



Highlights

Of the 40th PDK/Gallup Poll

Presidential Candidates

- Americans view Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama as much more supportive of public schools than Republican presidential candidate John McCain.

Federal Funding

- Americans support an increased use of federal funds to maintain local public schools.

No Child Left Behind

- Fewer than 2 of 10 Americans believe the No Child Left Behind legislation should be continued without significant change.

Biggest Problems

- Lack of funding for schools tops the list of “biggest problems facing schools” for the sixth year in a row.

International Comparisons

- Americans’ impressions of public schools in Europe and Asia are very positive with almost 50% assigning grades of A’s and B’s, as compared with lower grades assigned to our nation’s schools.

College Courses for High School Students

- Americans are supportive of high school students taking college-level courses and earning college-level credits while still in high school.

Paying for College

- Even though college costs have increased significantly, seven of 10 American parents believe they will be able to pay for college for their oldest child, a finding consistent with the response 13 years ago when it was last asked .

Assessment

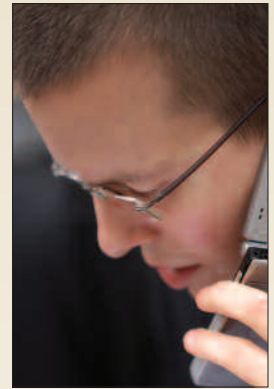
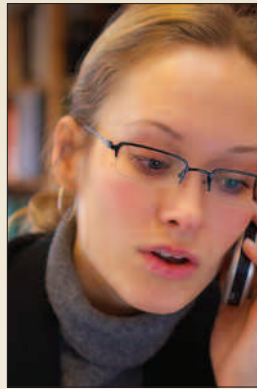
- In a change from nine years ago, Americans believe written observations by teachers, as opposed to scores on standardized tests, are a superior way to document student academic progress.

Teacher Pay

- Almost three of four Americans believe teachers should be paid higher salaries as an incentive to teach in schools identified as ‘in need of improvement.’

The poll results are available at www.pdkeducationpoll.org.





Americans Speak Out — Are Educators And Policy Makers Listening?

The 40th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll
Of the Public's Attitudes Toward The Public Schools

**BY WILLIAM J. BUSHAW
AND ALEC M. GALLUP**

PARENTS, educators, political leaders — all Americans need the information contained in the next few pages. But why this poll? First, it's not just a quick snapshot of public perception. Rather, it is a serious research tool, conducted annually, that allows PDK members and other educators and policy makers to track public opinion from one year to the next. And second, this poll is not meant to advocate. It is an honest, straightforward account of how Americans perceive their public schools and the learning that takes place within those walls.

Who decides what questions to include in this poll? In March 2008, a group of prominent educational leaders (see page 20) met to identify the issues and topics for this year's poll:

- Election year politics and policies;
- School quality;
- Global education comparisons;
- National education standards;
- High school to college transitions;
- Student testing and the curriculum;
- Teacher quality and teaching incentives; and
- No Child Left Behind legislation.

We encourage you to thoroughly review each question, consider the responses, and then form your own conclusions on how to use this information. Through this candid review, we hope you will have a better understanding of which current educational practices should continue and an even clearer understanding of which practices must change.

POLITICS AND POLICY: WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF ELECTION YEAR POLITICS ON PUBLIC EDUCATION?

Coinciding with the presidential election, we queried Americans about their perceptions of how the two major party presidential candidates stack up on education issues. In addition, we asked other important policy questions dealing with vouchers, charter schools, financing education, local control,

and changes to the No Child Left Behind legislation.

FINDINGS

- Americans view Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama as much more supportive of public schools than Republican presidential candidate John McCain. This is in stark contrast to American's perceptions in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections where Republican and Democratic presidential candidates were viewed as equally supportive of schools. Americans also trust Sen. Obama to do a better

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job addressing a variety of education issues from parental choice, to closing the achievement gap, to funding schools.

- Americans believe the next president should turn to education leaders — not political or business leaders — in developing policies for public schools.

- Americans support an increased use of federal funds to maintain local public schools.

- Fewer than 2 of 10 Americans believe the No Child Left Behind legislation should be continued without significant change.

- Americans are more supportive of school vouchers than they have been in recent years but are less favorable toward charter schools, ending a five-year trend of increased support for these alternative public schools. Republicans favor vouchers much more than do Democrats. However, Democrats and Republicans favor charter schools at about the same levels.

TABLE 1. Suppose you were voting solely on the basis of a desire to strengthen the public schools. Who would you vote for in the presidential election this November — John McCain or Barack Obama?

2008 National Totals	
	%
Barack Obama	46
John McCain	29
Don't know	25
2004 National Totals	
	%
John Kerry	41
George W. Bush	41
Don't know	18
2000 National Totals	
	%
Al Gore	37
George W. Bush	38
Don't know	25

TABLE 2. In your opinion, which of the two major political parties is more interested in improving public education in this country — the Democratic Party, or the Republican Party?

