ computers | 2 | 2 | 1 |

Having asked the respondents what change they would desire, it seemed logical to ask them what they considered to be the greatest obstacle to change. This is the first time this question has been asked in these polls. Finances/funding tops the list, mentioned by 13% of respondents. Parents/lack of parent involvement (12%) and government (10%) follow. The next two obstacles mentioned are ones over which the schools have some control. The board of education or superintendent is mentioned by 8% and better teachers by 5%. There are some differences across groups. Nonwhites (17%) and those from the South (18%) place parents/lack of parent involvement at the top of the obstacle list. Republicans (15%) see government as the greatest obstacle.

The second question:

In your opinion who or what is the main obstacle to improving the public schools in your community?

| | National Totals % | No Children In School % | Public School Parents % |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Finances/funding | 13 | 14 | 13 |
| Parents/lack of parent involvement | 12 | 12 | 12 |
| Government | 10 | 11 | 10 |
| Board of education/superintendent | 8 | 6 | 11 |
| Better teachers | 5 | 6 | 3 |
| Politics/politicians | 4 | 3 | 6 |
| Taxpayers/general public | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| Unions/teacher unions/NEA | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Lack of discipline/teachers can't discipline | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Students/kids | 2 | 2 | * |
| Administration/administrators | 2 | 1 | 2 |



Teachers

The public clearly sees teachers as the most important factor in bringing about improvements in the schools. Three questions in this poll explore the public's suggestions for attracting and retaining good teachers, its preferences in paying teachers, and its attitude toward requiring teachers to demonstrate their competence in their subject-matter areas.

The first question asks the public to choose between suggested ways for attracting and retaining good teachers. The top choice, identified by 90%, is increased pay for teachers who demonstrate high performance. This is followed by loans and scholarships for prospective teachers (86%) and school-financed professional development opportunities (85%). Two other options, tax credits for teachers who demonstrate high performance (63%) and increased pay for all teachers (62%), also draw majority support. Regarding tax credits for teachers who demonstrate high performance, nonwhites (73%) and those in the 18-

to 29-year-old age group (72%) are most supportive. Those earning more than \$50,000 (54%) and college graduates (56%) are least likely to be supportive. Regarding increased pay for all teachers, groups showing strong support include nonwhites (81%), Democrats (71%), and those who live in the South (70%). Those least supportive include Republicans (54%) and those who live in the East (48%).

The first question:

Here are some ways that have been suggested for attracting and retaining good public school teachers. As I read off each suggestion, would you tell me whether you favor it or oppose it as a way to attract and retain good teachers?

| | Favor % | Oppose % | Don't Know % |
|---|---------|----------|--------------|
| Increased pay for teachers who demonstrate high performance | 90 | 9 | 1 |
| Loans and scholarships for prospective teachers | 86 | 12 | 2 |
| School-financed professional development opportunities | 85 | 12 | 3 |
| Tax credits for teachers who demonstrate high performance | 63 | 37 | * |
| Increased pay for all teachers | 62 | 37 | 1 |

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The public wants quality in its teaching staff. In response to a question asking if, before they are hired, teachers should be required to demonstrate their knowledge in the subjects they will teach, 97% said yes. Support for this requirement varies little across demographic groups.

The second question:

In addition to meeting college requirements for a teacher's certificate, should those who want to become teachers be required to prove their knowledge in the subjects they will teach, before they are hired?

| | National Totals '99 % | No Children In School '99 % | Public School Parents '99 % |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Yes | 97 | 97 | 96 |
| No | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Don't know | * | * | * |

*Less than one-half of 1%.

