

Highlights of the 2010

Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll

What Americans Said About the Public Schools



#1 EDUCATION PRIORITY

Improving the quality of teachers should be the top national education priority. We should recruit the best teacher candidates, provide professional development to help current and prospective teachers use the best teaching practices, and do whatever we can to retain the best teachers while dismissing those who aren't skilled or suited for the job.



COLLEGE FOR ALL

A college education is necessary for today's students. I believe my children will go to college and should because that education will provide more job opportunities and a better income.



UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS

Fix poorly performing schools by providing comprehensive external support. We don't support firing teachers and principals without cause. We don't support converting underperforming schools to charter schools, and we don't support closing schools altogether.



CHARTER SCHOOLS

We like public charter schools more every year! We'd be happy to have new public charter schools in our communities and more throughout the United States.



SCHOOL FUNDING CRISIS

The current public school funding crisis is one of the top problems facing the public schools in my community.



ECONOMIC STIMULUS MONEY

Federal stimulus money saved 300,000 education jobs in America last year? Really? I didn't know that!



TEACHER PAY

Change the single salary schedule to pay public school teachers. Quality of work — including improvements in student learning — should determine how much teachers earn.



RESPECT FOR TEACHERS

We trust teachers! If my son or daughter became a teacher, that would be fine with me — but I'm not sure about becoming a teacher myself.

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PAY TO LEARN

Don't pay students to read books, attend school, or try for better grades. That's not right!

The 2010 PDK/Gallup Poll results are available at www.pdkpoll.org. *Kappan's* digital edition includes all 2010 tables.

A Time for Change

The 42nd Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll
of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

BY WILLIAM J. BUSHAW AND SHANE J. LOPEZ



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Change is the new constant — the new status quo. Yet, while we thrive on technological advances, we worry that our social systems can't keep pace with the accelerating rate of change. We have witnessed the rise and collapse of businesses and organizations, large and small, unable to evolve quickly enough to avoid extinction, and wonder how could that happen. We can't imagine living without iPods, Internet, and cell phones, yet we still reminisce about the good old days. But that was then. This is now.

More than ever, improvements in technology and changes in social infrastructures require that all organizations, whether they operate for profit or not for profit, implement thoughtful improvements in how they provide services or create products. Public schools aren't exempt. For educators, this means identifying more efficient and effective approaches to helping all students learn.

WILLIAM J. BUSHAW is executive director of Phi Delta Kappa International, Bloomington, Ind. **SHANE J. LOPEZ** is senior scientist in residence, Gallup, Omaha, Neb.

Making the right changes requires research that primarily falls into two categories: 1) the analysis of experts, and 2) the opinions of stakeholders and consumers. Both sources of information are essential to organizations in order to avoid extinction.

The annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools is the most trusted source of American opinion about schools. It is not an advocacy poll. It is a carefully constructed research tool that provides direct feedback from the public — feedback that can provide corrective information to improve performance, feedback that educators and policy makers should seriously consider before implementing improvements to how teachers teach and children learn.

THIS YEAR'S ISSUES

A diverse and bipartisan group of education experts assembled in February to debate the issues and identify topics for this year's poll (see page 26). This year, the following topics surfaced:

- The federal role in public education
- School quality
- Teacher salaries and teacher evaluation
- Teacher quality and perceptions of the teaching profession
- Student learning and rewards
- The importance of a college education
- Charter schools and parental choice
- The parents' perspective about their child's learning and their child's future

With this PDK/Gallup poll report, you see the questions verbatim as they were asked — enabling you to make your own interpretation and reach your own conclusions of how Americans perceive the public schools.



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THE FEDERAL ROLE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

The federal role in public education continues to be a contentious issue in the United States, so we probed the topic with a series of questions. In one of its most aggressive reform efforts, the U.S. Department of Ed-

ucation will identify 5,000 of America's lowest-performing schools for turnaround efforts, requiring that these schools use one of four required models to improve student learning at their sites: 1) turnaround — replacing the principal and a portion of the staff; 2) restart — closing the school and re-opening it as a charter school; 3) closure — closing the school permanently and enrolling students in higher-performing schools; and 4) transformational — keeping the staff but replacing the principal while providing comprehensive outside support. As it turns out, Americans have definite opinions about this controversial topic.

We asked questions to better understand if Americans believe public education should be a federal, state, or local responsibility; if Americans knew whether the economic stimulus funds directed toward education were spent in their own community; which national education programs are of greatest importance to Americans; and how Americans rate the President's support of public education. And we hope that the 2010 PDK/Gallup poll will mark the last time we ask Americans their opinions about the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation enacted in January 2002, as it is already more than three years overdue for reauthorization by Congress.

FINDINGS

- Overwhelmingly, Americans favor keeping a poorly performing school in their community open with existing teachers and principals, while providing comprehensive outside support. This finding is consistent across political affiliation, age, level of education, region of the country, and other demographics.

- Whether it's paying the bills, setting standards, deciding what should be taught, or holding schools accountable, Americans believe state government is the responsible agency for public education in the United States. Conversely, four of five Americans believe the federal government should not have a role in holding schools accountable, and that local government — that is, school boards — should not set education standards.

- Americans believe the most important national education program should be improving the quality of teaching. Developing demanding standards, creating better tests, and improving the nation's lowest-performing schools were rated significantly lower.

- While research indicated that the economic stimulus legislation passed by Congress in January 2009 saved more than 300,000 education jobs, Americans were unaware if any of those federal funds were spent locally to support education.

- Grades assigned to President Obama for his performance in support of public schools are down by 11% since last year, and they're down whether the respondent was a Democrat, Republican, or an independent.

- American opinion of NCLB is unchanged from last year, and overall remains unfavorable, as less than one in four Americans believe NCLB has helped their local schools.

TABLE 1. Let's say there is a consistently poor-performing school in your community. What do you believe would be the best solution? Close the school and reopen with a new principal? Close the school and reopen as a public charter school? Close the school and send the students to other higher performing nearby schools? Or, keep the school open with existing teachers and principal and provide comprehensive outside support?

	National Totals '10 %
Close the school and reopen with a new principal	17
Close the school and reopen as a public charter school	13
Close the school and send the students to other higher performing nearby schools	11
Keep the school open with existing teachers and principal and provide comprehensive outside support	54
Don't know	5

TABLE 2. Which unit of government — federal, state, or local — do you believe is most responsible for the following education issues? Paying for the K-12 education system? Setting standards for what students should know? Deciding what should be taught in schools? Holding schools accountable for what students learn?

