

INFORMATION CAPSULE

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The Public's Attitudes Toward "No Child Left Behind" Summary of Recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll

"Take schools that have strong public support from the communities they serve. Impose on these schools a major federal mandate that attempts to reach worthy goals using strategies that lack public approval, and you have the ingredients for a failed system."

In September 2003, the Phi Delta Kappan journal released the results of their 35th annual Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. This year the focus was on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and its involvement in decisions affecting schools at the K-12 level. The findings were that "while the public sees improved student achievement as an important goal, it rejects the strategies used in NCLB."

The general conclusions were as follows:

- The public has high regard for the public schools, wants needed improvement to come through those schools, and has little interest in seeking alternatives.
- The public sees itself as uninformed on the NCLB Act, with 69% saying they lacked the information needed to say whether their impression of the act is favorable or unfavorable.
- Responses to questions related to strategies associated with NCLB suggest that greater familiarity with the law is unlikely to lead to greater public support.
- The public is concerned about getting and keeping good teachers, thinks teacher salaries are too low, and is willing to see higher salaries paid to teachers in more challenging situations.
- The public continues to believe that closing the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students is important but blames the gap on factors unrelated to the quality of schooling.
- The public is not convinced that narrowing the achievement gap requires spending more money on low-achieving students.
- A majority of respondents are opposed to vouchers and would oppose having their state adopt them, despite the 2002 U.S. Supreme Court decision stating that voucher plans do not violate the U.S. Constitution.

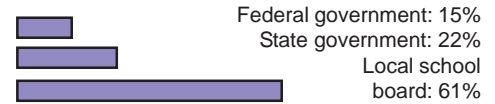
No Child Left Behind — A Look Ahead

According to the researchers of Phi Delta Kappa International and the Gallup Organization, “Responses to questions related to strategies associated with NCLB suggest that greater familiarity with the law is unlikely to lead to greater public support. The public will be even more resistant if there is a discrepancy between the government’s judgment and the community’s perception of the local schools.”

NCLB strategy: Have the federal government directly involved in determining the curricular emphasis, the testing program, and other means of assessment at the state and local levels.

Public view: Asked which level of government should exercise the greatest influence on what should be taught in the local schools, the public selects the local school board.

Greatest influence on local schools



NCLB strategy: Judge a school by whether a fixed percentage of the overall student group and of each subgroup passes a standardized test.

Public view: Eighty-four percent say a school should be judged by the improvement shown by students, measured from the point at which they start.

Schools should be judged on improvement



NCLB strategy: Determine whether a school is in need of improvement using a single standardized test given annually.

Public view: Sixty-six percent believe a single test will not provide a fair picture of whether a school needs improvement.

Single test does not show a fair picture



NCLB strategy: Base the determination as to whether a school is in need of improvement on standardized testing in English and math only.

Public view: Eighty-three percent say the determination as to whether a school is in need of improvement should include other subjects in addition to English and math.

Include other subjects in addition to math and English



NCLB strategy: Judge each student’s proficiency in English and math using a single test given annually.

Public view: Seventy-two percent say it is not possible to judge a student’s proficiency in English and math based on the results of a single test.

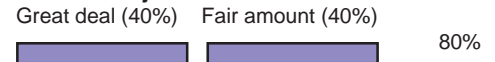
Proficiency can’t be judged by a single test



NCLB strategy: Judge a school’s performance based on test results in English and math.

Public view: Forty percent say they are concerned a great deal that judging a school’s performance on English and math only will mean less emphasis on art, history, and other subjects. Forty percent say they have a fair amount of concern, bringing the total expressing concern to 80%.

Concerned about the lack of emphasis on other subjects



NCLB strategy: Offer parents in a school designated as in need of improvement the option of transferring their student to a school not in need of improvement.

Public view: Given the option of transferring a student out of the school or having additional efforts made to help the student in the present school, 74% say that, if they had a student in need of improvement, they would opt for additional efforts to help the student in the school.

Prefer additional efforts to help students in the current school



NCLB strategy: Judge the performance of special education students using the same fixed percentage of students passing as is required for all other students and groups.

Public view: Sixty-seven percent say special education students should not have to meet the same standard that is used for all other students.

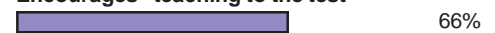
Should be different standards for special education students



NCLB strategy: Base the judgement of a school’s performance on standardized test results.

Public view: Sixty-six percent say the emphasis on standardized tests will encourage teachers to teach to the test. Sixty percent say this is a bad thing.

Encourages “teaching to the test”



“Teaching to the test” is a bad thing

