



# The 39th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/ Gallup Poll Of the Public's Attitudes Toward The Public Schools

**BY LOWELL C. ROSE  
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**T**HIS IS the 39th annual poll in this now venerable series. The noted pollster George Gallup was one of the poll's founders and, until his death in 1987, played the major role in selecting the questions and writing the article that appeared in each year's *Phi Delta Kappan*. His son Alec, chairman of the Gallup Poll, stepped into a leadership role after his father's death and has continued to work closely with those at Phi Delta Kappa to maintain the standard of quality established by George Gallup. The Gallup Organization goes far beyond the normal role for a polling firm. Alec Gallup approves the wording of each question and monitors the development of the poll report to guarantee that the suggested interpretations are supported by the data.

The poll has changed over the 39 years. It started as an effort to inform educators. While it continues to perform that role, it has come to serve as a source of information for those who shape education policy, and the database that has accumulated over 39 years of polling chronicles the growth and changes in K-12 schooling since the late 1960s.

As it has grown in importance, the PDK/Gallup Poll has fueled debate regarding K-12 schooling, and charges of bias are routine. With that in mind, we have gradually reshaped the poll report to make it user-friendly and to draw the reader into the analysis of the data. We report the data, state what we believe they say, and leave it to the reader to reach his or her own conclusions.

In this year's report, the statements following a table and designated as "Findings" are in the nature of summaries that we believe offer a fair interpretation of the data. Statements designated as "Conclusions" are highlighted because we think they capture the most significant of the poll results. These are offered as topics for debate. In the end, our aim is to let the data speak for themselves.

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## • IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT •

The 39th poll comes at a time when K-12 schooling is near the top of the agenda in state and national policy discussions, and efforts to improve student achievement dominate those discussions. Chief among the improvement efforts is No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the sweeping federal initiative. Given the importance of this law and the fact that the poll was founded on the belief that public support is a vital component of shaping effective education policy, it is appropriate to open this report with the public's reaction to NCLB and its principal strategy, standardized testing.

### Public View of NCLB

Since 2003 the PDK/Gallup Poll has traced the evolving public response to NCLB. The analysis here focuses primarily on the questions asked in the current poll, but readers interested in more detail on the evolution of the public view should consult earlier poll reports.

A question asked every year since 2003 seeks to find out how much people know about NCLB. The responses are reported in Table 1. For the first time, a majority (54%) say they know a great deal or a fair amount about the law. Sixty-five percent of public school parents give this response. However, 46% of the total group still say they know very little or nothing at all about NCLB. This percentage drops to 35% for public school parents.

**TABLE 1. 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?**

	National Totals					No Children In School					Public School Parents				
	'07	'06	'05	'04	'03	'07	'06	'05	'04	'03	'07	'06	'05	'04	'03
<b>Great deal + fair amount</b>	54	45	40	31	24	50	42	39	28	25	65	49	45	37	22
Great deal	8	8	8	7	6	6	6	8	6	5	14	11	10	8	7
Fair amount	46	37	32	24	18	44	36	31	22	20	51	38	35	29	15
Very little	38	40	43	40	40	40	41	44	41	37	31	37	40	38	44
Nothing at all	8	15	16	28	36	10	17	16	30	38	4	13	14	24	34
<b>Very little + nothing at all</b>	46	55	59	68	76	50	58	60	71	75	35	50	54	62	78
Don't know	*	*	1	1	*	*	*	1	1	*	*	1	1	1	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

An important question is whether the gradual gain in knowledge about NCLB is causing the public to have a more favorable or more unfavorable view of the law. Trend data for this question are reported in Table 2. While 31% say they have a very or somewhat favorable view of the law, 40% say they have a somewhat or very unfavorable view. The percentage selecting one of the two favorable responses has grown by 13% since 2003, while the percentage choosing one of the two unfavorable responses has climbed by 27%. An even stronger unfavorable view of NCLB is held by those who say they know a great deal or a fair amount about the law.

**TABLE 2. From what you know or have heard 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					Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount '07 %
	'07 %	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'03 %	
<b>Very + somewhat favorable</b>	31	32	28	24	18	38
Very favorable	4	9	7	7	5	5
Somewhat favorable	27	23	21	17	13	33
Somewhat unfavorable	23	18	15	12	7	28
Very unfavorable	17	13	12	8	6	27
Don't know enough to say	29	37	45	55	69	7
<b>Somewhat + very unfavorable</b>	40	31	27	20	13	55
Don't know	*	*	*	1	*	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

**■ FINDING:** It seems fair to say that, as the public knowledge of NCLB grows, the public's view of NCLB is becoming less and less favorable. This confirms a prediction we made in 2003.

This year's poll asked the public whether NCLB is hurting or helping the public schools in the community. Table 3 provides the public's response: 26% believe NCLB is "helping"; 27% believe it is "hurting"; 41% say it is making no difference at all. This is a total of 68% who believe the law is hurting the performance of schools or making no difference. Of those respondents who claim to know a great deal or a fair amount about NCLB, 37% believe it is "hurting" as compared to 28% believing it is "helping."

**TABLE 3. Just your impression, how would you rate the overall impact of the "No Child Left Behind" program on the public schools in your community? Would you say it was helping, hurting, or making no difference in the performance of the local public schools?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount %
Helping	26	24	33	28
Hurting	27	27	28	37
Making no difference	41	43	35	34
Don't know	6	6	4	1

NCLB requires that every student in a school demonstrate proficiency on a state test in 2013-14. This is a high-stakes standard, since failure to meet it will mean that the school will be designated as failing. Table 4 reports the public's expectations in this area. Two-thirds believe this goal is likely to be reached in the local schools. The percentage who say this outcome is very or somewhat likely is down by 14% since 2002, while the percentage saying it is not very or not at all likely is up by 15%.

**TABLE 4. National legislation requires that a public school guarantee that every student in that school pass the state proficiency test by the end of the school year 2013-14. How likely do you think it is that this goal could be achieved in the public schools in your community — very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely?**

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount
	'07 %	'02 %	'07 %	'02 %	'07 %	'02 %	'07 %
<b>Very + somewhat likely</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>60</b>
Very likely	21	31	18	30	32	36	18
Somewhat likely	45	49	47	51	39	41	42
Not very likely	23	12	24	11	20	15	24
Not at all likely	10	6	11	5	9	6	16
<b>Not very + not at all likely</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>40</b>
Don't know	1	2	*	3	*	2	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

The debate over NCLB includes the question of whether the standard used to judge a school's performance should be the percentage of students passing the state test or the improvement shown on the state test by students in the school. Table 5 reports the public's view: a strong majority (82%) say the standard should be improvement shown by the students.