NATIONAL TOTALS 2010

FEDERAL	STATE	LOCAL
20%	50%	29%*
Paying for the K-12 education system		
35%	46%	18%*
Setting standards for what students should know		
28%	43%	28%*
Deciding what should be taught in schools		
19%	45%	35%*
Holding schools accountable for what students learn		

* 1% responded "don't know."

TABLE 3. Of the following national education programs, which do you think is most important: developing demanding education standards, creating better tests to more accurately measure student achievement, improving the quality of our teachers, or improving the nation's lowest-performing schools?

	National Totals '10 %
Developing demanding education standards	24
Creating better tests to more accurately measure student achievement	11
Improving the quality of our teachers	44
Improving the nation's lowest-performing schools	20
Don't know	1

TABLE 4. President Barack Obama has been in office for over a year. How would you grade his performance in support of public schools using the A, B, C, D, Fail scale?

(As asked in 2009) President Barack Obama has been in office for almost six months. How would you grade his performance in support of public schools using the A, B, C, D, Fail scale?

	National Totals		Rep.		Dem.		Ind.	
	'10 %	'09 %	'10 %	'09 %	'10 %	'09 %	'10 %	'09 %
A & B	34	45	11	17	62	70	33	40
A	7	12	1	2	18	24	5	9
B	27	33	10	15	44	46	28	31
C	26	26	24	36	23	19	30	26
D	18	11	30	18	6	3	15	13
Fail	15	10	31	20	3	1	13	13
Don't know	7	8	4	9	6	7	9	8

What's most important in education?

The quality of teaching

Apps for iPad, iPhone, and iTouch



The complete 2010 PDK/Gallup poll results are available free for iPad, iPhone, and iTouch users

- Highlights of results
- Tables
- Charts
- Commentaries

Download the PDK/Gallup poll app at the App Store



TABLE 5. In 2009, Congress passed the economic stimulus legislation. Some of that money went to support education. Are you aware of whether or not any of this money helped pay for education expenses in your local community?

	National Totals '10 %
Yes	21
No	71
Don't know	8

TABLE 6. 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 2003-2010

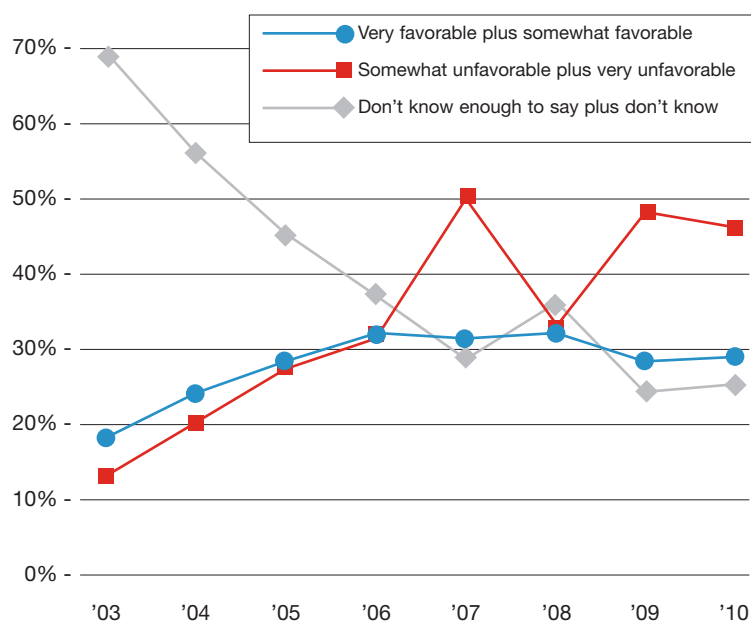


TABLE 7. Just your impression, how would you rate the overall impact of the No Child Left Behind program on the public schools in your community? Would you say it is helping, hurting, or making no difference in the performance of the local public schools?

	National Totals				
	'10 %	'09 %	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %
Helping	22	24	25	26	26
Hurting	28	29	22	27	21
Making no difference	45	43	34	41	37
Don't know	5	4	19	6	16



SCHOOL QUALITY

For more than 40 years, the first question we've asked Americans is to describe the biggest problem facing public schools in their communities. We ask this as an open-ended question — no prompts are provided to respondents — and we ask it first so the responses are not biased by other questions. In this year's report, we display the top three problems identified by Americans reaching back to 1970. The data documents a fascinating transition, through the student use of drugs, to the current school funding crisis.

Next, we asked Americans three questions: Give letter grades to the public schools in general, A to Fail; give letter grades to schools in your community; and asked just parents to give letter grades to the school their oldest child attends. As above, we're providing longitudinal data in five-year intervals.

And in what could be the most important question we posed in this year's poll, we asked Americans what schools would need to do to earn an "A" grade from them.

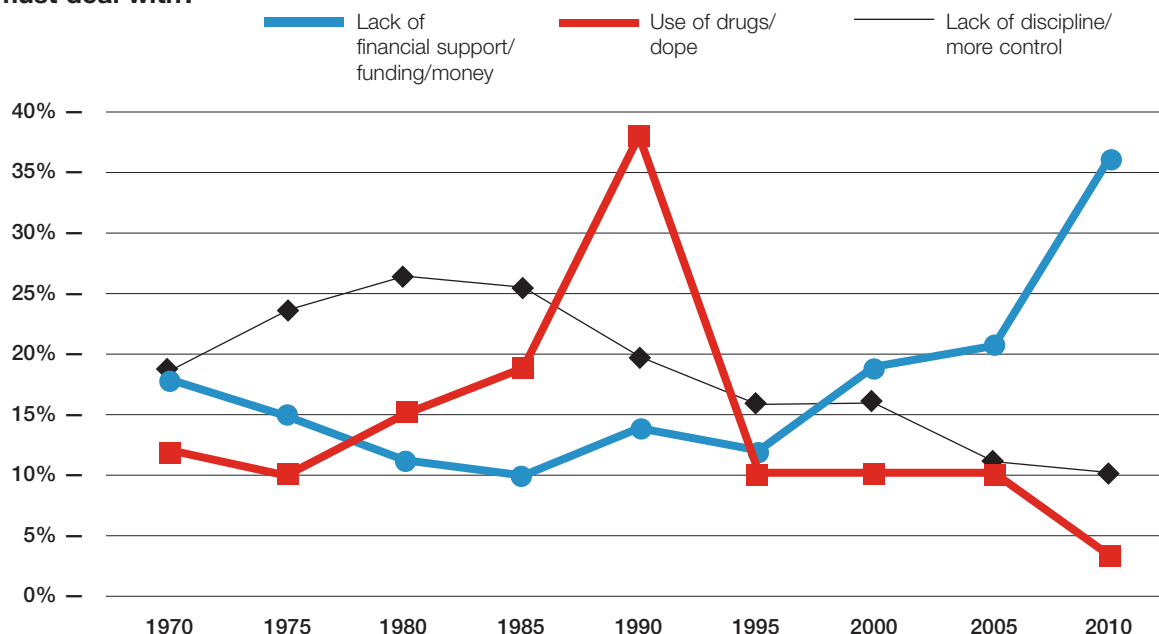
FINDINGS

- Thirty-six percent of Americans said school funding tops the list of the biggest problems facing the schools in their community, followed by lack of discipline and overcrowded schools. School funding has been identified as the biggest problem throughout this decade; this year alone, it increased 4% over last year's findings. Public school parents consider it an even bigger problem — 46% of them selecting it as the No. 1 challenge facing their schools. For the first time, government interference moved toward the top of the biggest-problem list, moving from 15th last year to a surprising fifth place.