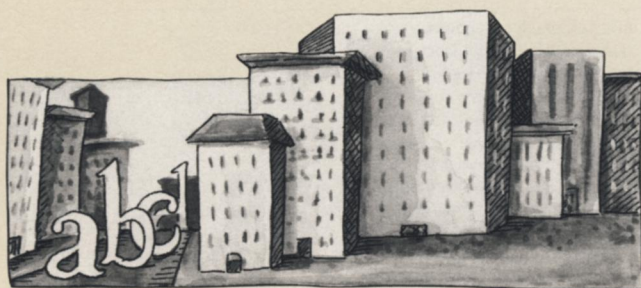
When asked what factors should be considered in determining a teacher's salary, the somewhat surprising finding is that the public identifies those factors that have traditionally been considered important. The public sees the level of academic degree earned as very important (60%). Another 52% see the years of teaching experience as very important. The scores a teacher's students receive on standardized tests are viewed as very important by 47%. The group most likely to see academic degree earned as very important in determining salaries is nonwhites (72%).

The third question:

How important do you think each of the following factors should be in determining a public school teacher's salary? Very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important?

| | Very Important % | Somewhat Important % | Not Very Important % | Not at All Important % | Don't Know % |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Level of academic degree earned | 60 | 33 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| Years of teaching experience | 52 | 35 | 9 | 4 | * |
| Scores the teacher's students receive on standardized tests | 47 | 38 | 10 | 4 | 1 |

*Less than one-half of 1%.



Standards

Much attention is being paid to standards students are required to meet. Raising standards, providing for accountability in meeting those standards, and requiring high school students to take a common core of courses are issues in almost every state.

Standards

The first question related to standards explores the public's views with regard to standards currently in place. A majority (57%) believe that the current standards are about right. However, a strong minority (33%) believe the standards are too low. Non-whites (48%) and urban dwellers (43%) are the groups most likely to feel that standards are too low.

The first question:

In your opinion, are student achievement standards in the public schools in your community too high, about right, or too low?

| | National Totals % | No Children In School % | Public School Parents % |
|-------------|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Too high | 6 | 5 | 9 |
| About right | 57 | 56 | 60 |
| Too low | 33 | 34 | 30 |
| Don't know | 4 | 5 | 1 |

The second question related to standards involves social promotion. This is the practice whereby students, especially at the elementary school level, are moved from grade to grade solely on the basis of age. The public is skeptical of this practice. Sev-

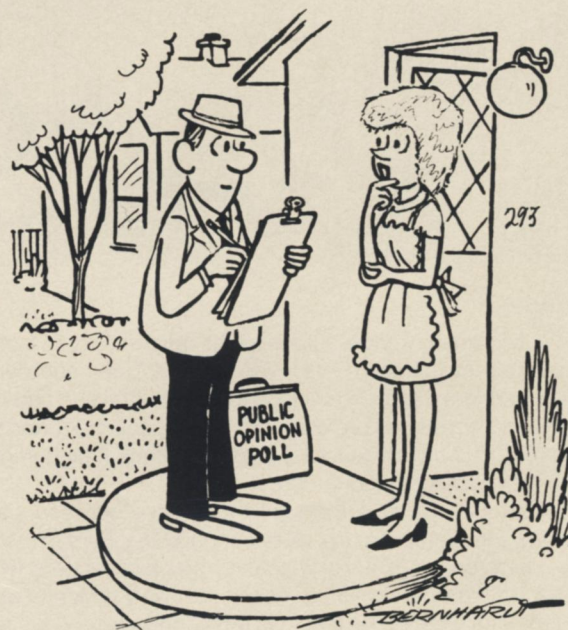
enty-two percent favor stricter standards for promotion even if it would mean that "significantly more students would be held back." Groups especially strong in their opposition to stricter standards are nonwhites (37%) and those who earn between \$10,000 and \$20,000 annually (39%).