	National Totals		
	2008 %	2004 %	2000 %
Democratic party	44	42	41
Republican party	27	35	29
Don't know	29	23	30

TABLE 3. In your opinion, which presidential candidate — Barack Obama or John McCain — do you trust to do a better job dealing with the following education issues? Closing the achievement gap between whites and minority students, promoting parental choice, supporting research efforts for developing new curriculum courses and new educational assessment methods, and funding education?

	National Totals		
	John McCain %	Barack Obama %	Don't Know %
Closing the achievement gap	18	59	23
Promoting parental choice	32	43	25
Supporting research	25	48	27
Funding education	28	48	24

TABLE 4. In your opinion, who should the next president rely most on for advice about education policy — education leaders, political leaders, or business leaders?

	National Totals %	Democrats %	Republicans %
Education leaders	77	83	75
Political leaders	4	5	2
Business leaders	14	9	20
Don't know	5	3	3


TABLE 5. Just your opinion, should the next president extend the No Child Left Behind Act without change, change the law significantly, or let the law expire?

	National Totals %	Democrats %	Republicans %
Extend law without change	16	13	20
Change the law significantly	42	50	31
Let the law expire	25	25	27
Don't know	17	12	22

>> COMMENTARY <<

PUBLIC WANTS REFORMS

Ignoring the election-year stuff that journalists will surely focus on, I'm most struck by five revelations in these data: Though parents still give high marks to their own kids' schools, Americans plainly sense that not all is well with the nation's K-12 system. Hence, the middling-to-low grades for "public schools in the nation as a whole" and the widespread awareness that schools in other lands are doing better.



The public is receptive to, often eager for, a host of reforms that educators view with alarm and politicians with apprehension. These include national academic standards, national teacher testing, differentiated pay, and both charter schools and vouchers.

People still know little about NCLB and are wary of its renewal, yet when it's deconstructed into key elements such as standards and testing, most people like them fine and even want more of them!

The case has yet to be made with much of the public that schools should impart a broad, liberal arts curriculum to youngsters. I'm depressed to find a (slim) majority continuing to view it as a "good thing" if today's press for stronger reading and math skills leads to de-emphasis on other subjects.

Americans say they trust state and local officials (and educators) more than Uncle Sam to make education decisions — but that doesn't keep them from wanting Washington to shoulder a larger share of school budgets! Maybe folks don't believe the maxim that he who pays the piper calls the tune. — *Chester E. Finn, Jr.*, Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, President, Thomas B. Fordham Institute

TABLE 6. 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		Democrats	Republicans
	'08 %	'07 %	'08 %	'08 %
Federal	20	20	18	22
State	30	31	32	29
Local school board	46	49	47	45
Don't know	4	0	3	4

TABLE 7. There is always a lot of discussion about the best way to finance the public schools. Which do you think is the best way to finance the public schools — by means of local property taxes, by state taxes, or by taxes from the federal government in Washington?

	National Totals			Democrats	Republicans
	'08 %	'97 %	'86 %	'08 %	'08 %
Local taxes	20	27	24	12	29
State taxes	35	34	33	35	35
Federal taxes	37	30	24	44	31
Don't know	8	9	19	9	5

TABLE 8. Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?

	National Totals					Democrats	Republicans
	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'08 %	'08 %
Favor	44	39	36	38	42	33	54
Oppose	50	60	60	57	54	60	44
Don't know	6	1	4	5	4	7	2

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

	National Totals					Democrats	Republicans
	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %	'08 %	'08 %
Favor	51	60	53	49	44	50	54
Oppose	35	35	34	41	43	35	36
Don't know	14	5	13	10	13	15	10

SCHOOL QUALITY: HOW DO AMERICANS GRADE OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

The first question Americans are asked in the PDK/Gallup poll is to identify the biggest problem facing the public schools in their community. It is asked first so that responses are not biased by other questions, and it is an open-ended question — no prompts are provided to respondents.

That question is followed by three questions asking Americans to give a letter grade to public schools, A - FAIL. We ask all Americans to grade the schools *within their community*. Then we ask parents to grade the school that their oldest child attends. Finally, we ask all Americans to grade the *nation's schools* in contrast to their community schools.

So why do we ask these three questions every year? Documenting how Americans perceive their public schools is important, but equally significant is establishing how their perceptions vary depending on their relationship to schools. For example, parents are connected differently with their schools, as compared to Americans who do not have children in school. And perceptions of school quality vary significantly when Americans consider schools in their community as compared to public schools as depicted in the media, i.e., the nation's schools.

FINDINGS

- Lack of funding for schools tops the list of “biggest problems facing schools” for the sixth year in a row. After inadequate funding, their second largest concern is discipline. Parents don't consider lack of discipline in schools as a problem at all and are more concerned with overcrowding.
- Americans continue to view their community schools positively with 46% assigning grades of A and B. This is in

>> COMMENTARY <<

RAISE STANDARDS, EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES

The American public has some clear messages about education for our next president. Although parents feel more positive than ever about the schools their own children attend — with 72% giving these schools an A or B grade — they worry about other schools and believe there is a need for continuing improvement. Most would like to see more common expectations for what students learn, more opportunities for students to take college courses while they are in high school, and more financial aid for students to attend college — a critical issue as reduced access to college aid has collided with demands for a more educated workforce, and the U.S. has slipped from 1st in the world in college participation to 15th. The public also wants to see more common standards for teachers, as well as incentives such as career ladders to reward excellence in teaching.



