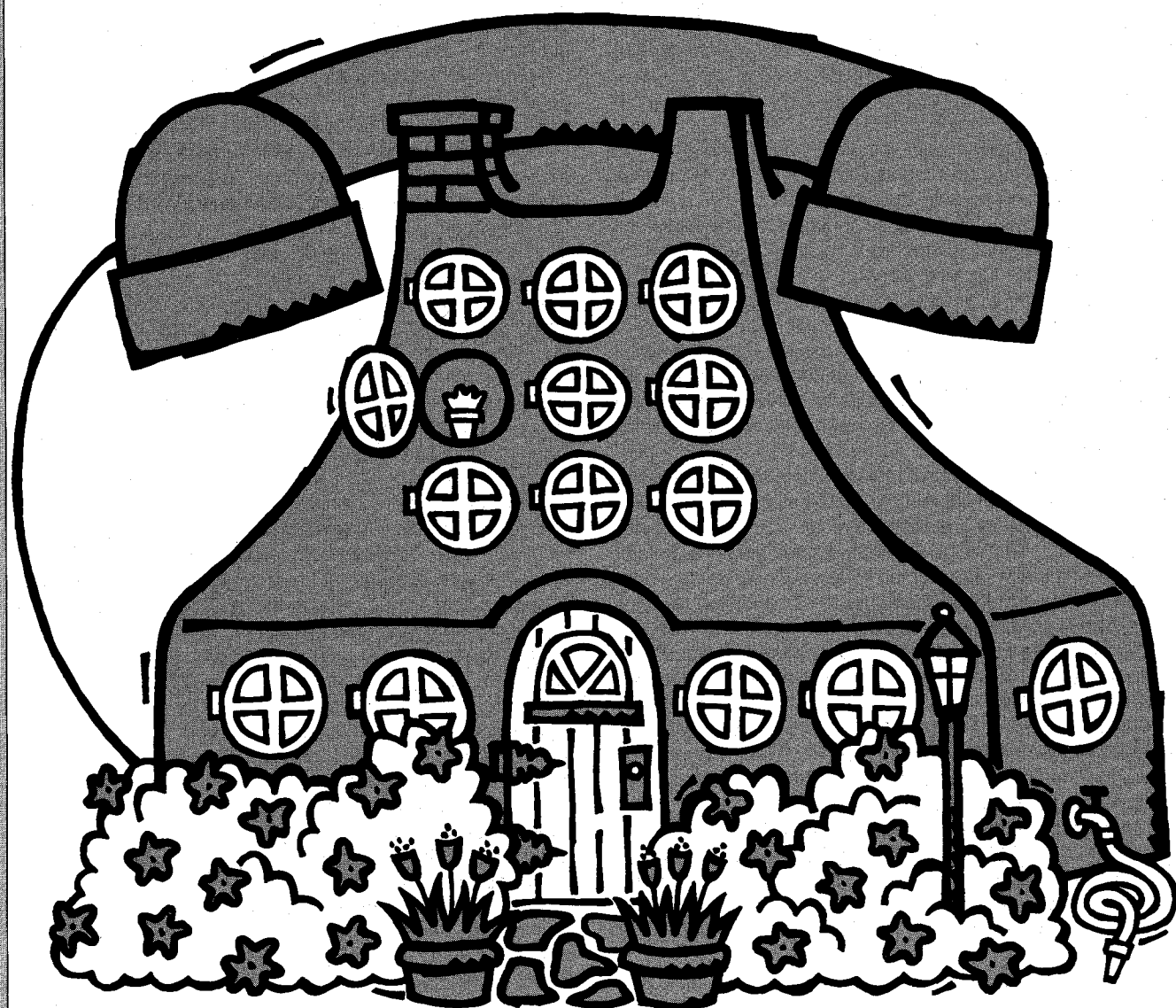


THE 34TH ANNUAL PHI DELTA KAPPA/GALLUP POLL OF THE PUBLIC'S ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BY LOWELL C. ROSE AND ALEC M. GALLUP



The 34th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools comes with K-12 education at the state and federal levels in flux. School improvement efforts that have been blossoming since the 1990s are threatened by financial realities. Public school educators find themselves pulled between the improvement demanded in the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) and financial conditions at the state level that make simply maintaining the status quo a challenge. And, in continuing to lower the wall between church and state, the U.S. Supreme Court has given approval to vouchers that allow parents to direct public funds to private schools, including religious schools. This poll explores these and other issues in depth.

There is good news in the poll for public school advocates. Local schools continue to be regarded favorably, with 71% of public school parents giving the school their oldest child attends a grade of A or B. And, in what may be the best news for the public schools, when asked how states should adjust to the reduced revenues brought on by the weak economy, Americans reject cuts in education spending. Seventy-eight percent would avoid such cuts by reducing spending in other areas, while 58% would go so far as to raise taxes to avoid cutting education spending.

There is also good news in this poll for advocates of directing public funds to private schools. Although 52% of Americans still oppose allowing parents and students to "choose a private school to attend at public expense," support for this idea rises to 46% in this year's poll, after dropping to 34% last year. And, in the companion question, support for allowing parents to choose "any public, private, or church-related school" with the government paying all or part of the tuition for parents who choose a "nonpublic school" rises eight points in this year's poll to 52%. This poll was conducted prior to the Supreme Court's decision, and we can expect these gains to have an impact on the public debate regarding vouchers that will doubtless arise as a result of that decision.

A major focus in this year's poll is the No Child Left Behind Act, signed into law on 8 January 2002. A bipartisan effort, the NCLBA represents the greatest federal incursion into K-12 education to date. The NCLBA initiatives will make the federal government a major player at the state and local levels — despite the fact that federal funding for K-12 education remains less than 8% of total expenditures. This year, the poll set out to determine how the public is reacting to the prospect of an increased federal role. The data suggest that the public welcomes the possibility.

Fifty-seven percent believe the federal government's increased involvement is a good thing; 68% of Americans would go beyond the requirements of the NCLBA and require all 50 states to use the same nationally standardized test to measure student achievement. Although not suggested by the NCLBA, 66% would go so far as to have a national curriculum. In response to specific provisions of the NCLBA, support among Americans is evident in a number of areas:

- 67% support mandated testing in grades 3 through 8;

- 96% support requiring teachers to be licensed in the subjects they teach;

- 96% believe that teachers should pass a competency test before being licensed; and

- for schools that fail to meet state standards, 86% support offering "in-district" choice for all students, 90% support offering tutoring by state-approved private providers; and 56% support termination of the principal and the teachers.

The one consequence the public rejects for a school that fails to meet state standards is closing the school. Seventy-seven percent are opposed to this action. And, perhaps in support of this opinion, 77% believe that additional money should be provided to such schools.

The public and educators do not see eye to eye on many of the details of the NCLBA. Many educators are concerned about the provision of the NCLBA that indicates that a school will be judged to be failing unless every student demonstrates proficiency on a "high-standards" test by the end of the 2013-14 school year. The public does not share this concern. Eighty percent believe the goal is likely to be met by their local schools. Educators are also concerned that the emphasis on reading and mathematics in both the NCLBA and state improvement efforts will mean reduced attention in other subject areas. Not the public! To the contrary, 56% believe this result would be a good thing.

Neither is the public concerned by the increase in testing involved in state improvement efforts and likely to be enhanced by the NCLBA. Forty-seven percent express the view that the amount of testing is just about right, a level of satisfaction that has not changed since 1997.

The public shows some disagreement with the NCLBA regarding the consequences for schools that fail to meet the NCLBA mandate that there be a "highly qualified teacher" in every classroom by 2005-06. A "highly qualified teacher" is, at a minimum, one with a degree and certification and demonstrated competency in the areas taught. The NCLBA, although silent on the consequences, excludes waivers in this area. Ninety-three percent of the public takes what may be a more realistic view, saying that, in the event that teacher supply makes compliance with the NCLBA impossible, schools should use the most qualified teachers available.

