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The 35th Annual
PHI DELTA KAPPA/GALLUP

POLL

Of the Public's Attitudes
Toward the Public Schools

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MAYBE

NO



TAKE SCHOOLS that have strong public support from the communities they serve. Impose on those schools a major federal mandate that attempts to reach worthy goals using strategies that lack public approval, and you have the ingredients for a failed system. Recognizing the importance of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and the extent to which it involves the federal government in decisions affecting schools at the K-12 level, those who plan this annual poll decided to focus this year's edition on NCLB. To the surprise of this report's authors, the findings point to the situation described in the first two sentences. While the public sees improved student achievement as an important goal, it rejects the strategies used in NCLB. What is reported in the following pages should be cause for reflection and concern on the part of those who believe that success for every child is vital. We hope that this year's poll leads to a lively debate focused on strategies that will advance that goal.



Executive Summary

The 35th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools comes at a time when relationships at the federal, state, and local levels with regard to K-12 education are increasingly complex, change is the mantra of the day, and money is short in almost every state. Attention is currently directed at efforts to improve student achievement, with special emphasis on those minorities and other groups that have traditionally been less successful in gaining the quality of education needed for future success. These differences in school success have come to be known as the "achievement gap," a gap that virtually everyone agrees must be closed. How this is to be done and the relative roles of the parties involved are, however, matters involving uncertainty and controversy. This poll, the 35th in this series, addresses those issues.

The poll focuses on NCLB, the extension of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which became law in January 2002. Some questions deal directly with NCLB, while others address strategies associated with the act's implementation. Since NCLB's intention is to improve the public schools, a number of traditional poll questions — those dealing with grading the public schools, vouchers, problems the public schools face, the nature of the achievement gap, the challenge of getting and keeping good teachers, and the merits of the current emphasis on standardized testing — all fit nicely into the poll's focus. Taken as a whole, the results offer sig-

nificant and timely information about the public's view of the state of our schools and current improvement efforts.

We begin this report with seven overarching conclusions. In each case, we refer by number to the tables in which data supporting the conclusion can be found. We then offer additional findings, followed by a comprehensive set of tables. Readers are invited to judge the appropriateness of the conclusions and to make their own interpretations of the data and what they tell us about the public's view of the public schools.

The authors believe the data support the following general conclusions:

1. The public has high regard for the public schools, wants needed improvement to come through those schools, and has little interest in seeking alternatives. The number assigning an A or a B to schools in their community is 48%, with an additional 31% assigning the grade of C. The number of A's and B's rises to 55% for public school parents and to 68% for parents asked to grade the public school their oldest child attends. The number believing that reform should come through the existing public schools is 73%, up from 69% in 2002, while the number of those seeking an alternative is down to 25%. (See Tables 1 through 4.)

2. The public sees itself as uninformed on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, with 69% saying they lack the information needed to say whether their impression of the act is favorable or unfavorable. Forty percent say they know very little about the NCLB, with an additional 36% saying they know nothing at all about the act. Somewhat surprisingly, public school parents consider themselves just as uninformed as others. (See Tables 5 and 6.)

3. Responses to questions related to strategies associated with NCLB suggest that greater familiarity with the law is unlikely to lead to greater public support.

- A total of 83% of respondents believe decisions regarding what is taught in the public schools should be made at the state level (22%) or by the local school board (61%). NCLB involves major federal intervention. (See Table 7.)
- Eighty-four percent believe the job a school is doing should be measured on the basis of improvement shown by students. NCLB requires that a specified percentage of students — in the school as a whole and in each subgroup — must pass a state test, and improvement is not a factor. (See Table 8.)
- Sixty-six percent believe a single test *cannot* provide a fair picture of whether a school is in need of improvement. NCLB bases this judgment on a state test administered annually in grades 3 through 8. (See Table 9.)
- Only 15% believe testing on English and math alone can produce a fair picture of whether or not a school is in need of improvement. Eighty-three percent believe it cannot. Under NCLB, whether a school is in need of improvement is determined solely by the percentage of students whose test scores meet the goal in English and math. (See Table 10.)
- Only 26% believe it is possible to accurately judge a student's proficiency in English and math on the basis of a single test. Seventy-two percent believe it is not possible. NCLB uses a state test given annually to determine student proficiency in English and math and then judges the school according to the percentage meeting the standard. (See Table 11.)
- Eighty percent are concerned either a great deal or a fair amount that relying only on testing in English and math to judge a school will mean less emphasis on art, music, history, and other subjects. NCLB relies only on English and math scores to judge a school. (See Table 12.)

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- When offered two options for dealing with a school in need of improvement, 74% of respondents select making additional efforts to help students achieve in their present school, while 25% choose offering students the opportunity to transfer to a school not in need of improvement. NCLB does not rule out efforts to help students in their current school, but it mandates that the choice of a transfer be offered. (See Table 13.)
- Sixty-seven percent believe special education students should not be required to meet the same standards as other students. NCLB requires that the percentage of special education students showing proficiency must be the same as the percentage required for the total school and for all subgroups. (See Table 14.)
- Sixty-six percent believe the emphasis of NCLB on standardized testing will encourage teachers to teach to the tests, and 60% believe this would be a bad thing. NCLB mandates testing in grades 3 through 8 and in at least one high school grade. (See Tables 15 and 16.)

4. The public is concerned about getting and keeping good teachers, thinks teacher salaries are too low, and is willing to see higher salaries paid to teachers teaching in more challenging situations. Sixty-one percent say schools in their communities have trouble getting good teachers, and 66% say they have trouble keeping good teachers. Fifty-nine percent say teacher salaries are too low, and 65% believe higher salaries should be paid as an incentive for teaching in schools determined to be in need of improvement. (See Tables 19 through 22.)

5. The public continues to believe that closing the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students is important but blames the gap on factors unrelated to the quality of schooling. Ninety percent believe closing the gap is either very important or somewhat important. The number attributing the gap to the quality of schooling dropped from 29% a year ago to 16% in 2003. In identifying factors that are either very important or somewhat important in creating the gap, 97% point to home life and upbringing; 97%, to the amount of parent involvement; 95%, to student interest or the lack thereof; and 94%, to community environment. (See Tables 23, 24, and 26.)