While the public wants to see standards increase, most do not think the current No Child Left Behind Act is accomplishing the job. Only 16% of respondents would re-authorize NCLB without change. Two-thirds would either change it significantly or abandon it entirely. While several answers suggest the public does not want to abandon testing, overwhelming majorities would like to see school progress measured by student improvement rather than by a single score, as NCLB now requires, and 4 out of 5 think that examples of student work, teacher grades, or teacher observations are the most accurate measures of students' academic progress, rather than test scores. The next president's challenge may be to build a broader vision of learning and performance while raising educational standards and greatly expanding opportunities to learn. — Linda Darling-Hammond, Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education, Stanford University

contrast to how Americans view the nation's schools, with only 22% of respondents giving the nation's schools A's and B's.

- Parents' perception of the school attended by their oldest child is very positive with 72% assigning grades of A and B, the highest recorded in 15 years.

TABLE 10. What do you think are the biggest problems that the public schools of your community must deal with?

	National Totals			Public School Parents		
	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %
Funding	17	22	24	19	26	21
Discipline	10	10	11	3	5	7
Overcrowding	6	7	13	11	9	16
Fighting	6	6	5	8	8	4
Drugs	4	4	8	4	3	7
Good teachers	4	5	4	3	4	4
Standards	3	4	4	2	4	3

TABLE 11. 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?

	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %
A & B	46	45	49	48	47
A	12	9	13	12	13
B	34	36	36	36	34
C	30	34	32	29	33
D	11	14	9	9	10
Fail	5	5	5	5	4
Don't know	8	2	5	9	6

TABLE 12. Using the A, B, C, D, and FAIL scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?

	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %
A & B	72	67	64	69	70
A	30	19	26	31	24
B	42	48	38	38	46
C	14	24	24	21	16
D	5	5	5	6	8
Fail	4	3	4	4	4
Don't know	5	1	3	0	2

TABLE 13. 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?

	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %	'05 %	'04 %
A & B	22	16	21	24	26
A	3	2	2	2	2
B	19	14	19	22	24
C	44	57	51	46	45
D	13	18	14	13	13
Fail	5	5	3	4	4
Don't know	16	4	11	13	12

>> COMMENTARY <<

CHANGING ECONOMY REQUIRES DIFFERENT LEARNING



As long as Americans think American education generally is pretty bad, but their own children go to a pretty good school, it will be very difficult to make the kinds of changes actually needed to make the American education system globally competitive. People who are very happy about the schools in their neighborhood will be in no hurry to change them.

Their view of the status of American schools generally is explained by the unrelenting news from all the media about the poor performance of our nation's schools.

But parents who are looking at the homework and texts their children bring home see that the work is more difficult than the material they covered in the same subject at the same grade, and their children's grades are at least as good as those they got. So they conclude that their children are learning more and doing better than they did. The schools, then, must be better than the ones they went to.

What they do not understand is that, if they have any hope at all that their children will live as well as they have lived, their children will have to know and be able to do much more than their parents, because of fundamental changes in the dynamics of the global economy. Until that truth has been learned, it will be impossible to stem the tide of the steady decline in the relative quality of the American workforce that has been going on since the 1960s. — *Marc Tucker*, president, National Center on Education and the Economy

GLOBALIZATION: DO OUR STUDENTS MEASURE UP?

The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century, by Thomas Friedman, sensitized Americans to the increasing interconnectedness of our world, i.e., globalization. Political and technical transformations have pushed these changes forward at lightning speed. But how does globalization impact America's public schools? How do Americans view their public schools as opposed to those in Asia and Europe, and how do Americans believe our high school students compare to other students around the world?

FINDINGS

- Americans' impressions of public schools in Europe and Asia are more positive, with almost 50% assigning grades of A's and B's, as compared with much lower grades assigned to our nation's schools.

- Americans believe that U.S. high school students compare favorably to students in other developed countries in terms of their creativity and problem-solving abilities. However, Americans are less confident that the reading and writing skills of American high school students compare favorably to students globally, and they believe that high school students in other countries rank much higher in mathematics and science skills than American students.

TABLE 14. Now, here are some questions about the public schools in other countries. Just based on your impressions, or what you may have heard or read, what grade would you give the public schools in Europe — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

TABLE 15. How about the public schools in Asia? Just based on your impressions, what grade would you give the public schools in Asia — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

	Europe		Asia	
	National Totals %	Public School Parents %	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
A & B	48	49	52	50
A	12	15	27	26
B	36	33	25	24
C	15	14	12	13
D	2	2	2	3
Fail	1	2	2	3
Don't know	34	34	32	31

TABLE 16. Again, just based on your impression, or what you might have heard or read, where do American high school students rank in math and science achievement compared to those in other developed countries — near the top, in the middle, or at the bottom?

