

# The 30th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll

OF THE

# Public's Attitudes Toward The Public Schools



**T**HE 1998 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools includes a special focus on public funding for private and church-related schools. Along with the traditional trend questions in this area, new questions were asked regarding vouchers and tuition tax credits.

The public continues to oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense, with 44% in favor and 50% opposed. How-

ever, the public favors (51% to 45%) allowing parents to send their school-age children to any public, private, or church-related school if the government pays all or part of the tuition.

Two new questions were asked about vouchers, government-issued notes that parents can use to pay all or part of the tuition at a private or church-related school. Regarding a voucher that would pay all of the tuition, 48% of respondents are in favor, and 46% are opposed. When the question states that only *part* of the tuition would be paid, the proportion of respondents in favor rises to 52%, while the proportion who are opposed drops to 41%.

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Two questions were asked regarding the obligations that should be assumed by private or church-related schools that accept government tuition payments. In response to the first question, 75% of respondents say that schools accepting such payments should be accountable to the state in the same way the public schools are accountable. In the second question, 70% say that nonpublic schools accepting public funds should be required to accept students from a wider range of backgrounds and academic ability than is now generally the case.

New questions were also asked about tuition tax credits, which would allow parents who send their children to private or church-related schools to recover all or part of the tuition paid. When the question mentions recovery of *all* tuition paid, 56% favor such credits, and 42% are opposed. When the question limits the credit to *part* of the tuition paid, 66% favor the credits, and 30% are opposed.

What do the results of this series of questions tell us? The public is deeply divided over the issue of funds going directly to private or church-related schools. Responses split almost evenly when the question implies that the public would pay *all* of the costs. The opposition seems to lessen when public schools are listed as a part of the choice option and when the funding provided pays only *part* of the cost. Tax credits for parents who send their children to private or church-related schools are supported by the public, but that support is greater if the credit covers only *part* of the tuition. Moreover, funding for private or church-related schools is conditioned on the willingness of those schools to be accountable in the same way the public schools are accountable.

The findings appear to guarantee that the issue of public funding for church-related schools will be a battleground for the foreseeable future. The public's willingness to consider aid to private and church-related schools in various forms will certainly encourage those who want to see such aid provided. By the same token, the public's seeming unwillingness to provide all of the tuition involved in such programs reinforces the belief of opponents of such aid that the "haves" will be the ones who can take advantage of such programs and that the "have-nots" will be the ones left behind. The battle would seem to be joined along those lines.

With this in mind, the 1998 poll repeated an earlier question in which public school parents were asked what they would do if given the option of sending their oldest child to any public, private, or church-related school, with the tuition paid by the government. Fifty-one percent of respondents indicate that they would choose their present public school. Another 6% would choose a different public school, bringing to 57% the number of families that would remain in the public school system. Thirty-nine percent would choose a private or church-related school. Clearly, this is an issue that could affect the future of the public schools.

The poll also sought to determine the confidence Americans have in the public schools as an institution and the priority the public places on improving these schools. When asked about the amount of confidence they have in the public schools, 42% of Americans say a great deal or quite a lot of confidence. Only the church or organized religion, with a combined rating of 57%, tops the public schools. Institutions in which the public expresses less confidence include local government (a combined 37%), state government (36%), big business (31%), na-



tional government (30%), the criminal justice system (29%), and organized labor (26%).

Regarding the priority the public places on improving the public schools, respondents were asked what the states should do with the surpluses they are accumulating as a result of the booming economy. Fifty percent of respondents say spend it on the public schools, 31% say use it to reduce taxes, 14% say build a "rainy day" fund, and 4% say spend it on other state services.

This being an election year, respondents were asked which of the two major political parties they feel is more interested in improving public education. Thirty-nine percent name the Democratic Party, and 28% name the Republican Party. The corresponding percentages in 1996 were 44% and 27%. In an interesting political twist, the breakdown of responses to the voucher question that stated that *all* tuition would be paid at a private or church-related school shows that 47% of Republicans favor such vouchers, and 48% oppose them. This statistical tie is surprising given the fact that the Republican Party is generally regarded as the party of vouchers. The picture becomes more interesting when one notes that Democrats, those from the party viewed as standing in opposition to vouchers, favor the same voucher plan by 51% to 43%. The party messages do not seem to be reaching the party faithful.

In another question, about programs with clear connections to political parties, the issues of providing funds to repair and replace older school buildings and providing funds to reduce class size in grades 1, 2, and 3—two programs associated with the Democratic Party — drew support from 86% and 80% of respondents respectively. Giving states block grants from which to fund some of the current federal programs and allowing parents to set up tax-free savings accounts to be used to pay tuition and other expenses at private or church-related schools — two programs associated with the Republican Party — drew support from 73% and 68% respectively.

Other findings in the 1998 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll include the following.

- Forty-six percent of the respondents give the schools in their own community a grade of A or B. This figure increases to 52% among public school parents and to 62% when public school parents are asked to grade the school their oldest child attends.

- Americans are undecided as to whether children today get a better education than they received. Forty-one percent believe children today get a better education, 48% believe it is worse, and 8% believe there is no difference. Public school parents believe the education children get today is better by 49% to 43%.

- Approximately half of the respondents (49%) believe that the public schools in the community are about the right size. However, a significant number (30%) believe they are too big. A majority (58%) would like a child of theirs to attend a high

school with less than 1,000 students.

- Almost two-thirds of respondents (62%) believe that schools in their communities are taking the necessary steps to promote understanding and tolerance among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

- Fifty percent of public school parents believe that school has caused their child to become an eager learner, 34% believe it has caused their child to tolerate learning as a necessary chore, and 15% believe it has caused their child to be turned off to learning.

- The percentage of Americans who believe that public school parents should have more say in such aspects of school operation as selection and hiring of teachers and administrators, setting of their salaries, and selection of books for school libraries has increased significantly since the question was first asked in 1990.

- There is significant public support (71%) for a voluntary national testing program, administered by the federal government, that would routinely test fourth- and eighth-grade students in order to measure the performance of the nation's public schools.

- Support for amending the U.S. Constitution to permit prayers to be spoken in the public schools remains strong, with 67% of the respondents in favor.

- The public is undecided regarding the way schools should deal with non-English-speaking students. Proposals calling for tutoring in English, providing instruction in the students' native language, and requiring students to learn English before receiving instruction in other subjects each draw support from roughly one respondent in three.

- The public is undecided about the best way to finance schools: 21% believe the means should be by local property taxes; 33%, state taxes; and 37%, federal taxes.

- Fifty percent of respondents believe that the quality of public schools is related to the amount of money spent on students in these schools.

- Sixty-three percent of public school parents say they do not fear for the safety of their oldest child when he or she is at school. This figure is down from 69% in 1977. Similarly, 68% say they do not fear for the safety of their oldest child when he or she is outside at play in the neighborhood.

- Almost two-thirds (65%) of respondents believe students with learning problems should be put in special classes.