6. The public is not convinced that narrowing the achievement gap requires spending more money on low-achieving students. While divided on this matter, the public leans in the direction of spending the same dollars on each student. When asked whether the dollars spent on each student should be the same or should vary on the basis of student needs, 52% said the same, while 45% said the dollars spent should vary. And 58% of Americans believe that it is possible to narrow the achievement gap without spending more money on low-achieving students. (See Tables 25 and 38.)

7. A majority of respondents are opposed to vouchers and would oppose having their state adopt them, despite the 2002 U.S. Supreme Court decision stating that voucher plans do not violate the U.S. Constitution. The number of Americans in favor of allowing private school attendance at public expense fell to 38% this year, compared to 46% a year ago. The number opposed climbed from 52% to 60%. When reminded of the Supreme Court decision permitting such plans, 56% expressed opposition to having legislation enacted in their state that would permit private school attendance at public expense. (See Tables 28 and 29.)

Additional Findings and Conclusions

- Respondents regard funding as the biggest problem schools in their communities must face. Twenty-five percent mentioned funding, followed by 16% who mentioned discipline and 14% who mentioned overcrowded schools. (See Table 35.)

- The public is divided on whether parents in the community would have enough information to choose another school for their children to attend, as NCLB allows if their current school is identified as needing improvement. (See Table 17.)

- A slight majority of parents, 52%, would want a child of theirs who was failing in school to be tutored in his or her own school, not by an outside tutor as NCLB provides. (See Table 18.)

- Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the standard used by NCLB to determine whether a school is in need of improvement. It is based on the percentage of students showing proficiency in English and math. Questions in the poll designed to measure the public's expectations regarding the annual determination of AYP that NCLB requires the state to make for each school provide interesting information but shed little light on such expectations. The collective responses to the two questions would, however, seem to call into question NCLB's goal of having every student demonstrate proficiency by 2013-14. (See Tables 36 and 37.)

- The public is evenly divided regarding the extent to which providing vouchers would improve achievement in schools in the community, with 48% of respondents saying achievement would improve and 48% saying it would get worse. Fifty-four percent believe achievement would improve for students using vouchers to go to private schools, and 59% believe achievement for students staying in the public schools would remain the same. (See Tables 30 through 32.)

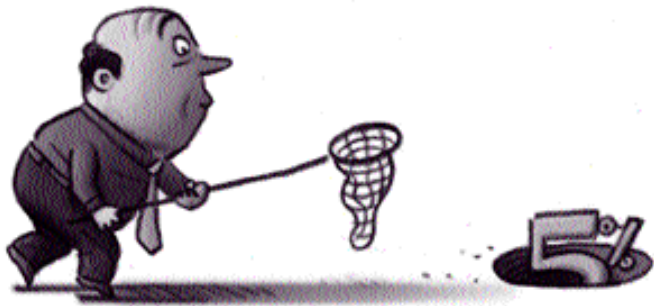
- Given a full-tuition voucher, 62% of respondents would choose a private school for their child, while 35% would choose a public school. The choices change if the value of the voucher drops to half the cost of tuition, with 47% choosing a public school. (See Tables 33 and 34.)

- The public identifies factors unrelated to schooling as the causes of the achievement gap in which Asian students generally outperform their white peers. There is, in fact, little difference between the factors the public believes to be responsible for this "reverse gap" and those it believes to be responsible for the gap between whites and other minorities. (See Table 27.)

- The public attributes the failure of some students to learn to factors related to life outside the school and to lack of student interest, along with the school-related factors of lack of discipline and the quality of teaching. (See Table 39.)

- The public has little interest in the four-day school week as a means of cutting costs. (See Table 40.)

- And finally, respondents believe that the public will view schools that do not make AYP as "schools in need of improvement" and



not as “failing schools.” This is an interesting question that has been given added importance by the United States Department of Education. After routinely describing schools not making AYP as “failing schools” in the days immediately after the passage of NCLB, the department is currently stressing that such schools should be regarded simply as “schools in need of improvement.” It will be interesting to see how the final arbiter, the media, deal with this issue. (See Table 41.)



Attitudes Regarding the Public Schools

Grading the Public Schools

The data regarding the grading of the public schools are summarized in Tables 1-3. Table 1 provides the grades for the schools in the community, Table 2 gives the grades for the nation's schools, and Table 3 reports parents' grades for the school their oldest child attends. The data show what they have shown every year, and the trend data displayed for every second year, starting in 1983, confirm the consistency of the public's grades. The public gives the schools high marks, and the grades improve the closer people are to the schools. That 68% of the parents give the public school their oldest child attends an A or a B is a truly remarkable approval rating for any institution. Moreover, the grades have remained remarkably steady through the years. In an interesting bit of data not in the tables, 30% of nonwhites, 18% below the total, give the community schools an A or a B. It seems reasonable to infer that this difference grows out of the achievement gap between whites and nonwhites.

TABLE 1. Students are often given the grades of A, B, C, D, and FAIL to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves, in your community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'03 %	'02 %	'03 %	'02 %	'03 %	'02 %
A & B	48	47	45	44	55	58
A	11	10	8	9	17	16
B	37	37	37	35	38	42
C	31	34	30	35	31	30
D	10	10	10	10	10	8
FAIL	5	3	7	3	3	3
Don't know	6	6	8	8	1	1

Trend Data: Grades for Community Schools (National Totals)

	2003 %	2001 %	1999 %	1997 %	1995 %	1993 %	1991 %	1989 %	1987 %	1985 %	1983 %
A & B	48	51	49	46	41	47	42	43	43	43	31
A	11	11	11	10	8	10	10	8	12	9	6
B	37	40	38	36	33	37	32	35	31	34	25
C	31	30	31	32	37	31	33	33	30	30	32
D	10	8	9	11	12	11	10	11	9	10	13
FAIL	5	5	5	6	5	4	5	4	4	4	7
Don't know	6	6	6	5	5	7	10	9	14	13	17

TABLE 2. 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	
	'03 %	'02 %	'03 %	'02 %	'03 %	'02 %
A & B	26	24	26	25	26	20
A	2	2	1	1	5	2
B	24	22	25	24	21	18
C	52	47	52	46	49	51
D	12	13	11	13	13	11
FAIL	3	3	4	3	2	3
Don't know	7	13	7	13	10	15

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

	Public School Parents	
	'03 %	'02 %
A & B	68	71
A	29	27
B	39	44
C	20	20
D	8	6
FAIL	4	2
Don't know	*	1

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Focus of School Improvement

This question was added in 1997 in an attempt to gauge public support for reform efforts originating outside the public schools. The responses consistently indicate that the public sees the existing public school system as the vehicle within which change should occur. The percentage of those expressing that opinion this year is up from last year and is the highest in five years.

