

The 37th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll Of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

By Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup



THIS IS the 37th consecutive year for this poll. Its early success can be credited to George Gallup, Sr. Gallup considered it his poll, picked the panel to select the questions, oversaw the surveying, analyzed the results, and wrote the report. The close relationship between Phi Delta Kappa and the Gallup Organization continued after the death of George Gallup, Sr., with his son, Alec Gallup, representing that organization. Since 1992, I have had the privilege of directing the poll for PDK. Alec and I share the beliefs that the procedures used minimize the possibility of bias in the poll and present the results in user-friendly fashion. The Gallup Organization has absolute authority over the phrasing of the questions and certifies that the data support the findings and conclusions. Alec and I use the executive summary to state our best judgment as to what the data mean. Each conclusion cites the table or tables containing the data on which it is based. Some readers tell us that they read the tables first, draw their own conclusions, and then compare those with the ones we have drawn. Alec and I believe the information in this poll is unusually significant and commend it to your use. — LCR

Executive Summary

In this Executive Summary we present a number of findings and conclusions of this, the 37th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. Some conclusions strike us as more significant than others. Conclusions 10 and 11, for example, regarding the achievement gap, and conclusions 12 through 16, dealing with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, seem worthy of special notice. That the public is so strong in its support for closing the achievement gap should send a clear message to policy makers. There is also a message in the conclusions related to NCLB in that they note the public's disagreement with the law's strategies and, at the same time, suggest that there is still time for midcourse corrections. Again, we feel that policy makers would do well to heed the message.

Another important contribution of the poll results is that they should help to destroy one of the myths surrounding the public schools: that the public schools are losing public support. The trend lines in this poll suggest the exact opposite. The grades the public assigns the schools remain as high as ever and are truly impressive when public school parents give their evaluation; the public continues to express a strong preference for change through the existing public schools; support for choice shows no sign of increasing and could be said to be lagging; and it is the public schools to which the public turns for closing the achievement gap.

Finally, before we move to the specific conclusions, it seems necessary to comment on the important distinction between the nation's schools and schools in the community. These polls have repeatedly documented that the public has a low opinion of the nation's schools and a high opinion of schools in the local community. The media, some education experts, and some government leaders base their comments on the nation's schools and are then surprised when they do not resonate with a public that is concerned primarily with the schools in the community, schools that generally draw approval. As long as those seeking to improve the public schools make their case on the supposed inadequacy of the schools in the community, support for improvement will be hard to build.

We turn now to the 20 conclusions that we believe summarize the most significant findings of this year's poll. The data supporting each conclusion are provided, and the tables

in which additional supporting data will be found are cited by number.

1. Lack of financial support is solidly entrenched in the public mind as the major problem facing the nation's public schools. Responding to an open-ended question, 20% of those surveyed mention lack of financial support. This problem has been among the top problems mentioned for 15 straight years and has been the top problem for six years running. This year, it attracts almost twice the number of mentions of any other problem. (See Table 1.)

2. The high level of support Americans give to schools in their community is unchanged, and support for the public schools grows in direct proportion to the closeness of respondents to those schools. In this poll, 24% assign an A or a B to the nation's schools; 48% award an A or a B to schools in the community. This figure rises to 57% when pub-

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The following individuals worked with Alec Gallup and the Gallup Organization to select and frame the questions asked in the 37th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools.

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lic school parents grade the schools in the community and to 69% when parents grade the school their oldest child attends. (See Tables 2, 3, and 4.)

3. The public's strong preference is for improvement that comes by reforming the current public schools rather than by finding an alternative system. Asked to choose between the two options, the public has, since this question was first asked, consistently chosen reform through the existing system. (See Table 6.)

4. The public opposes permitting parents and students to choose to attend private schools at public expense. Fifty-seven percent of respondents oppose making this choice available as compared to 38% who favor it. The percentage in favor peaked at 46% in 2002 and has declined by 8% since that time. (See Table 7.)

5. The major reason cited for supporting private school attendance at public expense is the belief that achievement is better in private schools. Forty-nine percent of those supporting this alternative point to better achievement, 18% cite safety, and 25% mention receptivity to religious practices. (See Table 8.)

6. A plurality of respondents support the idea of charter schools. However, strong majorities say that such schools should be accountable to the state in the same way as regular public schools and should not be created if doing so means less funding for regular public schools. While 49% favor charter schools, 80% say they should be accountable to the state just as regular public schools are accountable. In addition, 65% of respondents oppose having charter schools in their community if it means reducing regular public school funding. (See Tables 9, 10, and 11.)

7. The public believes that the amount of achievement testing in schools is just about right, and a majority of respondents support additional testing in three grades at the high school level. The 40% saying there is about the right amount of testing and the 17% saying there is not enough constitute a majority in support of testing at least at current levels, while 67% support testing in high school at grades 9, 10, and 11. (See Tables 12 and 13.)

8. The public is divided regarding the use of student scores on standardized tests for the purpose of evaluating teachers and principals. Fifty-two percent believe student performance on standardized tests should be one measurement used in determining a teacher's ability; 44% say it should not. As for evaluating principals, 50% endorse taking student test scores into consideration, while 46% disapprove. It is important to note that the question asks if standardized test results should be "one measure." (See Tables 14 and 15.)

9. The public believes that the current emphasis on standardized tests will lead teachers to teach to the test and does not regard this as a positive outcome. Fifty-eight percent say that teaching to the test will be encouraged, and 54% say that this is a bad thing. (See Tables 16 and 17.)

10. The public approaches consensus on the importance of closing the achievement gap, attributes the gap to factors other than schooling, believes parents and students have more to do with whether students learn than teachers, but still believes that it is the responsibility of the schools to close the gap.

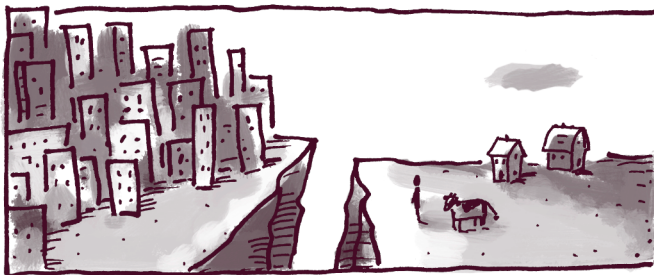
- Ninety percent say it is either very important or somewhat important to close the gap.
- Seventy-five percent relate the gap to factors other than

the quality of schooling received.

- Sixty-three percent say that parents or students themselves determine student performance.
- Nevertheless, 58% say that it is the responsibility of the public schools to close the gap. (See Tables 18, 19, 20, and 21.)

11. The public believes that the achievement gap can be substantially narrowed while maintaining high standards for all students. Eighty-one percent of respondents hold the view that the gap can be narrowed without sacrificing high standards. (See Table 22.)

12. The fact that so much of the public still considers it-uniformed regarding No Child Left Behind (NCLB) can



be taken as reason to regard current opinions as preliminary. The public's final judgment of NCLB is presumably yet to be made. While the number saying they know a great deal or fair amount about NCLB has grown from 24% in 2003 to 40% in this year's survey, 59% say they know very little or nothing at all. (See Table 23.)