- Eighty-seven percent of those surveyed believe sex education should be included in high school instructional programs. The respondents expressed strong support for presenting virtually all topics, including AIDS, homosexuality, and teen pregnancy.

- There is strong support for improving the nation's inner-city schools, with two-thirds of the public (66%) indicating a willingness to pay more taxes to provide the funds to do so.

- Public opinion is divided about the impact that unions have had on the quality of public education: 37% believe they have made no difference; 27% believe they have helped it; 26% believe they have hurt it.

- Almost three-fourths of respondents (73%) believe themselves to be either well informed or fairly well informed regarding local public schools.

(Editor's Note — Due allowance should be made for findings based on relatively small samples, e.g., nonpublic school

parents. The sample for this group this year consists of only 33 respondents and is, therefore, subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 17 percentage points.)



## Public Versus Nonpublic Schools

### Choosing Private Schools at Public Expense

For the fifth year since 1993, the public was asked whether it favored allowing parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense. As in 1997, 44% of respondents are in favor. Since 1993, support has grown steadily from 24% to 44%. At the same time, the opposition has dropped steadily from 74% in 1993. This year 50% are opposed, down from 52% in 1997.

Blacks are the group most likely to support this choice, with 59% in favor. Public school parents are evenly divided: 48% in favor; 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				
	'98	'97	'96	'95	'93
	%	%	%	%	%
Favor	44	44	36	33	24
Oppose	50	52	61	65	74
Don't know	6	4	3	2	2

A question posed for the fourth time since 1994 asked respondents whether they would favor allowing parents to send their school-age children to any public, private, or parochial school of their choice with the government paying part or all of the tuition. Fifty-one percent favor the idea, while 45% oppose it. This is a reversal from 1996, when 43% favored the idea, while 54% opposed it. Public school parents approve this year by a 56% to 40% margin.

Groups most likely to favor this proposal include nonwhites (68%) and 18- to 29-year-olds (63%). Groups most likely to oppose it include those in the 50- to 64-year-old age group (56%) and those in rural areas (56%).

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				Nonpublic School Parents			
	'98	'97	'96	'94	'98	'97	'96	'94	'98	'97	'96	'94	'98	'97	'96	'94
Favor	51	49	43	45	48	46	38	42	56	55	49	48	74	68	70	69
Oppose	45	48	54	54	48	51	59	57	40	43	49	51	21	31	28	29
Don't know	4	3	3	1	4	3	3	1	4	2	2	1	5	1	2	2



Two questions new to the poll asked specifically about the use of vouchers, government-issued notes to be used to pay tuition at a private or church-related school. A split sample design was used. Half of the sample was asked about vouchers that would pay *full* tuition, and the other half was asked about vouchers that would pay *part* of the tuition. The public is evenly divided on vouchers paying all the tuition, with 48% in favor and 46% opposed. When asked about a voucher paying part of the tuition, 52% are in favor, and 41% are opposed. Public school parents support either option.

Nonwhites (59%), 18- to 29-year-olds (57%), and manual laborers (58%) offer strong support for paying all tuition. As indicated earlier, the responses are interesting in that, with regard to vouchers to pay *all* tuition, Republicans split 47% in favor and 48% opposed, while Democrats are 51% in favor and 43% opposed.

The third question:

**In the voucher system, a parent is given a voucher which can be used to pay all the tuition for attendance at a private or church-related school. Parents can then choose any private school, church-related school, or public school for their child. If a parent chooses a public school, the voucher would not apply. Would you favor or oppose the adoption of the voucher system in your state?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	48	44	55	69
Oppose	46	50	42	22
Don't know	6	6	3	9

The fourth question:

**In the voucher system, a parent is given a voucher which can be used to pay part of the tuition for at-**

**tendance at a private or church-related school. Parents can then choose any private school, church-related school, or public school for their child. If a parent chooses a public school, the voucher would not apply. Would you favor or oppose the adoption of the voucher system in your state?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	52	50	58	61
Oppose	41	43	37	25
Don't know	7	7	5	14

### Tax Credits for Parents of Those Attending Private or Church-Related Schools

Asked for the first time in this poll were questions involving the use of tax credits at the state level for parents who send their children to private or church-related schools. Once again, a split sample design was used, with half of the sample being asked about a credit for *all* tuition and the other half about a credit for *part* of the tuition.

On the question regarding a tax credit for all tuition paid, 56% of respondents are in favor, and 42% are opposed. Public school parents favor such a credit by 63% to 35%. When asked about a credit for part of the tuition, 66% of respondents are in favor, and 30% are opposed. Support by public school parents rises to 73% for a partial tax credit, while the number opposed drops to 24%.

Groups most likely to be in favor of full tuition credits include nonwhites (71%). It is interesting to note that Republicans, whose party is supporting tax credits at the federal level, approve full tax credits (57% in favor, 42% opposed), while Democrats, whose party is opposing tax credits at the federal level, favor such credits by an even larger margin (61% in favor, 37% opposed).

The first question:

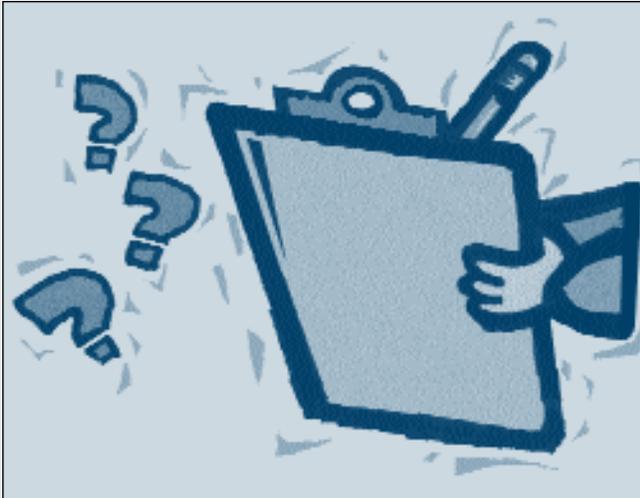
**Proposals are being made in a number of states to provide a tax credit that would allow parents who send their children to private or to church-related schools to recover all of the tuition paid. Would you favor or oppose this proposal in your state?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	56	50	63	89
Oppose	42	48	35	11
Don't know	2	2	2	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

The second question:

**Proposals are being made in a number of states to provide a tax credit that would allow parents who send their children to private or to church-related schools to recover part of the tuition paid. Would you favor or oppose this proposal in your state?**



	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	66	62	73	89
Oppose	30	33	24	11
Don't know	4	5	3	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

## Obligations of Private or Church-Related Schools Accepting Public Funds

Any debate over providing public funds to private or church-related schools eventually leads to the obligations schools must accept if they take the public funding. This year's poll included two questions in this area. The first asked if schools accepting such payments should be accountable to the state in the same way that public schools are accountable. In a consensus echoed by all demographic groups, 75% of respondents indicate that these schools should have the same accountability as public schools.