TABLE 17. How about in terms of their reading and writing skills, where do American high school students rank in reading and writing skills — near the top, in the middle, or at the bottom?

TABLE 18. How about in terms of their creativity and problem-solving abilities, where do American high school graduates rank in their creativity and problem-solving abilities compared to those in other developed countries — near the top, in the middle, or at the bottom?

	Math & Science		Reading & Writing		Creativity & Problem Solving	
	National Totals %	Public School Parents %	National Totals %	Public School Parents %	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
Near the top	7	9	13	12	23	26
In the middle	54	56	57	60	51	51
At the bottom	35	33	25	25	19	19
Don't know	4	2	5	3	7	4

HOW IMPORTANT ARE NATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS?

Can we agree on what American students should know? During the last 25 years, each of the 50 states has developed, promulgated, and revised standards that all public school students should attain. Typically, these standards apply to reading and mathematics instruction. More recently, states have developed standards in other curricular areas, including science, social studies, and writing. But are Americans satisfied with these standards? And should standards be developed at the national level rather than leave it up to each of the 50 states? Should standards be mandated, and if so, who should create them?

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COMMENTARY

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PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS 'GOOD SCHOOLS'

During my 16 years as a full-time classroom teacher, my professional life has literally been defined by standardized testing. Each year, I find myself slipping further and further away from the core beliefs that define my vision of a quality education as I work to produce the simplistic results that policy makers have embraced as an indicator of excellence.



Rather than encouraging my students to embrace curiosity and to always wonder, I drill discrete skills, teach from a pacing guide, deliver prepackaged multiple-choice assessments every three weeks, and refuse to slow down in a never-ending quest to demonstrate my effectiveness as an educator.

Our nation's embrace of standardized testing has forced imagination from my classroom. In an effort to remain "competitive," I've turned away from many of the student-centric learning experiences necessary for preparing children for tomorrow.

That's why the results of this year's PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools are so heartening. In each answer, respondents demonstrate a growing sophistication in their understanding of what good schools look like — and an awareness of the impact of haphazard assessments on our classrooms and our kids.

They recognize that real growth can only be measured over the course of an entire school year, rather than a stand-alone exam on one day in June. They value teacher observations and student work as valid indicators of learning, and they realize that our emphasis on reading and mathematics has pushed other meaningful subjects aside.

Having experienced firsthand the changes that the No Child Left Behind legislation has had on classroom instruction, I can only hope that policy makers will hear their voices. — *Bill Ferriter*, 6th-grade language arts teacher, Wake County Public School System, Cary, N.C.

FINDINGS

- Americans are equally divided over whether our nation should have one set of national education standards as opposed to education standards established by each state. However, in an interesting experiment, we asked Americans their opinion of establishing "common expectations" nationally, avoiding the words "national standards." We learned that the concept of national "common expectations" is more acceptable to Americans.

- If national education standards are developed, Americans feel strongly that they should be created by state-level leaders working together as opposed to a federally appointed panel or employees working at the U.S. Department of Education.

- Assuming that national education standards are developed, Americans believe all states must comply with these standards and not be allowed to voluntarily opt in or out.

- By a 2 to 1 margin, Americans are satisfied with education standards developed by their state's policy makers.

TABLE 19. 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?

TABLE 20. To measure student achievement, each state establishes its own common expectations and then tests students to see if these expectations are met. Some people prefer that common expectations be established that would be used in every state. Which would you prefer in the local public schools, expectations established by your own state or one set of expectations for *all* states?

TABLE 19		TABLE 20	
	National Totals %		National Totals %
State standards	46	State common expectations	36
National standards	50	One set of expectations for all	62
Don't know	4	Don't know	2

TABLE 21. Let's assume that if national public school education standards are created, in your opinion, should these standards be created by the U.S. Department of Education, a federally appointed panel, or by state-level leaders working together?

	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
U.S. Department of Education	22	28
Federally appointed panel	10	10
State-level leaders working together	62	55
Don't know	6	7

TABLE 22. Again let's assume that national public school education standards are created. In your opinion, should every state be required to comply with these standards, or should the states be allowed to comply with them on a voluntary basis?

	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
All states comply	59	63
States compliance voluntary	35	33
Don't know	6	4

TABLE 23. In general, how satisfied are you with your own state's public school education standards, very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?

	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
Very & somewhat satisfied	63	70
Very satisfied	14	21
Somewhat satisfied	49	49
Not very satisfied	23	18
Not at all satisfied	10	11
Not very & not at all satisfied	33	29
Don't know	4	1

HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE: A MURKY TRANSITION?