13. We drew the conclusion in 2003 that the public's dissatisfaction with the strategies used in NCLB gave reason to believe that greater familiarity with the act was unlikely to bring approval. Based on the findings in this year's poll, that conclusion is even more valid today. Forty-five percent in the current poll still say that they do not know enough about NCLB to express an opinion. Twenty-eight percent of respondents say that their view is either very favorable or somewhat favorable, while 27% say that it is somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable. More significant is the fact that among those professing a "great deal" of knowledge about NCLB, 57% view it unfavorably, while 36% view it favorably. (See Table 24.)

14. The NCLB strategies are frequently out of step with approaches favored by the public.

- NCLB uses a single test to determine if a school is in need of improvement. Sixty-eight percent say that a single test cannot give a fair picture. (See Table 25.)
- NCLB tests only English and math to determine if a school is in need of improvement. Eighty percent say testing English and math only will not give a fair picture. This rises to 87% within the "great deal" of knowledge group. (See Table 26.)
- NCLB gives parents of a child attending a school found to be in need of improvement the chance to transfer their child to a school making "adequate yearly progress" (AYP). Seventy-nine percent say they would prefer to have additional help given to their child in his or her own school. (See Table 28.)
- NCLB requires that test scores be broken out into eight groups based on ethnicity, English-speaking ability, poverty level, and disability status and reported separately

by each group. A plurality of 48% opposes this requirement, with most of that group saying that they do so because they believe all students are equal — and presumably should be treated in the same way. Support for reporting scores separately, however, is strong among those claiming knowledge of NCLB. (See Tables 29 and 30.)

- With limited exceptions, NCLB requires students enrolled in special education to meet the same standards as other students. Sixty-eight percent say these students should not be held to the same standards. (See Table 31.)
- NCLB includes the scores of special education students in determining whether a school is or is not in need of improvement. Sixty-two percent say these scores should not be included. (See Table 32.)
- NCLB designates a school in need of improvement if one group fails to make AYP for two consecutive years. The public is evenly split on whether this should happen if the special education group is the only one failing. However, a majority of the “great deal” of knowledge group says that scores of the special education group alone should not determine the designation. (See Table 33.)
- NCLB determines whether a school has made AYP based on the percentage of students meeting fixed goals in passing English and math. Eighty-five percent believe that it would be better to base AYP on *improvement* shown during the year. (See Table 35.)
- NCLB requires that all of the groups meet the same fixed goals regardless of how far a given group starts from the goals. Sixty-three percent say the goals should vary according to where the school starts. (See Table 36.)

15. The public is split as to whether teachers and principals will be less willing to accept special education students at their schools knowing that doing so could reduce their chances of making AYP. However, those professing knowledge of NCLB are more likely to say that teachers and principals will be less willing to accept these students. The public splits on this question, with 47% saying that teachers and principals will be less willing to accept special education students and 45% saying that it will make no difference. Sixty-two percent of those in the “great deal” of knowledge group and 56% of those in the “fair amount” of knowledge group say that teachers and principals will be less willing to accept these students. (See Table 34.)

16. The public is equally divided on whether a large number of school failures would reflect shortcomings of the schools or of the law. Forty-five percent believe that the public schools should be blamed if a large number of schools fail to meet requirements. Forty-three percent say it is the law that should be blamed. (See Table 37.)

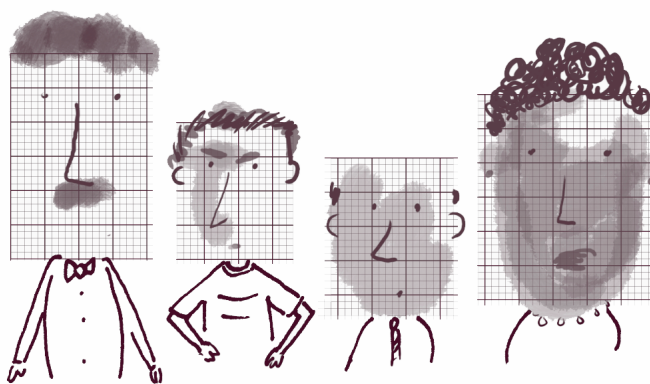
17. The public’s concerns regarding NCLB are consistent with the facts that the public favors a curriculum that offers a wide variety of courses and would prefer to see a child of theirs be active in extracurricular activities and earn average grades in school as compared to earning A grades but not participating in activities. Asked to choose between a wide variety of courses and a concentration of courses, 61% of respondents opt for a wide variety of courses. Given a choice between having a child of theirs earn A grades and having a child earn average grades but be active in extracurricular

activities, 64% choose average grades and extracurricular activities. (See Tables 38 and 39.)

18. The public does not believe that the increasingly common practice of pursuing postsecondary education online should lead to a requirement that each high school student take at least one course online. Fifty-six percent of respondents say they would not require each high school student to take one course online. (See Table 40.)

19. The public believes that students who do not speak English should learn to do so in public school classes before enrolling in regular classes. Sixty-one percent of respondents support requiring non-English-speaking students to learn English in public school classes before enrolling in regular classes. (See Table 41.)

20. Almost two-thirds of those surveyed would like to see a child of theirs take up teaching as a career. Sixty-two percent of respondents endorse teaching as a career for their child. (See Table 42.)



Problems and Assessment

The Biggest Problem

The question asked in every year since 1969 gives those surveyed the chance to mention the biggest problem the schools in their communities face. The public is consistent and slow to change. Discipline topped the list for the first 16 years of the poll. Use of drugs then occupied the top by itself until 1991, when lack of financial support drew into a tie. Lack of financial support has been unchallenged as the top problem since 2000.

TABLE 1. What do you think are the biggest problems the public schools of your community must deal with?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %
Lack of financial support/ funding/money	20	21	25	19	22	26	21	20	24
Overcrowded schools	11	10	14	9	9	12	15	13	16
Lack of discipline, more control	10	10	16	12	10	17	8	8	13
Use of drugs/dope	9	7	9	9	7	10	8	7	7

Grading the Public Schools

Three questions dealing directly with the public's assessment of its schools trace back to the 1980s. The data are reported in Tables 2, 3, and 4. This year's responses vary little from recent years. Twenty-four percent give the nation's schools an A or a B. The percentage rises to 48% for schools in the community, to 57% when public school parents grade their community's schools, and to 69% when parents grade the school their oldest child attends. The long-term trend line for community schools shows the percentage assigning an A or a B at 41% in 1990, 49% in 1999, and 48% in 2005. In addition to the three longtime questions, respondents to this year's poll were asked a new question regarding the effectiveness of community schools in preparing students for employment after graduation. The data in Table 5 show that 41% assign the schools an A or a B in preparing students for employment.

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

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'05 %	'04 %	'05 %	'04 %	'05 %	'04 %
A & B	48	47	45	42	57	61
A	12	13	9	11	20	17
B	36	34	36	31	37	44
C	29	33	29	37	29	24
D	9	10	9	9	8	10
FAIL	5	4	4	3	5	5
Don't know	9	6	13	9	1	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

TABLE 3. 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	
	'05 %	'04 %	'05 %	'04 %	'05 %	'04 %
A & B	24	26	24	28	26	22
A	2	2	2	2	3	3
B	22	24	22	26	23	19
C	46	45	47	45	42	44
D	13	13	14	13	8	13
FAIL	4	4	3	3	6	6
Don't know	13	12	12	11	18	15

TABLE 4. Using the A, B, C, D or FAIL scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?

