

Americans Speak Out

Are Educators and
Policy Makers Listening? The 41st Annual
Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the
Public's Attitudes Toward the
Public Schools

BY WILLIAM J. BUSHAW AND
JOHN A. McNEE

What an extraordinary year this has been for our nation. We're experiencing an economic downturn the likes of which we have not seen for almost 80 years; we've witnessed the election of the first minority president and Democratic Party control of the White House and both houses of Congress; and we held our breath as venerated financial institutions and major manufacturers collapsed or teetered on the brink of bankruptcy.

Like it or not, all of these events affect our everyday lives. And with these major changes come changes in public attitudes about a variety of issues — including education.

The annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools is unique because it's not an advocacy poll, but rather a thoughtful study of Americans' current perceptions of their public schools. Each year, the poll includes new questions about such emerging issues as the recent economic stimulus legis-

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lation and its impact locally on the schools. At the same time, the survey draws from previously asked questions to carefully gauge shifts in public opinion.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The topics for this year's poll were identified by a diverse and bipartisan group of education experts assembled in February (see page 23). They debated the issues and then selected topics. This year, the following topics surfaced:

- Grading our schools
- No Child Left Behind
- Charter schools
- Teachers
- Dropouts
- Early childhood/preschool
- Innovation — Moving in the right direction
- Economic stimulus
- Schools and the news media

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

A. For the 10th consecutive year, the public thinks lack of funding is the biggest problem facing the schools.

With this PDK/Gallup poll report, you see every question verbatim as it was asked. That enables you to make your own interpretations — to arrive at your own conclusions of how Americans perceive their public schools.

GRADING OUR SCHOOLS

In every annual PDK/Gallup poll since 1969, the first question we ask Americans is to describe the biggest problem facing public schools in their community. We ask this as an open-ended question — no prompts are provided to respondents — and we ask it first so responses aren't biased by other questions.

That question is followed by three questions asking Americans to give a letter grade to public schools in general, A through Fail. We ask all Americans to grade schools in their community. Then we ask parents to grade the school their oldest child attends. Finally, we ask all Americans to grade the nation's schools as a whole.

A new question introduced this year asks Americans, using the same grading scale, to rate President Barack Obama's performance in support of public schools during his first six months in office. We then brought back a question asking Americans if they believe schools are better or worse today than when they attended school

FINDINGS

- By a wide margin, lack of funding for schools was listed as the biggest problem, followed by lack of discipline and overcrowding. Funding has been cited as the number-one problem since 2000, but its mention by 32% of the respondents is the highest ever recorded. Parents agree that funding is the biggest problem but list overcrowded schools second.

- More than 50% of Americans gave either an A or B to schools in their community, equaling the highest score, which was given back in 2001.

- The positive grading trend continued when parents were asked to assign grades to the schools attended by their oldest child, with almost 75% assigning either an A or B, the highest ever recorded.

- Letter grades given to the nation's schools are significantly lower, with less than 20% giving schools an A or B. This continues a long-standing difference, suggesting that Americans like the schools they know but are much less positive about public education in general. Public school proponents view these responses as affirmation that Americans view their public schools positively. However, public school reformers fear that the results show that Americans are overly satisfied with the schools in their community and, consequently, less open to reform efforts.

- Forty-five percent of Americans gave President Barack Obama's either an A or B, which seems to be a solid approval rating. However, we're unsure without comparative data. Not surprising, only 17% of Republicans gave the president an A or B, while 70% of the Democrats gave him high grades.

- Americans say that education is not as good today as when they were in school. This mirrors their response from when we asked the same question 11 years ago. However, parents believe education is better today.



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TABLE 1. What do you think are the biggest problems that the public schools of your community must deal with?