- The grades Americans assign to the schools in their community have remained relatively stable over the past 35 years, trending slightly upward. This year, almost half of Americans give the schools in their community either an "A" or "B."

- Similarly, the grades Americans assign to the nation's schools, monitored for the past 25 years, have remained relatively stable. However, they are trending downward. This year, only 18% of Americans give the nation's schools either an "A" or "B."

Table 8. What do you think are the biggest problems the public schools of your community must deal with?



- Differences between how Americans view their local schools versus the nation's schools suggests that Americans like the schools they know but are much less positive about public education in general. This finding is often viewed from two very different perspectives. Some compare it to similar findings in other situations. For example, while Americans give Congress low grades, they give their local congressperson much higher grades. Researchers then write these two questions off as being consistent with Americans' fickleness toward their public and private institutions. On the other hand, these responses greatly concern some educators and policy makers. They believe it affirms that Americans are content with schools as they currently exist, the status quo, and that too many American will not embrace important reform efforts.

- Seventy-seven percent of America's parents gave the school their oldest child attends either an "A" or "B." These are the highest grades parents have assigned to their oldest child's school since the poll began. During the past 25 years, parent grades assigned to schools have continued to improve.

- For the first time, we asked Americans, "What are the main things the school has to do before it could earn an A." By a considerable margin, the top three responses were: 1) Improve the quality of teaching, 2) implement a challenging curriculum, and 3) help students be more successful. One interpretation suggests that Americans support greater investments in teacher recruitment and training and better ways to keep only the better teachers. It also suggests that Americans believe schools should challenge students more, but provide the support students need to meet these greater challenges.

- As Americans have stated previously, they believe the amount of money spent on education affects the quality of that education.

TABLE 9. 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 your community were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

	National Totals							
	'10 %	'05 %	'00 %	'95 %	'90 %	'85 %	'80 %	'75 %
A & B	49	48	47	41	41	43	35	43
A	11	12	11	8	8	9	10	13
B	38	36	36	33	33	34	25	30
C	33	29	35	37	34	30	29	28
D	11	9	8	12	12	10	12	9
Fail	5	5	3	5	5	4	6	7
Don't know	2	9	7	5	8	13	18	13

TABLE 10. Using the A, B, C, D, and FAIL scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?

	Public School Parents					
	'10 %	'05 %	'00 %	'95 %	'90 %	'85 %
A & B	77	69	70	65	72	71
A	36	31	26	27	27	23
B	41	38	44	38	45	48
C	18	21	21	23	19	19
D	4	6	5	8	5	5
Fail	1	4	2	3	2	2
Don't know	0	*	2	1	2	3

* Less than one-half of 1%.

Want to earn an "A" from the public?

Improve teaching quality

TABLE 11. 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					
	'10 %	'05 %	'00 %	'95 %	'90 %	'85 %
A & B	18	24	20	20	21	27
A	1	2	2	2	2	3
B	17	22	18	18	19	24
C	53	46	47	50	49	43
D	20	13	14	17	16	12
Fail	6	4	5	4	4	3
Don't know	3	13	14	9	10	15



RANDI WEINGARTEN Teachers Proud to Do Their Part

Americans value teachers, believe they do a good job of educating children, and recognize that teachers are essential to our society and our future. It is heartwarming — and humbling — to know that two-thirds of parents would like their children to enter our profession.

This poll shows that Americans understand that good teaching is not an innate skill or something that can be defined by test scores. Parents and **COMMENTARY** the public realize that teaching is incredibly complex. Like other professionals, teachers improve over time, making year-to-year adjustments and refining their skills. And most respondents think teacher evaluations should not be used to cast blame, but as a way to support good teaching. The AFT has taken a leading role in this area through new, more thoughtful teacher evaluations that are being implemented in more than 50 school districts nationwide — evaluations that are focused on student learning.

As we work to ensure that every child, in every school, is prepared to succeed, teachers are proud to shoulder a heavy load. And we recognize that we can't do it alone. Parents, the public, and teachers share the same beliefs about the importance of good teaching and strong neighborhood schools. For all of us who care about kids, the challenge is to act on this shared vision. We must come together to do the hard work of making every neighborhood school an excellent school that all families know they can count on, every year, for all their children.

RANDI WEINGARTEN is president of the American Federation of Teachers.

TABLE 12. In your opinion, what are the main things a school has to do before it can earn an "A"? (Open-ended question)

	National Totals '10 %
Top Five Answers	
Improve the quality of teaching	34
Implement a challenging curriculum	12
Help students be more successful	12
Implement standardized testing/grading	6
Establish closer relations with parents	5

TABLE 13. In your opinion, how much does the amount of money spent on a public school student's education affect the quality of his or her education: a great deal, quite a lot, not too much, or not at all?

	National Totals		
	'10 %	'01 %	'93 %
A great deal	32	38	38
Quite a lot	35	30	30
Not too much	24	25	25
Not at all	8	5	5
Don't know	1	2	2



TEACHER SALARIES AND EVALUATION

Much of the May 2010 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan* was devoted to performance pay for teachers. In her editorial, "A Carrot By a Different Color," *Kappan* editor Joan Richardson wrote, "Performance pay has catapulted itself to the national stage because of widespread frustration with teacher tenure (read: districts can't get rid of teachers who are poor performers), frustration with the single salary schedule, and frustration with stalled performance in urban districts."

Putting the teacher tenure question aside (we asked that question in last year's poll), we pulled from our archive a question about the single salary schedule, an approach first tested by school districts in the 1920s and which became universal by 1950. The single salary schedule was originally created to eliminate pay discrimination between male and female and elementary and secondary school teachers. Following this approach, teachers are paid based on their years of experience and their level of education, that is, advanced degrees. Performance evaluations based on classroom observations, student achievement, or other factors are not included in this salary approach.