TABLE 4. 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				
	'03 %	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'99 %	'03 %	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'99 %	'03 %	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'99 %
Reforming existing system	73	69	72	59	71	73	69	73	59	73	73	69	73	60	68
Finding alternative system	25	27	24	34	27	24	26	23	34	24	25	27	25	34	30
Don't know	2	4	4	7	2	3	5	4	7	3	2	4	2	6	2

No Child Left Behind Act

The Information People Have About NCLB

The summary at the beginning of this report indicated that people know very little about the NCLB Act, an extension of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act first passed in 1965. That conclusion is based on the two tables that follow. Table 5 shows that only 24% of the respondents said they know a great deal or a fair amount about NCLB. This contrasts with the 76% who said they know very little or nothing at all about it. A second question, presented in Table 6, asked whether the respondents' opinion of NCLB is favorable or unfavorable. Sixty-nine percent said that they did not know enough to say. As Table 5 shows, public school parents, the group most directly affected, felt themselves to be no more knowledgeable than any other group.

TABLE 5. Now, here are a few questions about the No Child Left Behind Act. How much, if anything, would you say you know about the No Child Left Behind Act — the federal education bill that was passed by Congress in 2001 — a great deal, a fair amount, very little, or nothing at all?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
A great deal plus a fair amount	24	25	22
A great deal	6	5	7
A fair amount	18	20	15
Very little	40	37	44
Nothing at all	36	38	34
Don't know	*	*	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

TABLE 6. From what you know or have heard or read about the No Child Left Behind Act, do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of the act — or don't you know enough about it to say?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Very favorable plus somewhat favorable	18	17	20
Very favorable	5	4	7
Somewhat favorable	13	13	13
Somewhat unfavorable	7	7	6
Very unfavorable	6	6	6
Don't know enough to say	69	69	68
Don't know	*	1	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The Strategies Used in NCLB

The public shows little support for the strategies that are an integral part of NCLB as it is being implemented. The tables in this section provide the documentation for the nine statements in the opening summary.

Statement 1. The public believes decisions regarding what is taught in the public schools should be made at the local level.

TABLE 7. In your opinion, who should have the greatest influence in deciding what is taught in the public schools here — the federal government, the state government, or the local school board?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Federal government	15	15	18
State government	22	22	21
Local school board	61	61	59
Don't know	2	2	2

Statement 2. The public believes the job a school is doing should be measured on the basis of improvement shown by students.

TABLE 8. Under the NCLB Act, a school's performance is evaluated annually based on the performance of its students. In your opinion, which is the better way to judge the job a public school is doing?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Whether students meet a fixed standard	14	15	13
Whether students show reasonable improvement from where they started	84	84	86
Don't know	2	1	1

Statement 3. The public believes a single test cannot provide a fair picture of whether a school is in need of improvement.

TABLE 9. According to the NCLB Act, determining whether a public school is or is not in need of improvement will be based on the performance of its students on a single statewide test. In your opinion, will a single test provide a fair picture of whether or not a school needs improvement?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Yes, will provide fair picture	32	32	31
No, will not provide fair picture	66	67	66
Don't know	2	1	3

Statement 4. The public believes a test based on English and math alone cannot produce a fair picture of whether or not a school is in need of improvement.

TABLE 10. According to the NCLB Act, the statewide tests of students' performance will be devoted to English and math only. Do you think a test covering only English and math would provide a fair picture of whether a school in your community is or is not in need of improvement, or should the test be based on other subjects also?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Test covering only English and math would provide a fair picture of whether a school is in need of improvement	15	14	18
Test should be based on other subjects also	83	84	81
Don't know	2	2	1

Statement 5. The public does not believe it is possible to accurately judge a student's proficiency in English and math on the basis of a single test.

TABLE 11. In your opinion, is it possible or not possible to accurately judge a student's proficiency in English and math on the basis of a single test?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Yes, possible	26	27	22
No, not possible	72	71	77
Don't know	2	2	1

Statement 6. The public is concerned that relying on testing in English and math only to judge a school will mean less emphasis on art, music, history, and other subjects.

TABLE 12. How much, if at all, are you concerned that relying on testing for English and math only to judge a school's performance will mean less emphasis on art, music, history, and other subjects? Would you say you are concerned a great deal, a fair amount, not much, or not at all?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
A great deal plus a fair amount	80	80	82
A great deal	40	38	45
A fair amount	40	42	37
Not much	14	13	15
Not at all	6	7	3
Don't know	*	*	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Statement 7. The public believes that making additional efforts to help students achieve in a school judged to be in need of improvement is preferable to allowing students to transfer to a school not in need of improvement.

TABLE 13. Assume you had a child attending a school identified as in need of improvement by the NCLB Act. Which would you prefer, to transfer your child to a school identified as NOT in need of improvement or to have additional efforts made in your child's present school to help him or her achieve?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
To transfer child to school identified as not in need of improvement	25	24	25
To have additional efforts made in child's present school	74	75	74
Don't know	1	1	1

Statement 8. The public does not believe special education students should be required to meet the same standards as other students.

TABLE 14. In your opinion, should students enrolled in special education be required to meet the same standards as all other students in the school?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Yes, should	31	31	31
No, should not	67	66	68
Don't know	2	3	1

Statement 9. The public believes the emphasis of NCLB on standardized testing will encourage teachers to teach to the tests and regards that as a bad thing. (Two tables address this statement.)

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

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Will encourage teaching to the tests	66	64	68
Will not have this effect	30	32	27
Don't know	4	4	5

TABLE 16. If the current emphasis on results is encouraging teachers to "teach to the tests," do you think this will be a good thing or a bad thing?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Good thing	39	38	40
Bad thing	60	61	58
Don't know	1	1	2

Other Questions Directly Related to NCLB

Two other questions in this poll related directly to NCLB are reported in Tables 17 and 18. The first sought to determine whether parents in the community would have the information needed to select a school not in need of improvement if given that choice. Public opinion is evenly divided. The second question

involves an NCLB strategy in which parents with a child in a school in need of improvement can choose to have their child tutored by an outside provider selected from a list of providers approved by the state. This choice is limited to students who qualify under Title I's poverty standards. Fifty-two percent of the respondents say they would prefer to have the tutoring provided by teachers in the child's school.