	Public School Parents	
	'05 %	'04 %
A & B	69	70
A	31	24
B	38	46
C	21	16
D	6	8
FAIL	4	4
Don't know	*	2

*Less than one-half of 1%.

COMMENTARY: AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE

Since its inception, state education policy makers have looked to the annual PDK/Gallup poll to garner a clear picture of the public's attitudes toward public education. As in years past, the findings of the 2005 poll communicate an important message. The findings affirm the approaches to school reform that many states have adopted, including high standards and meaningful accountability for all students. The poll results reflect an understanding on the part of the public of the challenges our nation's schools face. And the results send an unmistakable signal to education leaders and policy makers at the local, state, and national level that the public believes in the institution of public schools and that we as a nation have the capacity and responsibility to transform them from within.

Members of the public articulate the conviction that the achievement gap can be closed and that it can be closed within the current system of public schooling. They understand that it takes resources to provide a high-quality education to every student, and they believe that a comprehensive public school experience includes subject matter beyond mathematics and English and provides for co-curricular activities. Clearly the public is not interested in policies that divide, but in policies and practices that get results. — **Brenda Lilienthal Welburn**, executive director, National Association of State Boards of Education, Alexandria, Va.

TABLE 5. What grade would you give the public schools in your community for preparing students for employment following graduation from high school?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
A & B	41	39	43
A	9	8	12
B	32	31	31
C	32	33	29
D	10	10	10
FAIL	7	6	11
Don't know	10	12	7

*Less than one-half of 1%.

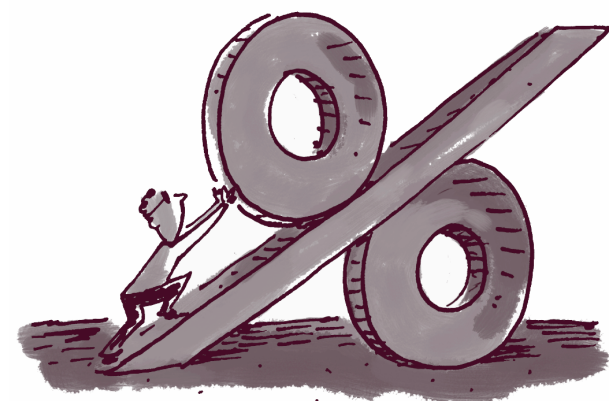
School Improvement and School Choice

Source of School Improvement

Taking as a given the public's desire to see improvement, the 1997 poll queried respondents as to whether they wanted that improvement to come by reforming the existing public schools or by finding an alternative system. Seventy-one percent said in 1997 that reform should come through the existing schools. That percentage has changed little in the intervening years and now stands at 68%. The fact that over two-thirds of Americans want change to come through the existing schools provides a benchmark against which proposals for change can be assessed.

TABLE 6. 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				
	'05	'04	'03	'02	'01	'05	'04	'03	'02	'01	'05	'04	'03	'02	'01
Reforming existing system	68	66	73	69	72	67	63	73	69	73	72	72	73	69	73
Finding alternative system	23	26	25	27	24	23	28	24	26	23	22	21	25	27	25
Don't know	9	8	2	4	4	10	9	3	5	4	6	7	2	4	2



Private School at Public Expense

Two possible alternatives to regular public schools — private school choice and charter schools — are covered in Tables 7 through 11. Table 7 reports on this poll's trend question related to choice. Respondents are asked whether they favor or oppose permitting parents to have their child attend a private school at public expense. This year's percentage in support is the lowest since 2001, 38%. The percentage opposed is up to 57% from 54% in 2004. This year's poll also explored why attendance at private schools is favored by some respondents. Forty-nine percent cite better student achievement at private schools, and 25% attribute their support to private schools' greater receptiveness to religious practices.

TABLE 7. Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?

	National Totals							
	'05	'04	'03	'02	'01	'00	'99	'98
Favor	38	42	38	46	34	39	41	44
Oppose	57	54	60	52	62	56	55	50
Don't know	5	4	2	2	4	5	4	6

TABLE 8. (Asked of those in favor.) Which of the following statements comes closest to indicating why you favor permitting parents to choose a private school at public expense?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Student achievement will be better in private schools	49	48	52
Private schools are safer	18	17	18
Private schools are more receptive to religious practices	25	24	25
Don't know	8	11	5

Charter Schools

The next three tables deal with the charter school alternative. Started in 1992, charter schools are considered public schools. Their supposed advantage is that they operate with fewer rules and more flexibility. The data in Table 9 suggest that about half of the public supports the concept of charter schools. However, 80% of respondents say that charter schools should be accountable to the state in the same way as other public schools. This is significant in that it seems contrary to the greater flexibility that is one of the reasons for organizing such schools. The response to a final question indicates that a majority of the public would oppose operating charter schools if it meant reduced funding for regular public schools.

TABLE 9. As you may know, charter schools operate under a charter or contract that frees them from many of the state regulations imposed on public schools and permits them to operate independently. Do you favor or oppose the idea of charter schools?

	National Totals				No Children In School				Public School Parents			
	'05	'02	'01	'00	'05	'02	'01	'00	'05	'02	'01	'00
Favor	49	44	42	42	49	44	40	42	48	44	43	40
Oppose	41	43	49	47	40	43	51	47	43	44	47	47
Don't know	10	13	9	11	11	13	9	11	9	12	10	13

TABLE 10. Do you think that charter schools should be accountable to the state in the way regular public schools are accountable?

	National Totals				No Children In School				Public School Parents			
	'05	'02	'01	'00	'05	'02	'01	'00	'05	'02	'01	'00
Should be accountable	80	77	77	79	79	78	77	78	81	77	77	81
Should not	14	19	18	17	14	19	18	18	14	19	18	14
Don't know	6	4	5	4	7	3	5	4	5	4	5	5

TABLE 11. Would you favor charter schools in your community if funding them meant reducing the amount of funds for the regular public schools — or not?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'05	'02	'05	'02	'05	'02
Favor	28	30	29	31	26	25
Oppose	65	65	63	64	69	70
Don't know	7	5	8	5	5	5

Testing

Amount of Testing

The testing mandated by NCLB and additional testing required by state-level initiatives have meant that the use of standardized testing to drive instruction has increased. The trend question reported in Table 12 assesses the public's opinion on the amount of testing. The percentage saying there is too much testing is up 6% since 2000, while the percentage saying there is about the right amount is down by 3%. That suggests a slight movement in the direction of concern about too much testing. That concern however, is countered by the fact that two-thirds support President Bush's proposal for testing in grades 9, 10, and 11.

TABLE 12. Now, here are some questions about testing. In your opinion, is there too much emphasis on achievement testing in the public schools in your community, not enough emphasis on testing, or about the right amount?

	National Totals					No Children In School					Public School Parents				
	'05 %	'04 %	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'05 %	'04 %	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'05 %	'04 %	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %
Too much	36	32	31	31	30	35	30	30	29	28	39	36	32	36	34
Not enough	17	22	19	22	23	17	23	20	22	26	17	20	14	20	19
About the right amount	40	40	47	44	43	39	40	46	45	41	43	43	54	43	46
Don't know	7	6	3	3	4	9	7	4	4	5	1	1	*	1	1

*Less than one-half of 1%.