On a matter closely related to the NCLBA's emphasis on meeting the needs of students not currently being well served by the schools, last year's poll sought to determine the public's attitude toward the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students. This year's poll revisited that issue. Results for the two years confirm that the public believes that there is a gap and that that gap must be closed. However, the public does not attribute the gap to the quality of schooling. Asked what causes the gap, the public lists, in order, factors related to home life, economic disadvantage, and poor community environment.

The 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* recommended increasing time-on-task by lengthening the school day or year as one way to improve student achievement. At the time, parents showed little support for this idea. Not much has changed. This year, 70% of respondents oppose lengthening the school day, and 59% oppose lengthening the school year. The public is, however, in favor of having formal school experience start earlier. Eighty-five percent favor making kindergarten mandatory, and 82% favor making prekindergarten available as part of the formal school program.

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Regarding the problems that the public schools face, lack of financial support tops the list of public concerns (23%), with lack of discipline and overcrowded schools, which tied for second, lagging well behind at 17%. Asked about the seriousness of these problems, 76% say discipline is a very or somewhat serious problem, and 71% say likewise for overcrowding. It is worth mentioning that public school parents are less likely to point to discipline and more likely to point to financing and overcrowding as problems for the schools.

For the first time, this year's poll explored size of a school. The public believes that size is important and that smaller is better. Seventy-seven percent say the size of a school makes a difference in student achievement. And, regarding the desired size, 52% prefer elementary schools of less than 500, and 73% prefer middle schools of less than 1,000. Preferences for the size of high schools are less clear, with one method of grouping showing 50% preferring less than 1,000 and another showing 64% supporting high schools of 500 to 2,000.

These and other findings are presented in detail in the following pages. There are also examples of the interesting demographic data provided in the full cross tabulations of the poll, a complete reporting of which can be obtained from Phi Delta Kappa (see notes at the end of this report).

Attitudes Regarding the Public Schools

Grading the Public Schools

When asked to grade schools on the traditional A-to-F scale, respondents continue to assign high grades to the schools in their own community while downgrading schools nationally. Twenty-four percent give the nation's schools an A or a B. This rises to 47% for the schools in the community, to 58% when public school parents grade their local schools, and to 71% when public school parents are asked to grade the school their oldest child attends. The 47% is down four points from one year ago, while the 71% is up three points. Looking back 10 years to 1992, 41% of the total sample assigned an A or a B to community schools, while 66% of parents gave an A or a B to the school attended by their oldest child.

The first question:

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

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'02 %	'01 %	'02 %	'01 %	'02 %	'01 %
A & B	47	51	44	47	58	62
A	10	11	9	8	16	19
B	37	40	35	39	42	43
C	34	30	35	33	30	25
D	10	8	10	8	8	8
FAIL	3	5	3	4	3	4
Don't know	6	6	8	8	1	1

• A's and B's awarded in the East are 51%; in the Midwest, 54%; in the South, 44%; and in the West, 40%.

• A's and B's awarded by urbanites are 32%; by suburbanites, 51%; and by rural residents, 53%.

The second question:

How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'02 %	'01 %	'02 %	'01 %	'02 %	'01 %
A & B	24	23	25	22	20	25
A	2	2	1	1	2	2
B	22	21	24	21	18	23
C	47	51	46	53	51	47
D	13	14	13	13	11	15
FAIL	3	5	3	5	3	4
Don't know	13	7	13	7	15	9

• 34% of 18- to 29-year-olds assign an A or a B; 20% of those 50 and older.
• 19% of Republicans assign an A or a B; 30% of Democrats.

The third question:

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

	Public School Parents	
	'02 %	'01 %
A & B	71	68
A	27	28
B	44	40
C	20	22
D	6	6
FAIL	2	3
Don't know	1	1

Focus of School Improvement

Asked about the focus of school improvement, the public supports — by 69% to 27% — the option of "reforming existing system" over that of "finding an alternative system." In a follow-up question designed to probe the meaning of the response to the first question, 69% chose "improving and strengthening existing public schools," while 29% chose "providing vouchers." The percentages are little changed from last year.

The first question:

In order to improve public education in America, some people think the focus should be on reforming the existing public school system. Others believe the focus should be on finding an alternative to the existing public school system. Which approach do you think is preferable — reforming the existing public school system or finding an alternative to the existing public school system?

	National Totals					No Children In School					Public School Parents				
	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'99 %	'97 %	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'99 %	'97 %	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'99 %	'97 %
Reforming existing system	69	72	59	71	71	69	73	59	73	70	69	73	60	68	72
Finding alternative system	27	24	34	27	23	26	23	34	24	23	27	25	34	30	24
Don't know	4	4	7	2	6	5	4	7	3	7	4	2	6	2	4

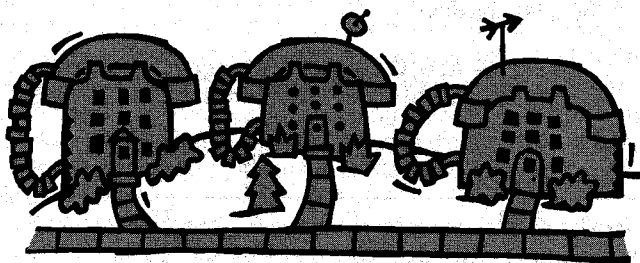
• 71% of whites would reform the existing system, as compared to 60% of nonwhites.

The second question:

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

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'02	'01	'02	'01	'02	'01
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Improving and strengthening existing public schools	69	71	69	71	72	73
Providing vouchers	29	27	28	26	27	25
Neither (volunteered)	—	—	—	—	—	2
Don't know	2	2	3	3	1	—

• 38% of Republicans select providing vouchers; 24% of Democrats.



Funding the Public Schools

In questions related to school funding, 88% of respondents expressed the view that funding should be the same for all public school students in the state. This finding, which varies little among the demographic groups, bears directly on the many state court actions designed to equalize funding. A second question explored public attitudes toward dealing with revenue shortages so severe that tax increases or spending cuts are necessary. Only 26% would reduce state spending for education. Seventy-eight percent would avoid such cuts by cutting in other areas, while 58% would do so by increasing state taxes. The public's view of the importance of funding and the priority it assigns to schools seem clear.

The first question:

Do you think the amount of money allocated to public education in this state from all sources should or should not be the same for all students whether or not they live in wealthy or poor districts?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'02	'93	'91	'02	'93	'91	'02	'93	'91
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Should be the same	88	88	80	89	87	78	86	89	84
Should not be the same	10	10	13	9	11	14	13	10	12
Don't know	2	2	7	2	2	8	1	1	4

The second question:

The current economy is forcing most states to reduce revenue shortages by either increasing revenues or reducing expenditures. As I read each of

the following ways to fund education in your state, please tell me whether you would favor that action a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or not at all.

	Great Deal And Fair Amount %	Great Deal %	Fair Amount %	Not Very Much %	Not At All %	Don't Know %
Reduce state spending for education	26	10	16	18	55	1
Increase state taxes to produce enough funds to avoid education cuts	58	23	35	18	22	2
Use a combination of increased state taxes and spending cuts in education	53	17	36	21	24	2
Keep present level of education funding by making spending cuts in other areas	78	35	43	13	7	2

Approaches to School Improvement

The No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA), signed into law on 8 January 2002, increases the federal government's decision-making role regarding K-12 schools. Using specific provisions from the NCLBA, this year's poll set out to determine how the public feels about this expansion of federal authority. Eight questions most directly related to the NCLBA are reported in this section; however, other questions in the poll touch directly and indirectly on its provisions. The first question dealt directly with the federal government's increased involvement; 57% said they believe it is a good thing.