TABLE 17. The NCLB Act allows parents of a child in a public school identified as in need of improvement to select another school in the same school district that is identified as NOT in need of improvement. Just your impression, would parents in your community have enough information about the local schools to be able to select a school that is not in need of improvement?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Yes, have enough information	47	46	48
No, do not have enough	49	49	50
Don't know	4	5	2

TABLE 18. Now, let's assume that your child was failing in his or her school. Which kind of tutoring would you prefer — tutoring provided by teachers in your child's school or tutoring provided by an outside agency that you would select from a state-approved list?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Tutoring provided by teachers in child's school	52	52	54
Tutoring provided by outside agency	45	46	42
Don't know	3	2	4

The Importance of Good Teaching

Getting and Keeping Good Teachers

NCLB requires that every classroom be staffed by a highly qualified teacher by the beginning of the 2005-06 school year. A highly qualified teacher is defined as a fully certified teacher, licensed in the subject area in which he or she is teaching.

The poll did not ask the public's opinion regarding this requirement and whether it could be met; however, it did ask a number of questions designed to determine the extent to which getting and keeping good teachers is a problem. The

public believes that getting good teachers and keeping them are both problems for local schools. Nonwhites are even stronger in these beliefs, with 75% saying it is hard to get good teachers and 87% saying the same for keeping them. Looking back, we find that these same two questions were asked in the first poll in this series, in 1969, with 52% saying they felt local schools had a hard time getting good teachers and 48% saying they had a hard time keeping them.

TABLE 19. Do you think your local public school system has a hard time GETTING good teachers?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Yes, has hard time	61	60	62
No, does not	37	36	38
Don't know	2	4	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

TABLE 20. Do you think your local public school system has a hard time KEEPING good teachers?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Yes, has hard time	66	65	68
No, does not	31	32	31
Don't know	3	3	1

Salaries Paid to Teachers

Salary is an obvious factor in attracting people to a particular job. Fifty-nine percent of respondents to this year's poll believe that the salaries paid teachers are too low. The trend data in Table 21 indicate that this is an area where public opinion has changed over the years. Thirty-three percent believed salaries were too low in 1969, and this figure changed little through 1985. However, the percentage then climbed to 50% by 1990 and has increased nine points since that time. This is almost certainly a reflection of the growing belief that high-quality teaching is the key to student achievement. This conclusion is reinforced by the data in Table 22, which show that 65% of respondents say that teachers should be paid even higher salaries for agreeing to teach in a school designated as in need of improvement.

TABLE 21. Do you think salaries for teachers in this community are too high, too low, or just about right?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Too high	6	6	6
Too low	59	58	60
Just about right	33	34	32
Don't know	2	2	2

Trend Data: Teacher Salaries, 1969 to 2003 (National Totals)

	'03 %	'90 %	'85 %	'84 %	'83 %	'81 %	'69 %
Too high	6	5	6	7	8	10	2
Too low	59	50	33	37	35	29	33
Just about right	33	31	43	41	31	41	43
Don't know	2	14	18	15	26	20	22

TABLE 22. In your opinion, should teachers be paid higher salaries as an incentive to teach in schools which have been identified as in need of improvement or not?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Yes, should	65	64	67
No, should not	33	34	32
Don't know	2	2	1



The Achievement Gap

Closing the Achievement Gap

Previous polls have made it clear that the public understands that there is a gap between the achievement of white students and that of Hispanic and black students. This poll sought to probe further by exploring both the closing of the gap and the factors that the public believes cause it to exist. Tables 23-25 deal with the importance of closing the gap and the extent to which the public sees funding as a factor in achieving that goal. The public has been clear and consistent regarding the importance of closing the gap since this question was first asked in 2001. This year, 71% of respondents say that it is very important to close the gap, and an additional 19% say it is somewhat important. This response is uniform across all demographic groups. The responses in Table 24 indicate that the public continues to attribute the gap to factors other than schooling. Eighty percent indicate that this is the case, while only 16% cite the quality of schooling. Nonwhites differ somewhat, with 33% designating the quality of schooling as related to the achievement gap. This response has also been consistent over the three years, although the 16% this year is actually down 13 points from a year ago. The data in Table 25 indicate that the public believes the gap can be narrowed without spending more money to help low-achieving students. Fifty-eight percent indicate that this is the case, while 39% say additional funding for these students is essential.

TABLE 23. There is a recognized academic achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students, with white students consistently outperforming black and Hispanic students. How important do you think it is to close this gap — very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'03 %	'02 %	'01 %	'03 %	'02 %	'01 %	'03 %	'02 %	'01 %
Very plus somewhat important	90	94	88	91	93	89	88	96	87
Very important	71	80	66	70	80	66	73	80	67
Somewhat important	19	14	22	21	13	23	15	16	20
Not too important	5	2	5	5	2	5	4	2	5
Not important at all	4	3	5	3	4	4	7	1	6
Don't know	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2

TABLE 24. In your opinion, is the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students mostly related to the quality of schooling received or mostly related to other factors?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'03 %	'02 %	'01 %	'03 %	'02 %	'01 %	'03 %	'02 %	'01 %
Mostly related to quality of schooling	16	29	21	15	31	20	18	22	22
Mostly related to other factors	80	66	73	80	64	72	80	75	74
Don't know	4	5	6	5	5	8	2	3	4

TABLE 25. Do you think it is possible or not possible to narrow the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students without spending more money than is currently being spent to help low-achieving students?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Yes, possible	58	56	62
No, not possible	39	41	36
Don't know	3	3	2



Factors Contributing to the Achievement Gap

The 2002 poll sought to find the factors that people think contribute to the achievement gap. Five factors were identified, and these were used in this year's poll to determine the importance assigned to each factor. The responses appear in Table 26. Table 27 uses the same factors but applies them to the achievement gap that exists between white students and Asian students, a gap in which the Asians come out ahead. With percentages ranging from 94% to 97%, the public identifies factors relating to parent involvement, home life, student interest, and community environment as very or somewhat important in explaining the gap between white students and black and Hispanic students. Regarding the reverse gap involving Asians and whites, the public places the same four factors at

the top, with percentages ranging from 82% to 97%. Amount of family income is at the bottom in both cases. This is somewhat surprising given the demonstrated link between family income and test scores.

TABLE 26. In your opinion, how important do you think each of the following factors is in contributing to the achievement gap between white children and black and Hispanic children — very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important?