The second question repeated a question from the 1997 survey in which respondents were asked whether nonpublic schools accepting government tuition payments should be required to accept students from a wider range of backgrounds and academic ability than is now generally the case. Seventy percent of respondents say that nonpublic schools that accept public funding should be required to do so, while 23% say they should not. The percentage saying yes — down from 78% last year — is relatively uniform across all demographic groups.

These issues are of special significance since accountability to the state and required changes in admissions policies may be key factors in determining whether private or church-related schools choose to accept public funds if they are offered. It is certain that opponents of such aid will insist on the same kind of accountability that is required of public schools.

The first question:

**Do you think private or church-related schools that accept government tuition payments should be accountable to the state in the way public schools are accountable?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes, should	75	74	80	62
No, should not	20	22	16	26
Don't know	5	4	4	12

The second question:

**Do you think nonpublic schools that receive public funding should or should not be required to accept students from a wider range of backgrounds and academic ability than is now generally the case?**

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'98 %	'97 %	'98 %	'97 %	'98 %	'97 %	'98 %	'97 %
Yes, should	70	78	69	78	76	80	52	76
No, should not	23	18	23	17	20	17	45	22
Don't know	7	4	8	5	4	3	3	2

## Impact on Public Schools of Aid To Private or Church-Related Schools

One of the arguments raised by opponents of aid to private or church-related schools is that the effect will be to encourage those with the financial means to move out of the public schools, leaving them to the disadvantaged. To test these concerns, the poll asked public school parents what they would do if they could send their oldest child to any public, private, or church-related school of their choice with tuition paid by the government. Fifty-one percent indicate that they would continue to send their oldest child to his or her present public school, while 46% say they would send the child to a different school.

A follow-up question asked the 46% who say they would select a different school what kind of school they would select. Twenty-two percent say it would be a private school, 17% a church-related school, and 6% another public school. This would indicate that 57% of public school parents would keep their children in the public schools, while 39% would leave the public school system.

The first question:

**Suppose you could send your oldest child to any public, private, or church-related school of your choice, with tuition paid for by the government. Would you send your oldest child to the school he or she now attends, or to a different school?**

	Public School Parents	
	'98 %	'96 %
Present (public) school	51	55
Different school	46	44
Don't know	3	1

The second question:

**Would you send your child to a private school, a church-related school, or to another public school?**

	Public School Parents	
	'98 %	'96 %
Private school	22	19
Church-related school	17	17
Another public school	6	8



## Grading the Schools

Since 1974 respondents to the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup education polls have been asked to grade the public schools in their communities on a scale of A to F. In 1981 a second question was added in which the public was asked to grade the "nation's public schools." Then, beginning in 1985, parents were asked to grade the public school their oldest child was attending.

The importance of this series of questions cannot be overestimated. At a time when much criticism was being directed at the public schools, these questions provided annual evidence that people did not feel that the criticism applied to the schools in their own communities. This kept the discussion of the public schools more rational and recognized that schools vary widely and must be judged on a school-by-school and district-by-district basis.

The trends established by this series of questions have been consistent. They make it clear that the closer people are to the public schools, the higher their regard for them. The schools they rate lowest are those they do not know, the "nation's schools." These are the schools about which information comes through media reports. Ask people about the schools they do know, and the grades they assign go up. Indeed, the percentage of respondents who award the schools a grade of A or B increases almost 30 points when respondents are asked about the schools in their own community rather than about the "nation's schools." It rises again when public school parents, those closest to the schools, are asked to rate the local schools. And, finally, it increases again when public school parents are asked to grade the public school their oldest child attends.

### Local Public Schools

The grades assigned to the public schools in the community remain high, as has been the case for four decades, with 46% assigning those schools a grade of A or B. Adding in those assigning a C brings to 77% the percentage giving at least a passing grade to the schools in the community.

The 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		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'98 %	'97 %	'98 %	'97 %	'98 %	'97 %	'98 %	'97 %
A & B	46	46	43	42	52	56	39	26
A	10	10	8	8	15	15	8	9
B	36	36	35	34	37	41	31	17
C	31	32	31	33	33	30	24	35
D	9	11	9	11	9	10	16	21
FAIL	5	6	5	7	4	3	7	13
Don't know	9	5	12	7	2	1	14	5

### Public Schools Nationally

As has been true since 1981, the nation's public schools continue to be those receiving the lowest grades. In fact, the schools people are rating so low are, in many cases, the same ones receiving high marks from the people in the communities they serve. This year 18% assign the nation's schools an A or a B, down from 22% in 1997. No demographic groups assign these schools high grades, although nonwhites (24% A or B) and Democrats (25% A or B) give slightly higher grades than others.

The 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		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'98 %	'97 %	'98 %	'97 %	'98 %	'97 %	'98 %	'97 %
A & B	18	22	19	23	16	23	12	24
A	1	2	*	3	2	2	4	2
B	17	20	19	20	14	21	8	22
C	49	48	48	49	52	46	52	38
D	15	15	15	15	13	16	19	15
FAIL	5	6	6	6	4	4	7	6
Don't know	13	9	12	7	15	11	10	17

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

### Public School Oldest Child Attends

It would be difficult to argue that the parents of public school children would not be the best-informed people about the effectiveness of the public schools. That is why the grades that public school parents give the school their oldest child attends are so important. This year 62% assign a grade of A or B. Another 25% assign a C, bringing to 87% the proportion of parents who assign a passing grade to the school their oldest child attends.

There is some indication that the grades parents assign are somewhat affected by the success their children have had in school. For parents indicating that their child is above average

in achievement, the percentage assigning an A or a B is 69%. For those indicating average or below-average achievement for their child, the percentage assigning an A or a B drops to 53%.

The question:

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

	Public School Parents	
	'98 %	'97 %
A & B	62	64
A	22	26
B	40	38
C	25	23
D	8	7
FAIL	3	4
Don't know	2	2

## Effectiveness of Public Schools

The 1998 survey examined the effectiveness of public schools in a number of ways. One question asked respondents whether they thought children today receive a better or worse education than they did. Another listed measures used in gauging the effectiveness of schools and asked respondents to indicate which they felt was most important. Another question probed the extent to which the public schools are taking the steps necessary to promote understanding and tolerance among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

### Is Education Today Better or Worse?

Americans' assessment of whether children are getting a better or worse education today than they themselves received has changed little since the question was first asked nearly two decades ago. Forty-one percent believe that children get a bet-



ter education, 48% say children get a worse education, and 8% believe there is no difference. The range of opinions on this issue is great. Groups more likely to believe children are receiving a worse education include those in the West (27% better, 59% worse), political independents (33% better, 52% worse), college graduates (31% better, 51% worse), those with incomes of \$50,000 and over (34% better, 55% worse), and professionals and businesspeople (33% better, 55% worse). Groups likely to feel children are getting a better education include nonwhites (53% better, 40% worse), Democrats (47% better, 42% worse), those in the South (49% better, 43% worse), and public school parents (49% better, 43% worse).