The first question:

The new national education legislation will increase the federal government's involvement in local public school affairs to a greater extent than in the past. In your opinion, will this be a good thing or a bad thing for the public schools in your community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
A good thing	57	56	62
A bad thing	34	34	32
Don't know	9	10	6

- 55% of whites say a good thing; 70% of nonwhites.
- 72% of 18- to 29-year-olds say a good thing; just 46% of those 50 and older.
- 53% of Republicans say a good thing; 63% of Democrats.
- 65% in the East say a good thing; 49% in the Midwest; 61% in the South; and 53% in the West.

Two questions dealt with the NCLBA's testing program. In response to the first, 67% said they favor the use of an annual test to track student progress in grades 3 through 8. (In an independent Gallup poll conducted in 1997, 68% favored annual testing in grades 4 through 8.) In response to the second question, 68% said all 50 states should be required to use a nationally standardized test. The NCLBA currently leaves test selection to each state.

The second question:

The new national education legislation requires the tracking of student progress from grades 3 to 8 based on an annual test. Would you favor or oppose such a test in the public schools in your community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Would favor	67	69	65
Would oppose	31	29	34
Don't know	2	2	1

The third question:

According to the new national education legislation, each of the 50 states can select the test it wishes to use for the grade 3 through 8 tracking. Which would you prefer — letting your state use its own test, or requiring all 50 states to use a single standardized test?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Letting your state use its own test	30	31	26
Requiring all 50 states to use a nationally standardized test	68	67	72
Don't know	2	2	2

The next question dealt with the NCLBA goal requiring that every student in a school demonstrate proficiency on a high-standards test by the end of the 2013-14 school year. Eighty percent said they believe achieving this goal in their local schools is either very likely or somewhat likely. The responses varied little across demographic groups.

The fourth question:

The new 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 %
Very and somewhat likely	80	81	77
Very likely	31	30	36
Somewhat likely	49	51	41
Not very likely	12	11	15
Not at all likely	6	5	6
Don't know	2	3	2

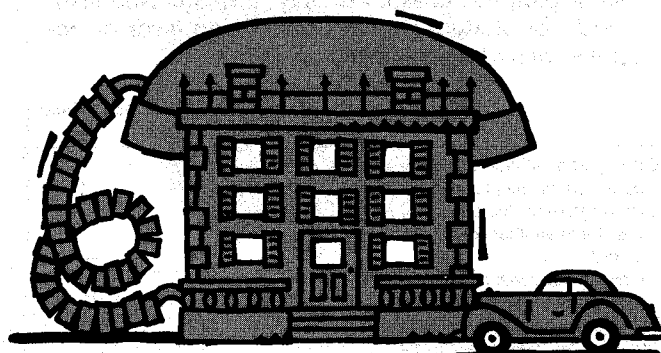
Three questions were directed at the NCLBA requirement that, by the 2005-06 school year, every teacher be highly qualified. Highly qualified, at the minimum, requires full certification, licensing in the area being taught, and demonstrated competency. The uncertainty of the teacher supply makes this a

matter of concern. Ninety-six percent of respondents indicated that it is either very or somewhat important that teachers be licensed in the subject area in which they teach; 96% said they support requiring teachers to pass a statewide basic competency test before being licensed. In probing what a school should do if a highly qualified teacher cannot be found, 93% of respondents said the schools should use the best-qualified teachers available.

The fifth question:

How important do you think it is that public school teachers in the public schools in your community be licensed by the state in the subject areas in which they teach — very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Very and somewhat important	96	97	97
Very important	80	79	84
Somewhat important	16	18	13
Not very important	2	1	1
Not at all important	1	1	1
Don't know	1	1	1



The sixth question:

Before being licensed, do you think the teachers in the public schools in your community should or should not be required to take a statewide competency test in the subjects they will teach?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Yes, should	96	96	95
No, should not	4	3	5
Don't know	—	1	—

The seventh question:

The new national education legislation requires that the public schools have a "highly qualified teacher" in every classroom. If the current shortage of teachers makes this requirement impossible to achieve, would you favor or oppose each of the following alternatives in the public schools in your community?

	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
Increasing the number of students per class	21	78	1
Reducing the number of courses offered in the school	37	61	2
Using the most qualified teachers available	93	6	1

- 26% of Republicans say increase students per class; 17% of Democrats.
- 26% of men say increase students per class; 16% of women.
- 25% of 18- to 29-year-olds say reduce the number of courses; 41% of those 50 and older.
- 27% of urbanites say reduce the number of courses; 38% of suburbanites; 43% of rural dwellers.

Finally, respondents were asked about what should be done if a school fails to meet state standards. Five of the six options were taken directly from the NCLBA. The public approves of all but one. Seventy-seven percent reject closing the school. The one option not mentioned in the NCLBA, obtaining additional money for the school, is supported by 77%. These two responses are similar to last year, when 66% rejected withholding federal funds from schools that did not meet state standards, and 65% favored awarding more money to the school.

The eighth question:

If a public school in your community does not show progress toward meeting state-approved standards for student learning, would you favor or oppose each of the following measures?

	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
Offering after-school tutoring by state-approved private providers	90	9	1
Offering students the opportunity to transfer to another school in the district	86	14	—
Obtaining additional money from the local district to address the school's problems	77	22	1
Not renewing the contract of the principal	56	40	4
Not renewing the contracts of the teachers	56	40	4
Closing the school	21	77	2

- 46% of 18- to 29-year-olds would fire the principal; 56% of those 50 and older.
- 61% of urbanites would fire the principal; 56% of suburbanites; and 49% of urban dwellers.
- 58% of whites would fire the teachers; 41% of nonwhites.
- 40% of 18- to 29-year-olds would fire the teachers; 59% of those 50 and older.
- 62% of Republicans would fire the teachers; 47% of Democrats.

Choice, Public and Private

Private Schooling at Public Expense

These polls have used two questions to track the public's attitude toward funding private school attendance. The first deals simply with allowing "students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense." The second focuses on allowing parents "to send their school-age children to any public, private, or church-related school they choose." Responses to the two questions are frequently the subject of debate.

The question regarding allowing "students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense" was first asked in 1995, with 33% responding in favor. Support then rose, peaked at 44% in the late Nineties, and declined to 34% last year. The percentage in favor this year has jumped to 46%, with 52% opposed.

The picture on the second question is almost identical. When first asked in 1996, the proportion in favor was at 43%. It climbed, peaked at 51% in the late 1990s, and had dropped to 44% last year. This year, 52% are in favor of the proposal, and 46% opposed.

The first question:

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

	National Totals							
	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'99 %	'98 %	'97 %	'96 %	'95 %
Favor	46	34	39	41	44	44	36	33
Oppose	52	62	56	55	50	52	61	65
Don't know	2	4	5	4	6	4	3	2

- 51% of men are in favor; 41% of women.
- 53% of 18- to 29-year-olds are in favor; 37% of those 50 and older.
- 52% of urbanites are in favor; 45% of suburbanites; 41% of rural dwellers.

The second question:

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

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Favor	52	51	51
Oppose	46	47	46
Don't know	2	2	3

- 49% of whites are in favor; 63% of nonwhites.
- 69% of 18- to 29-year-olds are in favor; 39% of those 50 and older.

	National Totals						Public School Parents					
	'01 %	'00 %	'99 %	'98 %	'97 %	'96 %	'01 %	'00 %	'99 %	'98 %	'97 %	'96 %
Favor	44	45	51	51	49	43	52	47	60	56	55	49
Oppose	54	52	47	45	48	54	47	51	38	40	43	49
Don't know	2	3	2	4	3	3	1	2	2	4	2	2

Charter Schools

This is the third year that the poll has explored charter schools, with three of the five questions having been asked in all three years. Awareness and opinions have changed little. In response to the first question, 56% said they have heard or read about charter schools. Given a brief definition, 44% said they are in favor of such schools, and 43% said they are opposed. And 77% said that charter schools should be account-

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Poll of the Public's Attitudes

(Continued from page 46)

able to the state in the same way public schools are accountable.