The second question:

Social promotion means moving children from grade to grade in order to keep them with others in their own age group. Would you favor stricter standards for social promotion in school even if it meant that significantly more students would be held back?

| | National Totals % | No Children In School % | Public School Parents % |
|------------|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Favor | 72 | 70 | 75 |
| Oppose | 26 | 27 | 24 |
| Don't know | 2 | 3 | 1 |

The third question related to standards asks whether high school students should be required to take a standardized core curriculum. Such a curriculum stresses English, mathematics, science, and social studies and is widely regarded as a way of raising standards. Seventy-eight percent of respondents support such a requirement. Groups feeling more strongly that there should be a core curriculum include college graduates (84%), those with annual incomes of \$50,000 and over (84%), and those age 50 and over (84%). Groups most likely to oppose the idea include the 18- to 29-year-old age group (28%), those earning \$10,000 to \$20,000 (28%), and public school parents under age 40 (27%).

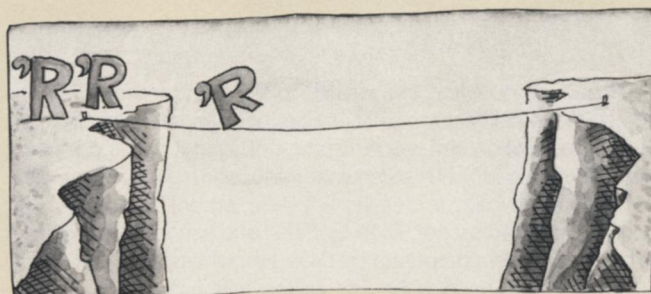


"Sixty percent of me is for it, 30% against it, and 10% undecided."

The third question:

As you know, many high school students are allowed to choose many of their academic courses. Would you favor or oppose requiring high school students to take a standardized core curriculum of certain courses?

| | National Totals % | No Children In School % | Public School Parents % |
|------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Favor | 78 | 78 | 76 |
| Oppose | 21 | 21 | 23 |
| Don't know | 1 | 1 | 1 |



Instructional Issues

Three questions explore what might be thought of as instructional issues. The teaching of values in the public schools was last considered explicitly in the 1993 poll. There appears to have been little change in the public's views since then. All groups are in strong agreement on teaching honesty, democracy, acceptance of people of different races and ethnic backgrounds, caring for friends and family members, moral courage, and patriotism/love of country. Teaching of the Golden Rule is supported by 86%; however, nonwhites (76%) and those in the 18- to 29-year-old age group (79%), while still strongly supportive, fall below the national norm. Support is strong for teaching acceptance of people who hold unpopular or controversial views (71%). Here those in the 18- to 29-year-old age group (79%) and college graduates (78%) are likely to be particularly supportive. Those 50 and older are likely to be less supportive (34% say that this value should not be taught).

Teaching acceptance of people with different sexual orientations and teaching acceptance of the right of a woman to choose an abortion are more controversial. Fifty-five percent support the former; 48% support the latter. The groups most receptive to teaching acceptance of different sexual orientations include those in the 18- to 29-year-old age group (64%), women (62%), and nonwhites (68%). The groups most likely to say that acceptance of different sexual orientations should not be taught are Republicans (56%), men (49%), people earning \$50,000 and over (49%), and people 50 and older (47%).

The first question:

I am going to read off a list of different values that might be taught in the public schools. For each one, please tell me whether you think it should be taught, or should not be taught, to all students in the public schools of your community?

| Should Be Taught | National Totals | | No Children In School | | Public School Parents | |
|--|-----------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|
| | '99 % | '93 % | '99 % | '93 % | '99 % | '93 % |
| Honesty | 97 | 97 | 97 | 97 | 97 | 97 |
| Democracy | 93 | 93 | 94 | 92 | 91 | 93 |
| Acceptance of people of different races and ethnic backgrounds | 93 | 93 | 93 | 92 | 93 | 96 |
| Caring for friends and family members | 90 | 91 | 90 | 90 | 90 | 93 |
| Moral courage | 90 | 91 | 90 | 91 | 89 | 94 |
| Patriotism/love of country | 90 | 91 | 89 | 91 | 92 | 93 |
| The Golden Rule | 86 | 90 | 87 | 90 | 84 | 89 |
| Acceptance of people who hold different religious beliefs | — | 87 | — | 87 | — | 87 |
| Acceptance of people who hold unpopular or controversial political or social views | 71 | 73 | 71 | 73 | 70 | 75 |
| Sexual abstinence outside of marriage | 68 | 66 | 68 | 66 | 66 | 67 |
| Acceptance of people with different sexual orientations; that is, homosexuals or bisexuals | 55 | 51 | 57 | 52 | 51 | 50 |
| Acceptance of the right of a woman to choose abortion | 48 | 56 | 52 | 56 | 45 | 57 |