**TABLE 5. 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 made 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			Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount
	'07 %	'06 %	'05 %	'07 %
Percentage passing the test	16	17	13	13
Improvement shown by the students	82	81	85	86
Don't know	2	2	2	1

■ **FINDING:** Given the large percentages preferring to judge schools by their students' improvement, it seems fair to suggest that one of the reasons that public opinion with regard to NCLB has become increasingly unfavorable is that the law has focused on the wrong standard of school success.

Students with limited proficiency in English present a unique problem under NCLB. The flexibility NCLB provides with regard to testing is limited to a small percentage of students. Many schools find themselves with three alternatives: give students with limited English the regular test, even though they cannot read it, just so they will count as participating; give them an alternative test that suits their needs but constitutes automatic failure under NCLB; or hold them out of testing, in which case they count as nonparticipating. Table 6 provides

the public's views on this problem: 79% believe that students should pass an English proficiency test before their scores are used to judge a school's performance.

**TABLE 6. One requirement of the NCLB Act is that the achievement test scores for the students in that school be reported separately for each of eight groups of students, including one based on students' English-speaking ability. In your opinion, should students with limited English-speaking ability be required to pass an English proficiency test before their reading and math test scores are used to measure that school's performance or not?**

	National Totals %	Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount %
Yes	79	73
No	19	25
Don't know	2	2

■ **FINDING:** It seems fair to suggest that the large percentage of the public that holds this view may be another reason why public opinion on NCLB is trending toward the unfavorable.

It had become obvious by 2005 that the number of schools labeled as failing under NCLB was steadily growing. A question added to that year's poll sought to find out whom the public would blame for these increasing numbers. In 2005 and 2006, the public indicated, by narrow margins, that it would blame the schools. In this poll, that view is reversed, with the percentage blaming the schools dropping to 43%, while the percentage saying they would blame the law rises to 49%. The group claiming the most knowledge of NCLB is even more inclined to blame the law.

**TABLE 7. 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			Know Great Deal/ Fair Amount
	'07 %	'06 %	'05 %	'07 %
The public schools	43	48	45	39
The law itself	49	41	43	56
Don't know	8	11	12	5

■ **FINDING:** It seems fair to say that the shift from blaming the schools to blaming the law for large numbers of failures means that growing familiarity with NCLB has led to growing disapproval. This shift is important because a law demanding accountability is unlikely to succeed if the public does not blame failures on the schools.

NCLB relies on testing of English and math. Many educators believe that this provision is forcing them to restrict the curriculum in an effort to give more attention to these subjects since they are the ones that count in making adequate yearly progress. Table 8 reports the public's reaction on this issue. While 52% of respondents believe that the curriculum is be-



ing narrowed and 36% do not, in a follow-up question (reported in Table 9), 93% of the group seeing narrowing said they were very or somewhat concerned about the reduced emphasis on subjects other than English and math.

**TABLE 8. Just based on your impression, or what you have heard, has NCLB's emphasis on English and math reduced the amount of instructional time spent in the local public schools for science, health, social studies, and the arts, or not?**

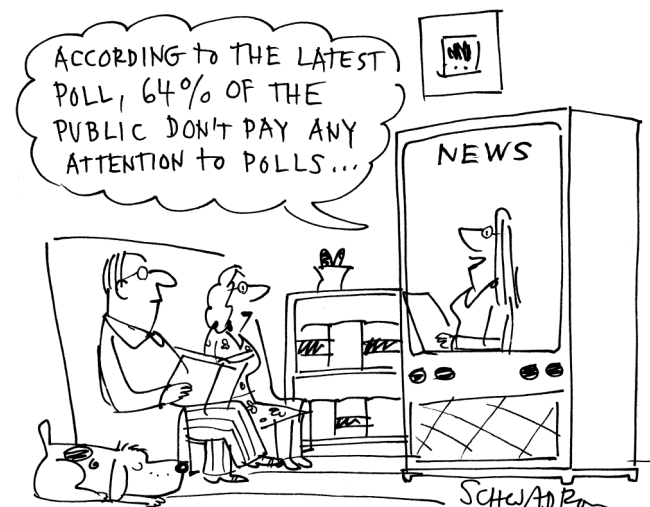
	National Totals %	Know Great Deal/Fair Amount %
Yes, reduced	52	58
No, has not reduced	36	35
Don't know	12	7

**TABLE 9. (Asked of those who said yes.) How do you feel about this reduced emphasis on the teaching of science, health, social studies, and the arts in the local public schools? Are you very concerned about this, somewhat concerned, not very concerned, or not at all concerned?**

	National Totals %	Know Great Deal/Fair Amount %
<b>Very + somewhat concerned</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>94</b>
Very concerned	56	61
Somewhat concerned	37	33
Not very concerned	5	4
Not at all concerned	2	2
<b>Not very + not at all</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>

■ **FINDING:** It seems fair to say that the public believes that NCLB's emphasis on English and math is reducing the attention to other subjects and that this is a matter of concern.

One of the most controversial parts of NCLB requires all but a small percentage of special education students to meet the same academic standards as all other students. This has resulted in the special education group's producing the most



failures of any of the eight groups measured by NCLB. A large majority of the public believes that special education students should not be required to meet the same standards as all other students. Among those claiming knowledge of NCLB, that opposition is even stronger.

**TABLE 10. 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 %		Know Great Deal/Fair Amount %
	'07	'05	'07	'05	'07	'05	'07
Yes, should	26	28	28	28	21	29	19
No, should not	72	68	70	67	78	68	80
Don't know	2	4	2	5	1	3	1

■ **CONCLUSION:** What the data say to us is that the public, despite its desire for high standards and accountability, does not approve of the strategies used in NCLB. This dislike of some of the strategies keeps the public from embracing the law, and it is one reason that a plurality say that they will now blame the law if schools fail under NCLB.

## Public View of Standardized Testing

The major strategy driving the implementation of NCLB is the use of standardized tests. This has resulted in a great increase in high-stakes testing. The public reaction, reported in Table 11, is evenly divided between those who believe the increased testing has helped or has hurt the performance of schools. However, more than two-thirds of respondents believe the increased testing has hurt the schools or has made no difference.

**TABLE 11. Over the last decade there has been a significant increase in testing in the public schools to measure academic achievement. Just your impression, or what you may have heard or read, has increased testing helped, hurt, or made no difference in the performance of the local public schools?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Helped	28	26	32
Hurt	28	27	32
Made no difference	42	44	35
Don't know	2	3	1

Table 12 reports on a baseline question that has been asked a number of times to determine how the public feels about the amount of testing in the public schools. This year, 43% say that there is too much testing. This is up marginally (4%) from 2006 and 12% since 2002. The views of public school parents have swung even further toward the view that there is too much testing. This year, 52% of public school parents say there is too much testing. This is up 7% from 2006 and a whopping 20% since 2002.