The first question:

Have you heard or read about so-called charter schools?

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'02	'01	'00	'02	'01	'00	'02	'01	'00
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	56	55	49	55	57	49	58	50	44
No	43	44	50	45	42	49	41	49	55
Don't know	1	1	1	—	1	2	1	1	1

- 39% of 18- to 29-year-olds say yes; 69% of those 50 and older.
- 54% of urbanites say yes; 63% of suburbanites; and 45% of urban dwellers.

The second question:

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		
	'02	'01	'00	'02	'01	'00	'02	'01	'00
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Favor	44	42	42	44	40	42	44	43	40
Oppose	43	49	47	43	51	47	44	47	47
Don't know	13	9	11	13	9	11	12	10	13

- 57% of 18- to 29-year-olds are in favor; 36% of those 50 and older.
- 51% of Republicans are in favor; 33% of Democrats.
- 52% of urbanites are in favor; 44% of suburbanites; and 39% of rural dwellers.

The third question:

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		
	'02	'01	'00	'02	'01	'00	'02	'01	'00
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Should be accountable	77	77	79	78	77	78	77	77	81
Should not	19	18	17	19	18	18	19	18	14
Don't know	4	5	4	3	5	4	4	5	5

Respondents were then asked whether they would favor charter schools if funding them meant reduced funds for the regular public schools. Sixty-five percent said no. A final question on charter schools asked about the appropriateness of offering all instruction over the Internet. Sixty-five percent of respondents said they would oppose such schools in their community. The latter finding is similar to the 67% in last year's poll who said no to high school students' earning all credits over the Internet.

The fourth question:

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 %
Would favor	30	31	25
Would oppose	65	64	70
Don't know	5	5	5

- 37% of men would still favor; 24% of women.
- 38% of Republicans would still favor; 26% of Democrats.
- 37% of urbanites would still favor; 29% of suburbanites; and 26% of rural dwellers.

The fifth question:

Some charter schools offer all instruction to students online over the Internet. Would you favor or oppose such schools in your own community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Would favor	30	30	31
Would oppose	65	65	65
Don't know	5	5	4

- 27% of whites would favor; 45% of nonwhites.
- 39% of 18- to 29-year-olds would favor; 21% of those 50 and older.
- 25% in the East would favor; 26% in the Midwest; 33% in the South; and 37% in the West.

Problems Facing the Public Schools

The one question repeated in all 33 previous Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup polls offers respondents the opportunity to identify the biggest problems facing local public schools. Lack of financial support has topped the list for the last two years and remains in first place this year. The percentage of mentions is higher this year (23%), with lack of discipline and overcrowded schools tied for second at 17%. Respondents were also asked to indicate how serious four of the problems identified last year are in their local schools. Percentages rating them very serious or somewhat serious range from 63% to 76%.

The first question:

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

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'02	'01	'00	'02	'01	'00	'02	'01	'00
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Lack of financial support/funding/money	23	15	18	23	15	17	23	17	19
Lack of discipline, more control	17	15	15	18	17	17	13	10	9
Overcrowded schools	17	10	12	14	7	10	23	15	14
Use of drugs/dope	13	9	9	14	9	10	11	10	9
Fighting/violence/gangs	9	10	11	9	11	11	9	9	11
Difficulty getting good teachers/quality teachers	8	6	4	8	6	4	8	6	4

- Overcrowding at 23% ties for the head of the list among public school parents.

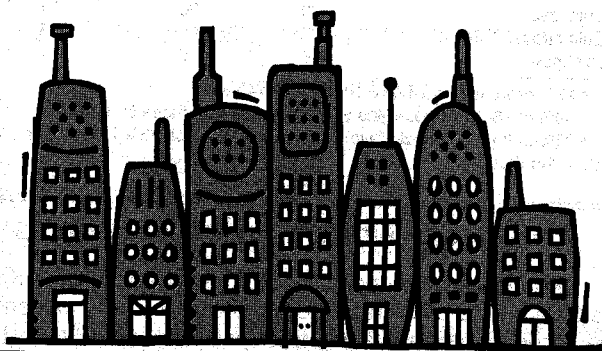
The second question:

I am going to read off several of the problems facing the public schools, nationally, one at a time. For each problem, please tell me how serious you think

that problem is in the public schools in your community — is it very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not at all serious?

	Very and Somewhat Serious %	Very Serious %	Somewhat Serious %	Not Too Serious %	Not At All Serious %	Don't Know %
Lack of student discipline	76	43	33	17	4	3
Getting good teachers	73	40	33	17	9	1
Overcrowding	71	38	33	16	10	3
Fighting, violence, gangs	63	37	26	24	12	1

- 33% of public school parents see discipline as a very serious problem; 46% of those with no children in school.
- 60% of nonwhites regard getting good teachers as a very serious problem; 36% of whites.
- 60% of urbanites consider fighting, violence, and gangs a very serious problem; 35% of suburbanites; and 28% of rural dwellers.



Education and Minorities

The No Child Left Behind Act focuses the federal role in education on those students who are failing to achieve success in school. Minorities make up a disproportionate share of such students. The public is aware of the gap between white and minority students. Forty-nine percent said that achievement for whites is higher than that for black or Hispanic students. Last year, respondents were asked if closing the gap is important. Eighty-eight percent judged it to be very important or somewhat important; that percentage rises to 94% this year.

The first question:

Just your impression, is the academic achievement of white students nationally higher, lower, or about the same as black and Hispanic students?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'02 %	'01 %	'02 %	'01 %	'02 %	'01 %
Higher	49	48	49	47	47	46
Lower	4	5	4	5	4	5
About the same	38	39	37	38	42	43
Don't know	9	8	10	10	7	6

The second question (asked of those who chose "higher"):

In your opinion, how important do you think it is to close the academic achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students — very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all?

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents	
	'02 %	'01 %	'02 %	'01 %	'02 %	'01 %
Very and somewhat important	94	88	93	89	96	87
Very important	80	66	80	66	80	67
Somewhat important	14	22	13	23	16	20
Not too important	2	5	2	5	2	5
Not important at all	3	5	4	4	1	6
Don't know	1	2	1	2	1	2

• 69% of Republicans say very important; 82% of Democrats.

Respondents this year and last year were asked whether the perceived gap is related to the quality of schooling received or to other factors. Seventy-three percent responded "other factors" last year, and 66% did so this year. That being the case, poll planners this year deemed it important to determine the nature of the "other factors." Those who were asked the follow-up question this year mentioned home life/environment/upbringing, economic advantages/disadvantages, poor community environment, education not a priority for parents, and lack of parent involvement in that order. The factors are important since last year's respondents, though saying that the gap is not related to schooling, indicated that it is still the schools that must close the gap.

The third question:

In your opinion, is the achievement gap between white 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	
	'02 %	'01 %	'02 %	'01 %	'02 %	'01 %
Related to the quality of schooling received	29	21	31	20	22	22
Related to other factors	66	73	64	72	75	74
Don't know	5	6	5	8	3	4

- 70% of whites say other factors; 53% of nonwhites.
- 75% of Republicans say other factors; 64% of Democrats.
- 56% of urbanites say other factors; 70% of suburbanites; and 71% of rural dwellers.

The fourth question (asked of those who chose "other factors"):

Just your opinion, what are some of the factors that cause the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Home life/environment/upbringing	37	36	38
Economic advantage/disadvantage	24	24	24
Poor community environment	15	15	15
Education not a priority for parents	14	16	11
Lack of parent involvement	12	11	12
Biased/racist attitudes	10	9	12
Student lack of interest	8	9	7

- 40% of whites mention home life/environment/upbringing; 23% of nonwhites.
- 34% of those in the East mention home life/environment/upbringing; 41% in the Midwest; 42% in the South; and 27% in the West.