TABLE 13. The No Child Left Behind law currently requires testing in one grade in high school. A proposal has been made to expand the testing to include grades 9, 10, and 11. Do you favor or oppose this proposal?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Favor	67	66	68
Oppose	28	28	30
Don't know	5	6	2

Testing and High-Stakes Decisions

One result of the growing emphasis on accountability has been an increase in the use of standardized tests for making high-stakes decisions involving schools and students. Several instances of this practice will be dealt with in the subsequent section on NCLB. The four tables that follow relate to the use of standardized test results in evaluating teachers and principals and the extent to which high-stakes uses encourage teaching to the test. Table 14 deals with the public's view of using standardized test data to assess teacher performance. Fifty-two percent support such use. Similarly, 50% of the public supports using student test results for evaluating principals. Tables 16 and 17 summarize the responses on the issues of teaching to the tests. A majority of respondents believe that the emphasis on standardized test results will cause teachers to teach to the test, and 54% say this is a bad thing.

TABLE 14. In your opinion, should one of the measurements of a teacher's quality be based on how well his or her students perform on standardized tests or not?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'05 %	'04 %	'05 %	'04 %	'05 %	'04 %
Yes, should	52	49	53	50	52	49
No, should not	44	47	43	45	46	49
Don't know	4	4	4	5	2	2

TABLE 15. How about school principals? In your opinion, should one of the measurements of a principal's quality be based on how well the students in his or her school perform on standardized tests?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'05 %	'04 %	'05 %	'04 %	'05 %	'04 %
Yes, should	50	47	51	47	47	48
No, should not	46	50	44	50	51	51
Don't know	4	3	5	3	2	1

COMMENTARY: FACING A MESSY REALITY

The American public doesn't know a lot about No Child Left Behind (NCLB), has mixed feelings about the law itself, and is dubious about the statute's machinery. These results aren't shocking. The implications could be another story.

While the public embraces educational accountability in principle, it always hesitates when faced with the messy reality. The poll results depict antipathy toward key NCLB components, including the emphasis on math and English assessment, use of subgroups, and uniform state performance standards for schools and students. Suggesting discomfort with the most basic tenets of performance-based accountability, respondents were evenly split on whether student achievement should be one measure of teacher or principal quality.

Most respondents think their schools are fine and that schools have a pretty limited ability to close the achievement gap. Meanwhile, the most commonly cited educational problem is insufficient funding. Cumulatively, these beliefs undermine the case for performance-based accountability — which presumes that schools are underperforming, that they can address achievement gaps, and that the key problems are institutional and organizational.

This skepticism isn't about to melt away. Respondents who know "a great deal" about NCLB are no more supportive of its provisions — aside from the requirement to disaggregate performance data by student subgroups — than anyone else. Whether proponents can find a way to persuade the public that NCLB is necessary, effective, and sensibly designed will likely determine the fate of this landmark legislation. — **Frederick M. Hess, director of education policy studies, American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C.**

TABLE 16. 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	
	'05	'03	'05	'03	'05	'03
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Will encourage teachers to teach to the tests	58	66	57	64	60	68
Will not have this effect	33	30	32	32	35	27
Don't know	9	4	11	4	5	5

TABLE 17. 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	
	'05	'03	'05	'03	'05	'03
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Good thing	39	39	36	38	45	40
Bad thing	54	60	55	61	51	58
Don't know	7	1	9	1	4	2



The Achievement Gap

The achievement gap — white students outperforming black and Hispanic students and non-poverty-level students outperforming those from poverty-level homes — is present in all states. This poll has consistently delved into the public’s views on what causes the gap and who is responsible for closing it. Table 18 deals with a trend question on the importance of closing the gap. For four years running, some 9 of 10 respondents indicate that it is very important or somewhat important to close the gap. The results reported in Tables 19 and 20 make it clear that the public does not see the schools as responsible for the gap. On the contrary, the percentage blaming the gap on the quality of schooling is down 12 points since 2002. Data in Table 20 may explain this belief, with 63% of respondents saying parents or students are responsible for what students learn and only 33% saying teachers. But the majority of the public nonetheless believes that schools are responsible for closing the gap, and 81% believe substantial progress in doing so can be made while maintaining high standards.

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

	National Totals				No Children In School				Public School Parents			
	'05	'04	'03	'02	'05	'04	'03	'02	'05	'04	'03	'02
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very + somewhat important	90	88	90	94	89	89	91	93	89	89	88	96
Very important	63	64	71	80	63	65	70	80	62	63	73	80
Somewhat important	27	24	19	14	26	24	21	13	27	26	15	16
Not too important	3	5	5	2	2	4	5	2	5	3	4	2
Not at all important	5	5	4	3	6	5	3	4	4	7	7	1
Don't know	2	2	1	1	3	2	1	1	2	1	1	1

TABLE 19. 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			
	'05	'04	'03	'02	'05	'04	'03	'02	'05	'04	'03	'02
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Mostly related to quality of schooling received	17	19	16	29	17	19	15	31	17	20	18	22
Mostly related to other factors	75	74	80	66	75	73	80	64	75	76	80	75
Don't know	8	7	4	5	8	8	5	5	8	4	2	3

TABLE 20. In your opinion, who is most important in determining how well or how poorly students perform in school — the students themselves, the students’ teachers, or the students’ parents?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'05	'04	'05	'04	'05	'04
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Students themselves	20	22	20	23	20	21
Students’ teachers	33	30	32	31	35	29
Students’ parents	43	45	44	42	41	48
Don't know	4	3	4	4	4	2

TABLE 21. In your opinion, is it the responsibility of the public schools to close the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students or not?

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

TABLE 22. Do you believe that the achievement gap can be narrowed substantially while maintaining high standards for all children or not?

	National Totals	No Children In School	Public School Parents
	%	%	%
Can be narrowed	81	83	78
Cannot be narrowed	15	13	19
Don't know	4	4	3

COMMENTARY: LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC

This year's PDK/Gallup poll, like so many polls before it, reaffirms that the vast majority of the American people support our public schools. Critics of public education need to listen hard to what the American people are saying: help us improve the system, don't walk away from it.

The public also recognizes the direct link between maintaining high standards, investing in public education, and closing the achievement gap. For almost a decade, there has been an intense national focus on making sure that all children can read by the end of the third grade. This bipartisan commitment of extra resources, focus, and expertise spans two Administrations. As a result, reading scores for the National Assessment of Educational Progress are up for 9-year-olds. Funding matters in education, especially if we want to close the achievement gap for older students.

Testing is necessary, the public tells us, but an overemphasis on standardized tests is a growing concern. Teaching to the test is not the answer. The public senses that this narrow focus is causing America's students to lose out on music, art, civics, foreign language, and other learning opportunities that help them grow to be well-rounded individuals and better citizens.

The public, of course, is correct. We should respond by shifting our focus away from standardized testing and placing a greater emphasis on quality teaching and making our schools exciting community learning centers. This will require some midcourse corrections in NCLB. — **Richard W. Riley**, former U.S. secretary of education.

No Child Left Behind

NCLB was signed into law on 8 January 2002 and was explored in depth for the first time in this poll later that year. The results then led to the conclusion that the public knew little about the law. In the 2003 poll, the public's attitudes toward the strategies the law employs led us to conclude that greater familiarity with the law was unlikely to bring approval. Developments to date have given no cause to change that assessment.