The question:

**As you look on your own elementary and high school education, is it your impression that children today get a better — or worse — education than you did?**

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'98 %	'79 %	'98 %	'79 %	'98 %	'79 %	'98 %	'79 %
	Better	41	41	38	36	49	53	38
Worse	48	42	49	43	43	39	55	54
No difference	8	9	10	11	6	6	3	6
Don't know	3	8	3	10	2	2	4	4

### Size of School

This was the first poll in a number of years to raise the question of school size as an element relating to school effectiveness. The large comprehensive high schools that students in many communities attend today are far different from most of the schools of the past. Large elementary schools and middle schools have also become more common. It is not unusual to hear parents and students complain that the school the youngsters attend is large and impersonal. Two questions related to school size were asked.

The first question asked whether public schools in the community are too big, too small, or about the right size in terms of the number of students they serve. About half of the respondents (49%) say schools are about the right size, while 30% say they are too big. The two groups most likely to believe that public schools are about the right size are those age 50 and over (59% say they are about the right size) and rural residents (64% say they are about the right size). Since respondents were not asked the size of the schools in their communities, there is no way of identifying the size of the schools being judged as "about the right size." However, the fact that rural residents, who live where the smaller schools are located, so strongly believe that their schools are the right size and the fact that the public expresses a preference (in the second question) for smaller high schools both seem to indicate that the public thinks small is better.

The second question asked respondents to indicate how big a high school should be. Four choices were offered, ranging from less than 1,000 students to more than 2,000 students. Fifty-eight percent of respondents prefer a high school of less than 1,000 students. Only 2% prefer a high school larger than 2,000 students. The latter is, of course, the size of the high schools that a vast number of students currently attend. The preference for smaller high schools is uniform across all groups.

The first question:

**In your opinion, are public schools in your community too big, too small, or about the right size in terms of the number of students?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Too big	30	29	29	55
Too small	15	13	21	6
About the right size	49	51	48	28
Don't know	6	7	2	11

The second question:

**If you had the choice, which size high school would you prefer for a child of yours — a high school with less than 1,000 students, a high school with between 1,000 and 1,500 students, one with between 1,500 and 2,000 students, or one with more than 2,000 students?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Less than 1,000 students	58	56	57	84
Between 1,000 and 1,500 students	28	29	30	10
Between 1,500 and 2,000 students	6	6	7	*
More than 2,000 students	2	2	3	*
Don't know	6	7	3	6

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

## Measuring School Effectiveness

In the public school forums conducted by Phi Delta Kappa, the National PTA, and the Center on Education Policy, participants have struggled to identify the indicators they believe should be used to measure school effectiveness. This year's poll listed six indicators often mentioned in these forums and asked respondents to state the importance of each. The highest rating (82% very important) is given to the percentage of students who graduate from high school. Second is the percentage of high school graduates who practice good citizenship (79% very important). Third comes the percentage of high school graduates who go on to college (71% very important). The indicator rated lowest is the scores that students receive on standardized tests (50% very important).

Nonwhites show the greatest tendency to vary from the general population, with 65% saying that standardized test scores are very important, 83% rating the percentage going on to college or junior college as very important, and 86% citing the percentage graduating from college or junior college as very important.

The question:

**How important do you think each of the following is for measuring the effectiveness of the public schools in your community? Would you say very important, somewhat important, not very important, or**

**not at all important?**

	Very Important %	Somewhat Important %	Not Very Important %	Not at All Important %	Don't Know %
Percentage of students who graduate from high school	82	14	2	1	1
Percentage of high school graduates who practice good citizenship	79	15	3	1	2
Percentage of high school graduates who go on to college or junior college	71	24	3	1	1
Percentage who graduate from college or junior college	69	25	3	1	2
Percentage of graduates who get jobs after completing high school	63	28	5	2	2
Scores that students receive on standardized tests	50	34	9	3	4

## Understanding and Racial Tolerance

Promoting racial understanding and tolerance among students is one of the goals of the public schools. With a national commission studying racial matters, poll planners deemed this a good time to revisit a question asked in earlier polls to determine how effective Americans think the public schools are in this area. Sixty-two percent of Americans say they feel the public schools in their community are taking the necessary steps to promote understanding and tolerance among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Public school parents agree. Nonwhites, a group that would be expected to be sensitive in this area, also concur, but only 56% of nonwhites believe schools are taking the necessary steps to promote tolerance and understanding.

The question:

**In your opinion, are the public schools in your community taking the necessary steps to promote understanding and tolerance among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds or not?**

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'98 %	'92 %	'98 %	'92 %	'98 %	'92 %	'98 %	'92 %
Yes	62	50	62	44	64	59	57	47
No	27	28	25	26	31	30	28	31
Don't know	11	22	13	30	5	11	15	22

## Impact of the Public School on Students

Appropriately, the final question related to effectiveness dealt with the impact of the public schools on students. Obviously, the schools would like to have every child become an eager learner. In response to this question, 50% of public school parents say they believe the public schools have made their oldest child an eager learner. Another 34% indicate that the public schools have caused their child to tolerate learning as a necessary chore. Only 15% feel that the public schools

have caused their child to be turned off to learning.

This question also separates those who say their child is an above-average learner from those who indicate their child is an average or below-average learner. Sixty percent in the former group say the public schools have made their child an eager learner, as compared to 36% in the latter category. Twenty-three percent of those who indicate that their child is an average or below-average achiever also say that the public schools have turned off their child to learning.

The question:

**How would you describe the impact school has had or is having on your oldest child's attitude toward learning? Has it caused your child to become an eager learner, caused your child to tolerate learning as a necessary chore, or caused your child to be turned off to learning?**

	Public School Parents %
Caused child to become eager learner	50
Caused child to tolerate learning as a necessary chore	34
Caused child to be turned off to learning	15
Don't know	1

## Improving the Nation's Inner-City Schools

There is much evidence to indicate that problems relating to the public schools are concentrated in the inner cities of our urban areas and in poor rural areas. While most respondents to the 1998 survey give their own schools high marks, they assign much lower grades to the nation's schools. There is every reason to suspect that the schools in the nation to which they are assigning low grades are those in the inner cities. It is not unusual for these schools to be housed in old, dilapidated buildings and to be staffed by a higher proportion of teachers who are new or lack proper credentials. In addition, teachers in these schools are likely to be short of books and other teaching materials.

Two of the questions in this poll were designed to determine whether the public is aware of the need to improve the inner-city schools and whether it has the will to do something about it. The first question asked how important respondents think it is to improve these schools. The results have to be regarded as encouraging. Eighty-six percent indicate it is very important to do so. Adding in the 10% who say the task is fairly important brings the total to 96%. This response is uniform and consistent among all demographic groups.