The second question dealing with instructional issues asks respondents to determine where the focus should be in the curriculum. The response is inconclusive, with 46% of respondents choosing to place the emphasis on helping students develop the ability to take responsibility, 39% choosing to focus on academic skills, and 13% choosing to emphasize helping students develop the ability to work with others.

Groups that would place more emphasis on academic skills include public school parents of above-average students (47%), college graduates (49%), those with annual incomes of \$50,000 and over (46%), and professional and business people (50%). Groups favoring placing more emphasis on working with others include nonwhites (26%) and blacks (30%).

The second question:

Which one of the following areas do you think the local public schools should give the main emphasis to: the academic skills of students, the ability of students to work with others, or the ability of students to take responsibility?

| | National Totals % | No Children In School % | Public School Parents % |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Academic skills of students | 39 | 36 | 43 |
| Ability of students to work with others | 13 | 14 | 10 |
| Ability of students to take responsibility | 46 | 47 | 47 |
| Don't know | 2 | 3 | * |

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Regarding the reporting of student progress, respondents were asked to choose between letter grades given by the teacher, standardized test scores, observations written by the teacher, and examples of student work. The public provides no definitive answer. Thirty-three percent prefer examples of student work, 27%

prefer standardized test scores, 23% prefer letter grades, and 14% prefer written observations by the teacher. College graduates (29%) more strongly support the use of letter grades. Professional and business people (31%), men (31%), and parents of public school students making above-average grades (34%) more strongly support the use of scores on standardized tests.

The third question:

In your opinion, which one of the following methods would provide the most accurate picture of a public school student's academic progress?

| | National Totals % | No Children In School % | Public School Parents % |
|--|----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Examples of the student's work | 33 | 35 | 30 |
| Scores on standardized local and state achievement tests | 27 | 27 | 27 |
| Letter grades awarded by the teacher | 23 | 21 | 27 |
| Written observations by the teacher | 14 | 14 | 14 |
| Don't know | 3 | 3 | 2 |



The Federal Role

The federal government is considering various strategies to improve the public schools. The first question regarding the federal role asks respondents to assign priorities to each of five possible strategies. At least 50% of respondents assigned the highest priority to each of the five areas. Adding in those who assigned each area the second-highest priority reveals that all five areas of proposed federal involvement have strong support.

There are some differences among groups. Those assigning the highest priority to updating instructional materials and books include nonwhites (83%) and parents with public school children achieving at or below average (83%). Those assigning staff development and training the highest priority include nonwhites (81%) and Democrats (73%). Those assigning the highest priority to class-size reduction include Democrats (57%), those in the West (63%), public school parents (61%), and public school parents whose oldest child is in elementary school (65%). Those assigning the highest priority to keeping teachers' salaries competitive include nonwhites (67%) and Democrats (63%). And those assigning the highest priority to technology are nonwhites (80%).

The first question:

Here are a number of educational areas that receive government funding. To indicate how high a priority you think each area should have, would you

mention a number between one and five — the higher the number, the higher the priority; the lower the number, the lower the priority?

| | National Totals | | | | | Don't Know % |
|--|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-----------------|
| | 1 % | 2 % | 3 % | 4 % | 5 % | |
| Update instructional materials and books | 2 | 2 | 4 | 20 | 72 | * |
| School staff development and training | 2 | 2 | 8 | 23 | 65 | * |
| Technology | 2 | 3 | 9 | 25 | 61 | * |
| Keeping teachers' salaries competitive | 2 | 4 | 12 | 28 | 54 | * |
| Class-size reduction | 3 | 4 | 16 | 26 | 50 | 1 |

*Less than one-half of 1%.