American high schools have attracted increasing attention in the last decade. Much of this attention has focused on the transition from high school to college. Is the senior year at high school productive? Does graduation still mark the end of high school and the beginning of college? Should it? Should high school attendance last for four years, and should it lead all students toward college? Increasingly related to high school instruction is college attendance. Can families still afford college? These are questions we posed to Americans to understand their perceptions about their high schools and college attendance.

■ FINDINGS

- Almost 6 in 10 Americans agree that the senior year of high school is not academically productive. However, they don't favor students leaving high school early. Nor do they support the idea that students could receive a diploma based upon a proficiency test as opposed to attending four years of high school.

- Americans are highly supportive of high school students taking college-level courses and earning college-level credits while still in high school.

- Americans are evenly divided on whether all high school students should take classes preparing them for college, but they remain highly supportive of college attendance, with almost 9 of 10 favoring increased state and federal financial support for students having the desire and academic ability to attend college.

- Even though college costs have increased significantly, seven of 10 American parents believe they will be able to pay for college for their oldest child, a finding consistent when it was last asked 13 years ago.

TABLE 24. Some observers claim that the senior year of high school is not academically productive for many students. How do you feel about this claim? Do you strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly?

	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
Strongly agree & agree somewhat	58	61
Strongly agree	18	22
Agree somewhat	40	39
Disagree somewhat	23	22
Disagree strongly	13	13
Disagree somewhat & disagree strongly	36	36
Don't know	6	4

TABLE 25. (Asked of those who strongly agree or agree somewhat with the question above) Which one of the following proposals do you think would best deal with the lack of academic productivity in the senior year of high school: encourage students to graduate early from high school in order to enroll in college or begin working, offer student opportunities for unpaid internships or community service instead of attending classes in high school, encourage students to take college-level classes while in high school?

	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
Encourage to graduate early	17	14
Offer unpaid internships or community service	21	20
Encourage students to take college-level classes in high school	56	61
Don't know	6	5

TABLE 26. Historically, students have been required to attend school for four years in order to receive a high school diploma. Which approach would you prefer for awarding a high school diploma — for completing four years of high school, or for passing proficiency tests that would show mastery of academic skills?

	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
Complete four years of high school	46	45
Passing a proficiency test	49	50
Don't know	5	5

TABLE 27. Some students are earning college credits while still in high school through programs such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment or middle college programs. How much, if anything, would you say you know about these programs, a great deal, a fair amount, not much, or nothing at all?

	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
Great deal & fair amount	53	60
Great deal	18	20
Fair amount	35	40
Not much	29	27
Nothing at all	17	12
Not much & nothing at all	46	39
Don't know	1	1

TABLE 28. In general, do you favor or oppose allowing students to earn college credits while still in high school?

	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
Favor	87	90
Oppose	11	9
Don't know	2	1

TABLE 29. Some high school districts are now requiring ALL high school graduates to complete a curriculum that prepares them to attend a four-year college whether or not they plan to attend college. Would you favor or oppose such a requirement for all the students in the high schools in your community?

	National Totals		Public School Parents	
	'08 %	'06 %	'08 %	'06 %
Favor	51	56	57	62
Oppose	45	42	40	37
Don't know	4	2	3	1

>> COMMENTARY <<

EMBRACE PARTNERSHIPS

Though the American public and parents of children in school continue to express confidence in their local schools, participants in the 2008 poll understand that funding is not adequate to the task at hand. Parents and the public recognize the differential in performance of U.S. students and students from Europe and Asia. Given the implications for the economic interests of the United States, this matter should be addressed by the next U.S. president, by public officials at all levels of government, and especially by local communities as an urgent priority.



Americans know that more than standardized testing is needed to measure quality of performance by students and schools, that financial incentives should be used to improve staffing at schools in need of improvement, and that emphasis on academics and student responsibility are priority objectives of reform. Significantly, the American public is saying that policy makers should call on the expertise of educators rather than business leaders to craft solutions.

If the next president takes cognizance of this poll, he will consult educators to make changes in NCLB to support partnerships between schools and colleges of education that focus on pre-K-12 schools identified as needing to improve. AACTE has documented more than 20 examples of such partnerships in a publication available at www.aacte.org/Governmental_Relations/Partnerships%20That%20Work.pdf. These partnerships also accomplish reform in teacher education so that more teachers enter practice ready to support higher academic achievement for all students. — Sharon Robinson, president and chief executive officer, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

TABLE 30. Many high school graduates cannot afford to attend college, although they may have the ability and desire to do so. When students have the ability and desire to attend college but not enough money, would you favor or oppose more state or federal assistance to enable them to attend?

	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
Favor	86	90
Oppose	12	9
Don't know	2	1

TABLE 31. (Asked of parents only) How likely do you think it is that you or your family will be able to pay for college for your oldest child?