Issues Related to the Operation of Schools

Curriculum

With the prospect of the federal government's increased role in local schools, it seemed logical to ask about a national curriculum. Sixty-six percent of respondents said they support such a move. This finding is little changed from the 68% that favored this choice in 1981 and the 69% that did so in 1991. In a repeat of a question first asked in 1979, 57% said they would favor a curriculum with a wide variety of courses, while 41% said they would favor one with fewer but more basic courses. Here, opinions have changed since 1979, when respondents favored concentration on a few basic courses by 49% to 44%. In a response that seems somewhat conflicting, 56% of respondents said it would be a good thing if the current emphasis on reading and math in federal and state improvement efforts resulted in less emphasis on other subjects.

The first question:

Would you favor or oppose requiring the schools in your community to use a standardized national curriculum?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Would favor	66	67	66
Would oppose	31	30	30
Don't know	3	3	4

• 64% of whites favor a national curriculum; 77% of nonwhites.

The second question:

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 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 %
Wide variety of courses	57	57	57
Basic courses	41	41	42
Don't know	2	2	1

• 55% of whites say a wide variety of courses; 65% of nonwhites.

• 70% of 18- to 29-year-olds say wide variety of courses; 46% of those 50 and older.

	National Totals			
	2002 %	2001 %	1993 %	1979 %
Wide variety of courses	57	54	48	44
Basic courses	41	44	51	49
Don't know	2	2	1	7

The third question:

Suppose the increased emphasis on reading and mathematics results in reduced emphasis on the other subjects in the curriculum. In your opinion, would this be a good thing or a bad thing?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
A good thing	56	55	57
A bad thing	40	41	40
Don't know	4	4	3

Testing

Monitoring the reaction to testing is important because the NCLBA and other improvement efforts place great stress on test performance. Two questions explored the public response to testing. Forty-seven percent of respondents said that there is just the right amount of emphasis on testing, a finding that has changed little since the question was first asked in 1997. That Americans are satisfied with the amount of testing is interesting since, in response to the second question, they said that classroom work and homework are better ways to measure student achievement. This response was chosen by 53% of the respondents. Confusing the matter further is that 66% of last year's respondents indicated that tests should be used primarily to determine the instruction needed.

The first question:

Now, here are some questions about testing. 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			
	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'97 %	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'97 %	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'97 %
Too much emphasis	31	31	30	20	30	29	28	20	32	36	34	19
Not enough emphasis	19	22	23	28	20	22	26	28	14	20	19	26
Just the right amount of emphasis	47	44	43	48	46	45	41	46	54	43	46	54
Don't know	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	6	—	1	1	1

• 26% in the East indicate too much emphasis; 22% in the Midwest; 38% in the South; and 33% in the West.

The second question:

In your opinion, which is the best way to measure student academic achievement — by means of test scores, or by classroom work and homework?

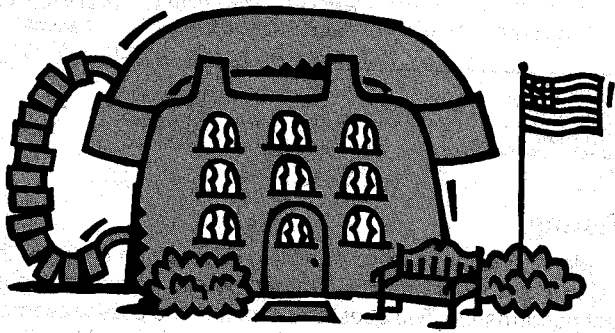
	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents		
	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %	'02 %	'01 %	'00 %
By means of test scores	26	31	26	28	31	28	22	31	23
By classroom work and homework	53	65	68	50	65	66	61	66	71
Both combined (volunteered)	20	—	—	21	—	—	16	—	—
Don't know	1	4	6	1	4	6	1	3	6

• 64% of 18- to 29-year-olds indicate classroom work and homework; 48% of those 50 and older.

• 48% of Republicans indicate classroom work and homework; 57% of Democrats.

School Size

In an area new to the poll, respondents were asked about the importance of school size and the ideal size for schools. In



response to the first question, 77% said that they believe size affects achievement a great deal or quite a lot. Then, in three additional questions, 82% specified less than 1,000 as the ideal size of an elementary school, 72% indicated less than 1,000 for a middle school, and 50% indicated less than 1,000 for a high school. The high school choice can be interpreted differently to indicate that 64% feel the ideal size is between 500 and 2,000. Nevertheless, the public is clear in its belief that smaller is better. Mean averages provide another way to look at desired school size. The Gallup Organization calculated the following mean averages: 520 for an elementary school, 711 for a middle school, and 1,033 for a high school.

The first question:

In your opinion, does the number of students in a school affect the level of achievement of its students a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or not at all?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
A great deal and a fair amount	77	75	81
A great deal	40	36	47
A fair amount	37	39	34
Not very much	13	13	13
Not at all	7	9	4
Don't know	3	3	2

The second question:

What do you consider the ideal number of students in an elementary school — less than 500 students, 500 to less than 1,000 students, 1,000 to less than 2,000 students, or 2,000 or more?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Less than 500 students	52	49	59
500 to less than 1,000	30	31	28
1,000 to less than 2,000	5	5	6
2,000 or more	1	2	1
Don't know	12	13	6
Mean average (calculated)	520	—	—

- 44% of men say less than 500; 60% of women.
- 55% of whites say less than 500; 39% of nonwhites.

The third question:

How about for a middle school? What do you con-

sider the ideal number of students — less than 500 students, 500 to less than 1,000 students, 1,000 to less than 2,000 students, or 2,000 or more?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Less than 500 students	31	29	34
500 to less than 1,000	42	42	44
1,000 to less than 2,000	13	14	12
2,000 or more	2	1	3
Don't know	12	14	7
Mean average (calculated)	711	—	—

The fourth question:

How about for a high school? What do you consider the ideal number of students — less than 500 students, 500 to less than 1,000 students, 1,000 to less than 2,000 students, or 2,000 or more?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Less than 500 students	16	16	16
500 to less than 1,000	34	31	41
1,000 to less than 2,000	30	32	27
2,000 or more	8	8	9
Don't know	12	13	7
Mean average (calculated)	1,033	—	—

- 43% of men say less than 1,000; 56% of women.
- 53% of whites say less than 1,000; 39% of nonwhites.

Scope of School Responsibilities

Over the years public schools have taken on additional responsibilities, many of which are not directly related to academic purposes. Two questions in this poll were designed to determine public reaction to this trend. Fifty-four percent of respondents said that they believe the schools have taken on too many responsibilities. On the second and more difficult question, 69% said that the school's responsibilities in nonacademic areas should be reduced. One-fourth (25%) said that the responsibilities should be reduced in both academic and nonacademic areas.

The first question:

Over the years, public schools have taken on additional responsibilities in both academic and non-academic areas. In your opinion, have the public schools today taken on too many responsibilities beyond their original role or not?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Yes, have	54	55	49
No, have not	41	39	48
Don't know	5	6	3

- 57% of whites say yes; 44% of nonwhites.

The second question (asked of those who said "yes"):

Which one of the following do you think would be

the best solution to this problem?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Reduce the school's responsibilities in the academic area	3	4	3
Reduce the school's responsibilities in nonacademic areas	69	67	72
Reduce the school's responsibilities in both areas	25	26	23
Don't know	3	3	2

- 75% of Republicans say reduce in nonacademic areas; 65% of Democrats.
- 57% of 18- to 29-year-olds say reduce in nonacademic areas; 70% of those 50 and older.