	Very Plus Somewhat Important %	Very Important %	Somewhat Important %	Not Very Important %	Not At All Important %	Don't Know %
Amount of parent involvement	97	90	7	2	1	*
Home life and upbringing	97	87	10	2	1	*
Interest on the part of students themselves	95	80	15	3	1	1
Community environment	94	66	28	4	1	1
Racial bias	71	42	29	17	9	3
Amount of family income	66	26	40	23	10	1

*Less than one-half of 1%.



TABLE 27. There is also a recognized academic achievement gap between Asian students and white students, with Asian students consistently outperforming white students. How important do you think each of the following factors is in explaining this gap — very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all?

	Very Plus Somewhat Important %	Very Important %	Somewhat Important %	Not Very Important %	Not At All Important %	Don't Know %
Amount of parent involvement	95	83	12	2	2	1
Home life and upbringing	93	80	13	4	2	1
Interest on the part of students themselves	97	85	12	2	1	*
Community environment	82	49	33	13	4	1
Racial bias	57	30	27	24	17	2
Amount of family income	52	17	35	33	14	1

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Choice, Public and Private

Choosing a Private School to Attend at Public Expense

This year's poll included two questions dealing with the public's view of using public funds to finance attendance at private schools. The first is the trend question that has been asked in each year since 1995. A quick review of the trend line will show that support was reasonably stable in the late 1990s and has moved up and down since 2000 (Table 28). This year, support drops by eight points from last year, to 38%. The difference between the two political parties is evident here, with 48% of Republicans and 31% of Democrats in favor. The second question (Table 29) was asked specifically with regard to the Supreme Court decision last year that opened the door to the passage of voucher programs at the state level. Fifty-six percent of respondents indicate they would oppose this option in their state. Once again, the parties differ, with 53% of Republicans in favor, versus 31% of Democrats.

TABLE 28. Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?

	National Totals							
	'03 %	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'99 %	'98 %	'97 %	'96 %
Favor	38	46	34	39	41	44	44	36
Oppose	60	52	62	56	55	50	52	61
Don't know	2	2	4	5	4	6	4	3

TABLE 29. Last year's Supreme Court decision says that the U.S. Constitution does not prevent a state from offering vouchers that parents can use to send their students to private schools at public expense. Do you favor or oppose your state making such vouchers available?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Favor	42	39	46
Oppose	56	60	52
Don't know	2	1	2

The Effect of Vouchers on Achievement

Those who propose vouchers argue that they would produce improved student achievement for the schools to which students move and for the public schools. The theory regarding the latter is that public schools would fear the loss of students and would take steps to improve. Table 30 reports results of a question designed to measure the public's view of the overall impact of vouchers on schools in the community. The public is divided on the question, with 48% saying achievement would improve and an equal percentage saying it would get worse. Republicans are significantly more likely than Democrats to say that overall achievement would improve, by a margin of 55% to 41%. Tables 31 and 32 deal with the effect on those who move to private schools and those who stay in

the public schools. Fifty-four percent believe achievement would improve for those going to private schools, as compared to 26% who believe achievement would improve for those remaining in public schools. The 54% is down 11 points since 1997, while the 26% figure is an increase of nine points. Republicans are significantly more likely than Democrats to say that the achievement of those who move to private schools would improve (65% to 46%).

TABLE 30. In your opinion, would vouchers that allow parents to choose private schools improve student achievement in your community, overall, or not?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Improve	48	47	47
Would not improve	48	48	50
Don't know	4	5	3

TABLE 31. How about the students who used the vouchers to move to private schools. Do you think their academic achievement would improve, get worse, or remain the same?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'03	'97	'03	'97	'03	'97
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Improve	54	65	52	68	56	58
Get worse	4	4	4	4	4	4
Remain the same	37	28	40	25	35	35
Don't know	5	3	4	3	5	3

TABLE 32. How about the students who remain in the public schools. Do you think their academic achievement would improve, get worse, or remain the same?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'03	'97	'03	'97	'03	'97
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Improve	26	17	24	16	29	19
Get worse	12	11	13	11	10	11
Remain the same	59	70	60	70	57	68
Don't know	3	2	3	3	4	2

Choices the Public Might Make

Two final questions related to vouchers sought to determine the choices parents might make if given full-tuition vouchers to the school of their choice or half-tuition vouchers. The data in Table 33 indicate that, with full tuition available, 38% of respondents would choose a church-related private school, and 24% would choose a private school with no church affiliation. These percentages change significantly if the voucher covers only half the tuition, with 47% choosing to remain in the public schools (Table 34). It is interesting that, on the full-voucher question, 45% of Democrats would select a public school, as compared to 28% of Republicans.

TABLE 33. Suppose you had a school-age child and

were given a voucher covering full tuition that would permit you to send that child to any public, private, or church-related school of your choice. Which kind of school do you think you would choose?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
A public school	35	35	39
A church-related private school	38	37	38
A non-church-related private school	24	25	21
Don't know	3	3	2

TABLE 34. What if the voucher covered only half of the tuition, which do you think you would choose?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
A public school	47	45	55
A church-related private school	34	34	29
A non-church-related private school	17	19	15
Don't know	2	2	1

Problems Facing the Public Schools

The one question that has been asked in each of the 35 polls conducted since 1969 deals with the problems schools in the community face. It is a unique question in that it is often the only one for which those polled generate their own responses. This being the case, the percentage of mentions for any single problem is relatively low. Discipline was at the top of the list for 16 of the first 17 polls in this series. Drugs moved to the top of the list in 1986 and remained there for six years. Finance tied for the top in 2001 and took that position for itself in 2002. It solidifies that position this year with mentions by 25% of the respondents. Discipline is second with mentions by 16%, and overcrowded schools is third at 14%. No other problem attracts double-digit support. The once-dominant problem of drugs attracts only 9% of mentions, and fighting/violence/gangs is near the bottom with just 4%.