Moreover, support for improving the nation's inner-city schools has trended upward since 1989, when 74% thought it very important to do so. In 1993 that figure rose to 81%.

The second question asked about the public's willingness to pay more taxes to improve inner-city schools. Approximately two-thirds (66%) indicate a willingness to do so. This expressed willingness is especially high among nonwhites (79%), Democrats (74%), those between the ages of 50 and 64 (78%), and manual laborers (73%). No group indicates an unwillingness to pay taxes for this purpose.

The first question:

**How important do you think it is to improve the nation's inner-city schools? Would you say very important, fairly important, not very important, or not important at all?**

	National Totals			No Children In School			Public School Parents			Nonpublic School Parents		
	'98	'93	'89	'98	'93	'89	'98	'93	'89	'98	'93	'89
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very important	86	81	74	86	80	71	86	81	83	100	79	83
Fairly important	10	15	19	9	15	21	11	16	14	—	13	14
Not very important	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	*	—	3	1
Not important at all	1	1	*	1	1	*	*	*	*	—	4	*
Don't know	2	1	5	3	2	6	2	1	3	—	1	2

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

The second question:

**Would you be willing or unwilling to pay more taxes to provide funds to improve the quality of the nation's inner-city public schools?**

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'98	'93	'98	'93	'98	'93	'98	'93
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Willing	66	60	69	59	64	62	52	52
Unwilling	30	38	26	38	34	37	46	47
Don't know	4	2	5	3	2	1	2	1

## Politics and the Public Schools

The pending congressional election comes at a time when education has moved to the foreground of the national political scene. Each of the major parties is attempting to portray itself as the education party. Their approaches are different, with one focusing primarily on the public schools and the other offering such alternatives to the public schools as vouchers and tuition tax credits. Poll planners thought this was an appropriate time to ask a series of questions bearing on issues that will be resolved in the political arena.

### The Major Parties and Education

Thirty-nine percent of respondents say the Democratic Party is more interested in improving public education, while 28% pick the Republican Party. A number of demographic groups assign a clear edge to the Democratic Party, including nonwhites (57%) and those in the West (47%). Only Republicans (61%) think the Republican Party is more interested in improving the public schools.

The second question asked respondents to indicate whether they favor or oppose four programs currently before Congress. The two programs associated with the Democratic Party — providing funds to repair and replace older school buildings and reducing class size in grades 1, 2, and 3 — have approval ratings of 86% and 80% respectively. The two programs supported by the Republican Party — block grants that states could use in assuming responsibility for federal programs and tax-free savings accounts that parents could use in paying tuition and other expenses at private and church-related schools

— draw support from 73% and 68% respectively.\*

The third question asked respondents to indicate how states should use the surplus funds that are being accumulated as a result of the booming economy. Fifty percent indicate that the surpluses should be spent on the public schools, 31% say they should be used to reduce taxes, and 14% say they should be used to build a “rainy day” fund for the states. Only 4% opted to spend the money on other state services. Among public school parents, 58% say that state surpluses should be spent on the public schools.

The first question:

**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		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'98 %	'96 %	'98 %	'96 %	'98 %	'96 %	'98 %	'96 %
Democratic Party	39	44	42	45	38	41	18	32
Republican Party	28	27	27	26	28	29	30	36
No difference (volunteered)	18	15	18	15	17	14	29	23
Don't know	15	14	13	14	17	16	23	9

The second question:

**Congress is currently considering various plans to improve the quality of the nation's public schools in kindergarten through 12th grade. As I read each of the following plans, would you tell me whether you favor or oppose that plan?**

	National Totals			Public School Parents		
	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
Providing funds to help repair and replace older school buildings	86	13	1	89	11	0
Providing block grants to states, with the states taking the responsibility for some federal programs	73	21	6	70	25	5
Allowing parents to build tax-free accounts that they would use to pay tuition and other expenses at private and church-related schools	68	29	3	74	25	1
Providing funds to be used to reduce class size in grades 1, 2, and 3	80	17	3	88	11	1

The third question:

**Because of the current strength of the nation's**

\*The second and third questions were two of the three questions that the Gallup Organization chose to include in one of its regular polls, so as not to bias the responses by including them in an education poll.

**economy, many states have surplus budget funds available. Which one of the following do you think would be the best way to use surplus funds — 1) use them to reduce taxes, 2) spend them on the public schools, 3) spend them on other state services, or 4) build a “rainy day” or emergency fund for the state?**

	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
Reduce taxes	31	30
Spend them on public schools	50	58
Spend them on other state services	4	1
Build a “rainy day” or emergency fund	14	11
Don't know	1	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.



## Financing the Schools

Two questions in the poll dealt with the issue of financing public schools. The first asked respondents about the best way to finance the schools. Respondents are divided, with 21% choosing local property taxes, 33% choosing state taxes, and 37% choosing federal taxes. A significant change since 1986 is that the percentage of those saying they favor federal taxes has gone up by 13%. Nonwhites (54%), 18- to 29-year-olds (45%), and Democrats (40%) express a strong preference for federal taxes as the source of funding.

The second, more basic question asked respondents whether they think the quality of the public schools is related to the amount of money spent on students in those schools. Fifty percent believe that it is. This result is generally uniform across all demographic groups.

The first question:

**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		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'98 %	'86 %	'98 %	'86 %	'98 %	'86 %	'98 %	'86 %
Local property taxes	21	24	22	22	19	28	34	22
State taxes	33	33	34	34	31	32	25	36
Federal taxes	37	24	35	23	41	28	28	22
Don't know	9	19	9	21	9	12	13	20

The second question:

**In your opinion, is the quality of the public schools related to the amount of money spent on students in these schools, or not?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes	50	51	52	34
No	42	42	40	56
Don't know	8	7	8	10



### Voluntary Testing Program

President Clinton has proposed a voluntary national testing program in which students at the fourth- and eighth-grade levels would be tested in order to measure the performance of the nation's public schools. This proposal is currently before Congress. Poll respondents were asked whether they favored or opposed the idea. The question did not identify President Clinton as the source of the proposal. Seventy-one percent say they favor the idea, and the support is uniform across all demographic groups.

The question:

**A proposal has been made that the federal government administer a voluntary national testing program that would routinely test fourth- and eighth-grade students in order to measure the performance of the nation's public schools. In general, do you favor or oppose this proposal?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	71	68	78	72
Oppose	25	28	19	21
Don't know	4	4	3	7

### Prayer Amendment

The question on support for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would permit prayers to be spoken in public schools was first asked in 1984. It attracted support from 69% of the respondents to that year's poll. This year the same question brought a favorable response from 67% of the respondents. Groups offering particularly high support include blacks (76%), those age 50 and older (74%), Republicans (80%), those living in the South (81%), and rural residents (75%). Those less likely to favor the amendment, though still offering majority support, include those in the 18- to 29-year-old age group (55%), political independents (56%), college graduates (56%), those in the West (51%), and professionals and businesspeople (61%).