**TABLE 12. In your opinion, is there too much emphasis on achievement testing in the public schools in this community, not enough emphasis on testing, or about the right amount?**

	National Totals					No Children In School					Public School Parents				
	'07	'06	'05	'04	'02	'07	'06	'05	'04	'02	'07	'06	'05	'04	'02
Too much emphasis	43	39	36	32	31	41	36	35	30	30	52	45	39	36	32
Not enough emphasis	15	25	17	22	19	15	28	17	23	20	10	17	17	20	14
About the right amount	40	33	40	40	47	42	32	39	40	46	38	37	43	43	54
Don't know	2	3	7	6	3	2	4	9	7	4	*	1	1	1	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

■ **FINDING:** It seems fair to say the increase since 2002 in the percentage who say there is too much testing, particularly the 20% increase among parents, indicates that the public's view of standardized testing is becoming less favorable.

The two remaining questions in this area deal with whether the current emphasis on standardized tests encourages teachers to teach to the test and whether that is a good or bad thing. Tables 13 and 14 report the results.

**TABLE 13. 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			
	'07	'06	'05	'03	'07	'06	'05	'03	'07	'06	'05	'03
Will encourage teachers to teach to the tests	69	67	58	66	66	64	57	64	75	74	60	68
Will not have this effect	28	26	33	30	30	28	32	32	22	20	35	27
Don't know	3	7	9	4	4	8	11	4	3	6	5	5

**TABLE 14. (Asked of those who said yes.) 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			
	'07	'06	'05	'03	'07	'06	'05	'03	'07	'06	'05	'03
Good thing	20	22	39	39	22	20	36	38	17	25	45	40
Bad thing	79	75	54	60	77	77	55	61	83	72	51	58
Don't know	1	3	7	1	1	3	9	1	*	3	4	2

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

■ **CONCLUSION:** What the data say to us is that the public is growing disenchanted with the increasing reliance on standardized testing. It seems likely that there is no coincidence in the fact that the criticism of standardized testing has developed since standardized testing became the principal strategy in implementing NCLB.

## • CHANGING THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS •

Those who seek to improve the public schools tend to divide over the best approach. Here we report on the public's view of the alternatives that are currently being tried. However, before doing so, it is important to place the responses in perspective. In 2002 we first asked a question designed to determine whether the public prefers to seek reform through the existing public school system or through an alternative system. Table 15 reports that 72% of respondents want change in the public schools to come through reforming the existing system. This figure has not varied much between 2002 and today.

**TABLE 15. 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		
	'07	'06	'05	'07	'06	'05	'07	'06	'05
Reforming existing system	72	71	68	75	72	67	68	69	72
Finding alternative system	26	24	23	24	23	23	29	25	22
Don't know	2	5	9	1	5	10	3	6	6

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'04	'03	'02	'04	'03	'02	'04	'03	'02
Reforming existing system	66	73	69	63	73	69	72	73	69
Finding alternative system	26	25	27	28	24	26	21	25	27
Don't know	8	2	4	9	3	5	7	2	4

■ **FINDING:** It seems fair to say that almost three-fourths of the public wants to see improvement come about through reforming the existing public schools and only about one-fourth wants to find an alternative.

## Vouchers

The longest-running question related to vouchers in this poll is the one reported on in Table 16. It is simple and straightforward and avoids the word "vouchers" altogether. Responses have varied over the years. In 1993, 24% favored allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense. That figure reached its high point at 46% in 2002 and is now at 39%. Those opposing now number 60%. At least for the past three years, the results appear to have stabilized.

**TABLE 16. Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?**

	National Totals										
	'07	'06	'05	'04	'03	'02	'01	'99	'97	'95	'93
Favor	39	36	38	42	38	46	34	41	44	33	24
Oppose	60	60	57	54	60	52	64	55	52	65	74
Don't know	1	4	5	4	2	2	2	4	4	2	2

In the years leading up to 2002, the poll asked a second question on vouchers, one that also avoided the word “vouchers.” It phrased the question somewhat differently, with the focus on government-paid tuition to any public, private, or church-related school. Table 17 reports this year’s results, along with those from 2002 and 1994.

**TABLE 17. A proposal has been made which would allow parents to send their school-age children to any public, private, or church-related schools they choose. For those parents choosing nonpublic schools, the government would pay all or part of the tuition. Would you favor or oppose this proposal in your state?**

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'07	'02	'94	'07	'02	'94	'07	'02	'94
Favor	41	52	45	37	51	42	50	51	48
Oppose	58	46	54	62	47	57	49	46	51
Don't know	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	3	1

This question has drawn some criticism in the past because of the use of the words “all or part.” This year, poll planners decided to split the sample and use “all” with one-half and “part” with the other. Tables 18 and 19 provide the results. Considering the two tables together, it is obvious that the results are greatly affected by the use of the “all or part” descriptor. The “all tuition” payment option is rejected by a strong majority of 67%. The “part” option splits the public almost evenly.

**TABLE 18. How about if the government paid ALL of the tuition? Would you favor or oppose this proposal in your state?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Favor	33	30	39
Oppose	67	70	60
Don't know	*	*	1

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

**TABLE 19. How about if the government paid PART of the tuition? Would you favor or oppose this proposal in your state?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Favor	51	48	61
Oppose	48	52	39
Don't know	1	*	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

**CONCLUSION:** What the data say to us is that vouchers have a strong core of support but have never been able to convert this base of support into a majority. That would indicate that building a choice component into NCLB has not had a major impact.

## Charter Schools

Charter schools may be out of place in this section on alternatives, since they are actually public schools. However,

we include them here because they operate outside the normal public school structure. Table 20 provides the data regarding the public’s view of these schools. The percentage that favors charter schools has climbed steadily since the question first appeared in the poll. The 60% in favor of charter schools is up 7% from 2006 and up 18% since 2000.

**TABLE 20. 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 charter schools?**

	National Totals					No Children In School					Public School Parents				
	'07	'06	'05	'02	'00	'07	'06	'05	'02	'00	'07	'06	'05	'02	'00
Favor	60	53	49	44	42	58	50	49	44	42	63	59	48	44	40
Oppose	35	34	41	43	47	36	37	40	43	47	34	31	43	44	47
Don't know	5	13	10	13	11	6	13	11	13	11	3	10	9	12	13

**FINDING:** It seems fair to say that, if charter schools are considered as an alternative, they are the most popular of the alternatives currently being considered or implemented.

## New Forms of Governance

The two alternatives considered here would shift much of the authority for operating the community schools away from the local school board. The first would shift the operation of the schools to a private profit-making corporation, and the second would have the mayor take over the operation of school districts with large percentages of low-performing schools. The 31% in favor of private contracting is up 7% from 2006, and the 39% favoring takeover by the mayor is up 10% from 2006. The results are reported in Tables 21 and 22.