	National totals			Public school parents		
	'09 %	'08 %	'07 %	'09 %	'08 %	'07 %
Lack of funding	32	17	22	30	19	26
Lack of discipline	10	10	10	8	3	5
Overcrowding	9	6	7	10	11	9
Drugs	5	4	4	5	4	3
Fighting	4	6	6	6	8	8
Lack of standards	3	3	4	2	2	4
Lack of good teachers	3	4	5	2	3	4

PDKConnect

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TABLE 2. 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?

	'09 %	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %	'05 %
A & B	51	46	45	49	48
A	10	12	9	13	12
B	41	34	36	36	36
C	32	30	34	32	29
D	11	11	14	9	9
Fail	3	5	5	5	5
Don't know	3	8	2	5	9

TABLE 3. Using the A, B, C, D, and Fail scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?

	'09 %	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %	'05 %
A & B	74	72	67	64	69
A	31	30	19	26	31
B	43	42	48	38	38
C	17	14	24	24	21
D	6	5	5	5	6
Fail	2	4	3	4	4
Don't know	1	5	1	3	0

TABLE 4. 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?

	'09 %	'08 %	'07 %	'06 %	'05 %
A & B	19	22	16	21	24
A	1	3	2	2	2
B	18	19	14	19	22
C	55	44	57	51	46
D	19	13	18	14	13
Fail	6	5	5	3	4
Don't know	1	16	4	11	13

TABLE 5. 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 '09 %	Rep. '09 %	Dem. '09 %	Ind. '09 %
A & B	45	17	70	40
A	12	2	24	9
B	33	15	46	31
C	26	36	19	26
D	11	18	3	13
Fail	10	20	1	13
Don't know	8	9	7	8

TABLE 6. 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 '09 %	'98 %	Public school parents '09 %	No children in school '09 %
Better today	41	41	50	36
Worse today	50	48	43	53
No difference	8	8	6	10
Don't know	1	3	1	1

GERALD BRACEY

Experience Outweighs Rhetoric



It's a constant in the PDK/Gallup polls: Respondents say their local schools are OK but the nation's schools are average to awful.

The reasons for this disconnect are simple: Americans never hear anything positive about the nation's schools and haven't since the years just before Sputnik in 1957. Think, *A Nation at Risk*. People who wax positive about public schools are so rare that the June 1996 *School Administrator* put pictures of all six of us on its cover as "The Contrarians." Negative information flows almost daily from media, politicians, and ideologues. During the 2008 presidential campaign, a \$50 million project, Ed in 08, inundated Americans with negativity through its web site, TV ads, and YouTube clips.

Our leaders don't help matters much. "The fact is that we are not just in an economic crisis; we are in an educational crisis," said Education Secretary Arne Duncan in February. He's said it repeatedly.

The President repeats the mantra. "In 8th-grade math, we've fallen to ninth place," Obama said in March. That's factually true, but those students were still ahead of 36 other nations. More important, when the test was first given in 1995, American 8th graders were in 28th place. They've been busy falling up.

On the other hand, parents use other sources and resources for information about their local schools: teachers, administrators, friends, neighbors, newsletters, PTAs, and their kids themselves; and they're in a much better position to observe what's actually happening in American schools.

Gerald W. Bracey is a longtime Kappan columnist and author of Education Hell: Rhetoric vs. Reality (Educational Research Service, 2009).



"But in the business world, failure is rewarded with big bailouts."



NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

With Congress addressing health care and energy issues this year, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is unlikely to come up for debate. This legislation, now seven years old, established a far greater federal role in education, and its implementation has been controversial. We've tracked Americans' opinions of NCLB since its enactment and will continue to do so through its reauthorization.

FINDINGS

- Support for NCLB continues to decline as almost one out of two Americans view it unfavorably, and only one out of four has a favorable opinion.

- Only one out of four Americans believe NCLB has helped schools in their community. This view is shared whether the respondent was a Republican, Democrat, or Independent.

- By a two-to-one margin, Americans continue to support one element of the legislation, annual testing of students in grades three through eight. This is unchanged since it was first asked in 2002. Republicans show even greater support for annual testing.