We also asked Americans about the link between student achievement and teacher salaries and what they believe is the primary purpose for evaluating teachers. Finally, many education reformers are en-

couraging local school districts to move more experienced teachers to schools with the lowest student performance, so we asked Americans if they support this approach, particularly by offering higher salaries as an incentive.

FINDINGS

- Almost three of four Americans believe quality of work and not a standard scale should determine teacher pay, with parents feeling equally strong about this issue. Clearly, Americans support a revised approach to paying teachers.

- Almost three of four Americans believe teacher pay should be very closely or somewhat closely tied to student academic achievement. This represents a significant increase from when the question was asked in 2000.

- While Americans question the current approach to paying teachers, it's not clear how strongly they support teacher pay for performance. When asked to identify the primary purpose for evaluating teachers, helping teachers improve their ability to teach was their first choice by far, followed by documenting ineffectiveness that could lead to dismissal. Establishing salaries based on skill was a distant third.

- More than two of three Americans support paying teachers higher salaries as an incentive to teach in schools identified as needing improvement.

TABLE 14. Should each teacher be paid on the basis of the quality of his or her work, or should all teachers be paid on a standard-scale basis?

	National Totals		Public School Parents
	'10 %	'83 %	'10 %
On the basis of his or her work	71	61	72
On a standard-scale basis	27	31	28
Don't know	2	8	*

* Less than one-half of 1%.

TABLE 15. In your opinion, how closely should a teacher's salary be tied to his or her students' academic achievement: very closely tied, somewhat closely tied, not very closely tied, or not at all tied?

	National Totals		Public School Parents
	'10 %	'00 %	'10 %
Very closely tied	19	25	14
Somewhat closely tied	54	35	61
Not very closely tied	14	12	13
Not at all tied	13	24	12
Don't know	*	4	*

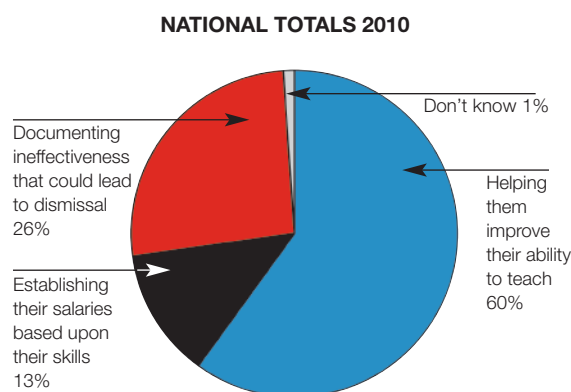
* Less than one-half of 1%.

TABLE 16. 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
	'10 %	'03 %	'10 %
Yes	68	65	68
No	31	33	31
Don't know	1	2	1

TABLE 17. In your mind, what do you think should be the primary purpose for evaluating teachers: helping them improve their ability to teach, establishing their salaries based upon their skills, or documenting ineffectiveness that could lead to dismissal?



What should decide teacher pay?

Quality of their work

TEACHER QUALITY

In a February speech, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, "talent matters tremendously in the classroom. It's no surprise that the single biggest in-school influence on student academic growth is the quality of the teacher standing in front of the classroom." Americans appear to agree with that. Americans singled out improving the quality of teachers as the most important action for improving education. They also indicated that the best way for schools to earn their respect and receive an "A" grade was to improve the quality of teaching.

So it's most appropriate that we asked Americans a series of questions to better understand their perceptions of the teaching profession. Do they have confidence in teachers? Would they want their child to become a teacher, and if they could change careers, would they want to become a teacher? Do they believe schools can hire and keep good teachers? And, most important, what words describe teachers who made a positive difference in their lives?

FINDINGS

- When asked to describe words or phrases that best describe a teacher who had the most positive influence in their life, Americans responded with the word "caring," followed by encouraging, interesting, personable, and of high quality. These reactions offer great advice for principals to consider the next time they hire a teacher.



SARAH WESSLING Teachers Make the Difference

While the general public may disagree about many aspects of education, there's one fact we implicitly understand: a special teacher can make all the difference.

Improving the quality of teaching really means improving the degree of individualization in the classroom. What parents hope for and what students know is that a teacher who cares is a teacher who is invested in the people who participate in a culture of learning. A caring teacher nurtures and encourages students and understands how life outside of school reverberates with the life inside of school. That teacher knows students' personal learning stories. That teacher recognizes that learning is personal, recursive, and not easily compartmentalized.

COMMENTARY

This section of the poll affirms that, for as much as we need standards to guide us and curriculum to inspire us, we want our children in the capable hands of dedicated professionals who meet our children exactly where they are: yearning to be recognized for their uniqueness and challenged to realize their potential.

We must commit to innovative teaching practices that will create openings to treat students as individuals, rather than defer to movements that homogenize them. As the survey reveals, we put our greatest trust in the people who make the phone calls, who make the home visits, who design learning for 28 different 1st graders. We trust that high-quality teachers — rich in content knowledge, confident in their skills, and poised to teach habits of mind — are the people who will turn our students into autonomous learners.

SARAH BROWN WESSLING is the 2010 National Teacher of the Year. She is an English teacher at Johnston High School, Johnston, Iowa.



- Seventy-one percent of Americans say they have trust and confidence in teachers, with public school parents registering even greater confidence at 78%. College graduates (76%) and Americans under 40 (76%) were more positive about their teachers than were high school graduates (67%) and older Americans (68%).

- Two of three Americans would support their child's decision to teach in the public schools as a career, a significant increase from when asked in 1980 and 1990.

- When asked if they were to choose a new line of work, four of 10 Americans said that they are very or somewhat likely to choose teaching as a profession. While it's difficult to say how this compares to other professions, it seems to be a relatively high percentage given the low grades assigned to the nation's schools. Among Americans under the age of 40, almost half say they would be very or somewhat likely to become teachers.

- Americans are less concerned now than they were seven years ago about their local public school's difficulty hiring good teachers.

TABLE 18. Please think about the teacher who has had the most positive influence in your life. Thinking about that teacher, please tell me three words or phrases that best describe how that teacher made a difference.

NATIONAL TOTALS 2010

Caring
Encouraging
Interesting **Personable**
Good/Quality Teacher/
Teaching Helpful Dedicated
Strict **Motivating** Fun Demanding
Expectations Compassionate

TABLE 19. Do you have trust and confidence in the men and women who are teaching children in the public schools?