**TABLE 21. Would you favor or oppose a plan in which your local school board would contract with private profit-making corporations to run the entire operations of the public schools in your community?**

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'07	'06	'02	'07	'06	'02	'07	'06	'02
Favor	31	24	31	32	24	31	27	25	30
Oppose	66	69	65	66	70	64	70	68	67
Don't know	3	7	4	2	6	5	3	7	3

**TABLE 22. In some communities that have a large percentage of low-performing public school students, the mayors have taken control over the entire public school system to attempt to correct the situation. If the public schools in your community had a large percentage of low-performing students, would you favor or oppose having the mayor take control over the schools?**

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'07	'06	'07	'06	'07	'06
Favor	39	29	37	28	42	33
Oppose	59	67	61	69	57	63
Don't know	2	4	2	3	1	4

It may be that some of the reaction to these two alternatives is shaped by the respondents' views as to who should determine what is taught in the local schools. This year we repeated a question asking which level of government should have the most say about what is taught in the public schools. The results are reported in Table 23. The public has always designated the local school board first, the state government second, and the federal government third. While the local school board continues to be the first choice, support has fallen 9% in just one year.

**TABLE 23. 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		
	'07 %	'06 %	'80 %	'07 %	'06 %	'80 %	'07 %	'06 %	'80 %
The federal government	20	14	9	19	13	9	20	15	8
The state government	31	26	15	32	26	16	30	28	15
The local school board	49	58	68	49	59	66	49	55	70
Don't know	*	2	8	*	2	9	1	2	7

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

■ **FINDING:** It seems fair to say that the public is showing an increasing willingness to shift the decision-making authority over K-12 schools from the local school board to other levels of government.

## Virtual Schooling

Virtual schooling refers to the delivery of instruction over the Internet. It may range from schools that provide almost all instruction by this method to those who use it to supplement regular instruction. We asked two questions related to this alternative. The first, which is reported in Table 24, deals with the reaction to the process itself. The second, which is reported in Table 25, pushes further by asking respondents if they would be willing to have a child of theirs take most high school courses online instead of in a regular school. While 41% of respondents approve of the practice of earning school credits over the Internet (an 11% increase over 2001), 73% would not be willing to have their own child take most high school courses online (an increase of 24%).

**TABLE 24. There are increasing opportunities for students to earn high school credits online over the Internet without attending a regular school. Generally speaking, do you approve or disapprove of this practice?**

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'07 %	'01 %	'07 %	'01 %	'07 %	'01 %
Approve	41	30	40	27	44	35
Disapprove	58	67	59	70	55	63
Don't know	1	3	1	3	1	2

**TABLE 25. Would you be willing or not willing to have a child of yours go through high school taking most courses online over the Internet at home instead of attending a regular school?**

	National Totals		Public School Parents	
	'07 %	'01 %	'07 %	'01 %
Willing	27	49	27	49
Not willing	73	49	73	49
Don't know	*	2	*	2

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

■ **FINDING:** It seems fair to say that opposition to earning some credits online may be softening, but opposition to earning most high school credits online is growing stronger.

■ **CONCLUSION:** What the data say to us is that the public is consistent in terms of its desire to have change come through reform of the existing system. While various alternatives are proposed and may draw some support, that support always falls short of the level required to offer a true alternative to the public schools.

## • GRADING THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS •

One of the traditions of the PDK/Gallup polls is the series of trend questions in which the public is asked to grade the public schools on a traditional A, B, C, D, and F scale. The same basic question is asked regarding the schools in the community (Table 26), the school a parent's oldest child attends (Table 27), and the nation's schools (Table 28). However, we have made the point repeatedly that there is no such thing as the "nation's" schools. Every school in the nation is someone's community school.

The percentage assigning an A or a B to the schools in the community is at 45%, down marginally (4%) from 2006. As always, parents give the local schools the highest grades, with 53% assigning an A or a B to local schools. Meanwhile, 67% of public school parents give the school their oldest child attends an A or a B, up marginally (3%) from 2006. Just 16% of respondents assign the nation's schools a grade of A or B.

**TABLE 26. 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	
	'07 %	'06 %	'07 %	'06 %	'07 %	'06 %
A & B	45	49	43	47	53	56
A	9	13	9	11	13	20
B	36	36	34	36	40	36
C	34	32	34	33	35	30
D	14	9	14	9	9	9
Fail	5	5	6	5	2	4
Don't know	2	5	3	6	1	1



**TABLE 27. Using the A, B, C, D, and FAIL scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?**

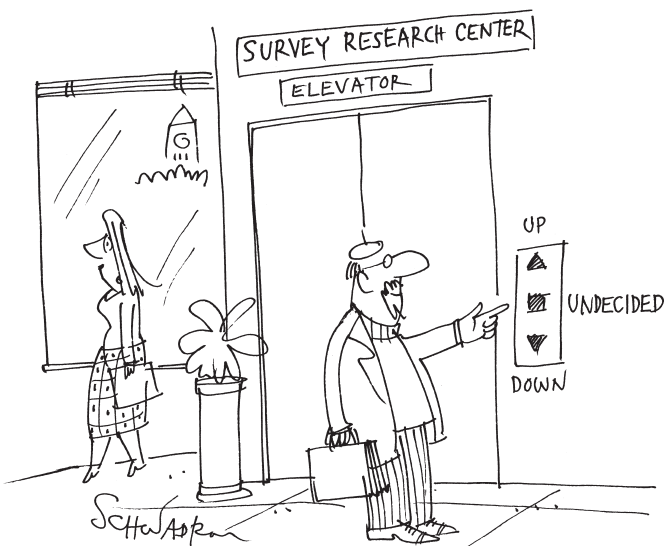
	Public School Parents	
	'07 %	'06 %
A & B	67	64
A	19	26
B	48	38
C	24	24
D	5	5
FAIL	3	4
Don't know	1	3

**TABLE 28. 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	
	'07 %	'06 %	'07 %	'06 %	'07 %	'06 %
A & B	16	21	17	21	14	22
A	2	2	2	1	2	3
B	14	19	15	20	12	19
C	57	51	55	50	66	51
D	18	14	17	14	16	13
FAIL	5	3	6	4	2	3
Don't know	4	11	5	11	2	11

■ **FINDING:** It seems fair to say it would be a mistake to shape public policy decisions on data regarding the nation's schools. The schools in the community are the ones the public knows about and cares about.

This year, we repeated a rating question that had not been asked since 1987. Respondents were asked to assign grades to the elementary schools and to the high schools in the community. The results are found in Table 29. As has historically been the case, high schools receive lower grades than elementary schools. The percentage assigning an A or a B to the elementary schools in 2007 is up 9% from 1987 and up 15%



## SCHOOLS HAVE STEPPED UP

Like politics, all education is local. Despite what detractors say about “the nation’s schools,” the closer the public gets to its local public schools, the more it likes them, and this continuing trend reflects well on those who lead schools.