Knowledge and Approval

The data in Table 23 show that, while the percentage claiming some level of knowledge about NCLB has climbed, 59% still say they know little or nothing at all. Surprisingly, a majority of public school parents say they are in the uninformed group. Meanwhile, the percentage saying they do not know enough to say whether their view is favorable or unfavorable is down from 69% in 2003 to 45% this year. Twenty-eight percent say their view is favorable while 27% say it is unfavorable.

TABLE 23. 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		
	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %
Great deal + fair amount	40	31	24	39	28	25	45	37	22
A great deal	8	7	6	8	6	5	10	8	7
A fair amount	32	24	18	31	22	20	35	29	15
Very little	43	40	40	44	41	37	40	38	44
Nothing at all	16	28	36	16	30	38	14	24	34
Don't know	1	1	*	1	1	*	1	1	*
Very little + nothing at all	59	68	76	60	71	75	54	62	78

*Less than one-half of 1%.

TABLE 24. 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			Knowledge of NCLB			
				Great Deal	Fair Amount	Very Little	None At All
	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %
Very favorable + somewhat favorable	28	24	18	36	44	21	11
Very favorable	7	7	5	19	9	5	6
Somewhat favorable	21	17	13	17	35	16	5
Somewhat unfavorable	15	12	7	21	20	15	4
Very unfavorable	12	8	6	36	18	4	7
Don't know enough to say	45	55	69	7	18	60	77
Don't know	*	1	*	*	*	*	1
Somewhat unfavorable + very unfavorable	27	20	13	57	38	19	11

*Less than one-half of 1%.

NCLB Strategies

The following tables reflect the public's views with regard to the strategies used in NCLB. Each table summarizes the responses to a particular strategy. Preceding each table is a statement of the strategy and the public's position in relation to the strategy.

Strategy. NCLB requires each state to decide if a school is in need of improvement based on the percentage of students showing proficiency in English and math on a state-selected test.

Public position. Sixty-eight percent of respondents say that a single test cannot give a fair picture of whether a school is in need of improvement.

TABLE 25. 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			Knowledge of NCLB			
				Great Deal	Fair Amount	Very Little	None At All
	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %
Yes	29	31	32	37	28	27	32
No	68	67	66	63	70	71	64
Don't know	3	2	2	*	2	2	4

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Strategy. NCLB bases its system of determining a school's status on student performance in English and math only.

Public position. Eighty percent of respondents say that a test of English and math only cannot give a fair picture of whether a school is in need of improvement.

TABLE 26. According to the NCLB Act, the statewide tests of student performance will be devoted to English and math only. Do you think a test covering only English and math would provide a fair picture of whether a school in your community is or is not in need of improvement, or should the test be based on other subjects?

	National Totals			Knowledge of NCLB			
				Great Deal	Fair Amount	Very Little	None At All
	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %
Yes, would provide fair picture	17	16	15	13	19	18	14
No, test should be based on other subjects also	80	83	83	87	77	80	83
Don't know	3	1	2	*	4	2	3

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Strategy. The subjects NCLB uses in determining if a school is in need of improvement are English and math.

Public position. Eighty-two percent of respondents are concerned that the reliance on English and math will mean less emphasis on art, music, history, and other subjects.

TABLE 27. 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			Knowledge of NCLB			
				Great Deal	Fair Amount	Very Little	None At All
	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %
A great deal + a fair amount	82	81	80	92	82	82	79
A great deal	39	37	40	66	39	33	36
A fair amount	43	44	40	26	43	49	43
Not much	12	13	14	4	11	14	11
Not at all	5	4	6	4	7	3	9
Don't know	1	2	*	*	*	1	1

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Strategy. NCLB provides that parents of a child attending a school that fails to make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) for two consecutive years must be offered the opportunity to

transfer their child to a school making AYP.

Public position. Seventy-nine percent of respondents say they would prefer to have additional help given to their child in the school he or she attends rather than transferring their child to another school.

TABLE 28. 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			Knowledge of NCLB			
				Great Deal	Fair Amount	Very Little	None At All
	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %
To transfer child to school identified as not in need of improvement	16	16	25	20	17	16	15
To have additional efforts made in child's present school	79	80	74	76	81	79	80
Don't know	5	4	1	4	2	5	5

Strategy. NCLB requires that test scores be reported separately for American Indians, Asians, blacks, Hispanics, whites, limited-English-proficient students, economically disadvantaged students, and special education students.

Public position. Forty-eight percent of respondents oppose reporting scores separately. However, separate reporting is supported by two-thirds of the "great deal" of knowledge group. A follow-up question indicates that 60% of those op-

COMMENTARY: GOOD NEWS AND BAD

This latest PDK/Gallup poll offers good news and bad news for public school educators. Despite the efforts of those who seek to undermine public education, there is still strong support for public schools, particularly at the local level. The closer people are to schools, the better they feel about them. Members of the public believe in personal experience more than in the words of reformers from afar. They are also able to parse what is important and what is not. Tests are important but not to the exclusion of a broader curriculum, and they should not determine the future of a child or school.

The bad news is embedded in the best of the news. Members of the public want to see the achievement gap closed and understand that the gap is created outside the schools, but they believe schools can overcome the ravages of social and economic conditions. While this belief is a vote of confidence for schools, when coupled with the recognition that money is the biggest challenge facing schools and is increasingly difficult to find, these expectations could set the schools up for failure if they *cannot* do what society *will not* do. — **Paul D. Houston, executive director, American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, Va.**

posing this method of reporting scores do so based on the belief that all students are equal — and presumably should be treated in the same way.

TABLE 29. The No Child Left Behind Act requires that test scores be reported separately by students' race and ethnicity, disability status, English-speaking ability, and poverty level. Do you favor or oppose reporting test scores in this way in your community?

	National Totals		Knowledge of NCLB			
			Great Deal	Fair Amount	Very Little	None At All
	'05 %	'04 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %
Favor	44	42	67	45	39	44
Oppose	48	52	31	48	53	45
Don't know	8	6	2	7	8	11

TABLE 30. (Asked of those opposed.) Why do you oppose reporting test scores separately?

	National Totals		Knowledge of NCLB			
			Great Deal	Fair Amount	Very Little	None At All
	%	%	%	%	%	%
All students are equal	60		46	60	61	67
Should judge by individuality	8		5	12	7	2
Unfair	7		9	9	6	2
Will cause differences between children	6		5	6	7	6
Will make no difference	3		7	1	4	2
Should apply only to disabled	2		1	4	2	*
Scores are a private issue	2		*	2	2	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

NCLB and Special Education

Students in special education are the one demographic group whose designation for separate reporting of scores is based on cognitive ability. When NCLB rules were issued, special education scores were treated like other scores. Even before the rules were ever enforced, changes were made allowing a small percentage of those with the most severe disabilities to be tested at other than grade-level standards. This percentage has recently been expanded. Still, special education scores are among the most frequent reasons that schools fail to make AYP.

Strategy. NCLB requires that all special education students except those with the most severe cognitive handicaps be tested against grade-level standards.

Public position. Just over two-thirds of respondents say that these students should not be held to the same standards as other students.