	'08 %	'95 %
Very likely & somewhat likely	70	69
Very likely	35	30
Somewhat likely	35	39
Not very likely	16	17
Not at all likely	11	12
Not very likely & not at all likely	27	29
Don't know	3	2

MEASURING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Take out a blank piece of paper, put your name at the top, and number 1 through 10. These are the dreaded words heard before a “pop quiz,” the bane of students everywhere. Increasingly, students are just as likely to take standardized tests as they are to take pop quizzes. Should standardized tests replace pop quizzes and other tools classroom teachers use to measure whether students are learning? Should policy makers focus on the improvements that students make from one year to the next, or should they insist that all students achieve at specified levels regardless of where they started? We asked Americans questions about student testing and about the curriculum to gain insights into the continuing debate over what we should teach in school and how we should measure student learning.

FINDINGS

- While Americans are divided on whether there’s too much emphasis on achievement testing in schools, parents are not. More than four of 10 public school parents believe there is too much emphasis on achievement testing with only one in 10 saying there is not enough.

- Americans continue to support using student academic progress, as opposed to the percentage of students that pass a state-mandated test, as the best way to measure a school’s performance.

- In a change from the results when the question was asked nine years ago, Americans believe written observations by teachers are a superior way to document student academic progress, compared to scores on standardized tests and even letter grades awarded by teachers. Americans believe the most accurate picture of academic progress is provided by examples of student work.

- Americans believe schools should emphasize academic skills first, followed by being more responsible.

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COMMENTARY

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INCREASED SUPPORT FOR VOUCHERS

No topic has greater implications for the future of American education than the school privatization movement. A question on the PDK/Gallup Polls since 1991 asks if students should be able to attend private schools at public expense. Support increased from 39% of respondents in 2007 to 44% in 2008, which is the largest proportion favoring vouchers since 2002 (46%). Unfortunately, the follow-up voucher questions have differed over time, precluding trend data on these items. In 2004, for example, 56% of the respondents said they would select a private school for their children if provided a voucher for the full tuition, but only one third of the 2007 respondents favored government support of full-tuition vouchers. Despite not wanting the government to foot the total bill, many parents would capitalize on full vouchers to choose private education for their children.



The 2008 poll data suggest somewhat more favorable attitudes toward vouchers than in recent years, but not yet the majority needed for states to adopt general voucher programs. Statewide referenda proposing vouchers for all students (rather than targeting special-need students) have been soundly defeated in several states, most recently in Utah. If that should change and vouchers should be widely adopted, the proportion of students in private schools or home education programs (currently 12%) would increase substantially. This development would have significant implications for the support of public schools and for the nature and structure of education in our nation. — *Martha McCarthy*, Chancellor’s Professor and Chair, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Indiana University

TABLE 32. Now, here are some questions about testing. In your opinion, is there too much emphasis on achievement testing in the public schools in your community, not enough emphasis on testing, or about the right amount?

	National Totals			Parents School Parents		
	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %
Too much	37	43	39	44	52	45
Not enough	23	15	25	12	10	17
About right	34	40	33	42	38	37
Don't know	6	2	3	2	0	1

TABLE 33. One way to measure a school’s performance is to base it on the percentage of students passing the test mandated by the state at the end of the school year. Another way is to measure the improvement students in the school make during the year. In your opinion, which is the best way to measure the

school's performance — the percentage passing the test or the improvement shown by the students?

	National Totals		Public School Parents	
	'08 %	'07 %	'08 %	'07 %
Passing the test at the end of the year	20	16	17	13
Improvement shown during the year	80	82	80	86
Don't know	4	2	3	1

TABLE 34. In your opinion, which one of the following methods would provide the most accurate picture of a public school student's academic progress: examples of the student's work, scores on standardized local and state achievement tests, letter grades awarded by the teacher, written observations by the teacher?

	National Totals		Public School Parents	
	'08 %	'99 %	'08 %	'99 %
Examples of student work	32	33	36	30
Test scores	21	27	20	27
Teacher grades	16	23	15	27
Teacher observations	25	14	24	14
Don't know	6	3	5	2

TABLE 35. Which one of the following areas do you think the local public schools should give the main emphasis to: the academic skills of students, the ability of students to work with others, or the ability of students to take responsibility?

	National Totals		Public School Parents	
	'08 %	'99 %	'08 %	'99 %
Academic skills	43	39	40	43
Working with others	11	13	13	10
Taking responsibility	39	46	43	47
Don't know	7	2	4	0

TABLE 36. 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		Public School Parents	
	'08 %	'02 %	'08 %	'02 %
Good thing	52	56	52	57
Bad thing	40	40	42	40
Don't know	8	4	6	3

TEACHER CERTIFICATION AND TEACHING INCENTIVES

All of us remember great teachers who made a difference in our lives. And few would argue that the quality of learning in our schools is directly related to the quality of the teachers. Great teachers motivate students to learn, help students overcome obstacles, and challenge students to do their best. But how does our nation attract and keep the best teachers? We posed several questions about teacher certification, career ladders, incentives, and performance pay to better understand how Americans perceive teachers and teaching.