	National Totals '10 %
Yes, have trust and confidence	71
No, do not	27
Don't know	2

TABLE 20. Do you think your local public school system has a hard time getting good teachers?

	National Totals	
	'10 %	'03 %
Yes, had a hard time	48	61
No, does not	49	37
Don't know	3	2

TABLE 21. Would you like to have a child of yours take up teaching in the public schools as a career?

	National Totals		
	'10 %	'90 %	'80 %
Yes	67	51	48
No	30	38	40
Don't know	3	11	12

TABLE 22. If you were to choose a new line of work, how likely would you be to choose teaching as a profession? Would you be very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely.

	National Totals '10 %
Very likely	12
Somewhat likely	28
Not very likely	26
Not at all likely	34
Don't know	*

* Less than one-half of 1%.



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STUDENT LEARNING AND REWARDS

The April 19, 2010, *Time* magazine cover story asked, "Should Schools Bribe Kids?" We decided that was a great question, so we asked Americans their opinion, and then posed a follow-up question directed just to parents to learn if they bribe their children to do well in school. We also asked parents about school's effect on their oldest child's learning — did school cause their child to become an eager learner; and we tackled the question, "Which is more important, effort or ability?" as it relates to student success in school. Finally, we devised a question that we think helps us better understand the value Americans place on increasing teacher learning time (professional development) as compared to increasing student learning time.

Adults had their say about K-12 schools this month, but what do teenagers say?

Next month, hear what Gallup has learned from them

Also . . .

- The changing face of teacher education
- Incompetent teachers or dysfunctional systems?
- *Kappan* Classic: Martin Haberman

OCTOBER

Phi Delta
Kappan

FINDINGS

- Three of four Americans oppose the idea of paying students money to read books, attend school, or strive for better grades. Consistent with this finding, only one in four parents said they paid their children to do better in school.
- Almost two of three parents believe school has caused their oldest child to become an eager learner, significantly higher than when we first asked that question in 1998.



ALFIE KOHN

“No” to Threats and Bribes

We know the Bush/Obama/Gates version of school reform isn’t “evidence-based”; research consistently fails to support high-stakes testing, school closures, merit pay, setting schools (or states) against one another, national standards, reduced job security for teachers, and an arrangement that says, “Obey us or lose funding.” It’s not good for kids. Most teachers — not only their unions — despise it, as do other educators. So, who’s left to support it? “The public?”

The new PDK/Gallup poll suggests that Americans in general don’t buy most of this nasty nonsense.

COMMENTARY

Respondents decisively reject the crude close-the-bad-schools option, preferring helping to dismantling (Table 1). NCLB has lost support as people become more familiar with it (Table 6). And while there’s interest in pay-for-performance (Tables 14, 15), dangling money in front of students for jumping through hoops is overwhelmingly opposed (Table 23).

So: People say no to threatening (to close schools) and to bribing (kids with money), which together define the carrot-and-stick approach favored by economists and behaviorists, who run the show. If contemporary “school reform” is a stool, that’s one of its three legs — gone. The second leg is standardized testing, and the 2008 PDK/Gallup poll found that most people regard test scores as less meaningful than “examples of student work” and “teachers’ observations.”

The last leg? Well, imagine this question on next year’s poll: If we had to choose between doing what’s best for children to help them become good learners and good people, or educating them in a way that primarily benefits their future employers, which would you favor?

ALFIE KOHN is author of a dozen books, including *The Schools Our Children Deserve* (Houghton Mifflin, 1999), *What to Look for in a Classroom* (Jossey-Bass, 1998), and *Feel-Bad Education . . . And Other Contrarian Essays on Children and Schooling* (Beacon Press, in press). www.alfiekohn.org.

- Of the two-thirds of Americans who believe increasing student or teacher learning time would increase student learning, more believe that having teachers spend more time learning new ways to teach would have a greater effect on student learning than having students spend more time in school.

- Three of four Americans believe success in school is based on effort and not natural ability.

- Three of four Americans believe the more important factor in determining whether students learn is the parents, not the schools. And parents agree.

TABLE 23. Recently, some school districts have experimented with the idea of paying students money for specific behaviors or achievements, such as reading books and getting good grades. We would like to know your views on the practice. Do you support or oppose the idea of school districts paying small amounts of money to students to, for example, read books, attend school, or get good grades?

	National Totals '10 %
Support	23
Oppose	76
Don't know	1

TABLE 24. Have you ever paid your child to read a book, attend school, or for getting good grades?

PUBLIC SCHOOL PARENTS 2010



Yes, have paid, 24%



No, have not paid, 76%

TABLE 25. 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? Has it caused your child to tolerate learning as a necessary chore? Or, has it caused your child to be turned off to learning?

	Public School Parents	
	'10 %	'98 %
Caused child to become an eager learner	63	50
Caused child to tolerate learning as a necessary chore	27	34
Caused child to be turned off to learning	9	15
Don't know	1	1

TABLE 26. Which of the following do you think could have a greater effect on increasing student learning? Having students spend more time in school with their teachers, having teachers spend more time learning new ways to teach, or neither of these would increase student learning?

	National Totals '10 %	Public School Parents '10 %
Having students spend more time in school with their teachers	29	23
Having teachers spend more time learning new ways to teach	38	44
Neither of these would increase student learning	31	32
Don't know	2	1

TABLE 27. Some people believe a student's success in school is based on his or her natural ability to learn. Others believe it has more to do with how hard they try. Which do you believe?

	National Totals '10 %	Public School Parents '10 %
Success based on natural ability to learn	23	28
Success based on how hard students try	73	68
Don't know	4	4

TABLE 28. In your opinion, which is a more important factor in determining whether students learn in school — the school or the student's parents?

	National Totals '10 %	'00 %	Public School Parents '10 %
School	22	30	21
Student's parents	76	60	78
Don't know	2	10	1

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THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLEGE

In his State of the Union address in January, President Obama said, "In this economy, a high school diploma no longer guarantees a good job." Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, in an interview in the September 2009 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*, said, "The president has drawn a line in the sand. He has said that by 2020, we want to again have the largest percentage of college graduates in the world. . . . That's our moon shot." We were curious to see if Americans agree.

Related to this, some policy makers believe that many Americans are reluctant to embrace the President's goal to have the highest percentage of college graduates in the world because these Americans equate

INGRID CARNEY

Teachers Need to Learn

Parents seem to agree that our nation's teachers need more time to learn new ways to teach and that more time for teacher learning is a better plan than longer school days for children. They understand what many professional educators

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have been saying for a long time: When teachers learn, students learn.