TABLE 31. In your opinion, should students enrolled in special education in a public school be required to meet the same academic standards as all other students in that school?

	National Totals	No Children In School	Public School Parents
	%	%	%
Yes	28	28	29
No	68	67	68
Don't know	4	5	3



Strategy. NCLB includes special education students with all other students in determining whether a school is in need of improvement.

Public position. Sixty-two percent of respondents say special education students should not be included in determining whether a school is in need of improvement; 34% say they should be included. The percentage saying these students should not be included is 12% higher for the "great deal" of knowledge group.

TABLE 32. In your opinion, should the standardized test scores of special education students be included with the test scores of all other students in determining whether a school is in need of improvement under NCLB or not?

	National Totals		Knowledge of NCLB			
			Great Deal	Fair Amount	Very Little	None At All
	'05 %	'04 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %	'05 %
Yes, should	34	39	25	29	35	46
No, should not	62	57	74	69	60	48
Don't know	4	4	1	2	5	6

Strategy. NCLB provides that if any demographic group fails to make AYP, the entire school fails to make AYP. The result is that the special education group causes a disproportionate number of AYP failures.

Public position. The public is split on whether a school should be designated as in need of improvement if the special education group is the only failure. However, majorities of those claiming a "great deal" or a "fair amount" of knowledge of NCLB are against that designation.

TABLE 33. How about if the special education students are the only group in a school whose test scores fail to meet NCLB requirements? Should that school be designated as in need of improvement or not?

	National Totals		Knowledge of NCLB			
			Great Deal	Fair Amount	Very Little	None At All
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes, should	47		37	44	50	50
No, should not be	48		55	54	44	44
Don't know	5		8	2	6	6

Respondents were asked whether a situation in which a large number of schools fail to make AYP because special education students alone fail to make AYP would make teachers and principals less willing to have special education students assigned to their schools. The public is also split on that

possibility. Again, the two groups professing knowledge of NCLB differ from respondents overall, with majorities saying that teachers and principals will be less willing to accept these students. The data are shown in Table 34.

TABLE 34. NCLB results have shown that schools with special education students are less likely to make adequate yearly progress than schools with no special education students. Do you think this will make principals and teachers less willing to have special education students assigned to their schools, or will it make no difference?

	National Totals %	Knowledge of NCLB			
		Great Deal %	Fair Amount %	Very Little %	None At All %
Less willing	47	62	56	47	26
Make no difference	45	38	38	44	65
Don't know	8	*	6	9	9

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Measuring School Performance Under NCLB

Fixed Goals Versus Improvement

NCLB measures school performance based on the percentage of students who meet specific goals in English and in math. Many believe that the amount of improvement made during the school year is a more appropriate measure than the percentage meeting fixed goals. The data in Table 35 reflect responses to a question in which the public was asked which method it preferred. Eighty-five percent prefer the improvement approach and reject the fixed-goals approach NCLB uses. A second question (reported in Table 36) sought to find out if the amount of improvement required should vary for schools starting far from the goals and schools starting close to the goals. Sixty-three percent say that the improvement required should vary. It does not under NCLB.

TABLE 35. One way to measure a school's performance is to base it on the percentage of students passing the test mandated by the state at the end of the school year. Another way is to measure the improvement students in the school make during the year. In your opinion, which is the best way to measure the school's performance — the percentage passing the test or the improvement shown by the students?

	National Totals %	Knowledge of NCLB			
		Great Deal %	Fair Amount %	Very Little %	None At All %
Percentage passing the test	13	16	13	13	9
Improvement shown by the students	85	84	86	85	88
Don't know	2	*	1	2	3

*Less than one-half of 1%.

TABLE 36. Let's assume that one school starts a year with 35% of its students passing the NCLB test,

while another school starts with 65% passing the test. In your opinion, should the amount of improvement required be the same for both schools or should it vary according to where the school started?

	National Totals %	Knowledge of NCLB			
		Great Deal %	Fair Amount %	Very Little %	None At All %
Should be the same for both schools	32	27	30	30	46
Should vary according to where the school started	63	70	67	64	48
Don't know	5	3	3	6	6

The Significance of Failure to Make AYP

Under NCLB the number of school failures is expected to grow with each passing year as the goals for students passing increase at the rate needed to reach 100% proficiency by 2013-14. Anticipating this steady increase in failing schools, the poll sought to find out how the public will react. The public splits on this question, with 45% saying they would blame the schools and 43% saying they would blame the law. Those claiming to know a "great deal" about NCLB differ from respondents overall, with a majority of 61% saying the law would be to blame. The data are found in Table 37.

TABLE 37. Let's say that large numbers of public schools fail to meet the requirements established by the NCLB law. In your opinion, which would be more to blame for this — the public schools themselves or the NCLB law?

	National Totals %	Knowledge of NCLB			
		Great Deal %	Fair Amount %	Very Little %	None At All %
The public schools	45	36	44	48	44
The NCLB law	43	61	47	37	40
Don't know	12	3	9	15	16

Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum

A frequent criticism of NCLB is that its focus on English and math will lead to a narrowing of the curriculum and mean less attention to the differing needs of students. This concern was addressed in two questions. The data in Table 38 come from a question first asked in 1979, in which respondents were asked to express their preference for a curriculum with a wide variety of courses or one emphasizing basic courses. A plurality of the 1979 respondents chose a concentration on basic courses, and a majority did so in 1993. However, the 2001 repeat found that the public had reversed its position, with 54% favoring a wide variety of courses. That majority reaches 61% with this poll. This preference seems to be confirmed by the data in Table 39, in which 64% of respondents choose the option of having their child earn average grades and participate in a broad range of extracurricular activities, compared to 29% who choose having their child get straight A's.

TABLE 38. Public high schools can offer students a wide variety of courses, or they can concentrate on fewer basic courses, such as English, mathematics, history, and science. Which of these two policies do you think the local high schools should follow in planning their curricula — a wide variety of courses or fewer but more basic courses?

	National Totals					No Children In School					Public School Parents				
	'05	'02	'01	'93	'79	'05	'02	'01	'93	'79	'05	'02	'01	'93	'79
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Wide variety of courses	61	57	54	48	44	59	57	50	44	44	66	57	64	55	44
Basic courses	37	41	44	51	49	39	41	48	54	47	31	42	35	44	53
Don't know	2	2	2	1	7	2	2	2	2	9	3	1	1	1	3



TABLE 39. Which one of the following would you prefer of an oldest child — that the child get A grades or that he or she make average grades and be active in extracurricular activities?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'05	'96	'05	'96	'05	'96
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Get A grades	29	28	26	26	35	33
Average grades and extracurricular activities	64	60	67	63	60	56
Both (volunteered)	*	9	*	8	*	9
Don't know	7	3	7	3	5	2

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Instruction

In a question new to the poll, respondents were asked if the greater use of computers in postsecondary education translated into the need for an online experience in high school. The data in Table 40 indicate that a majority of respondents do not think so. In a question repeated from 1993, this poll sought to determine the public preference for helping students who come to school lacking the ability to speak English. The data in Table 41 indicate that 61% believe such students should learn English in public school classes before enrolling in regular classes.

TABLE 40. It is becoming common for education courses after high school to be taken online. Should the high school in your community require every student to take at least one course online while in high school?