FINDINGS

- Three of four Americans believe teachers should be required to pass a national competency test.
- Three of four Americans believe a career ladder based primarily on classroom effectiveness with increasing salaries should be available to teachers, a finding that has not changed since the question was asked 25 years ago.
- Almost three of four Americans believe teachers should be paid higher salaries as an incentive to teach in schools identified to be in need of improvement, a slight increase from when asked five years ago.
- By comparison, Americans are far less supportive of performance pay for teachers, i.e., paying teachers based upon how well their students perform on standardized tests. These opinions are consistent with those from six years ago.

TABLE 37. Most people believe that, before being licensed, teachers should pass a state-level competency test in the subjects they will teach. In your opinion, before being licensed, should teachers also be required to pass a national competency test in the subjects they will teach?

	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
Yes	77	82
No	20	16
Don't know	3	2

TABLE 38. It has been suggested that public schools adopt a career ladder for teachers, based primarily upon demonstrated effectiveness in the classroom, with salaries increasing accordingly. Would you approve or disapprove if such a plan were adopted by the public schools in this community?

	National Totals		Public School Parents	
	'08 %	'84 %	'08 %	'84 %
Approve	76	75	79	77
Disapprove	16	16	15	16
Don't know	8	9	6	7

TABLE 39. In your opinion, should teachers be paid higher salaries as an incentive to teach in schools which have been identified as in need of improvement or not?

	National Totals		Public School Parents	
	'08 %	'03 %	'08 %	'03 %
Yes	70	65	72	67
No	25	33	23	32
Don't know	5	2	5	1

TABLE 40. 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		Public School Parents	
	'08 %	'02 %	'08 %	'02 %
Approve	48	43	51	46
Disapprove	46	54	44	52
Don't know	6	3	5	2

>> COMMENTARY <<
MESSAGE TO CHARTER SCHOOLS

This year's poll is a treasure trove of information and insights, worth pondering over. I am struck by two findings in particular, the results of questions about 'national standards' and charter schools.



First, the good news: Americans have more sense than many politicians and educational leaders give them credit for. Sure, we may not know the distinction between 'federal' and 'national,' but most Americans embrace the notion of common educational standards. We are also smart enough to know that we don't want Washington to be in charge.

I think the message to the next president and Congress is clear: *enable* the development of common standards by funding consortia of states, Achieve, and other credible organizations. Create incentives for states to adopt the common standards. Above all, fund the creation of good tests but, otherwise, stay out of the way.

It's disappointing that support for charter schools has dropped to 51%, down from 60% last year and 53% in 2006. I hope this does not mean that their window of opportunity is closing. Now 20 years old, the charter movement has never come close to achieving its original vision of being 'laboratories of innovation' for the rest of the system. Too many charters are revved-up versions of the existing system, public schools on steroids, instead of breaking the mold.

Perhaps the declining support for charter schools proves that, once again, the public is wiser than its leaders. At a minimum, it's a signal to charter supporters to be bold and innovative, not derivative. — *John Merrow*, Executive Producer/Host and president of Learning Matters, Inc.

THE CONTINUING SAGA OF NCLB

In January 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law. With the swipe of a presidential pen, this legislation established unprecedented levels of federal accountability in American schools. NCLB's adoption has been both challenging and challenged at all levels. Since 2003, we've asked Americans a series of questions about the NCLB legislation.

■ FINDINGS

- There's been relatively little change in American's professed knowledge of and opinion about the No Child Left Behind legislation during the last three years. An equal percentage have a very or somewhat favorable opinion of the Act as opposed to those having very or somewhat unfavorable views.

- After 5½ years of implementation, only 1 in 4 Americans believe the legislation is helping schools in their local community, while 3 of 4 believe NCLB is hurting, believe it is making no difference, or are unsure if it's making a difference.

- If a school is labeled as failing by the law's accountability provisions, equal numbers of Americans would blame the law as would blame the school.

TABLE 41. Now, here are a few questions about the No Child Left Behind Act. How much, if anything, would you say you know about the No Child Left Behind Act — the federal education bill that was passed by Congress in 2001 — a great deal, a fair amount, very little, or nothing at all?

	National Totals		
	2008 %	2007 %	2006 %
Great deal & fair amount	45	54	45
Great deal	10	8	8
Fair amount	35	46	37
Very little	40	38	40
Nothing at all	14	8	15
Very little & nothing at all	54	46	55
Don't know	1	0	0

> PDK/GALLUP POLL ONLINE RESOURCES

At www.pdkeducationpoll.org find:

- 40 years of annual PDK/Gallup polls
- Video: *Straight Talk About Schools*
- Flyer of poll highlights
- PowerPoint slide show

For PDK Members: the PDK/Gallup Poll Archive includes all of the specific questions and national results from the past 40 years.

TABLE 42. From what you know or have heard or read about the No Child Left Behind Act, do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of the Act — or don't you know enough about it to say?