"One of the keys to success in any field is to never stop learning," said Rep. Jared Polis (D-CO), as he introduced H.R. 5218 — the Great Teachers for Great Schools Act. This act would provide high-quality professional development to improve teacher quality and student achievement in our nation's schools.

High-quality professional learning on the job is our best chance for improving the knowledge and skills of our current and incoming teacher workforce. Teachers working in professional learning communities who assume collective responsibility for student performance, use student data to make instructional decisions, and work collaboratively on lesson planning, delivery, and assessment are experiencing success in many schools around this country. The average teacher in America, however, spends only 14-16 hours per year in professional development; in academically high-achieving nations such as Singapore, Sweden, and the Netherlands, teachers have at least 100 hours of professional development annually.

When we broaden our definition of professional development, teachers and students benefit. The National Staff Development Council's new definition for staff development calls for routine teacher collaboration on instructional issues that result from analyzing student work and assessment data.

The PDK/Gallup poll results suggest that we can rally parents to support this important effort.

INGRID CARNEY is president of the National Staff Development Council and a former deputy superintendent of schools in Boston, Mass.





BOB WISE Quality Education Essential

The Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll comes at a critical juncture for the nation's public school system as federal, state, and local policy makers grapple with how to increase student outcomes while contending with budget shortfalls. This poll dramatically states the steadily growing public awareness that a high-quality high school education must prepare all students for college and career. Just as significant, 91% of respondents

recognize the need for postsecondary education (Table 31). The poll also

COMMENTARY reveals a generational expectations gap: Overwhelming numbers of the public link job opportunities and economic success to education preparation, but almost one-half of parents believe today's graduates are less prepared for work or college than they were (Table 35). For policy makers concerned about economic growth, this poll graphically proclaims the public recognition that the best economic stimulus package is a high-quality diploma.

BOB WISE is a former governor of West Virginia (2001-05) and president of Alliance for Excellent Education.



“... And after scissors comes first-aid kit.”

the concept of college with four years of study immediately following high school, rather than consider college an ongoing commitment to postsecondary education anytime after high school graduation. We conducted a test to see if the word “college” affected how Americans felt about postsecondary education by asking half the poll’s respondents, about 500 Americans, if all high school students should be well-prepared for college and career, and the other 500 respondents if all high school students should be well-prepared for more education beyond high school and a career. We also asked parents if they thought their children would attend college, why they thought their children should attend college, and if they could afford to pay for college.

FINDINGS

- Overwhelmingly, Americans agree with the President and believe a college education is essential for success in today’s world. In 1978, only 36% said it was very important; in 1983, that increased to 58%; and this year, 75% of Americans agreed a college education is necessary.

- Eighty-four percent of Americans agree that all high school students should be well-prepared for college and a career. That increases slightly to 91% when you substitute the word “college” with “more education beyond high school,” suggesting that Americans are not “hung up” over the concept of preparing all high school students for college. Without question, Americans equate more education, including college, with greater readiness for the world of work.

- When parents are asked if their child will go to college, 92% said yes, up from 82% in 1995 and 57% in 1982. And even given the current recession, three of four parents believe they are very or somewhat likely to be able to pay for their child’s college education, an increase from when this question was asked just two years ago.

- The top three reasons parents give for wanting their child to attend college are: 1) more job opportunities and better income, 2) have a better life, and 3) people need more education today. These are the same top three reasons parents gave when asked this question in 1982.

- At the same time, Americans believe students today are less well-prepared for work or college than when the respondents graduated from high school, particularly those who are college graduates themselves.

TABLE 29. How important is a college education today: very important, fairly important, or not too important?

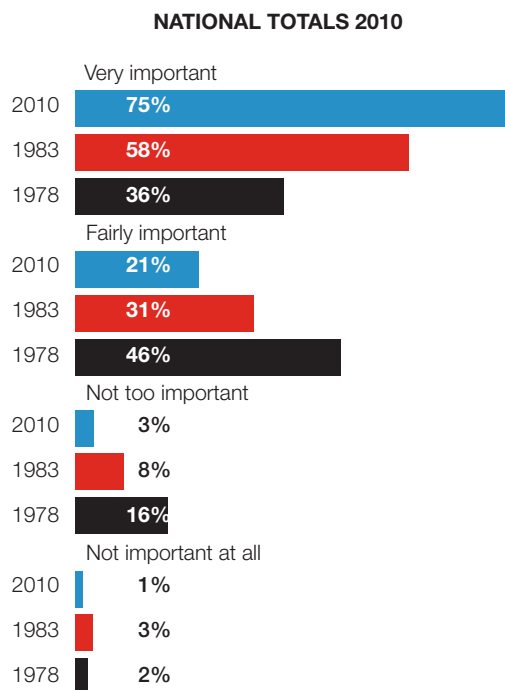


TABLE 30. Next are some questions about students and their future. On a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following items: Today's high school dropout is ready for the world of work; today's high school graduate is ready for the world of work; today's college graduate is ready for the world of work.

	National Totals '10					Don't Know
	Strongly Agree 5	4	3	2	Strongly Disagree 1	
Today's high school dropout is ready for the world of work.	2%	2%	5%	20%	71%	*
MEAN = 1.45						
Today's high school graduate is ready for the world of work.	3%	12%	40%	25%	19%	1%
MEAN = 2.55						
Today's college graduate is ready for the world of work.	13%	40%	34%	8%	4%	1%
MEAN = 3.50						

The results of the following two questions are shown side-by-side to show the difference between the public's response to the slight difference in the wording of these questions.

TABLE 31.

a. Some educators, politicians, and philanthropists believe that all high school students should be well-prepared for college and a career. Do you favor or oppose this goal?

b. Some educators, politicians, and philanthropists believe that all high school students should be well-prepared for more education beyond high school and a career. Do you favor or oppose this goal?

How important is a college education?
Very important

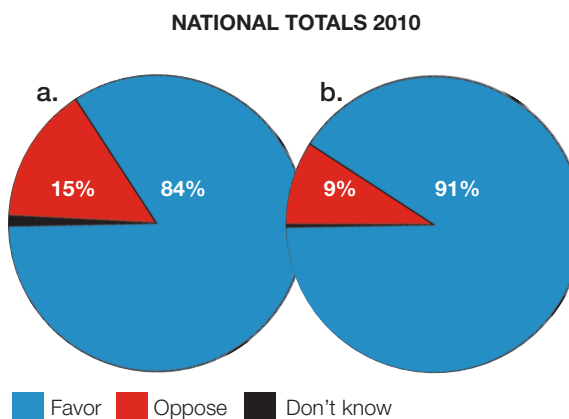


TABLE 32. Do you think your child will go to college?