Miscellaneous Questions

On three previous occasions, this poll sought to determine the sources the public relies on to get information about school quality. In 1973, students, newspapers, and parents of students were identified in that order. Newspapers moved into first place in 1983, stayed there in 1988, and remain there this year. Forty-three percent of respondents indicated that newspapers are their main source of information about schools. It should be noted that this is an open-ended question, with respondents mentioning whatever comes to mind. In that context, the 43% mentioning newspapers is impressive. It is interesting that only 10% of public school parents mention communications from school.

The question:

What are the sources of information you use to judge the quality of schools in your community — that is, where do you get your information about the schools?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Newspapers	43	46	36
Word of mouth/friends/relatives	35	35	30
Children/students	17	13	30
Television	16	17	11
Personal experience/observation	10	10	9
School employees	8	6	11
Media (not specified)	6	7	4
Communications from school	6	5	10

- 45% of whites say newspapers; 32% of nonwhites.

The NCLBA and the tracking of student progress create the possibility that teachers will be evaluated on the basis of the performance of their students on standardized tests. With this in mind, respondents were asked whether teacher salaries should be based on the results of the test selected by the state. Fifty-four percent of respondents indicated that they disapprove of this idea, while 43% expressed approval.

The question:

Do you approve or disapprove of a proposed plan that would base the salaries of public school classroom teachers on how well their students perform on the standardized test adopted by the state to track student progress?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Approve	43	42	46
Disapprove	54	54	52
Don't know	3	4	2

The public continues to be unwilling to lengthen the school day or year: 70% of respondents said they oppose lengthening the school day, and 59% said they oppose lengthening the school year. The public does, however, offer strong support for guaranteeing kindergarten participation (85% of respondents in favor) and providing prekindergarten experience (82% of respondents in favor).

The question:

Here are some plans that have been proposed for increasing the amount of time students spend in school. As I read each plan, please tell me whether you would favor or oppose that plan as a way of increasing the amount of time students spend in the public schools in your community?

	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
Increasing the length of the school day	29	70	1
Increasing the length of the school year	40	59	1
Making kindergarten a requirement	85	14	1
Making prekindergarten available as part of the public school system	82	17	1

- 35% of men favor lengthening the school day; 23% of women.
- 23% of 18- to 29-year-olds say lengthen the school day; 33% of those 50 and older.
- 30% of 18- to 29-year-olds say lengthen the school year; 47% of those 50 and older.

The issue of single-sex schools has surfaced recently, with proponents claiming that some girls achieve better when separated from boys. Sixty-seven percent of respondents said they would oppose such schools.

The question:

One issue being debated currently is whether separate schools for boys and girls would help to improve academic achievement for some students. Would you favor or oppose single-sex schools as an option for parents and students in your community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %
Would favor	31	32	25
Would oppose	67	65	74
Don't know	2	3	1

- 39% of urbanites would favor; 30% of suburbanites; and 25% of rural dwellers.

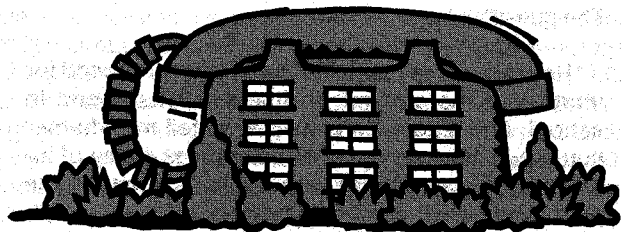
Fifty-nine percent of respondents in 1996 and 72% in 2001 opposed allowing local businesses to run the entire school operation. The respondents to this poll confirmed that opinion, with 65% indicating they would oppose contracting out the operation of schools to private profit-making corporations.

The question:

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 %
Would favor	31	31	30
Would oppose	65	64	67
Don't know	4	5	3

- 42% of 18- to 29-year-olds would favor; 21% of those 50 and older.
- 35% of Republicans would favor; 25% of Democrats.
- 42% of urbanites would favor; 30% of suburbanites; and 22% of rural dwellers.



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 5 June to 26 June 2002.

The Report. In the tables used in this report, "Nonpublic School Parents" includes parents of students who attend parochial schools and parents of students who attend secular private or independent schools.

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

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

Design of the Sample

For the 2002 survey the Gallup Organization used its standard national telephone sample, i.e., an unclustered, directory-assisted, random-digit telephone sample, based on a proportionate stratified sampling design.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Up to three calls were made to each selected telephone number to complete an interview. The time of day and the day of the week for callbacks were varied so as to maximize the chances of finding a respondent at home. All interviews

were conducted on weekends or weekday evenings in order to contact potential respondents among the working population.

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

Sampling Tolerances

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

Composition of the Sample

Adults	%	Education	
No children in school	71	Total college	60
Public school parents	26	College graduate	24
Nonpublic school parents	3	College incomplete	36
		Total high school	39
		High school graduate	33
		High school incomplete	6
Gender	%	Income	
Men	47	\$50,000 and over	34
Women	53	\$40,000-\$49,999	11
Race		\$30,000-\$39,999	13
White	82	\$20,000-\$29,999	12
Nonwhite	16	Under \$20,000	18
Black	11	Undesignated	12
Undesignated	1		
Age		Region	
18-29 years	22	East	23
30-49 years	41	Midwest	23
50 and over	36	South	32
Undesignated	1	West	22
		Community Size	
		Urban	25
		Suburban	49
		Rural	26

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 384-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

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

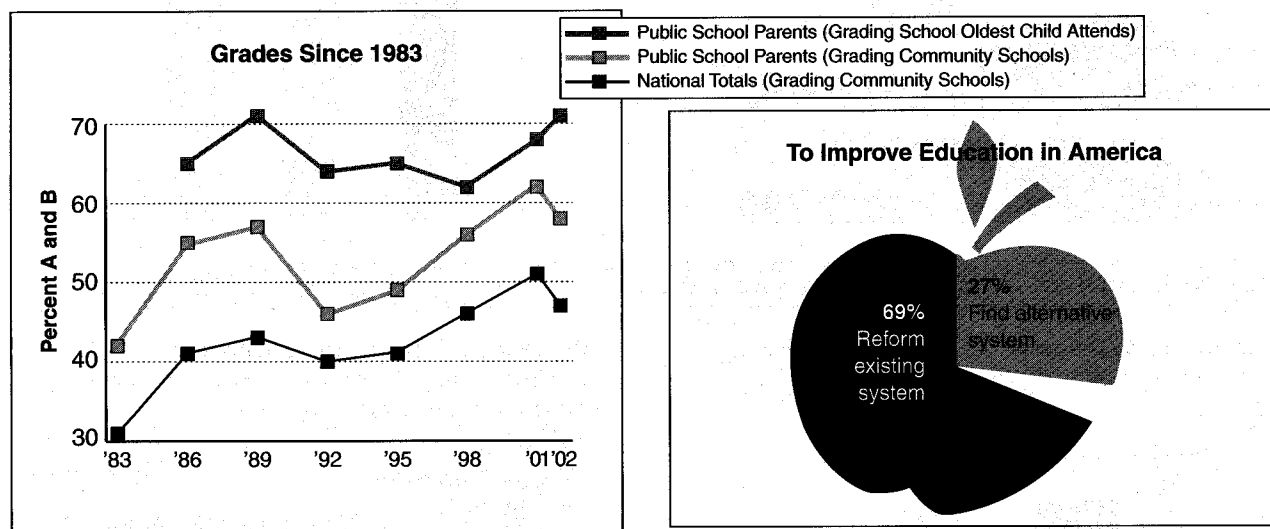
POLICY IMPLICATIONS

OF THE 34TH ANNUAL PHI DELTA KAPPA/GALLUP POLL

It has always been the purpose of this annual poll to provide information for use by policy makers in shaping the decisions that guide the direction of the public schools. This special section captures much that is important in the poll but is inadequate to provide the understanding that will come through a thorough study of poll results. It is brought to you by the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation in memory of Bessie F. Gabbard.