TABLE 35. What do you think are the biggest problems that the public schools of your community must deal with?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'03	'02	'01	'03	'02	'01	'03	'02	'01
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Lack of financial support/ funding/money	25	23	15	26	23	15	24	23	17
Lack of discipline, more control	16	17	15	17	18	17	13	13	10
Overcrowded schools	14	17	10	12	14	7	16	23	15
Use of drugs/dope	9	13	9	10	14	9	7	11	10
Difficulty getting good teachers/quality teachers	5	8	6	5	8	6	5	8	6
Standards/quality/basics	4	*	*	5	*	*	2	*	*
Fighting/violence/gangs	4	9	10	3	9	11	5	9	9
Low pay for teachers	4	*	*	4	*	*	3	*	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Public Expectations

Two questions were asked in this year's poll in an effort to gain some indication of the public's expectations regarding both school and student performance. Table 36 reports the opinion of respondents with regard to the number of schools not performing at an acceptable level in their state. Thirty-one percent place this number between 50% and 60%, and another 19% place it between 40% and 50%. These percentages seem high, given the grades the public assigns the schools. However, this question dealt with schools in the state, while the grading of the schools is based on those in the community. Table 37 reports the public's estimates regarding the percentage of students who would demonstrate proficiency on an English and math test based on high standards. Sixty-seven percent place the number above 60%. This question was focused on schools in the community, and that may well account for results that appear more positive.

TABLE 36. Forgetting the NCLB requirements for a moment, in your opinion, what percentage of the students in your state would you say are *not* performing at an acceptable level?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
50% to 60%	31	28	35
40% to 50%	19	20	18
30% to 40%	21	20	21
20% to 30%	12	11	13
Below 20%	10	11	8
Don't know	7	10	5

TABLE 37. Just your best guess, what percentage of students in a public school in your community would you expect to pass an English and math test, assuming it was based on high standards?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Above 80%	20	20	21
Above 70%	26	26	25
Above 60%	21	20	22
Above 50%	17	18	14
Below 50%	15	14	18
Don't know	1	2	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Miscellaneous Questions

There are always a few questions that do not seem to fit into any category. Tables 38-41 report on such questions. The first deals with the funding of the public schools. For many years, equity was the goal in school funding, and that meant providing the same number of dollars for each student regardless of where he or she lived or family income levels. That concept is now challenged by the idea of adequacy, which means providing varying amounts of dollars based on a student's educational needs. Fifty-two percent of respondents say the dollars should be the same, while 45% would vary them (Table 38). The second question explores reasons why some students

do not learn. The results are similar to those explaining the achievement gap, with lack of home and parental support and lack of student interest at the top. However, two factors related to schooling come into play, with 84% believing lack of discipline contributes either a great deal or a fair amount and 81% saying the same for the quality of teaching (Table 39). The third question asks about the four-day school week as a means of reacting to the funding shortage. Seventy-four percent of respondents reject this alternative (Table 40). Finally, a question was asked about how schools that do not meet NCLB standards will be described. Sixty-five percent of respondents say such schools will be described as "in need of improvement," while 32% say they will be described as "failing" (Table 41).

TABLE 38. In your opinion, which is the better way for your state to fund the public schools — provide equal dollars per student or vary the number of dollars to meet each student's educational needs?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Provide equal dollars per student	52	53	50
Vary the number of dollars	45	44	49
Don't know	3	3	1

TABLE 39. I am going to read a list of reasons that have been suggested as to why students fail to learn. As I read each reason, would you tell me how much you think it contributes to learning failures in the public schools in your community — a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or not at all?

	Great Deal Plus Fair Amount %	Great Deal %	Fair Amount %	Not Very Much %	Not At All %	Don't Know %
Lack of home or parental support	93	74	19	5	1	1
Lack of interest by the students themselves	90	60	30	8	1	1
Lack of discipline in the schools	84	60	24	10	5	1
Lack of good teaching	81	47	34	13	6	*
Lack of funding	78	45	33	14	7	1
Lack of community emphasis on education	78	43	35	15	6	1

*Less than one-half of 1%.

TABLE 40. As a means of saving money, some states are considering a four-day week consisting of longer school days. Would you favor or oppose such a plan in the public schools in your community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Favor	25	24	27
Oppose	74	74	72
Don't know	1	2	1

TABLE 41. In your opinion, which one of the following descriptions do you feel will be usually applied to schools that do not meet the standards of the NCLB Act?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
The school is in need of improvement	65	68	61
The school is failing	32	29	37
Don't know	3	3	2

Closing Statement

This poll reports public opinion on issues that are of major importance to decisions made every day regarding the public schools. The poll's authors believe that the findings accurately reflect the opinions expressed by those responding to the poll. The format is, however, carefully structured to allow the reader to make his or her own judgment on that question. It should be remembered that opinion does not necessarily reflect fact. Opinion is a snapshot of public attitudes at a particular point in time. While the matter may be open to question, the authors do not believe that public opinion should drive the policy and administrative decisions that govern the operation of the public schools. They do, however, recognize that those who ignore public opinion do so at their own peril. The wise course, when public support is missing, is to take time to build the support that will be essential to ultimate success.

Research Procedure

The Sample. The sample used in this survey embraced a total of 1,011 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 28 May to 18 June 2003.

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

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

Sampling Tolerances

In interpreting survey results, it should be borne in mind that all sample surveys are subject to sampling error, i.e., the extent to which the results may differ from what would be obtained if the whole population surveyed had been interviewed. The size of such sampling error depends largely on the number of interviews. For details and tables showing the confidence intervals for the data cited in this poll, please visit the Phi Delta Kappa website at <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kpoll0209sample.htm>.

Design of the Sample

For the 2003 survey the Gallup Organization used its standard national telephone sample, i.e., an unclustered, directory-assisted, random-digit telephone sample, based on a proportionate stratified sampling design.

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

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

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

Only working banks of telephone numbers were selected. Eliminating non-

working banks from the sample increased the likelihood that any sample telephone number would be associated with a residence.

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

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

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

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

Composition of the Sample

Adults		%	Education	
No children in school	65		Total college	58
Public school parents	32		College graduate	24
Nonpublic school parents	3		College incomplete	34
			Total high school	42
			High school graduate	33
			High school incomplete	9
Gender		%	Income	
Men	47		\$50,000 and over	39
Women	53		\$40,000-\$49,999	12
			\$30,000-\$39,999	13
Race		%	\$20,000-\$29,999	13
White	83		Under \$20,000	17
Nonwhite	15		Undesignated	6
Black	11		Region	
Undesignated	1		East	23
Age		%	Midwest	24
18-29 years	20		South	31
30-49 years	41		West	22
50 and over	38		Community Size	
Undesignated	1		Urban	25
			Suburban	51
			Rural	24

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 \$60. For information about using PACE materials, write or phone Marcia Kazmierzak at Phi Delta Kappa International, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. Ph. 800/766-1156.

How to Order the Poll

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

If faster delivery is desired, phone the Shipping Department at the number listed below. Persons who wish to order the 309-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.