The question:

**An amendment to the U.S. Constitution has been proposed that would permit prayers to be spoken in the public schools. Do you favor or oppose this amendment?**

	National Totals %			No Children In School %			Public School Parents %			Nonpublic School Parents %		
	'98	'95	'84	'98	'95	'84	'98	'95	'84	'98	'95	'84
Favor	67	71	69	64	68	68	73	75	73	85	74	68
Oppose	28	25	24	31	28	25	22	20	21	13	23	21
Don't know	5	4	7	5	4	7	5	5	6	2	3	11

### Problems Facing the Public Schools

Each of the previous Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup polls has given respondents an open-ended opportunity to identify the biggest problems with which the public schools in their communities must deal. This year poll planners decided to supplement that question with one in which seven problems frequently identified were given to respondents, who were then asked to indicate how serious they feel each of these problems is in the local schools. And, finally, given the recent reported cases of violence in schools, respondents were asked if they believe their child is safe at school and safe when playing in the neighborhood.

#### Biggest Problems Facing Local Schools

Concern about fighting/violence/gangs (mentioned by 15%) replaces lack of discipline/more control and lack of financial support/funding/money at the top of the list of biggest problems mentioned by those responding to this year's poll. Lack of discipline is mentioned by 14% of this year's respondents, lack of financial support is mentioned by 12%, and use of drugs is mentioned by 10%. These are the only problems in the poll to reach double-digit figures. Nonwhites also place fighting/violence/gangs at the top of the list, with 23% identifying it as the biggest problem.

	National Totals %		No Children In School %		Public School Parents %		Nonpublic School Parents %	
	'98	'97	'98	'97	'98	'97	'98	'97
Fighting/violence/gangs	15	12	14	12	20	12	10	16
Lack of discipline/more control	14	15	15	15	9	12	29	22
Lack of financial support/funding/money	12	15	13	15	11	14	2	4
Use of drugs/dope	10	14	10	14	12	14	8	9
Overcrowded schools	8	8	5	6	11	10	22	17
Concern about standards/quality of education	6	8	6	7	5	8	9	10
Difficulty getting good teachers/quality teachers	5	3	6	3	4	4	*	*
Pupils' lack of interest/attitudes/truancy	5	6	4	6	5	6	15	3
None	3	2	2	2	5	3	7	*
Don't know	16	10	19	13	10	6	8	4

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

## Seriousness of Selected Problems

In this question, respondents were given seven problems and asked to indicate how serious each is in the local public schools. In reporting the ratings, the very serious and fairly serious categories are combined. Drugs top the list, with 80% of respondents rating that problem either very serious or fairly serious. Discipline and smoking tie for second at 76%, followed by alcohol (72%), teenage pregnancy (71%), fighting (64%), and gangs (57%). Considering the combined percentages, responses are reasonably consistent across groups.

The question:

**How serious a problem would you say each of the following is in the public schools in your community? Would you say a very serious problem, fairly serious, not very serious, or not at all serious?**

	Very and Fairly Serious Combined %	Very Serious %	Fairly Serious %	Not Very Serious %	Not At All Serious %	Don't Know %
Drugs	80	52	28	13	3	4
Discipline	76	50	26	17	3	4
Smoking	76	50	26	15	3	6
Alcohol	72	44	28	18	4	6
Teenage pregnancy	71	43	28	19	4	6
Fighting	64	37	27	26	5	5
Gangs	57	37	20	28	11	4

## Safety at School and in the Neighborhood

The recent reports of violence in schools across the country have raised questions as to how safe children are when they are at school. It seemed a good time to repeat two questions first asked in 1977, one dealing with safety while at school and the other with safety when outside playing in the neighborhood. Sixty-three percent of public school parents do not fear for their child's safety when he or she is at school. This percentage is down from 69% in 1977, while the percentage who do fear for their child's safety is up from 25% to 36%. These percentages do not vary greatly across groups. Sixty-eight percent say they do not fear for their child's safety when outside at play in the neighborhood. Thirty-one percent indicate that they do. These percentages are relatively unchanged since 1977.



The first question:

**Thinking about your oldest child, when he or she is at school, do you fear for his or her physical safety?**

	Public School Parents	
	'98 %	'77 %
Yes	36	25
No	63	69
Don't know	1	6

The second question:

**When your oldest child is outside at play in your own neighborhood, do you fear for his or her physical safety?**

	Public School Parents	
	'98 %	'77 %
Yes	31	28
No	68	68
Don't know	1	4

## School Operation/Curriculum

The 1998 poll dealt with a number of topics involving school operations and curriculum, including means of communication, involvement of parents, dealing with students who cannot speak English, placement of students with learning problems, and inclusion of sex education in the curriculum.

### Communication

Schools and school districts use a variety of ways to communicate with parents and with the rest of the community. Some, such as open houses, neighborhood discussion groups, and school newsletters, have been around for a long time; others, such as televised school board meetings, public school news hotlines, and Internet chat rooms, are relatively new. Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of each of these methods.

The question:

**Here are some ways in which public schools try to open lines of communication with citizens. In your opinion, how effective do you think each of the following would be? Would you say very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective, or not at all effective?**

	Very and Somewhat Effective %	Very Effective %	Somewhat Effective %	Not Very Effective %	Not At All Effective %	Don't Know %
Public school open houses	89	54	35	6	3	2
Public school newsletters	87	47	40	9	3	1
Open hearings	85	48	37	8	4	3
Neighborhood discussion groups	81	43	38	12	5	2
Public school news hotlines	77	35	42	13	4	6
Televised school board meetings	74	39	35	15	9	2
Internet "chat rooms" set up by your local school	63	25	38	19	9	9

## Parental Control

The matter of parental control in seven areas related to the public schools has been explored just once previously in these polls. The responses in this year's poll suggest that the desire for parents to have a greater say in school matters has increased significantly since the question was first asked in 1989.

(The results were not published until 1990.) Of the seven areas included in the question, the desire is highest this year for greater parental input in the allocation of school funds (57% of respondents want more say), in the selection and hiring of administrators and principals (55% want more say), and in the choice of the curriculum offered (53% want more say).

Public school parents indicate a desire for more say in each of the seven areas. Nonwhites are more likely than whites to want more say in all areas except teacher and administrator salaries and allocation of school funds, where the groups are essentially tied. College graduates are more likely than high school graduates to believe that parents have the right amount of say in each of the seven areas.