A second question that relates to the government role asks the public to indicate the seriousness of three problems that call for the renovation and modernization of school buildings. When the "very serious" and "somewhat serious" responses are combined, overcrowding is identified by 74%, school classrooms that are in poor physical condition by 64%, and school buildings that are not wired for computers by 64%. Nonwhites consider all the problems more serious than do whites, with combined "very serious" and "somewhat serious" responses of 86%, 84%, and 76% respectively. Other groups taking a more serious ("very serious" and "somewhat serious" combined) view of overcrowding include those in the 18- to 29-year-old age group (83%), urban dwellers (82%), and public school parents under 40 (83%).

The second question:

As you may know, many of the nation's public schools are in need of renovation and modernization. Thinking about the public schools in your community, how serious do you consider each of the following problems — very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious, or not at all serious?

| | Very Serious % | Somewhat Serious % | Not Very Serious % | Not At All Serious % | Don't Know % |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Overcrowding | 47 | 27 | 14 | 9 | 3 |
| School classrooms that are in poor physical condition | 41 | 23 | 20 | 12 | 4 |
| School buildings that are not wired for computers | 37 | 27 | 19 | 11 | 6 |

Public School Alternatives

Consideration of alternatives to the public schools begins with the previously reported data showing that 71% of those surveyed in this year's poll prefer to improve the existing system of public schools rather than seek an alternative system and that 70% prefer to improve the public schools rather than to provide vouchers for parents to use in selecting a private or church-related school. This year's poll repeated all the 1998 questions related to funding public and private schools: one on aid to private schools, two voucher questions, two tax credit questions, and two trend questions related to the conditions

the public places on providing aid to private schools. This year's poll also asks two new questions regarding home schooling.



Trend Questions on Public/Private School Relationship

This poll included two trend questions on aid to private schools. The first asks directly whether students and parents should be given the choice of selecting a private school to attend at public expense. The percentage favoring this choice had risen from 33% in 1995 to 44% last year. This year that figure drops to 41%, and the percentage opposed rises from 50% to 55%. The groups most likely to favor this form of choice are nonwhites (49%), those in the 18- to 29-year-old age group (48%), those in the West (52%), and urban residents (48%). Those most likely to oppose this choice include those between the ages of 50 and 64 (63%) and those living in the East (62%).

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 | | | | |
|------------|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | '99 | '98 | '97 | '96 | '95 | '99 | '98 | '97 | '96 | '95 | '99 | '98 | '97 | '96 | '95 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Favor | 41 | 44 | 44 | 36 | 33 | 38 | 41 | 44 | 33 | 30 | 45 | 48 | 45 | 39 | 38 |
| Oppose | 55 | 50 | 52 | 61 | 65 | 58 | 54 | 54 | 63 | 68 | 50 | 46 | 50 | 59 | 59 |
| Don't know | 4 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 3 |

The second trend question proposes that the government would pay all or part of the tuition with parents then selecting the public, private, or church-related schools of their choice. Including public schools in the list of options results in a thin margin in favor, 51% to 47%. The only change on this question since last year is a statistically insignificant increase of 2% in those opposed. Those with no children in school oppose the option by a small margin, 52% to 45%. Public school parents support the proposal by 60% to 38%. Groups most likely to favor this option include nonwhites (70%), those in the 18- to 29-year-old age group (62%), and public school parents with children achieving at or below average (70%).