	National Totals			Great Deal & Fair Amount of Knowledge		
	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %
Very & somewhat favorable	32	31	32	43	38	42
Very favorable	7	4	9	7	5	12
Somewhat favorable	25	27	23	36	33	30
Somewhat unfavorable	18	23	18	26	28	24
Very unfavorable	15	17	13	24	27	23
Somewhat & very unfavorable	33	40	31	50	55	47
Don't know enough to say	33	29	37	6	7	10
Don't know	2	0	0	1	0	1

TABLE 43. 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			Great Deal & Fair Amount of Knowledge		
	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %
Helping	25	26	26	28	28	29
Hurting	22	27	21	35	37	31
Making no difference	34	41	37	32	34	37
Don't know	19	6	16	5	1	3

TABLE 44. 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			Great Deal & Fair Amount of Knowledge		
	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %
Schools	42	43	48	38	39	46
NCLB	38	49	41	51	56	48
Don't know	20	8	11	11	5	6

> SAMPLING TOLERANCES

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 had been interviewed. The size of such sampling error depends largely on the number of interviews.

ANATOMY OF AN ANNUAL POLL

What steps do PDK/Gallup poll co-directors Alec Gallup and Bill Bushaw follow in developing this poll each year?

- January** PDK solicits issues, topics, and questions for the poll from policy makers and educators.

- March** An advisory committee convenes to consider suggestions, select topics, and frame questions.

- April** Poll topics are finalized; the PDK/Gallup poll archives are searched to determine if similar questions have been asked in the past; preliminary wording is written for new questions.

- May** Gallup assembles and reviews a draft survey instrument to ensure question items are written correctly and free of any ordering bias. Pretest interviews are conducted to ensure respondent comprehension. Gallup constructs sampling frame.

- June** Final survey questionnaire is programmed for interviewers onto CATI system. Telephone interviews are administered and data collected. All completed surveys are coded and processed, and the final sample is matched and balanced to U.S. census population parameters.

- July** Detailed tabular analyses (cross-tabulations) are generated. Data are reviewed and analyzed, and the results are written for an article appearing in the September issue of *Kappan*. Additional content is developed for a PDK/Gallup poll DVD.

- August** Results released to media, PDK members, members of Congress, state superintendent/commissioners, and other interested policy makers.

- September** Complete poll report is printed in the September issue of the *Kappan*.

PDK/GALLUP POLL ADVISORY PANEL

The following individuals worked with poll co-directors **William Bushaw** and **Alec Gallup** to select the topics and frame the questions asked in the *40th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*. Phi Delta Kappa International and the Gallup Organization express their appreciation for the guidance provided by panel members.

Carole Ames, Dean, College of Education,
Michigan State University

Rick Hess, Resident Scholar and Director,
Education Policy Studies, American Enterprise
Institute

Jack Jennings, President and CEO, Center on
Education Policy

Scott Montgomery, Deputy Executive Director,
Council of Chief State School Officers

Judy Seltz, Deputy Executive Director, Association
for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Lyonel Tracy, Commissioner of Education, New
Hampshire Department of Education

Brenda Welburn, Executive Director, National
Association of State Boards of Education

The directors also wish to acknowledge of the excellent support provided by **Erin Young**, PDK's director of electronic publications and external outreach.

TRIBUTE TO LOWELL C. ROSE

Since 1991, Lowell Rose was co-director with Alec Gallup in authoring the annual *PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*. After a brief illness, Lowell passed away on Dec. 2, 2007.



Working on the poll each year was a labor of love for Lowell. With Alec, Lowell devoted many hours researching issues, developing questions, reviewing results, and summarizing findings. Both Alec Gallup and I have missed Lowell's knowledge and his wisdom. — William J. Bushaw, PDK International Executive Director

> DESIGN OF THE SAMPLE

All findings for the 2008 PDK/Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of adults aged 18 and older. A national cross-section of households was sampled to yield a representative survey across all segments of the population in telephone-owning households. A four-call design was used to complete an interview with each intended respondent. A Random Digit Dialing (RDD) technique was used to ensure the inclusion of both listed and unlisted telephone numbers. In households with more than one eligible survey participant present, interviewers used the "most recent birthday" method for additional randomness.

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.

> COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE

Adults	%	Income	%
No children in school	53	\$50,000 and over	43
Public school parents	39	\$40,000-\$49,999	8
Nonpublic school parents	8	\$30,000-\$39,999	11
		\$20,000-\$29,999	8
		Under \$20,000	13
Gender	%	Undesignated	17
Men	35	Region	%
Women	65	East	23
Race	%	Midwest	25
White	84	South	33
Black	10	West	19
Hispanic	6	Community Size	%
Other nonwhite	0	Urban	26
Age	%	Suburban	52
18-29 years	8	Rural	22
30-49 years	37	Political Party	%
50 and over	50	Republican	24
Undesignated	5	Democrat	34
Education	%	Independent	32
Total college	71	Undesignated	10
College graduate	44		
College incomplete	27		
Total high school	28		
High school graduate	24		
High school incomplete	4		

> RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The 2008 survey findings are based on 1,002 completed interviews. The completed interviews include an oversample of parents with school-aged children in order to permit examination and analyses of results by this population segment. Fieldwork (data collection) for this study was administered during the period June 14 to July 3, 2008. 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.