The first question:

**Do you feel that parents of public school students should have more say, less say, or do they have about the right amount of say about the following areas in the public schools?**

	More Say		Less Say		Right Amount		Don't Know	
	'98 %	'90 %	'98 %	'90 %	'98 %	'90 %	'98 %	'90 %
Allocation of school funds	57	59	8	10	29	27	6	4
Selection and hiring of administrators and principals	55	46	9	14	30	37	6	3
Curriculum, that is, the subjects offered	53	53	10	9	32	36	5	2
Selection and hiring of teachers	48	41	13	17	34	38	5	4
Teacher and administrator salaries	48	39	14	17	32	39	6	5
Selection of books and instructional materials	46	43	13	13	37	41	4	3
Books placed in school libraries	44	38	14	15	38	44	4	3

**Non-English-Speaking Students**

How to meet the needs of students who come to the public schools unable to speak English is a matter of controversy across the nation. The problem was highlighted recently in California when the state approved a referendum virtually banning bilingual education. This year's poll offered respondents three choices for dealing with the problem of non-English-speaking students. The first, putting them in classes taught in English with a minimum amount of tutoring in English, is supported by 34% of those polled. The second, providing public school in-

struction in all subjects in the students' native language while they learn English, is supported by 27%. The third, requiring students to learn English in public schools before they receive instruction in any other subjects, is supported by 37%. Nonwhites (42%) are the group most likely to choose the option of providing students with instruction in their native language. College graduates (42%) are the group most likely to opt for providing the minimum amount of tutoring needed in English.

The question:

**Many families who come from other countries have school-age children who cannot speak English. Which one of the following three approaches do you think is the best way for public schools to deal with non-English-speaking students?**

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Put the students in classes taught in English with the minimum tutoring needed to help them learn English	34	33	34	40
Provide public school instruction in all subjects in the students' native language while they learn English	27	26	30	20
Require students to learn English in public schools before they receive instruction in any other subjects	37	38	34	40
Don't know	2	3	2	*

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

**Placement of Students with Learning Problems**

There has been a trend across the country, supported by federal law and a line of court decisions, to place students with learning problems in the same classrooms with other students. In a question asked in 1995, two-thirds of the public (66%) expressed the view that students with learning problems should be in special classes. The same question was repeated in this year's poll, and the results show little change of opinion. Sixty-five percent favor placement in special classes, while 26% favor placement in the same classrooms. Groups most likely to support placement in special classes include those age 65 and older (74%), Republicans (72%), high school graduates (71%), and manual laborers (71%).

The question:

**In your opinion, should children with learning problems be put in the same classrooms with other students, or should they be put in special classes of their own?**

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'98 %	'95 %	'98 %	'95 %	'98 %	'95 %	'98 %	'95 %
Yes, same classrooms	26	26	26	25	29	29	10	25
No, special classes	65	66	65	68	63	62	70	66
Don't know	9	8	9	7	8	9	20	9

**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 \$55. For information about using PACE materials, write or phone Phillip Harris at Phi Delta Kappa International, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. Ph. 800/766-1156.

## Including Sex Education in the Curriculum

In earlier polls, respondents were routinely asked about the inclusion of sex education in the public high school curriculum. The topic was last explored in 1987, at which time 76% of respondents favored including sex education in the curriculum. In the intervening 11 years, support has increased to 87%. It is also uniform across all groups.

A second question, also from previous polls, asked respondents about the inclusion of specific topics in the sex education curriculum. Once again, support for inclusion has increased for each of the nine topics listed. The percentage favoring inclusion varies from a high of 92% for instruction about AIDS and about venereal disease to a low of 65% for instruction about homosexuality.

The first question:

**Do you feel the public high schools should or should not include sex education in their instructional programs?**

	National Totals				No Children In School				Public School Parents				Nonpublic School Parents			
	'98	'87	'85	'81	'98	'87	'85	'81	'98	'87	'85	'81	'98	'87	'85	'81
Yes, should	87	76	75	70	87	73	72	66	89	82	81	79	78	81	80	79
No, should not	12	16	19	22	12	16	21	25	10	14	16	16	22	18	15	17
Don't know	1	8	6	8	1	11	7	9	1	4	3	5	*	1	5	4

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

The second question:

**Which of the following topics, if any, should be included for high school students?**

	Topics That Should Be Included			
	'98	'87	'85	'81
Venereal disease	92	86	84	84
AIDS	92	84	*	*
Biology of reproduction	90	80	82	77
Teen pregnancy	89	84	*	*
Birth control	87	83	85	79
Premarital sex	77	66	62	60
Nature of sexual intercourse	72	61	61	53
Abortion	70	60	60	54
Homosexuality	65	56	48	45

\*These topics were not included in the earlier surveys.

## Impact of Unions

The impact unions have had on the quality of public education is another area that had been explored in the early years of the poll but had not been revisited since 1976. The public remains divided in this area: 27% believe that unions have improved the quality of the public schools, 26% believe that unions have hurt the public schools, and 37% believe that unions have made no difference. These responses reflect a somewhat more positive attitude toward unions today than in 1976. Thirty-nine percent of public school parents share the view that unions have made no difference. Nonwhites (36%) are the group most

likely to believe that unions have helped.

The question:

**Most teachers in the nation now belong to unions or associations that bargain over salaries, working conditions, and the like. Has unionization, in your opinion, helped, hurt, or made no difference in the quality of public education in the U.S.?**

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'98	'76	'98	'76	'98	'76	'98	'76
Helped	27	22	27	22	28	23	23	24
Hurt	26	38	26	38	24	36	36	47
Made no difference	37	27	37	26	39	28	27	25
Don't know	10	13	10	14	9	13	14	4

## The Public's Knowledge Of Local Schools

The question of how well informed respondents feel about the local public schools was last asked in 1987. During this interval, the public feels it has become much better informed, with those rating themselves well informed rising from 15% to 31% and those rating themselves as fairly well informed rising from 39% to 42%. This means that 73% of respondents now consider themselves to be either well informed or fairly well informed about the local schools. It is somewhat surprising that those with no children in school feel almost as well informed as do public school parents. This is a major change since 1987. Groups most likely to consider themselves well informed include nonwhites (40%) and college graduates (42%).

The question:

**Would you say you were well informed, fairly well informed, or not well informed about the local public school situation?**

	National Totals		No Children In School		Public School Parents		Nonpublic School Parents	
	'98	'87	'98	'87	'98	'87	'98	'87
Well informed	31	15	29	12	36	25	23	16
Fairly well informed	42	39	41	33	44	51	39	47
Not well informed	26	41	28	48	20	23	33	34
Don't know	1	5	2	7	*	1	5	3

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

## Confidence in Institutions

It seemed appropriate to close this poll with a question seeking to find out how much confidence Americans have in the institutions that serve them. This is the last of the three questions that the Gallup Organization chose to include in its regular poll in order to reduce bias. The public schools fared reasonably well in this comparison, with 42% of respondents expressing either a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in them.

They came in second only to the church or organized religion (57%).

The percentage of public school parents expressing either a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the public schools is 47%, almost identical to the 46% who award the schools in their communities a grade of A or B. In regular polls conducted by the Gallup Organization since 1980, the percentage of total respondents expressing either a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the public schools has ranged from a high of 50% in 1987 to a low of 34% in 1994.