- Not only do Americans support such testing, they also support using a single national test, rather than letting each state use its own test, again by a two-to-one margin. This opinion is held by Democrats and Republicans equally.

TABLE 7. 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			Rep. '09 %	Dem. '09 %	Ind. '09 %
	'09 %	'08 %	'07 %			
Very favorable	9	7	4	12	8	7
Somewhat favorable	19	25	27	24	14	22
Somewhat unfavorable	24	18	23	20	25	25
Very unfavorable	24	15	17	17	30	24
Don't know enough about it to say	24	33	29	27	23	22
Don't know	-	2	0	-	-	-

TABLE 8. Just your impression, how would you rate the overall impact of the No Child Left Behind program on the public schools in your community? Would you say it was helping, hurting, or making no difference in the performance of the local public schools?

	National totals			Rep. '09 %	Dem. '09 %	Ind. '09 %
	'09 %	'08 %	'07 %			
Helping	24	25	26	29	19	25
Hurting	29	22	27	24	32	31
Making no difference	43	34	41	43	46	40
Don't know	4	19	6	4	3	4

TABLE 9. National education legislation requires the tracking of student progress from grades three to eight based on an annual test. Do you favor or oppose such a test in the public schools in your community?

	National totals		Rep. '09 %	Dem. '09 %	Ind. '09 %
	'09 %	'02 %			
Favor	66	67	71	62	64
Oppose	34	31	29	38	35
Don't know	-	2	-	-	1

TABLE 10. According to national education legislation, each of the 50 states can select the test it wishes to use for the grade-three-to-eight tracking. Which do you prefer in the public schools in your community — letting your state use its own test, or requiring all 50 states to use a single standardized test?

	National totals		Rep. '09 %	Dem. '09 %	Ind. '09 %
	'09 %	'02 %			
Letting your state use its own test	33	30	35	30	36
Require all 50 states to use a single standardized test	66	68	65	68	63
Don't know	1	2	-	2	1



CHARTER SCHOOLS

In a speech on June 22, 2009, to the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan reiterated his and President Obama's support for public charter schools. "The charter movement is one of the most profound changes in American education — bringing new options to underserved communities and introducing competition and innovation into the education system," stated Secretary Duncan during the speech.

The PDK/Gallup poll has monitored public opinion about charter schools for several years, and it's often

been one of the most reported findings. In addition to establishing charter school approval ratings, we attempted to gauge how much Americans knew about charter schools.

FINDINGS

- During the last five years, Americans' approval of charter schools has increased by 15%, as almost two out of three Americans now say they favor the idea of charter schools.

- At the same time, Americans still don't understand charter schools. They're evenly split on whether charter schools are in fact public schools (they are) or if they can teach religion (they can't). The majority continue to believe that charter schools can charge tuition (they can't), and almost three out of four Americans believe charter schools can select the students who attend (they can't).

- Allowing high school students to earn credits online without attending regular school is another alternative to traditional schooling. Americans are still split on their acceptance of this alternative, but over the last eight years, they've warmed to the idea. Interestingly, Americans' opinions regarding online instruction are not related to their age, but Westerners (53%) are more open to the idea than residents of the Midwest (48%), the South (48%), and the East (37%).

TABLE 11. 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					Rep.	Dem.
	'09	'08	'07	'06	'05	'09	'09
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Favor	64	51	60	53	49	70	59
Oppose	33	35	35	34	41	27	40
Don't know	3	14	5	13	10	3	1

TABLE 12. Just from what you know or have heard about charter schools, please tell me whether each of the following statements is true or false?

	National Totals	
	'09	'06
	%	%
A charter school is a public school		
True	45	39
False	51	53
Don't know	4	8
Charter schools are free to teach religion		
True	46	50
False	47	34
Don't know	7	16
Charter schools charge tuition		
True	57	60
False	39	29
Don't know	4	11
Charter schools can select students on the basis of ability		
True	71	58
False	25	29
Don't know	4	13

TABLE 13. There are increasing opportunities for students to earn high school credits online over the Internet without attending a regular school. Generally speaking, do you approve or disapprove of this practice?