The second 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 | | | | |
|------------|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | '99 | '98 | '97 | '96 | '94 | '99 | '98 | '97 | '96 | '94 | '99 | '98 | '97 | '96 | '94 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Favor | 51 | 51 | 49 | 43 | 45 | 45 | 48 | 46 | 38 | 42 | 60 | 56 | 55 | 49 | 48 |
| Oppose | 47 | 45 | 48 | 54 | 54 | 52 | 48 | 51 | 59 | 57 | 38 | 40 | 43 | 49 | 51 |
| Don't know | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 |

Vouchers

A question directly related to vouchers appeared in the poll for the first time last year. It asked whether respondents would favor giving a parent a voucher that could be used at any private or church-related school. A split sample was used with half responding to a question that called for paying *all tuition* and half responding to a question that called for paying *partial tuition*. The responses have changed little since last year. Last year, 48% favored "all tuition" vouchers, and 46% opposed them. This year, 47% favor and 48% oppose them. Those with no children in school are opposed to "all tuition" vouchers (52% to 43%), while public school parents are in favor of them (54% to 42%). Other groups likely to favor "all tuition" vouchers include blacks (57%), those in the 18- to 29-year-old age group (56%), public school parents with children achieving at or below average (58%), and urban dwellers (58%).

The "all tuition" question:

In the voucher system, a parent is given a voucher which can be used to pay all the tuition for attendance at a private or church-related school. Parents can then choose any private school, church-related school, or public school for their child. If a parent chooses a public school, the voucher would not apply. Would you favor or oppose the adoption of the voucher system in your state?

| | National Totals | | No Children In School | | Public School Parents | |
|------------|-----------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Favor | 47 | 48 | 43 | 44 | 54 | 55 |
| Oppose | 48 | 46 | 52 | 50 | 42 | 42 |
| Don't know | 5 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 3 |

Restricting the voucher to paying "partial tuition" draws enough support that a small majority (52% to 45%) favors this plan. Those with no children in school are almost equally split on the plan (47% in favor, 49% opposed), and public school parents are in favor (59% to 40%). Groups most likely to favor the "partial tuition" voucher plan include nonwhites (68%), those in the 18- to 29-year-old age group (60%), public school parents with children achieving at or below average (69%), and public school parents under 40 (66%). Those most likely to oppose this voucher option are respondents aged 50 and over (58%) and those living in the East (53%).

The "partial tuition" question:

In the voucher system, a parent is given a voucher which can be used to pay part of the tuition for at-

tendance at a private or church-related school. Parents can then choose any private school, church-related school, or public school for their child. If a parent chooses a public school, the voucher would not apply. Would you favor or oppose the adoption of the voucher system in your state?

| | National Totals | | No Children In School | | Public School Parents | |
|------------|-----------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Favor | 52 | 52 | 47 | 50 | 59 | 58 |
| Oppose | 45 | 41 | 49 | 43 | 40 | 37 |
| Don't know | 3 | 7 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 5 |

Tax Credits for Tuition

A less direct way to provide aid to private and church-related schools is to offer tax credits for tuition paid by those who send their children to these schools. Public school parents are not excluded; however, few can take advantage of the credit because public schools do not, under normal circumstances, charge tuition. Providing such tax credits was explored in the poll for the first time in 1998, using a split sample in which half of the sample was asked about a tax credit that would allow parents to recover *all tuition* and half was asked about a tax credit that would allow parents to recover *partial tuition*. The situation has changed little in the past year.

The public favors tax credits to recover "all tuition" (57% to 41%). In a pattern somewhat similar to the responses on the voucher question, only 53% of those with no children in school favor the tax credits as compared to 63% of public school parents.

The "all tuition" tax credit question:

Proposals are being made in a number of states to provide a tax credit that would allow parents who send their children to private or to church-related schools to recover all of the tuition paid. Would you favor or oppose this proposal in your state?

| | National Totals | | No Children In School | | Public School Parents | |
|------------|-----------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Favor | 57 | 56 | 53 | 50 | 63 | 63 |
| Oppose | 41 | 42 | 44 | 48 | 35 | 35 |
| Don't know | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 |

When the question is changed to allow parents to recover "partial tuition," the support rises to 65%, with opposition falling to 34%. This is little changed from last year. The groups most likely to support such credits are public school parents (79%) and public school parents with students achieving at or below average (83%). Those most likely to oppose such credits are those 50 and older (48%) and those with no children in the schools (42%).