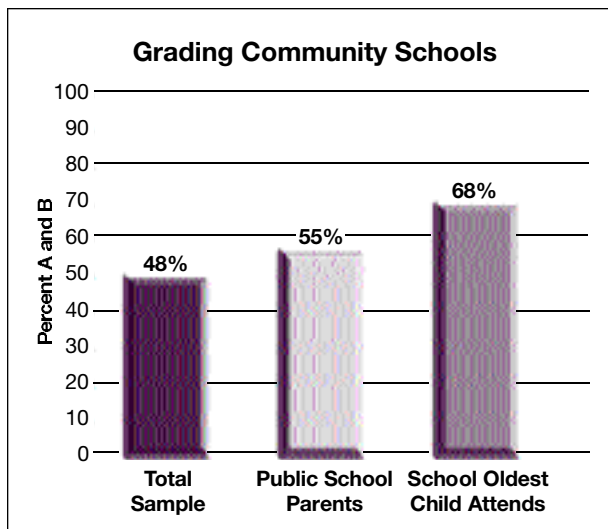
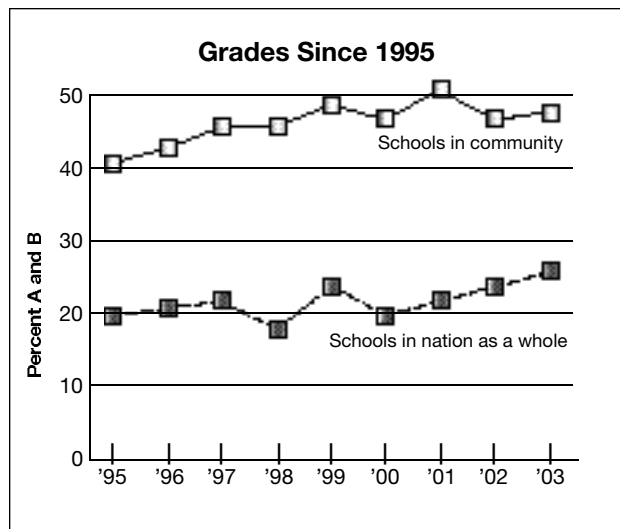
POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Of the 35th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll

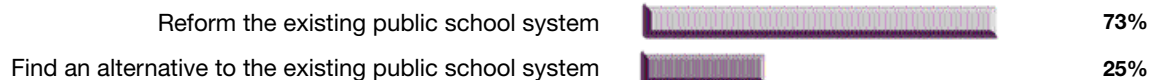
These four pages highlight the poll findings that have particularly strong implications for those making decisions regarding the public schools.

Grading the Public Schools

Findings and Implications: *The public has high regard for the public schools, wants needed improvement to come through those schools, and has little interest in seeking alternatives. Given this understanding, the quickest and best way to improve student achievement is to focus efforts on the existing public schools.*

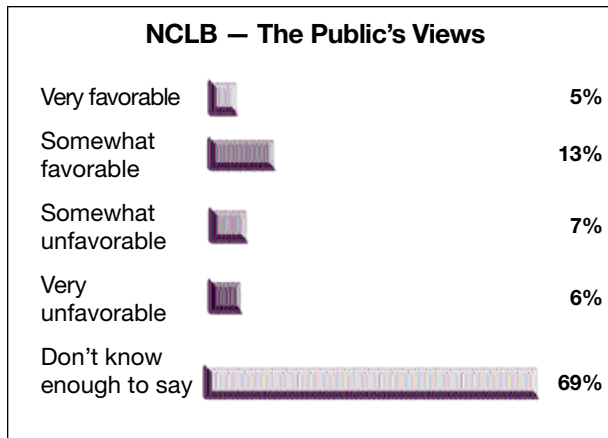
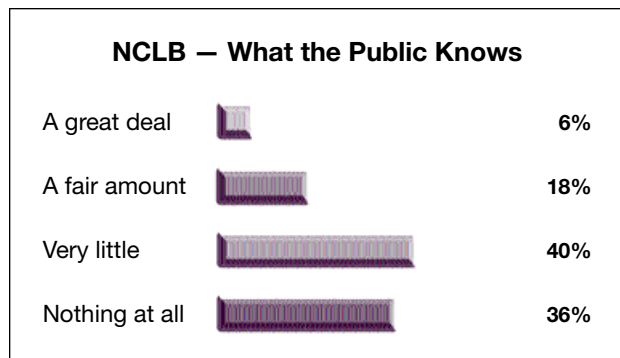


To improve schools in America:



No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Findings and Implications: *The public sees itself as uninformed on NCLB, with more than two-thirds saying they lack the information to decide whether their view is favorable or unfavorable. The public will formulate its opinion of NCLB as it becomes more familiar with the law itself and with the results it produces. The impact on schools in the local community will be a key factor.*



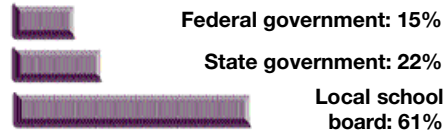
No Child Left Behind — A Look Ahead

Findings and Implications: Responses to questions related to strategies associated with NCLB suggest that greater familiarity with the law is unlikely to lead to greater public support. The public will be even more resistant if there is a discrepancy between the government's judgment and the community's perception of the local schools.

NCLB strategy: Have the federal government directly involved in determining the curricular emphasis, the testing program, and other means of assessment at the state and local levels.

Public view: Asked which level of government should exercise the greatest influence on what should be taught in the local schools, the public selects the local school board.

Greatest influence on local schools



NCLB strategy: Judge a school by whether a fixed percentage of the overall student group and of each subgroup passes a standardized test.

Public view: Eighty-four percent say a school should be judged by the improvement shown by students, measured from the point at which they start.

Schools should be judged on improvement



NCLB strategy: Determine whether a school is in need of improvement using a single standardized test given annually.

Public view: Sixty-six percent believe a single test will not provide a fair picture of whether a school needs improvement.

Single test does not show a fair picture



NCLB strategy: Base the determination as to whether a school is in need of improvement on standardized testing in English and math only.

Public view: Eighty-three percent say the determination as to whether a school is in need of improvement should include other subjects in addition to English and math.

Include other subjects in addition to math and English



NCLB strategy: Judge each student's proficiency in English and math using a single test given annually.

Public view: Seventy-two percent say it is not possible to judge a student's proficiency in English and math based on the results of a single test.