	Public School Parents		
	'10 %	'95 %	'82 %
Yes	92	82	57
No	7	12	19
Don't know	1	6	24

TABLE 33. Why do you want your child to attend college? (Open-ended question)

	Public School Parents	
	'10 %	'82 %
More job opportunities/better income	52	48
Have a better life	19	20
Need more education today to cope with problems	15	27
College allows more time to mature	8	4
Other	5	11
I don't want my child to attend college.	1	*

* Not reported in 1982. Total equals more than 100% because of multiple answers.

TABLE 34. How likely do you think it is that you or your family will be able to pay for college for your oldest child: very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely?

	Public School Parents		
	'10 %	'08 %	'95 %
Very likely	36	35	30
Somewhat likely	41	35	39
Not very likely	16	16	17
Not at all likely	7	11	12
Don't know	0	3	2



JON SCHNUR

Parents Need More, Better Information

The public rightly understands that the most important strategy for achieving unprecedented educational goals is investing in and improving the quality of our children's teachers. A plurality says that improving teacher quality is the most important piece of federal education policy. Moreover,

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people appropriately blend this belief with respect for teachers and show promising and higher levels of support for the next generation going into teaching. They also astutely make clear that they differentiate among the qualities of work done by different teachers: 71% say teachers should be paid based on the quality of their work and not on a standard-scale basis.

The American public is right on target on all of these counts.

But there's a major discrepancy between how the public rates the quality of local schools compared to the nation. While three-quarters give their own local public school an A or B, less than 20% say the same about the nation's schools. Indeed, public ratings of local schools have improved, while the ratings have dropped for the nation's schools.

The alarm bells — and data releases — about the state of our nation's schools have rightly distressed the public. But the absence of truly meaningful data on their own neighborhood school's performance means people overestimate local performance. Similarly, parents vastly overstate their children's chances of graduating from high school and going on to college.

That's why the second most important strategy to improve our schools is adopting college- and career-ready standards and high-quality, aligned assessments. This promising effort will give Americans the most realistic picture yet of the achievement levels of their own children and their local schools.

JON SCHNUR is the founder and chief executive officer of New Leaders for New Schools.

TABLE 35. As you consider your own elementary and high school education, do you believe that graduates today are better, less, or equally prepared for work or college than they were when you were in school?

	National Totals '10 %
Better prepared for work or college	26
Less prepared for work or college	47
Equally prepared for work or college	25
Don't know	2



CHARTER SCHOOLS AND PARENTAL CHOICE

In 1991, Minnesota was the first state to authorize public school academies, better known as charter schools, and during the ensuing 20 years, charter schools have remained a lightning rod for controversy. Every year, various new reports document the successes and the failures of charter schools as an education reform option. The PDK/Gallup poll has monitored American's attitudes toward charter schools throughout this decade, and the trend data is undeniable. This year, we added a question to make the charter school issue more personal by asking Americans if they would support new public charter schools in their communities. Finally, pulling from our archive of questions, we asked parents if they would consider moving their child to a different school.

FINDINGS

- Americans increasingly embrace public charter schools. In 2000, only 42% favored charter schools. Just 10 years later, favorable opinions increased to 68%. Support is uniform across several demographics, including respondent's age, political affiliation, level of education, and even among public school parents.

- Similarly, almost two of three Americans would support a new public charter school in their communities, and 60% of Americans say they would go so far as to support a large increase in the number of public charter schools operating in the United States.

- Fifty-eight percent of public school parents said they would keep their children at the same school they now attend. This is about the same response we received when we first asked the question in 1996. There are two

ways to view this response. The positive twist would suggest that more than half of parents are pleased with their child's current school. On the negative side, four of 10 parents say they would move their child if they could — certainly not a vote of confidence from many parents.

TABLE 36. 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		
	'10 %	'05 %	'00 %
Favor	68	49	42
Oppose	28	41	47
Don't know	4	10	11

TABLE 37. Generally speaking, would you support a large increase in the number of public charter schools operating in the United States?

	National Totals '10 %
Yes	60
No	38
Don't know	2

TABLE 38. Would you support new public charter schools in your community?

	National Totals '10 %
Yes	65
No	33
Don't know	2

TABLE 39. If you could send your oldest child to any school and cost was not a factor, would you send the child to the school he/she now attends or to a different school?

	Public School Parents	
	'10 %	'96 %
I would send my child to the school he or she now attends.	58	55
I would send my child to a different school.	41	44
Don't know	1	1

ANATOMY OF AN ANNUAL POLL

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

January	PDK solicits issues, topics, and questions for the poll from policy makers and educators.
February	An advisory committee convenes to consider suggestions, select topics, and frame questions.
April	Poll topics are finalized; the PDK/Gallup poll archive is 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 that question items are written correctly and are 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 <i>Kappan</i> .
August	Results are released to media, PDK members, members of Congress, superintendents/ commissioners, and other interested policy makers.
September	Complete poll report is printed in the September issue of <i>Kappan</i> and posted online at www.pdkpoll.org .

PARENTS ON CHILD'S LEARNING

In a departure from the kinds of questions we normally ask in the PDK/Gallup poll, we asked parents a series of more personal questions about their child's current experiences in school and about expectations for their child's future success. Parents responded to these questions using a five-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.



VIOLETA GARCIA

Invest in Teacher Learning

Professional development and sharing best practices are essential for teachers to stay inspired and improve their instruction. But, too frequently, with a constant turnover and reshuffling of central office administrators and superintendents who seem determined to reinvent or at least rename the vision and mission of public schools, the top down flow of information is disorganized, confusing, and disconnected to the day-to-day rigors of teaching and learning in the classroom.

COMMENTARY

Educators need more time to learn new ways to teach in order to improve and inform instruction, just as the majority of public school parents tell us in the 2010 PDK/Gallup poll results. However, teachers want more time and access to relevant workshops developed around long-term projects and programs, not just short-term, lingo-loaded seminars designed to make district administrators look like they're doing something new and different.

Spending more time learning new ways to teach is not the only solution to increase student learning. School districts also have the responsibility to improve the overall structure of public education. The experience in San Francisco is that every new superintendent expects us to follow his or her apparently new programs or strategies and to restart again with a project.

In my nine years working and being a parent in public schools, I have often heard teachers express that staff meetings are a waste of their time. By the end of an exhausting school day, new information loses its meaning, or trying to decipher the impact of the latest district agendas proves frustrating and feels irrelevant to their teaching practice. Teachers experience excitement when their ideas as educators are implemented in the school site or in the school district as a whole, and do not just come from the "top."