The "partial tuition" tax credit question:

Proposals are being made in a number of states to provide a tax credit that would allow parents who send their children to private or to church-related schools to recover part of the tuition paid. Would you favor or oppose this proposal in your state?

| | National Totals | | No Children In School | | Public School Parents | |
|------------|-----------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Favor | 65 | 66 | 57 | 62 | 79 | 73 |
| Oppose | 34 | 30 | 42 | 33 | 20 | 24 |
| Don't know | 1 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 3 |

Conditions the Public Places on Aid To Private or Church-Related Schools

The entire discussion of aid to private and church-related schools seems almost moot when one considers the responses to the final two questions in this area. The first question probes the issue of accountability for private schools that accept tuition payments from the government. More than three-fourths of respondents believe that states should hold such schools accountable in the same way as public schools are held accountable. Support is statistically the same as last year and is uniform across demographic groups.

The first question:

Do you think private or church-related schools that accept government tuition payments should be accountable to the state in the way public schools are accountable?

| | National Totals | | No Children In School | | Public School Parents | |
|----------------|-----------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 | '99 | '98 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Yes, should | 77 | 75 | 77 | 74 | 79 | 80 |
| No, should not | 21 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 18 | 16 |
| Don't know | 2 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 |

The second question relates to the student selection policies of private and church-related schools that accept government funding. Nearly three-fourths of respondents believe that these nonpublic schools should be required to accept students from a wider range of backgrounds and academic ability than is now the case.

The second 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 | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-----|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----|-----------------------|-----|-----|
| | '99 | '98 | '97 | '99 | '98 | '97 | '99 | '98 | '97 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Yes, should | 74 | 70 | 78 | 74 | 69 | 78 | 73 | 76 | 80 |
| No, should not | 21 | 23 | 18 | 21 | 23 | 17 | 23 | 20 | 17 |
| Don't know | 5 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 |

Home Schooling

An alternative available to parents is home schooling. When the question as to whether home schooling is a good or bad thing was last put to parents in 1997, 57% felt it was a bad thing for the nation. This year's poll asked two questions about home schooling: one explores what services should be made available to home-schoolers, and the other asks about the standards

to which home-schooled children should be held. The public expresses majority support for providing all five listed services to home-schooled children, with special education courses at the top (92% in favor). Giving home-schooling teachers the opportunity to participate in local public school teacher development activities draws 80% approval; participation in school extracurricular activities, 74% approval; driver's education, 73% approval; and transportation services, 53% approval. Support for making the top four services available is strong among all demographic groups.

The first question:

Would you favor or oppose making the following public school services available, at public expense, to children who are schooled at home?

| | Favor % | Oppose % | Don't Know % |
|--|------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Special education courses for disabled or handicapped children | 92 | 7 | 1 |
| The opportunity for home-schooling teachers to participate in local public school teacher development activities | 80 | 18 | 2 |
| The opportunity to participate in public school extracurricular activities | 74 | 25 | 1 |
| Driver's education | 73 | 26 | 1 |
| Transportation services | 53 | 44 | 3 |

With regard to holding home-schooled children to the same academic standards as public school students, 92% believe that home-schooled children should take all the state and national assessment tests that public school students are required to take. This belief is uniform across all groups.

The second question:

Would you favor or oppose requiring children who are schooled at home to take all the state and national assessment tests that public school students are required to take?

| | National Totals % | No Children In School % | Public School Parents % |
|------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Favor | 92 | 92 | 92 |
| Oppose | 7 | 6 | 8 |
| Don't know | 1 | 2 | * |

*Less than one-half of 1%.