	National Totals	No Children In School	Public School Parents
	%	%	%
Yes, should	39	43	34
No, should not	56	52	64
Don't know	5	5	2

TABLE 41. Many families who come from other countries have school-age children who cannot speak English. Which one of the following three approaches do you think is the best way for the public schools to deal with non-English-speaking students? Require students to learn English in special classes at the parents' expense, require public schools to provide instruction in the students' native language, or require students to learn English in public school classes before enrolling in regular classes?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'05	'93	'05	'93	'05	'93
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Require students to learn English in special classes at the parents' expense	19	25	18	27	19	23
Require public schools to provide instruction in the students' native language	16	27	15	26	18	30
Require students to learn English in public school classes before enrolling in regular classes	61	46	62	45	59	45
Don't know	4	2	5	2	4	2

Miscellaneous

Two poll questions did not fit into any particular grouping. Table 42 reports responses to a trend question asking parents whether they would like to see their child take up teaching as a career. While the 62% saying yes is down 5% from 1993, it is still the fourth-highest percentage in the nine times that the question has been asked. Table 43 shows that a majority, 59% of those surveyed, are seeing more children from other countries in their community than they did in the past.

TABLE 42. Would you like to have a child of yours take up teaching in the public schools as a career?

	National Totals								
	'05	'93	'90	'88	'83	'81	'80	'72	'69
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	62	67	51	58	45	46	48	67	75
No	33	29	38	31	33	43	40	22	15
Don't know	5	4	11	11	22	11	12	11	10

TABLE 43. Just your impression, do there seem to be more children from other countries attending the public schools in your community today than in the past, fewer than in the past, or about the same number?

	National Totals	No Children In School	Public School Parents
	%	%	%
More than in the past	59	60	56
Fewer than in the past	3	3	3
About the same number	31	28	38
Don't know	7	9	3

Closing Statement

Polling has become an important player in most aspects of American life, and the effort to improve the public schools is no exception. The issues explored in this poll are shaping the daily decisions made in K-12 schools. Moreover, given the variability of data interpretation, it is not surprising that this report and the interpretations provided by the authors are always subject to a critical review. That is as it should be. The poll is intended to contribute to the ongoing debate regarding the public schools, and disagreement fuels that debate. However, we continue to believe that the public has a way of getting it right with issues that are both complex and puzzling. And, whether the public is right or wrong, its attitudes determine, over the long haul, how those issues can be addressed. We believe that this poll and the one last year send an important message regarding NCLB. Agree or disagree, policy makers shaping any revisions to NCLB would find it profitable to study the results carefully and consider their implications for the ultimate success of that law.

Research Procedure

The Sample. The sample used in this survey embraced a total of 1,000 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 9 June through 26 June 2005.

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/kpoll0409sample.htm>.

Design of the Sample

For the 2005 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	%	Income	%
No children in school	67	\$50,000 and over	35
Public school parents	30	\$40,000 and over	44
Nonpublic school parents	3	\$30,000-\$39,999	13
		\$20,000-\$29,999	12
		Under \$20,000	16
Gender	%	Undesignated	15
Men	44	Region	%
Women	56	East	22
Race	%	Midwest	23
White	81	South	32
Nonwhite	15	West	23
Black	12	Community Size	%
Undesignated	1	Urban	32
Age	%	Suburban	47
18-29 years	18	Rural	21
30-49 years	40		
50 and over	40		
Undesignated	1		
Education	%		
Total college	58		
College graduate	24		
College incomplete	34		
Total high school	40		
High school graduate	32		
High school incomplete	8		

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 195-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.

Conducting Your Own Poll

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

Policy Implications

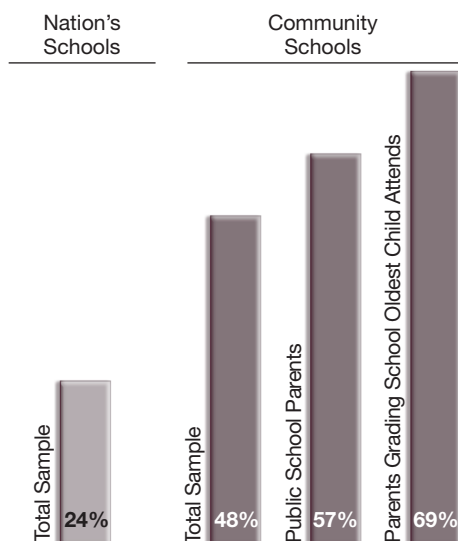
Of the 37th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll

It is important that policy makers be aware of the public's views, but public opinion alone should not drive policy decisions relating to the public schools. Those decisions should be made with the intent of providing an education tailored to the needs of each student and designed to help students achieve to their maximum. Students should leave our public schools prepared to live productive and satisfactory lives as contributors to the economic and social well-being of this nation. It is in the emphasis on both personal and public goals that we find the rationale for a system of public schools free and open to all. And it is this system that has fueled the remarkable progress of this nation. What follows is not a summary of the poll's findings. Those are available in the poll itself. The remarks below are an attempt to draw out for K-12 policy makers at all levels the implications of the poll's findings.

Public Support for the Public Schools

Finding: Americans make a distinction between the "nation's schools" and "schools in the community." They have a low opinion of the nation's schools and a relatively high opinion of schools in the community, an opinion that rises even higher the more closely connected the people in the community are to their local schools.

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



Implications:

- Programs that depend on the public's accepting the idea that the schools are failing are unlikely to generate support. Those seeking change should consider stressing that we already have good public schools and that the goal is to make them even better.
- Given the importance of public support, local policy makers and leaders can take comfort in consistently high approval ratings for our schools. That provides a base on which to build.
- Nevertheless, there is room for support levels to rise. Maintaining and building public support must be a constant goal.



Judging School Performance

Finding: The public strongly believes that school performance should be judged by the improvement students show and not by the percentage of students passing the state-selected test. This belief may well explain the public's concern with NCLB.

Implications:

- Those at the federal and state levels might consider shifting to a growth model of achievement that measures gains students make.
- Those at the local level can help themselves by fostering an understanding of the need for a growth model and by adding their support to the efforts to create one.

Preferred Basis for Evaluation

School performance should be judged based on the percentage of students who pass a test.

13%

School performance should be judged based on improvement shown.

85%

Knowledge and Views of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Finding: Public opinion on NCLB is still evolving; however, the prediction made in earlier polls that greater familiarity with the law was unlikely to bring approval is proving true. This year's poll found that the percentage viewing NCLB unfavorably rises from 30% of those who say they know very little or nothing at all about the law to 57% of those saying they know a great deal about it. Three consecutive polls have now shown that the public does not support the strategies NCLB uses. The question with NCLB is quickly becoming whether those responsible will make the changes needed to make it work.

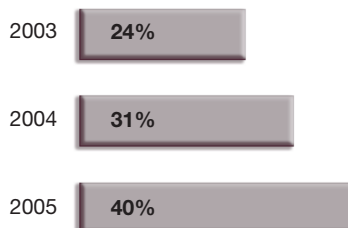
Public's views of the strategies used in NCLB:

- 68% say a single test cannot give a fair picture of a school.
- 80% say testing in English and math only cannot fairly picture a school.
- 82% are concerned that NCLB's emphasis on English and math will mean less emphasis on art, music, history, and other subjects.
- 79% prefer offering help to a student in a school found to be in need of improvement compared to 16% who prefer transferring the student out of the school.
- 68% believe that special education students should not be required to meet the same standards as other students.
- 62% disagree with NCLB's practice of including the scores of special education students in determining whether a school is in need of improvement.
- 58% believe that the emphasis on standardized tests will cause teachers to teach to the test, and 54% believe that that is a bad thing.