The question:

**Now I am going to read you a list of institutions in American society. Please tell me how much confidence you, yourself, have in each one — a great deal, quite a lot, some, or very little?**

	Great Deal/ Quite a Lot %	Quite a Lot %		Very Little %	None (volunteered) %	Don't Know %	
		Great Deal %	Quite a Lot %				
The church or organized religion	57	30	27	27	11	3	2
Public schools	42	16	26	35	20	2	1
Local government	37	13	24	41	20	1	1
State government	36	13	23	45	17	1	1
Big business	31	13	18	42	22	2	3
National government	30	11	19	43	22	2	3
Criminal justice system	29	12	17	37	30	4	*
Organized labor	26	13	13	39	28	3	4

\*Less than one-half of 1%.

## Closing Comments

This report is an attempt to provide a factual accounting of the findings contained in the 30th Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll. However, what has been reported is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the data that are available. The complete tabulations break the data down into 12 major population groups and 50 subgroups. It is possible to compare, for example, the responses given by those living in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Comparisons can be made of the responses provided by men and women or by Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.

There is not space in this report to go extensively into comparisons among groups. However, our examination suggests that nonwhites tend to provide responses that reflect greater variability and greater intensity of feeling than other groups. It is also apparent that the responses of college graduates tend to differ from those of high school graduates, those in the 18- to 29-year-old age group differ from those age 65 and older, and clerical/sales and manual workers tend to provide responses different from those of professionals and businesspeople. These kinds of comparisons add meaning to the poll results; however, they can be made only by those who have obtained the complete tabulations.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that the original reason for initiating the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup polls was to provide those making decisions about the schools with data to

be used as input in those decisions. This is not to say that educational decisions should be based on public opinion. However, in a democratic society the public schools are dependent on an informed and supportive public. If support for a worthwhile idea is not present, it becomes the responsibility of educational leaders to build the necessary support to move the public schools in the direction they need to go.

The original purpose of the poll remains as valid today as it was 30 years ago. The data contained in this report would suggest the following kinds of conclusions: public schools benefit when a large number of people have close contact with them; a significant part of the public remains to be persuaded that children today receive a better education than in the past; people tend to prefer smaller schools at a time when the trend is toward larger schools; and public school parents want more say in decisions related to the public schools. Such data-based conclusions should be useful to those who have the decision-making responsibility for the public schools.

## Research Procedure

*The Sample.* The sample used in this survey embraced a total of 1,151 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 23 June 1998.

*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 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.

## 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.

The following tables may be used in estimating the sampling error of any percentage in this report. The computed allowances have taken into account the effect of the sample design upon sampling error. They may be interpreted as indicating the range (plus or minus the figure shown) within which the results of repeated samplings in the same time period could be expected to vary 95% of the time, assuming the same sampling procedure, the same interviewers, and the same questionnaire.

The first table shows how much allowance should be made for the sampling error of a percentage:

### Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of a Percentage

	In Percentage Points (at 95 in 100 confidence level)*						
	Sample Size						
	1,500	1,000	750	600	400	200	100
Percentages near 10	2	2	3	3	4	5	8
Percentages near 20	3	3	4	4	5	7	10
Percentages near 30	3	4	4	5	6	8	12
Percentages near 40	3	4	5	5	6	9	12
Percentages near 50	3	4	5	5	6	9	13
Percentages near 60	3	4	5	5	6	9	12
Percentages near 70	3	4	4	5	6	8	12
Percentages near 80	3	3	4	4	5	7	10
Percentages near 90	2	2	3	3	4	5	8

\*The chances are 95 in 100 that the sampling error is not larger than the figures shown.

The table would be used in the following manner: Let us say that a reported percentage is 33 for a group that includes 1,000 respondents. We go to the row for "percentages near 30" in the table and across to the column headed "1,000."

The number at this point is 4, which means that the 33% obtained in the sample is subject to a sampling error of plus or minus four points. In other words, it is very probable (95 chances out of 100) that the true figure would be somewhere between 29% and 37%, with the most likely figure the 33% obtained.

In comparing survey results in two samples, such as, for example, men and women, the question arises as to how large a difference between them must be before one can be reasonably sure that it reflects a real difference. In the tables below, the number of points that must be allowed for in such comparisons is indicated. Two tables are provided. One is for percentages near 20 or 80; the other, for percentages near 50. For percentages in between, the error to be allowed for lies between those shown in the two tables.

#### Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of the Difference

TABLE A Size of Sample	In Percentage Points (at 95 in 100 confidence level)* Percentages near 20 or percentages near 80					
	1,500	1,000	750	600	400	200
1,500	4					
1,000	4	5				
750	5	5	5			
600	5	5	6	6		
400	6	6	6	7	7	
200	8	8	8	8	9	10

TABLE B Size of Sample	Percentages near 50					
	1,500	1,000	750	600	400	200
1,500	5					
1,000	5	6				
750	6	6	7			
600	6	7	7	7		
400	7	8	8	8	9	
200	10	10	10	10	11	13

\*The chances are 95 in 100 that the sampling error is not larger than the figures shown.

Here is an example of how the tables would be used: Let us say that 50% of men respond a certain way and 40% of women respond that way also, for a difference of 10 percentage points between them. Can we say with any assurance that the 10-point difference reflects a real difference between men and women on the question? Let us consider a sample that contains approximately 750 men and 750 women.

Since the percentages are near 50, we consult Table B, and, since the two samples are about 750 persons each, we look for the number in the column headed "750," which is also in the row designated "750." We find the number 7 here. This means that the allowance for error should be seven points and that, in concluding that the percentage among men is somewhere between three and 17 points higher than the percentage among women, we should be wrong only about 5% of the time. In other words, we can conclude with considerable confidence that a difference exists in the direction observed and that it amounts to at least three percentage points.

If, in another case, men's responses amount to 22%, say, and women's to 24%, we consult Table A, because these percentages are near 20. We look in the column headed "750" that is also in the "750" row and see that the number is 5. Obviously, then, the two-point difference is inconclusive.

### 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 \$10. (Institutional purchase orders, cash, or MasterCard or VISA number required.) Additional copies are 25 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 664-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.

## Design of the Sample

For the 1998 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.



## Composition of the Sample

<b>Adults</b>	%		
No children in school	67		
Public school parents	29		
Nonpublic school parents	4		
<b>Gender</b>	%	<b>Income</b>	%
Men	46	\$50,000 and over	29
Women	54	\$40,000 and over	40
		\$30,000-\$39,999	15
<b>Race</b>		\$20,000-\$29,999	15
White	82	Under \$20,000	16
Nonwhite	15	Undesignated	14
Black	11		
Undesignated	3	<b>Region</b>	
<b>Age</b>		East	23
18-29 years	22	Midwest	24
30-49 years	43	South	32
50 and over	34	West	21
Undesignated	1	<b>Community Size</b>	
<b>Education</b>		Urban	30
Total college	55	Suburban	44
College graduate	22	Rural	26
College incomplete	33		
Total high school	44		
High school graduate	28		
High school incomplete	16		
Undesignated	1		