The public’s satisfaction with local schools reflects the schools’ fulfillment of the diverse mandate given to them. While NCLB counts only that which can be counted, two-thirds of the public calls on its schools to see to its children’s social and emotional needs in addition to their academic needs, and, if poll numbers are any indication, the schools have stepped up. School leaders can be proud of what they’ve accomplished, but we still have work to do. Forty percent of the public remains unconvinced that students leave high school ready for college, and only about half believe that students leave high school adequately prepared to do skilled work.

But it’s interesting to note that the public doesn’t see a solution in NCLB. In fact, the more the public learns about the law, the less it likes it, with 43% pointing to an overemphasis on standardized testing and more than a quarter of those polled asserting the law is actually *hurting* our children. Further, the public continues to recognize a lack of financial support as, by far, the leading challenge facing its schools.

Policy makers have done an impressive job of ignoring the voice of educators for the past several years. Perhaps the public that puts them in office will have better luck delivering the message: reform NCLB now to emphasize testing less and promote learning more, and provide schools the flexibility and funding they need to fulfill their mission. — *Gerald N. Tirozzi*, executive director, National Association of Secondary School Principals, Reston, Va.

since 1981. The corresponding figure for high schools is up 7% from 1987 and up 15% since 1981. It appears that much of this gain is from the fact that the “don’t know” group has substantially declined.

**TABLE 29. Now, using the A, B, C, D, and FAIL scale again, what grade would you give the public elementary schools and the public high schools in your community?**

	Elementary Schools			High Schools		
	'07 %	'87 %	'81 %	'07 %	'87 %	'81 %
A & B	61	52	46	47	40	32
A	18	16	13	13	11	7
B	43	36	33	34	29	25
C	27	22	27	29	26	31
D	5	4	7	14	9	15
FAIL	5	3	5	7	4	9
Don't know	2	19	15	3	21	13

■ **CONCLUSION:** What the data say to us is that the public assigns generally high marks to the local public schools and that the level of satisfaction rises the closer the public gets to its schools. At the same time, there is ample room for improvement.



## • SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS •

Two questions in the poll asked the public to assess how effectively the public schools are performing specific functions. The first question deals with the effectiveness of the schools in meeting the needs of high-achieving students. The results are reported in Table 31. The second deals with the effectiveness of the schools in preparing students adequately for college, for skilled jobs, or for nonskilled jobs. The results are found in Table 32. Before turning to school effectiveness, it seemed important to ask people how much they know about the schools. Table 30 summarizes the responses to a question designed to get this information: 83% say they know quite a lot or some about the local schools.

**TABLE 30. How much do you know about the local schools — quite a lot, some, very little, or nothing at all?**

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'07 %	'83 %	'69 %	'07 %	'83 %	'69 %	'07 %	'83 %	'69 %
Quite a lot	38	22	18	32	19	12	54	31	27
Some	45	42	40	45	38	30	42	55	50
Very little	16	29	42	21	34	58	4	13	23
Nothing at all	1	7	*	2	9	*	*	1	*
Don't know	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

■ **FINDING:** It seems fair to say that the importance of a good education has become self-evident and that K-12 schools have moved toward the top of the policy agenda, causing the public to take an increasing interest in its local schools.

With regard to high-achieving students, 61% say that schools are doing an excellent or a good job of meeting the needs of this group.

**TABLE 31. Just based on your impression, or what you may have heard or read, how would you rate the job the local public schools are doing to meet the needs of their high-achieving students — excellent, good, fair, poor, or bad?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Excellent	17	18	17
Good	44	46	43
Fair	29	28	29
Poor	7	6	8
Bad	2	1	3
Don't know	1	1	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

■ **FINDING:** It seems fair to say that the public does not perceive any major problem in relation to the education high-achieving students are receiving.

Regarding the adequacy of high school education for a variety of postsecondary choices, 75% strongly agree or somewhat agree that students leave school adequately prepared to do nonskilled jobs, 60% say this about preparation for college, and 50% say this about preparation for skilled jobs.

**TABLE 32. As I read off each of the following statements, would you tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with that statement?**

	National Totals					
	Strongly + Somewhat Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Somewhat Agree %	Somewhat Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Don't Know %
Most public school students leave high school adequately prepared for college.	60	8	52	24	16	*
Most public school students leave high school adequately prepared to do skilled jobs.	50	8	42	31	19	*
Most public school students leave high school adequately prepared to do nonskilled jobs.	75	28	47	15	10	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

## • CURRICULUM •

As a nation we have spent so much time and energy lately on standards, testing, and accountability that we seem to forget sometimes that the purpose of public schools is to provide instruction for students. This section of the poll addresses a variety of issues related to that process.

### Role of the Schools

One question explores the responsibility of the schools for dealing with nonacademic issues. Two-thirds of respondents believe that the public schools should be responsible for dealing with the behavioral, social, and emotional needs of students. Table 33 reports the results.

**TABLE 33. In addition to being responsible for students' education, do you think the local public schools should be responsible, or not, for dealing with the behavioral, social, and emotional needs of their students?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Should be responsible	67	67	68
Should not be responsible	31	31	30
Don't know	2	2	2

■ **FINDING:** It seems fair to say that the public looks to the schools as the one place where all kinds of needs of all kinds of students can be addressed, and that would seem to make schools the logical place to address behavioral, social, and emotional needs.

### Standards That Drive the Curriculum

There is a debate going on as part of the reauthorization of NCLB as to whether the standards students are to meet

should be national standards or standards fixed by the state. The public is evenly divided on the question.

**TABLE 34. To measure student achievement, each state establishes its own standards and then tests students to see if these standards are met. Some people prefer national standards that would be used in every state. Which would you prefer in the local public schools — standards established by your own state or national standards?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Standards established by state	48	49	46
National standards	51	50	53
Don't know	1	1	1

## Emphasis on Math and Science

Given the attention that NCLB has drawn to math, it seemed appropriate to ask about the schools' emphasis on science and math in their own right. Table 35 reports the results. The public is equally split between "not enough" and "about the right amount" of emphasis.

### >> COMMENTARY << CAN WE MEET THE DEMAND?

Americans want their children to learn a foreign language, and they want them to start early. This year's PDK/Gallup Poll found that 85% of the respondents thought it very important or somewhat important for American students to learn a language in addition to English and that 70% of the respondents thought instruction in a second language should begin in elementary school. In the age of globalization, the importance of ability in a foreign language and the potential cultural understanding to be gained through learning that language cannot be overstated.

But the American education system lacks the capacity to meet the rising demand for foreign language instruction, particularly in the languages that have recently emerged as critical for economic, cultural, and national security reasons, such as Chinese and Arabic. These languages have been less commonly taught in the U.S., and the infrastructure for teaching languages other than the traditionally popular ones such as Spanish and French is almost nonexistent: no teachers, no programs, and no curriculum materials. Worse yet, the narrow focus of recent reform initiatives on math, reading, and science continues to consume most of the financial and political resources invested in education at the federal and state levels, leaving schools little freedom to take on new initiatives that do not seem to lead directly to improvement in what is deemed important by NCLB and standardized tests.