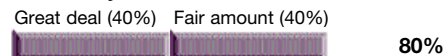
Proficiency can't be judged by a single test



NCLB strategy: Judge a school's performance based on test results in English and math.

Public view: Forty percent say they are concerned a great deal that judging a school's performance on English and math only will mean less emphasis on art, music, history, and other subjects. Forty percent say they have a fair amount of concern, bringing the total expressing concern to 80%.

Concerned about lack of emphasis on other subjects



NCLB strategy: Offer parents in a school designated as in need of improvement the option of transferring their student to a school not in need of improvement.

Public view: Given the option of transferring a student out of the school or having additional efforts made to help the student in the present school, 74% say that, if they had a student in a school in need of improvement, they would opt for additional efforts to help the student in the school.

Prefer additional efforts to help students in the current school



NCLB strategy: Judge the performance of special education students using the same fixed percentage of students passing as is required for all other students and groups.

Public view: Sixty-seven percent say special education students should not have to meet the same standard that is used for all other students.

Should be different standards for special education students



NCLB strategy: Base the judgment of a school's performance on standardized test results.

Public view: Sixty-six percent say the emphasis on standardized tests will encourage teachers to teach to the test. Sixty percent say this will be a bad thing.

Encourages "teaching to the test"



"Teaching to the test" is a bad thing



Teachers and Teacher Salaries

Findings and Implications: *The public is concerned about getting and keeping good teachers, thinks teacher salaries are too low, and supports paying higher salaries to teachers who are teaching in more challenging situations. Programs carefully tailored to meet these concerns are likely to enjoy public support.*

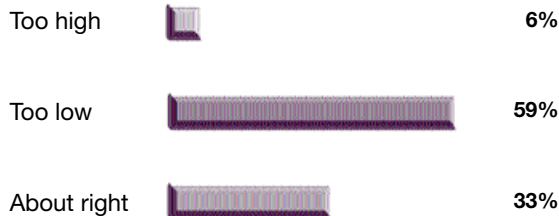
Do local schools have trouble getting good teachers?



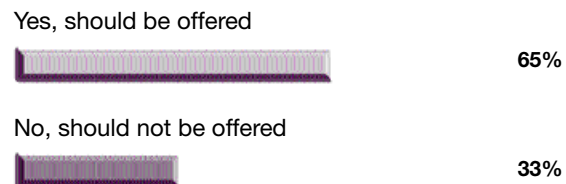
Do local schools have trouble keeping good teachers?



Teacher Salaries



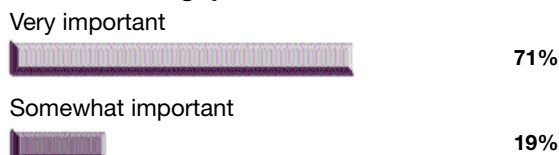
Incentives to Teach in Schools Needing Improvement



The Achievement Gap

Findings and Implications: *The public believes closing the achievement gap is important, does not attribute the gap to the quality of schooling received, and believes it can be narrowed without additional funding. Given the public's preference for seeing improvement come through the existing public schools, the findings suggest strongly that closing the gap should be a collective effort involving the public schools and all those responsible for child rearing and development.*

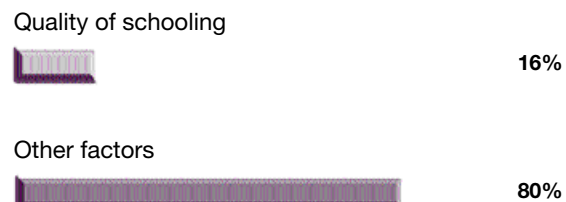
How important is it to close the achievement gap?



Can the gap be narrowed without more funding?



To what do you attribute the gap?



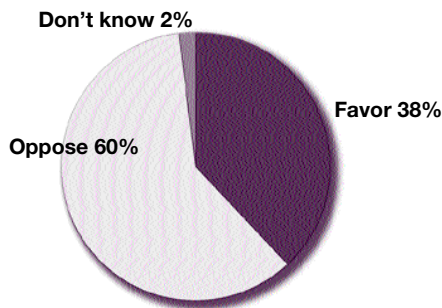
Top factors:

*Lack of parent involvement
Home life and upbringing
Lack of student interest
Community environment*

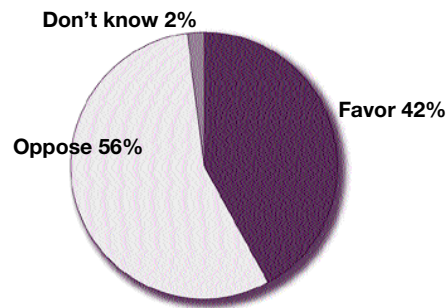
Choice — Public and Private

Findings and Implications: A majority of respondents are opposed to vouchers, would oppose having their state adopt vouchers despite the 2002 U.S. Supreme Court decision stating that voucher plans do not violate the U.S. Constitution, and offer mixed views on whether vouchers would improve student achievement in the community. Nothing in the poll results indicates that support for vouchers is increasing or that the level of support received any boost from the Supreme Court decision. Given the way support for vouchers has gone up and down in this poll in the last few years, it would be a mistake to make too much of the fact that support for permitting students and parents to choose private schools to attend at public expense dropped by 8% in this poll.

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



Do you favor or oppose the voucher program the Supreme Court says is permissible under the U.S. Constitution?



What effect would offering vouchers have on student achievement in the community?

	Community Overall
	%
Improve	48
Not Improve	48

	Those Moving To Private Schools	Those Staying In Public Schools
	%	%
Improve	54	26
Get worse	4	12
Stay the same	37	59

Concluding Statement

These are times of opportunity and challenge for the public schools. The opportunity springs from the growing awareness both inside and outside the education community of the importance of having each student move through the school experience and into adulthood armed with a high-quality education. The challenge lies in the lack of agreement on the best means for reaching that goal. Given these conditions, policy makers would do well to listen closely to what the public believes and what it is likely to support.

The poll results reported herein leave no doubt that the

public wants improvement to come through the existing public school system. It is also clear that the public wants the emphasis to be on identifying those schools and students in need of improvement and then providing the help and assistance needed. NCLB offers real promise, with its focus on the need for every student to succeed in school, on the disaggregation of student test scores, and on accountability for results. The public has, however, identified the problems with NCLB. Those desiring to see NCLB's bright promise realized would be wise to hear and heed the public's message.