	National totals		East	Midwest	South	West
	'09	'01	'09	'09	'09	'09
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Approve	47	30	37	48	48	53
Disapprove	53	67	63	51	52	47
Don't know	-	3	-	1	-	-

MARGARET TRIMER-HARTLEY Misinterpreting Charter Schools



Charter public schools are misunderstood — so much so that even families who send their children to them and educators who work in them often don't know how they operate. Interested families are often stunned to learn that charter schools

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may not charge tuition or establish enrollment requirements of any kind. Students are selected through an open lottery system. Anyone may apply — regardless of ability, special needs, race, religion, or means. Religion may not be taught in charter schools, though the discussion of teaching values is open and robust.

The misunderstanding starts with the characterization of charter schools as “free” from state or federal regulations. After two years directing charter schools in Detroit, it's clear to me that the rules that govern public education also regulate charter schools. State and federal officials audit charter schools routinely to make sure we're following the rules — No Child Left Behind, Title I, IDEA, and Michigan's voluminous School Code. Charter school authorizers, often public universities, appoint the schools' boards and provide an additional layer of oversight focused on results and accountability as well as compliance. At least in Michigan, authorizers can — and do — close poorly performing charter schools.

The continuing confusion about charter schools stems largely from political divisions and years of hostile partisan rhetoric over what role the nontraditional schools should play in education reform. There are powerful lessons to be learned from the successes and failures in the charter school movement. Mastering them will take a little less acrimony and a lot more truth.

Margaret Trimer-Hartley is superintendent of the University Prep Science and Math District, Detroit, Michigan.



ARTHUR LEVINE

Improve Quality of Teacher Force

I see good news and support for state and federal policy initiatives in the 2009 poll results. Today, the U.S. Secretary of Education and many governors are committed to increasing both the quantity and the quality of the teacher force.

The poll provides overwhelming support for creating scholarship programs to attract people to teaching careers in high-need fields — 90% of the

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parents surveyed said they favored such scholarships to increase teacher numbers in science, math, technical, and vocational fields.

There's also a strong case to be made for requiring quality teacher education programs and high standards of admission, as 71% of the parents surveyed oppose relaxing teacher education and certification standards to qualify more people for teaching in high-need fields.

And there's evidence that the pool of candidates may be available to make increasing teacher quality possible. The population of potential career changers is burgeoning owing to the economy, but the 2009 poll suggests the number of traditionally aged candidates may also rise. Historically, parents have been a barrier to teacher recruitment, discouraging their children from entering the profession. Today, 70% of parents say they would like their children to become teachers versus 48% in 1980.

Taken together, these results set the stage for the federal Race to the Top program and governors with stimulus funding to create comprehensive programs at the state level, where leverage and potential impact are greatest, to incorporate scholarships to attract the best and brightest to careers in teaching in the areas of highest need, and to provide incentives to universities to improve the quality of their teacher education programs in those fields.

Arthur Levine is president of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. He was president and professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University.



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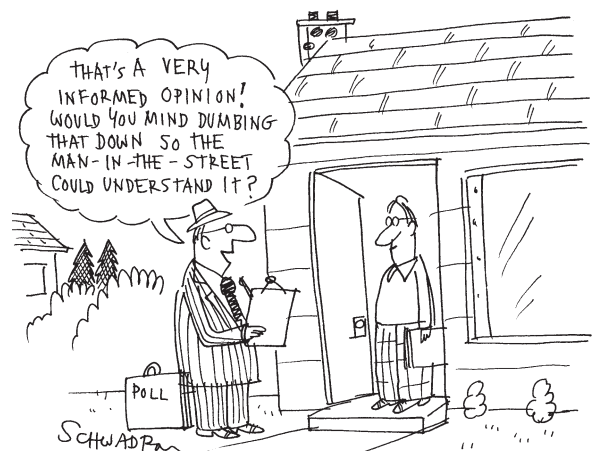
TEACHERS

In a speech to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce on March 10, 2009, President Obama said, "From the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their success is not the color of the skin or the income of their parents, it's the person standing at the front of the classroom."