There is, however, good news. Technology and globalization can be effectively employed to provide high-quality language education. What is needed is creative thinking, policy support, and funding. — *Yong Zhao*, University Distinguished Professor and director, U.S.-China Center for Research on Educational Excellence, College of Education, Michigan State University, East Lansing.

**TABLE 35. In your opinion, do the public schools in this community give too much emphasis to teaching science and math, not enough emphasis, or about the right amount of emphasis?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Too much emphasis	2	2	2
Not enough emphasis	48	48	46
About the right amount of emphasis	48	48	52
Don't know	2	2	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

## • CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP •

Closing the achievement gap is a goal of NCLB. Table 36 lists four ways that this might be done. The method drawing the strongest public support is giving low-performing students more instructional time and assistance. It is the only one of the four choices that draws majority support as "very effective." Additional preschool and kindergarten care also draws strong support, with 48% saying "very effective." The remaining two alternatives relate to choice, with the last option taking up the voucher question.

**TABLE 36. Here are some plans that have been proposed as ways to close the achievement gap between low- and high-achieving public school students. As I read off each of these proposals, would you tell me how effective you think it would be as a way to close this achievement gap? Would it be very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective, or not effective at all?**

	National Totals					
	Very + Somewhat Effective %	Very Effective %	Somewhat Effective %	Not Very Effective %	Not at All Effective %	Don't Know %
Provide more instructional time and other help for low-performing students	96	65	31	2	2	*
Provide additional, voluntary preschool and kindergarten care for low-performing students	85	48	37	11	4	*
Provide parents of low-performing students the ability to enroll them in any public school of their choice	74	30	44	17	8	1
Provide parents of low-performing students financial support to cover part or all of the tuition cost at a private school	55	20	35	28	16	1

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

**CONCLUSION:** What the data say to us is that the public understands what must be done to close the achievement gap and that the methods identified — including more time, more assistance, and increased time outside the regular school day — will require a considerable additional investment in schools.

## INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

There is a growing understanding that we are living in one world and that the education of students must reflect this reality. Three questions — reported in Tables 37, 38, and 39 — explore this issue. The first asks if students should spend more time on international study. The public, by a 57% to 40% margin, says they should. The second asks if students should learn a second language, and the third asks at what point such education should start in school. Note that just 15% of respondents say that learning a second language is not very important or not important at all and that 70% say instruction should begin in elementary school.

**TABLE 37. Should students spend more time than they now do on learning about other nations of the world and the way people live there, or do you think they already spend enough time now? (In 1980, this question was asked of parents only.)**

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'07	'80	'07	'80	'07	'80
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Spend more time	57	—	58	—	55	45
Spend enough time	40	—	39	—	44	46
Don't know	3	—	3	—	1	9

**TABLE 38. How important do you believe it is for all children in the United States to learn a second language in addition to English? Is it very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all?**

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Very + somewhat important</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>85</b>
Very important	48	—	48	—	47	—
Somewhat important	37	—	37	—	38	—
Not very important	9	—	9	—	9	—
Not important at all	6	—	6	—	6	—
<b>Not very + not at all important</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>
Don't know	*	—	*	—	*	—

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

**TABLE 39. In your opinion, should instruction in a second language, that is, in addition to English, begin in elementary school, middle school, or in high school?**

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Elementary school	70	—	69	—	72	—
Middle school	18	—	18	—	18	—
High school	11	—	11	—	10	—
Don't know	1	—	2	—	*	—

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

**FINDING:** It seems fair to say that the public understands the fact that we are living in an ever-smaller world, that language facility is important, and that children should learn a second language at an early age.

## TEACHERS AND SCHOOL PERSONNEL

NCLB requires that students be taught by “highly qualified teachers” but does not indicate what the characteristics of a highly qualified teacher would be. Notwithstanding the lack of definition, we asked the public to evaluate a number of approaches that might be used in attracting and retaining such teachers. Table 40 summarizes the responses. The incentive receiving greatest support is smaller class sizes, with 95% saying it would be very or somewhat effective. Financial incentives (92%) and making additional professional development available (92%) trail slightly, while higher salaries for beginning teachers (87%) comes in fourth.

**TABLE 40. NCLB requires that all students have access to highly qualified teachers. I am going to read off some incentive plans that might be used to attract and retain public school teachers. As I read off each of these incentive plans, would you tell me how effective you think it would be for attracting and retaining teachers? Would it be very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective, or not effective at all?**

	National Totals					
	Very + Somewhat Effective %	Very Effective %	Somewhat Effective %	Not Very Effective %	Not at All Effective %	Don't Know %
Smaller class sizes	95	65	30	4	1	*
Financial incentives for teachers based on their performance	92	59	33	5	3	*
Making additional professional development programs available to teachers	92	43	49	6	2	*
Higher salaries for beginning teachers	87	52	35	8	4	1

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

**FINDING:** It seems fair to say that the public believes that incentives involving additional pay will attract and retain highly qualified teachers.



“He’s a ‘data retriever.’”



We turn now to the ways of determining what teachers are paid. The difficulty of getting teachers to teach a particular subject tops the list, with 91% saying it is a very or somewhat important factor to consider. Teacher seniority was judged to be the least important factor, with 73% saying very or somewhat important.

**TABLE 41. Here are some factors that some states are using to determine how much teachers are paid. As I read off each of these factors, would you tell me how important you think that factor should be in determining how much the teachers in the local public schools should be paid? Is it very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all?**

	National Totals					
	Very + Somewhat Important %	Very Important %	Somewhat Important %	Not Very Important %	Not at All Important %	Don't Know %
The number of college credits or degrees a teacher has earned	87	44	43	10	2	1
The performance of the teacher's students on state tests	81	37	44	15	3	1
The teacher's seniority, i.e., how long the teacher has been teaching	73	30	43	18	8	1
How difficult it is to find a teacher in a particular subject area	91	44	47	6	2	1
How difficult it is to get a teacher to work in a particular public school	89	43	46	8	1	2

**FINDING:** It seems fair to say that the public is aware that finding teachers will require the use of new and practical criteria. This does not, however, change the public's traditional support for academic preparation as measured by credits earned.

The need for professional development is an important issue at this time. Table 42 reports on the responses to a question about one way of meeting this need. Eighty-one percent believe teachers should be required to spend part of the workday learning how to help their students perform at higher levels.