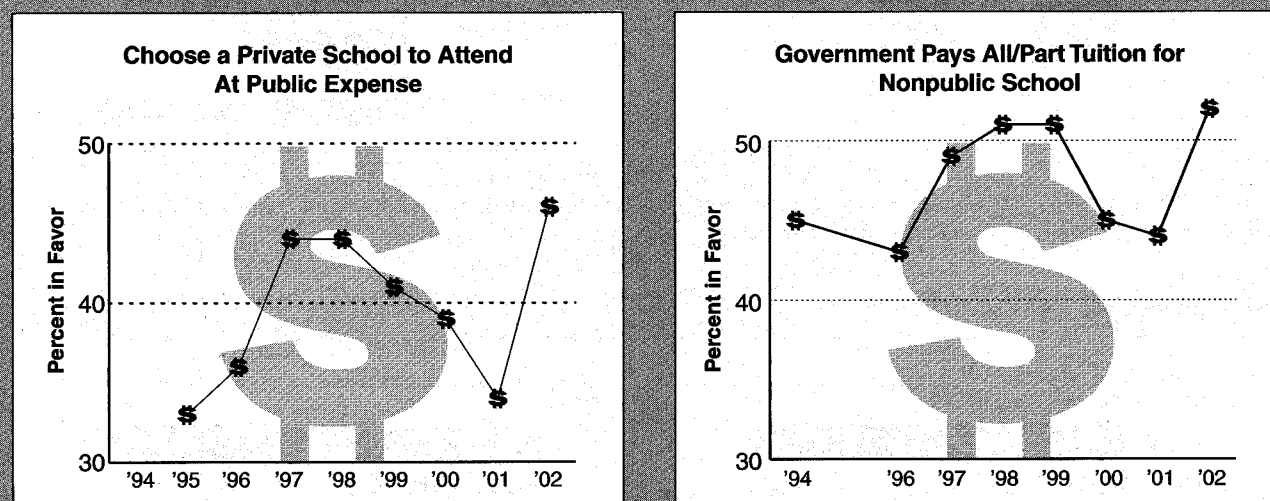
Conclusion 1: Public support for the public schools is strong and increases as people have more contact with the schools. It is logical, therefore, that the public expects improvement of education to come through the public school system.

FIGURE 1.
Public Support for and Reliance on Public Schools



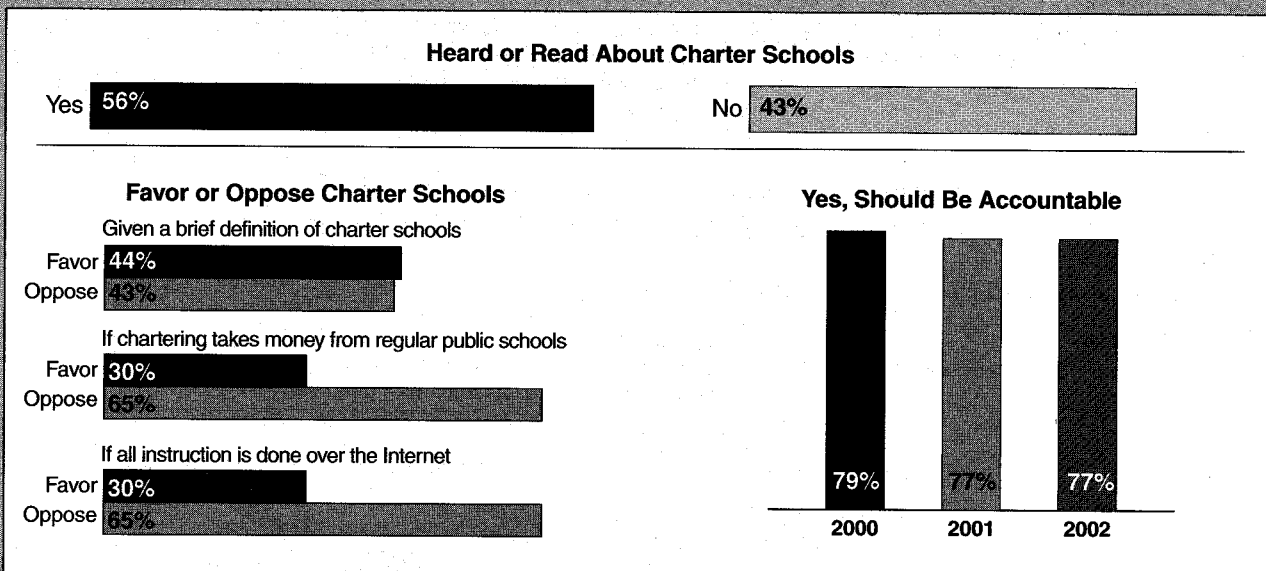
Conclusion 2: The jump in support for allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense will fuel the debate over vouchers that is almost guaranteed by the recent Supreme Court decision on vouchers.

FIGURE 2.
Public Support for Using Public/Government Money for Private School Tuition



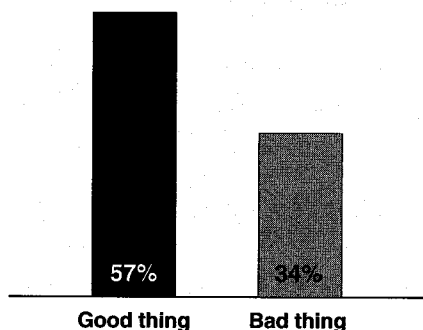
Conclusion 3: The public is not well informed on charter schools, is mixed in its support for them, and believes they should be accountable to the public in the same way public schools are accountable.

FIGURE 3.
Charter Schools



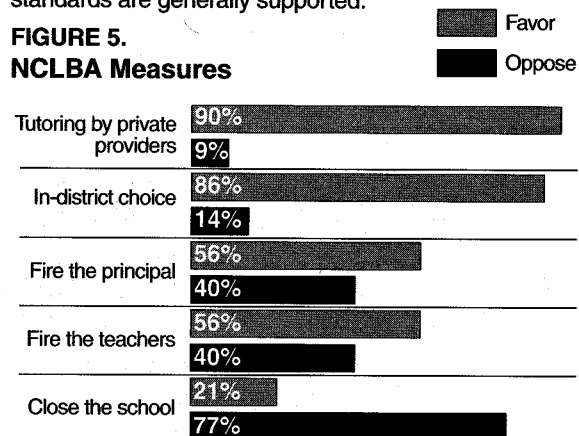
Conclusion 4: The public welcomes the possibility of an increased federal role in K-12 schools.

FIGURE 4.
Possibility of Increased Federal Role



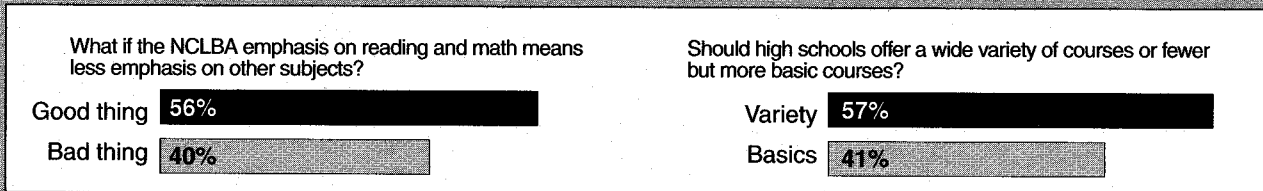
Conclusion 5: The sanctions in the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) for schools not meeting state standards are generally supported.