Over the years, the PDK/Gallup poll has explored Americans' opinions about public school teachers. We searched the PDK/Gallup poll archives and resurrected many excellent questions, some that were asked more than 30 years ago. These questions delve into teacher tenure, teacher pay including merit pay, national teacher certification, and the personal qualities that Americans look for in public school teachers.

FINDINGS

- Almost three out of four Americans favor merit pay for teachers. Interestingly, the issue of merit pay appears to be nonpartisan, approved at the same levels by Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.
- Student academic achievement, administrator evaluations, and advanced degrees are the three most favored criteria for awarding merit pay.



- Americans' opinions about teacher tenure have much to do with how the question is asked. We asked half of those participating in this year's poll if they approved or disapproved of teacher tenure, equating it to receiving a "lifetime contract." That group of Americans overwhelmingly disapproved of teacher tenure 73% to 26%. The other half of the sample received a similar question that equated tenure to providing a formal legal review before a teacher could be terminated. In this case, the response was reversed, 66% approving of teacher tenure, 34% disapproving.

- Seven out of 10 Americans would like a child of theirs to take up teaching in the public schools as a career, the highest favorable rating in more than three decades.

- In 1983, we asked Americans what personal qualities they would look for in a teacher, assuming that experience and training were similar. Twenty-five years later, we discovered that Americans have significantly changed their opinions about this. Dedication to the teaching profession and enthusiasm was rated #1 this year, but only #6 when asked 25 years ago. Caring about students was #2 this year, but only #9 in 1983. The ability to discipline, to be firm and fair, was #3 in 1983 and was only #7 this year.

- Three out of four Americans believe we should have national standards for the certification of public school teachers.

- Americans believe that beginning teachers with a bachelor's degree and teaching certificate should earn more than they are currently paid by their community's schools. Using categorical data collected in the poll, Americans estimate on average that the salary for beginning teachers should be about \$43,000, while they believed beginning teachers in their community earn only about \$33,600. According to data collected by the American Federation of Teachers in 2006-07, average salary for a beginning teacher was about \$35,300.

- Americans overwhelmingly favor increasing the number of scholarships to college students who agree to teach science, math, and other technical subjects, while only three out of 10 Americans approve relaxing certification requirements to allow more teachers to teach these technical subjects.

TABLE 14. How do you, yourself, feel about the idea of merit pay for teachers. In general, do you favor or oppose it?

	National totals		Rep. '09	Dem. '09	Ind. '09
	'09	'84			
	%	%	%	%	%
Favor	72	65	73	68	76
Oppose	21	22	20	25	18
Don't know	7	13	7	7	6

JOHN WILSON Fair Pay for Teachers

Community and education leaders have a rich opportunity to use this year's PDK/Gallup poll as the basis for conversations on at least two key areas:

1. *How can we achieve equitable and adequate funding?* The public is seriously concerned about school funding and wants to use stimulus funds to keep teachers in classrooms so students aren't shortchanged. Working together, community leaders and educators can tackle how best to meet funding needs while improving their schools.

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2. *What professional salary systems will attract and keep high-quality teachers?* On teacher pay and teacher quality, the public is not simplistic, and findings support many of NEA's positions.

The public realizes that teachers deserve a professional salary, supporting a \$40,000 starting salary for every teacher, an NEA goal. While favoring nondefined "merit pay," the pay factor that the public most supported was paying teachers for advanced degrees. Two thirds said teacher experience should be a factor in pay. Moreover, the public values hard-to-measure personal qualities in teachers, such as enthusiasm, caring, and ability to communicate.

Like the public, NEA supports the formal legal review of due process to ensure fair evaluations of teacher performance.