**TABLE 42. In your opinion, should public school teachers be required to spend some part of their workday learning how to help their students perform or achieve at higher levels academically, or not?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Yes, should	81	81	83
No, should not	18	18	17
Don't know	1	1	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

## • BIGGEST PROBLEM •

It seems appropriate to end this report with the "biggest problem" facing the schools. The public has been asked to identify the top problem in every one of the 39 polls. This is always the first question asked, as a means of eliminating any bias related to the order of the questions. The problems with the most mentions are reported in Table 43. Over the years, discipline, lack of funding, use of drugs, and fighting/violence/gangs have topped the list. Starting in 2004, poll respondents have identified funding as the major problem schools face. The percentage of mentions for this problem this year is 22%, and no other problem comes close.

**TABLE 43. 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			
	'07	'06	'05	'04	'07	'06	'05	'04	'07	'06	'05	'04
Lack of financial support/funding/money	22	24	20	21	21	25	19	22	26	21	21	20
Lack of discipline, more control	10	11	10	10	11	12	12	10	5	7	8	8
Overcrowded schools	7	13	11	10	6	12	9	9	9	16	15	13
Fighting/violence/gangs	5	5	8	6	5	6	7	6	8	4	10	6
Difficulty getting good teachers/quality teachers	5	4	3	5	5	4	3	5	4	4	3	5
Concern about standards/quality	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	3	4	3
Use of drugs/dope	4	8	9	7	5	8	9	7	3	7	8	7

**FINDING:** It seems fair to say that the public understands the fact that funding is closely tied to improving student achievement and is aware that lack of funding is currently a major concern.

## > RESEARCH PROCEDURE

*The Sample.* The sample used in this survey embraced a total of 1,005 adults (18 years of age and older). A description of the sample and methodology can be found on page 45.

*Time of Interviewing.* The fieldwork for this study was conducted during the period of June 12 through June 29, 2007.

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 [www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kpollsample.htm](http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kpollsample.htm).

## > DESIGN OF THE SAMPLE

All findings for the 2007 PDK/Gallup Poll are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of adults aged 18 and older. Respondents were selected from Gallup's 48,000-member household panel, which was, in turn, recruited through random-digit dialing (RDD) selection methods. The obtained sample was weighted to be representative of U.S. adults nationwide. For findings based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is 3 percentage points and, in the case of public school parents, 5 percentage points. It should be noted that in addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

## > 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 274-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.

## PDK/GALLUP POLL ADVISORY PANEL

The following individuals worked with Alec Gallup and the Gallup Organization to select and frame the questions asked in the 39th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools.

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**Bruce Smith**, Editor, *Phi Delta Kappan*.

**Delaine McCullough**, Director of Marketing and Communications, Phi Delta Kappa International.

## > COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE

<b>Adults</b>	%	<b>Income</b>	%
No children in school	73	\$50,000 and over	51
Public school parents	24	\$40,000 and over	61
Nonpublic school parents	3	\$30,000-\$39,999	11
		\$20,000-\$29,999	11
		Under \$20,000	12
		Undesignated	10
<b>Gender</b>	%	<b>Region</b>	%
Men	47	East	23
Women	53	Midwest	23
		South	32
<b>Race</b>	%	West	22
White	82	<b>Community Size</b>	%
Nonwhite	16	Urban	30
Black	11	Suburban	47
Undesignated	2	Rural	21
<b>Age</b>	%	<b>Political Party</b>	%
18-29 years	18	Republican	31
30-49 years	39	Democrat	36
50 and over	42	Independent	30
Undesignated	0		
<b>Education</b>	%		
Total college	57		
College graduate	25		
College incomplete	32		
Total high school	43		
High school graduate	40		
High school incomplete	3		

## > 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 Erin Young at Phi Delta Kappa International, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. Ph. 800/766-1156.





# Policy Implications

## Of the 39th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll

### Of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

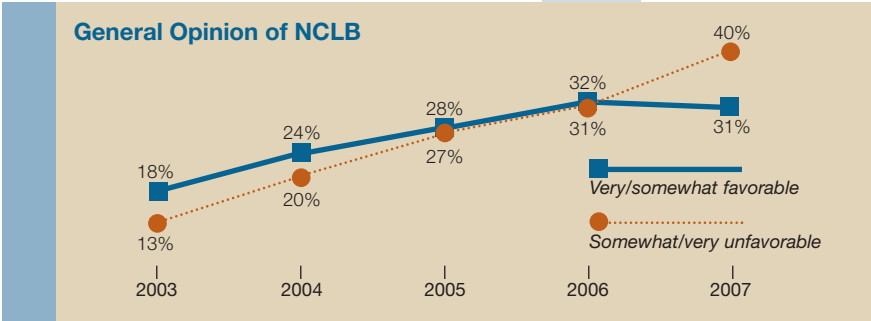
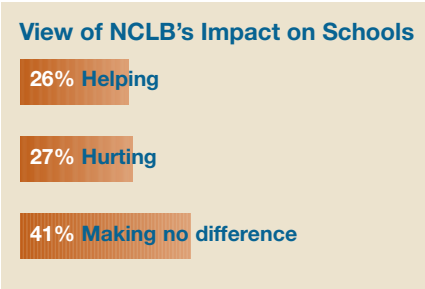
The PDK/Gallup polls provide a snapshot of the public's assessment of its schools and the challenges they face, as well as a measure of what the public will and will not support in terms of program initiatives. Such information can be invaluable in the ongoing policy debates regarding our public schools. However, that information will not be remotely useful unless school leaders consider the implications of the public's views for the operation of the schools. School leaders can bring to bear on school policy the common sense and practical wisdom that were missing from the creation of No Child Left Behind. Here, we offer seven implications of the 2007 PDK/Gallup Poll.

#### Implication 1

*NCLB: An opportunity lost is another door of opportunity opened.*

The growing disapproval of NCLB reflects the law's failure to fulfill the public's desire to improve achievement for all students. Schools have the chance to fill this void by embracing NCLB's goals and continuing the effort to bring them to reality.

#### PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD NCLB



#### LESSONS FOR LEADERS

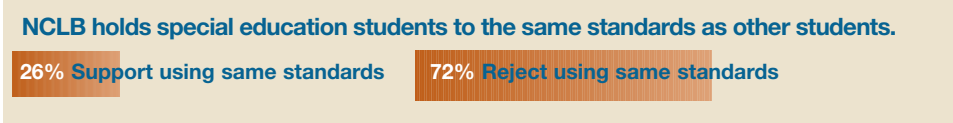
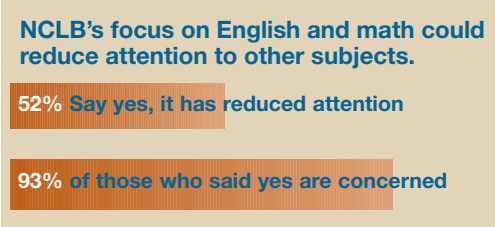
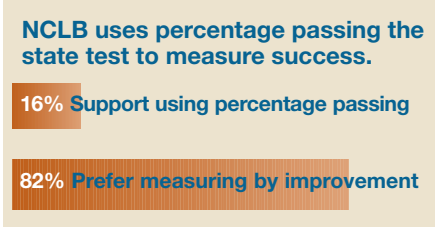
- The public is divided with regard to NCLB's impact, but dissatisfaction is growing.
- This dissatisfaction must be dealt with in the reauthorization of NCLB, and schoolpeople must contribute to this effort.