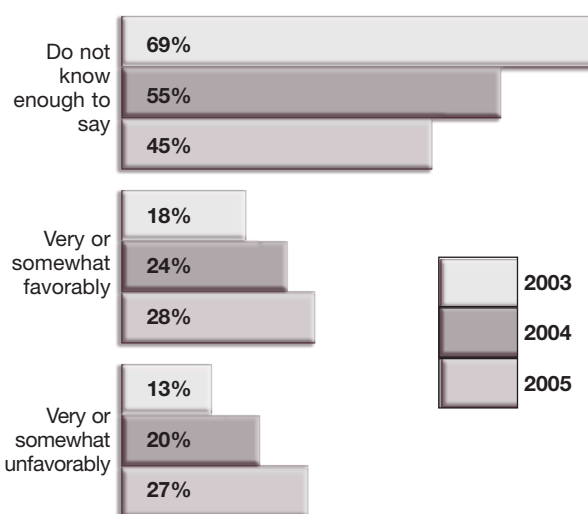
Implications:

- Those with the ability to shape the implementation of NCLB must address the variance between the strategies used and what the public believes should be done.
- Those who must implement NCLB should know that the best way to deal with disappointing outcomes is to explain them honestly to a public that is likely to be receptive.
- Those negatively affected by NCLB should continue to take reasonable steps to make adequate yearly progress while actively seeking changes in the law.
- Irrespective of the law's problems, the goal of improving the achievement of all students is one that all stakeholders can embrace, and efforts directed toward reaching that goal will be well spent.

Respondents Professing a Great Deal Or Fair Amount of Knowledge of NCLB



How the Public Views NCLB

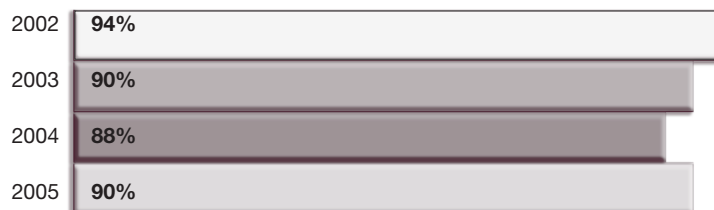


The Achievement Gap

Finding: The public believes that the achievement gap must be closed and that it results from factors other than schooling. At the same time, a majority believes that it is the responsibility of the public schools to close the gap.

The Importance of Closing the Gap

Very + Somewhat Important



Implications:

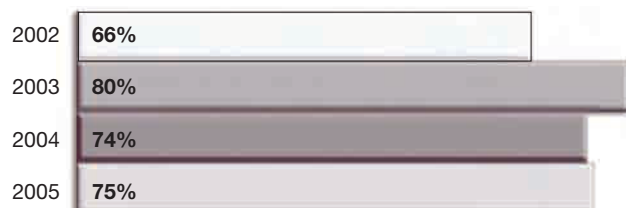
- The strength with which the public endorses the need to close the achievement gap suggests that a lack of leadership and not a lack of public will is one reason why it does not happen.
- That the public does not attribute the gap to schooling should be a clear message to policy makers that the public would support preschool and non-school programs to address the gap.
- That the public believes that schools must close

The Achievement Gap (continued)

the gap is affirmation of this poll's finding that the public sees the public schools as an appropriate vehicle for change.

Cause of the Gap

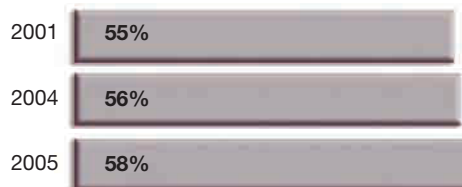
Mostly related to nonschool factors



Closing the Gap:

Public School Responsibility

Respondents answering yes

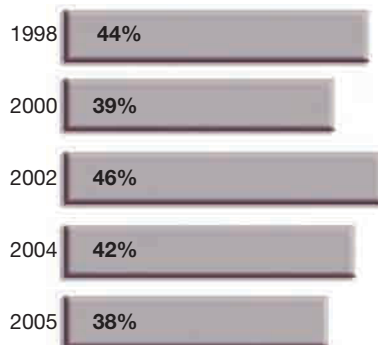


Attitudes Toward Change

Finding: The public prefers change that comes by reforming the current public school system, not by seeking an alternative system. Poll respondents continue to oppose using public funds to support attendance at private schools and condition their support for charter schools on the stipulations that such schools not be created at the expense of existing public schools and that

they be accountable in the same way as other public schools.

Support for Private School Attendance At Public Expense



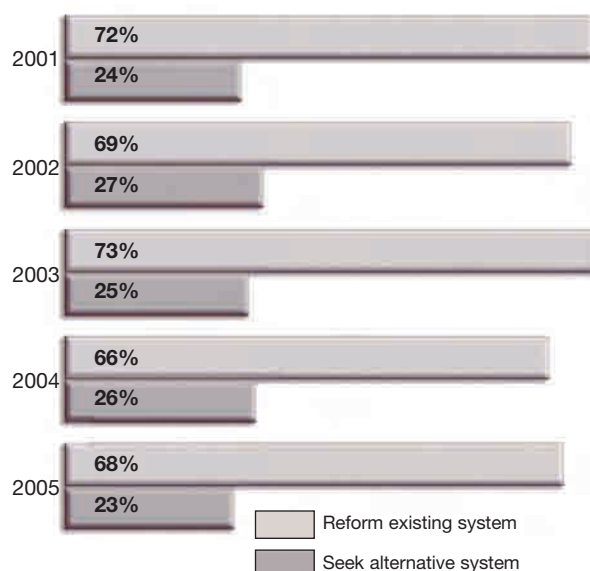
Implications:

- Change proposals will have the greatest likelihood of success if they involve changes in the existing public school system.

- The public does not want change to come at the expense of the existing public schools.

- The public is clear in its belief that schools receiving public funds must be accountable for the expenditure of those funds.

Preference for Improvement



Additional Implications

1. The fact that financing the public schools is firmly entrenched in the public's mind as the number-one problem the schools in the community face suggests that collaborative and concerted efforts to increase the current level of funding would have the prospect of success.

2. There is nothing to suggest that public concern over the level of testing in the public schools is growing. A majority of respondents support additional high school testing.

3. The fact that the public favors a curriculum with a broad variety of courses and values participation in extracurricular activities suggests again that policy makers at the federal and state levels are at variance with the public. Those providing schooling at the local level will need to walk carefully between the two.

4. That respondents would welcome seeing a child of theirs become a teacher indicates the value the public assigns to teaching and should be good news to those seeking to recruit high-quality students to teaching.

5. **The overarching implication of the poll is that the public likes its public schools, wants to see them get better, and has limited interest in alternative systems. This should be a strong signal to policy makers that the strategy most likely to bring success is to unite behind the public schools in a collaborative effort to improve them.**

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