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 |
| Percentages near 10 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Percentages near 20 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 7 |
| Percentages near 30 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 8 |
| Percentages near 40 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 9 |
| Percentages near 50 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 9 |
| Percentages near 60 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 9 |
| Percentages near 70 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 8 |
| Percentages near 80 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 7 |
| Percentages near 90 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

*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)* | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | Percentages near 20 or percentages near 80 | | | | | |
| TABLE A 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 |

| | Percentages near 50 | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| TABLE B 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.

Design of the Sample

For the 1999 survey the Gallup Organization used its standard national telephone sample, i.e., an unclustered, directory-assisted, random-digit telephone sample, based on a proportionate stratified sampling design.

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

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

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

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

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

Within each contacted household, an interview was sought with the 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.

Research Procedure

The Sample. The sample used in this survey embraced a total of 1,103 adults (18 years of age and older). A description of the sample and methodology can be found at the end of this report.

Time of Interviewing. The fieldwork for this study was conducted during the period of 18 May to 11 June 1999.

The Report. 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 | % | College incomplete | 33 |
| No children in school | 65 | Total high school | 45 |
| Public school parents | 33 | High school graduate | 28 |
| Nonpublic school parents | 2 | High school incomplete | 16 |
| Gender | % | Income | |
| Men | 47 | \$50,000 and over | 30 |
| Women | 53 | \$40,000 and over | 41 |
| Race | | \$30,000-\$39,999 | 15 |
| White | 85 | \$20,000-\$29,999 | 17 |
| Nonwhite | 14 | Under \$20,000 | 19 |
| Black | 11 | Undesignated | 9 |
| Undesignated | 1 | Region | |
| Age | | East | 24 |
| 18-29 years | 22 | Midwest | 24 |
| 30-49 years | 43 | South | 31 |
| 50 and over | 35 | West | 21 |
| Education | | Community Size | |
| Total college | 55 | Urban | 27 |
| College graduate | 22 | Suburban | 48 |
| | | Rural | 25 |

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. Phi Delta Kappa can also arrange for a poll in your district or state. The price of the PACE materials is \$60 (PDK members, \$55). For information about using PACE materials, write or phone Phi Delta Kappa International, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. Ph. 800/766-1156, ext. 2500.

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. (Institutional purchase orders, cash, or MasterCard or VISA number required.) 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 International, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. Ph. 800/766-1156.

If faster delivery is desired, phone the Shipping Department at the number listed below. Persons who wish to order the 664-page document that is the basis of this report should contact Phi Delta Kappa International, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. Ph. 800/766-1156. The price is \$95, postage included.

Demographic Analysis

Much of the useful information in this poll is obtained through an analysis of the demographic data. One interesting item that emerges in the analysis is that those in the nonwhite category and those in the 18- to 29-year-old age group tend to respond in similar fashion to certain kinds of questions. In grading the nation's schools, 24% of the general population assign those schools a grade of A or B. This percentage rises to 32% for nonwhites and 37% for 18- to 29-year-olds. Fifteen percent of the total group sees teacher-to-student sexual harassment as a very serious problem; 32% of nonwhites and 23% of 18- to 29-year-olds see the problem as serious. Overcrowding in schools is regarded as very serious or somewhat serious by 74% of the total group, by 86% of nonwhites, and by 83% of 18 to 29-year-olds. Permitting parents and students to choose a private school to attend at public expense is favored by 41% of the total by group, by 49% of nonwhites, and by 48% of 18- to 29-year-olds. And vouchers that could be used to pay part of the tuition at a private or church-related school are favored by 52% of the total group, by 68% of nonwhites, and by 60% of 18- to 29-year-olds.

Space limitations preclude a complete analysis of the responses from the various groups. What has been provided is simply a sample of the additional information that can be drawn from the poll. There are numerous other demographic breakdowns. For those with strong interest, the best approach is to purchase the full report — the "tabs" — summarizing all the information and then do an analysis. (See "How to Order the Poll," above.) — LCR