#### Implication 2

*Weak leaders rejoice in the mistakes of others; strong leaders learn from them.*

The flawed strategies used in determining adequate yearly progress (AYP) are causing NCLB to lose favor. Schoolpeople are in the best position to bring to the policy debate an accurate assessment of what it will take to get improvement right.

#### SELECTED NCLB STRATEGIES



#### LESSONS FOR LEADERS

- Ironically, the key to success in fixing NCLB may be doing what the law set out to do, but doing it right by building in flexibility, involving those affected, and focusing on assistance rather than punishment. But the goals of NCLB can only be a guide. Such factors as practicality, level of resources, and staff and community acceptance must also be considered. Change demands creativity.

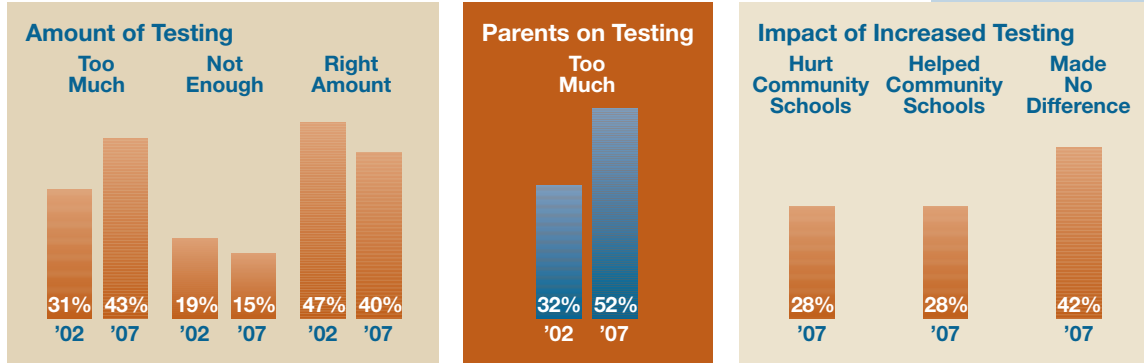


## Implication 3

*When to test? When testing promises to increase achievement!*

The public is growing disenchanted with the increased amount of standardized testing. This poses a challenge for schoolpeople who need to gear instruction to standards and individualize instruction as much as possible; some additional testing is required for both accountability and diagnostic purposes.

### PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD STANDARDIZED TESTING



### LESSONS FOR LEADERS

► It seems more than coincidental that the growing dissatisfaction with testing comes at a time when the use of test data in guiding high-stakes decisions has exploded. Schoolpeople must be prepared to explain to students, parents, and the community why each test is needed and what purpose it serves.

## Implication 4

*Authority carries the burden of responsibility.*

The public unhesitatingly vests its confidence in the public schools by supporting change through the existing school system. Only charter schools, which are public schools, garner majority support as an alternative. This places a burden on schoolpeople to meet the challenge and bring about the improvement that the public seeks.

### WAYS TO CHANGE SCHOOLS

#### Mode of Improvement

26% Find an alternative system

72% Reform existing system

#### Support for Alternatives

39% Favor vouchers

31% Favor contracting out operations

39% Favor takeovers by mayors

60% Favor charter schools

### LESSONS FOR LEADERS

- The public consistently chooses to bring about change in schools through the existing system.
- Vouchers and alternative ways to manage schools have consistently failed to attract majority support.
- Support for public charter schools reached a majority (53%) in 2006, and that support continues to grow.

## Implication 5

*"The world is flat." — The public thinks so!*

The public's recognition that students need to learn about other nations and need to acquire facility in a second language is laudatory; moreover, meeting those needs would broaden the curriculum at a time when the curriculum has been progressively narrowing.

### GLOBAL ISSUES

#### Time Spent Studying Other Nations

57% Need more

40% Enough time now

#### Importance of Second Language

85% Very + somewhat important

15% Not very + not at all

### LESSONS FOR LEADERS

- Respondents recognize that we live in a world where what happens anywhere can affect us all. The challenge for school leaders is how to respond in a positive way.
- In building support for strong international programs, schools should seek to forge links with and gain support from those who routinely operate in a globalized world.

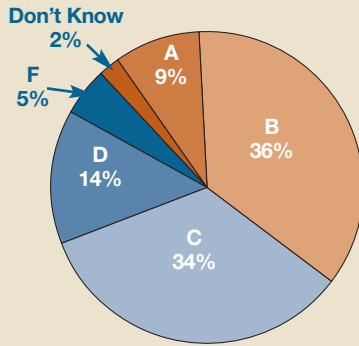
## Implication 6

*All children must be educated to the limit of their abilities.*

While the public expresses general satisfaction with the public schools, the grades assigned and the public's assessment of how well schools are performing specific functions leave room for seeking the improvement necessary to meet the needs of all students.

### GRADING THE SCHOOLS

#### Grades Assigned to Local Schools



#### Preparation for College and Work

- 60% Students leave high school adequately prepared for college
- 50% Students leave high school adequately prepared for skilled jobs
- 75% Students leave high school adequately prepared for nonskilled jobs

#### What About High Achievers?

- 17% Schools provide excellent education for high achievers
- 44% Schools provide good education for high achievers
- 29% Schools provide fair education for high achievers
- 7% Schools provide poor education for high achievers
- 2% Schools provide bad education for high achievers

#### LESSONS FOR LEADERS

- Words such as adequate, average, and acceptable have no place in the vocabulary of school leaders. No goal is worthy of those in the profession except to educate every child to the limit of the child's ability.
- The schools may be far better than they are given credit for being, but they are not nearly as good as they need to be to meet the needs of today's students.
- Schoolpeople will be most effective if they set aside distractions, such as AYP, and do what they became educators to do: the best possible job of educating kids.

## Implication 7

*Understanding the need is easy; meeting the need is not.*

The public understands the link between funding and school improvement and judges funding to be the biggest problem schools face. This provides an opportunity for school leaders, but no assurance that the problem will be solved.

#### LESSONS FOR LEADERS

- That the public understands that funding is the greatest problem facing the schools will have no practical significance unless we can find ways to translate this sentiment into better funding for schools.
- The day is gone when schoolpeople could concentrate on operating schools and leave others to take care of funding. School leaders, teachers, and parents have no choice but to become lobbyists for their schools. They are the best advocates for public schooling.

#### BIGGEST PROBLEMS

Lack of funding has headed the list of school problems since the turn of the century