FIGURE 5.
NCLBA Measures



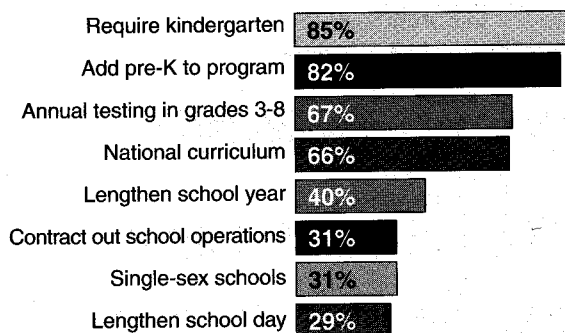
Conclusion 6: The public sends mixed signals that shed little light on the concern educators feel about the emphasis the NCLBA and state improvement efforts place on reading and math.

FIGURE 6.
Emphasis of the NCLBA



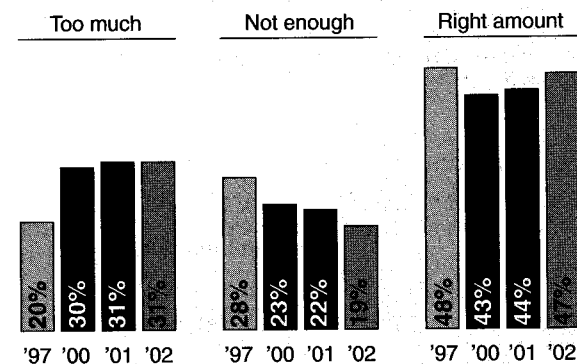
Conclusion 7: Preschool programs draw strong public support while the public continues to scorn other proposals for increasing time in school.

FIGURE 7.
Support for Selected Initiatives



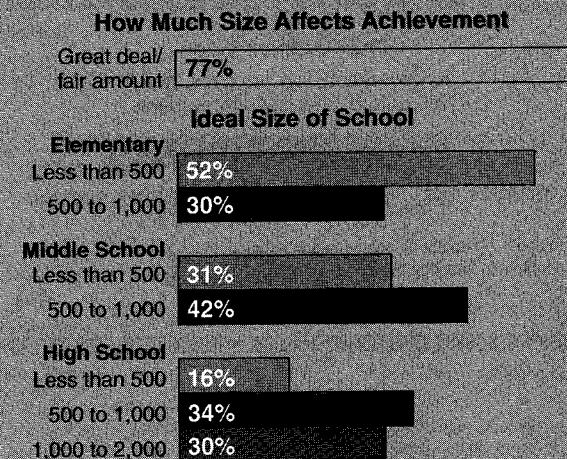
Conclusion 9: The public attitude regarding the amount of testing remains remarkably stable at a time when there is likely to be an increase in the amount of testing and concerns about too much testing are frequently heard.

FIGURE 9.
Amount of Testing



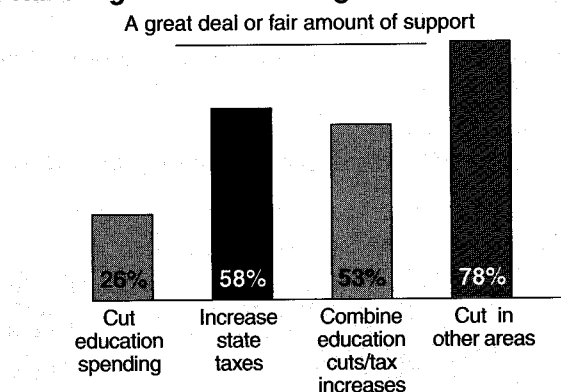
Conclusion 8: The public believes the size of a school is an important factor in student achievement and that "smaller is better"—especially for young children.

FIGURE 8.
Size of School



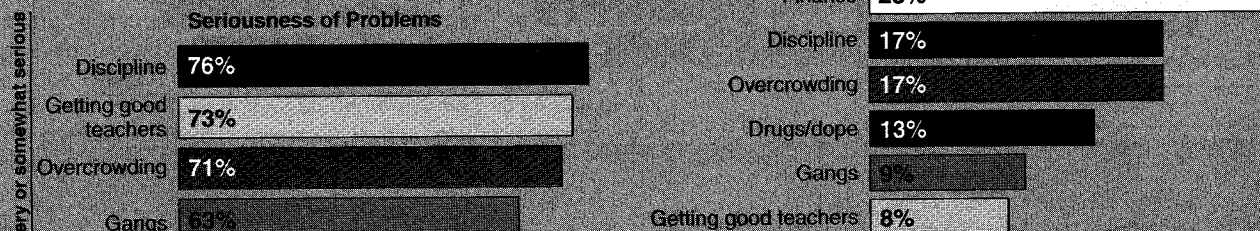
Conclusion 10: The public does not want current economic problems to result in cuts in education spending.

FIGURE 10.
Handling Revenue Shortages



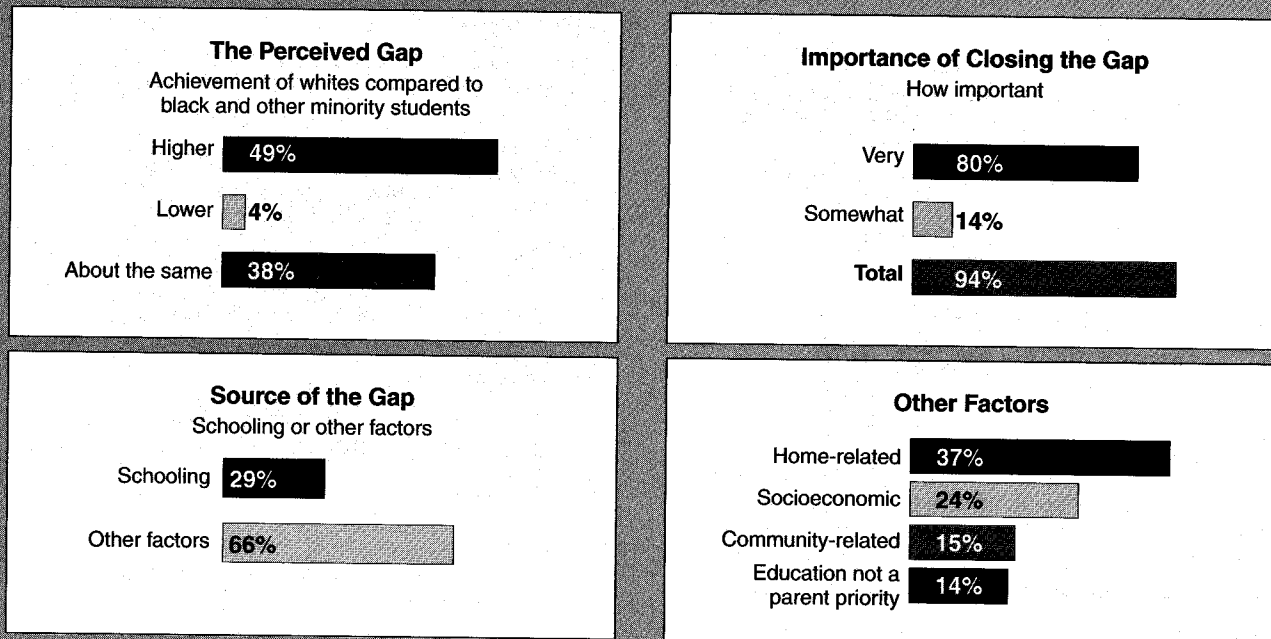
Conclusion 11: The public sees finance as the major problem facing public schools but is also concerned about discipline, overcrowding, drugs, gangs, and the difficulty of getting good teachers.

FIGURE 11.
Problems Facing Community Schools



Conclusion 12: The public believes there is a gap between the achievement of white and minority students, feels strongly that the gap must be closed, and (in a finding that suggests a more general effort than schools can mount) attributes the gap to factors not related to schooling.

FIGURE 12.
The Achievement Gap



Conclusion 13: Opinion differences by age, race, and home location are so significant that they must be recognized and addressed.

FIGURE 13.
Examples of Opinion Differences by Age, Race, and Home Location