VIOLETA GARCIA is a parent liaison for San Francisco Unified Schools and a member of the board of directors for Parents for Public Schools, a national advocacy group that works to promote and strengthen public schools.

Are you
confident your
child will
graduate from
high school?

Yes

FINDINGS

- Parents moderately agree that their child's teachers make schoolwork relevant with real-world examples and that their child has an opportunity to do what he or she does best every day.
- Most parents agree that their children are safe in school.
- Parents are optimistic that their child will graduate from high school, but significantly less optimistic that their child will find a good job after he or she graduates.



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TABLE 40. Now, think about your oldest child as you respond to the next seven statements:

Public School Parents 2010						
	Strongly Agree	4	3	2	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
	5				1	
I know my child will graduate from high school.	92%	2%	3%	1%	2%	0%
MEAN = 4.81						
I know my child will find a good job after he or she graduates.	29%	31%	30%	6%	3%	1%
MEAN = 3.77						
My child's teachers make schoolwork relevant with real-world examples.	25%	36%	25%	9%	4%	1%
MEAN = 3.68						
At school, my child has the opportunity to do what he or she does best every day.	27%	35%	24%	11%	3%	*
MEAN = 3.73						
I feel that my child is safe at school.	58%	25%	11%	5%	1%	0%
MEAN = 4.33						

* Less than one-half of 1%.



WHY IT MATTERS

Collecting and analyzing the opinions of how Americans view the public schools is an important first step in guiding educators and policy makers toward making U.S. schools better. But there are caveats to consider. Sometimes, American public opinion provides clear direction for change. For example, analyzing this year's polling data suggests that Americans recognize that schools need the highest quality teachers possible and that providing those teachers should be a #1 priority. Americans will support programs that invest in improved teacher skills. They will support programs that recruit the best candidates and that train current and prospective teachers to use the best teaching approaches. And they will support efforts to retain the best teachers and dismiss those who aren't skilled or suited for the task.

In other situations, American public opinion seems conservative, suggesting that Americans may be too willing to accept the status quo. Education reformers are then likely to discount public opinion, assuming that the American public either doesn't understand or doesn't care.

This is a mistake. Americans do care about the public schools, and they understand more than we imagine. But at times, they can be cautious about change. In those situations, reformers must recognize the importance of communicating with Americans why certain changes are essential to securing our nation's future by helping all children succeed to their greatest potential. Not communicating the need for change and a vision for improved public education will result in rejection by the American public and the continuation of failed programs that don't serve children well.

It's important to take a serious look at this and similar public opinion polls that focus on the public schools. This research can help improve services and products. In this case, the end users are the nation's children. And parents, educators, community leaders, and policy makers agree — our children deserve our best efforts. **K**

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.

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

The PDK/Gallup poll is an opportunity for parents, educators, and legislators to assess public opinion about our most important public institution, our public schools. These perceptions are powerful indicators about how well we as a nation are listening to citizens' concerns and desires regarding public schools and how effective we are in communicating with various stakeholders.

As consumers of the information included in this poll, we welcome your reactions, insights, questions, and suggestions. PDK members are invited to join the 2010 PDK/Gallup Poll group on PDKConnect, where Bill Bushaw will answer your questions regarding this year's results.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The 2010 survey findings are based on 1,008 completed interviews. The completed interviews include an oversample of parents with school-age children. Fieldwork (data collection) for this study was administered between June 4 and June 28, 2010. 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 United States as a whole and not to individual communities. Local surveys, using the same questions, can be conducted to determine how local areas compare with the national norm.

DESIGN OF THE SAMPLE

Findings for the 2010 PDK/Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of adults age 18 and older drawn from the Gallup Panel. The Gallup Panel was created in 2004 as a proprietary, probability-based longitudinal panel of U.S. households who have been selected using random digit dialing (RDD) sampling methods ensuring the inclusion of households with listed, unlisted, and cellular telephone numbers. 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.

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.

PDK/GALLUP POLL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Poll co-directors **Bill Bushaw** and **Shane Lopez** assembled a panel of experts in education to select the topics asked in the 2010 PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. Phi Delta Kappa International and Gallup express their appreciation for the guidance provided by these panel members.

Joseph Aguerrebere, president, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

Jon Clifton, deputy director, Gallup World Poll

Richard Lee Colvin, director, Hechinger Institute on Education & Media, Teachers College, Columbia University

Gail Connelly, executive director, National Association of Elementary School Principals

Sandee Crowther, president, Phi Delta Kappa International

Byron Garrett, chief executive officer, National PTA.

Rick Hess, director of education policy studies, American Enterprise Institute

Joan Richardson, editor-in-chief, *Phi Delta Kappan*

John Stocks, deputy executive director, National Education Association

Thomas Toch, executive director, Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington and *Phi Delta Kappan's* Washington View columnist

Susan Traiman, director of public policy, Business Roundtable

Kara Schlosser, communications director, Council of Chief State School Officers

PAST PDK/GALLUP POLLS

Copies of previously published PDK/Gallup polls are available to PDK members free — log in at pdkintl.org and select the Gallup Poll Archive link from the right sidebar menu. Others can buy previous polls using the PDK Publication Archive at pdkintl.org/publications/archives.htm (search for Gallup in the title field).

COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE

Adults	%
No children in school	67
Public school parents	28
Nonpublic school parents	5
Age	%
Over 40	77
40 and under	23
Education	%
Total college	64
College graduate	36
College incomplete	28
Total high school	36
High school graduate	33
High school incomplete	3
Political Party	%
Republican	32
Democrat	29
Independent	35
Undesignated	4

PDK/GALLUP POLL QUESTION ARCHIVE

PDK members can access the PDK/Gallup poll archive database by logging in at www.pdkintl.org with their user ID and password. The archive includes more than 800 questions asked of the American public since the first PDK/Gallup poll was conducted in 1969. The database is organized by topic and reports each question as it was asked. Multiple-year results are provided when the same question was used in subsequent polls.

ATTEND WEBINAR ON 2010 PDK/GALLUP POLL RESULTS

Bill Bushaw, PDK's executive director and co-director of the PDK/Gallup poll, will host a webinar from **4-5 p.m. ET Tuesday, Aug. 31**. The PDK Educational Foundation sponsors the webinar.

The webinar is free and open to any interested persons, but seats are limited. Reserve your spot by sending an e-mail to customerservice@pdkintl.org.

Face-to-face and webinar PDK/Gallup poll presentations can be specially arranged. Send e-mail requests to customerservice@pdkintl.org. Please provide the organization's name, contact person and contact information, proposed dates and times, and information about the anticipated audience.