Overall, findings support the notion that teachers are professionals who must possess a breadth of skills and abilities that are difficult to quantify and sometimes to evaluate. This poll offers opportunities for teacher leaders to open a dialogue with public school stakeholders about the best ways to attract and keep high-quality teachers.

John Wilson is executive director of the National Education Association.



Q. Should teachers receive merit pay?

A. Almost three out of four Americans favor merit pay for teachers.



"My weekend plans? You mean, besides grading?"



ALEC M. GALLUP, 1928-2009

Alec M. Gallup, co-chair of the Gallup Organization, was co-director of the PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools since 1984. He passed away on June 22 at the age of 81.

Alec Gallup worked on the poll since the death of his father, George Gallup Sr., in 1984. His co-directors during those years were, first, Stanley Elam, former editor of the *Kappan*, and then PDK Executive Director Lowell Rose. Both men often spoke of the dedication and insight that Alec Gallup brought to the poll each year. PDK Executive Director William Bushaw, who co-directed last year's poll with Gallup, lamented that Gallup's deep knowledge of the poll and understanding of education will be sorely missed.



BYRON V. GARRETT Standards Will Close Gap

The vast difference in perception between "your school" and "the nation's schools" is intriguing. The majority (75%) of parents give a grade of an A or B to their child's school. However, when it

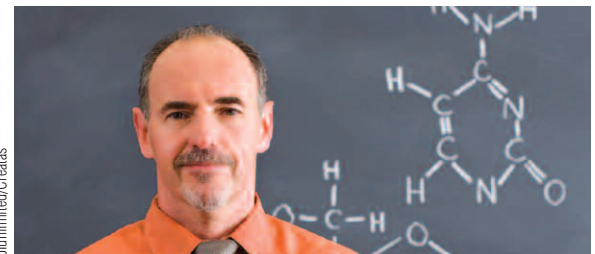
COMMENTARY comes to the nation's schools, less than 20% offered a similar grade. Does this mean that others need improvement, but our own schools do not? Are we resting on our laurels, when we should be taking meaningful steps forward?

I encourage taking a different approach. If we're to ensure that all students graduate from high school ready for college and career, we need to increase the rigor of what's being taught so that the nation's students can compete in today's global economy. Common Core State Standards, which PTA supports, will play a critical role in accomplishing this. Some question if students can rise to the challenge if the rigor of academic standards increases. Data shows that when students are challenged to step up to the plate, they will. These high expectations deserve high supports. Parents play a key role in providing support and encouragement to their children, but they can't do it alone. They need to work with educators to create an environment that welcomes meaningful parent involvement to foster student success. Together, parents and educators can partner to provide a low-cost, high-impact solution to improve student success.

Byron V. Garrett is chief executive officer of the National PTA.

TABLE 15. Now I am going to read possible criteria for giving additional pay to teachers for special merit. For each criterion I read, please tell me if you think it *should* or *should not* be used to determine which teachers should receive merit pay.

	National Totals	
	'09 %	'84 %
Academic achievement or improvement of students as measured by standardized tests		
Should	73	68
Should not	26	25
Don't know	1	7
Administrator's evaluations		
Should	72	67
Should not	26	26
Don't know	2	7
An advanced degree such as master's or Ph.D.		
Should	81	66
Should not	19	27
Don't know	-	7
Evaluation by other teachers in the system		
Should	56	48
Should not	43	42
Don't know	1	10
Length of teaching experience		
Should	67	48
Should not	32	47
Don't know	1	5
Students' evaluations		
Should	50	45
Should not	49	47
Don't know	1	8
Parents' opinions		
Should	49	36
Should not	50	55
Don't know	1	9



The public's view of tenure is very different depending upon the wording of the question. Here the same basic question was asked in two different ways:

TABLE 16a. Most public school teachers have tenure; that is, after a two- or three-year period, they receive what amounts to a lifetime contract. Do you approve or disapprove of this policy?

TABLE 16b. Most public school teachers have tenure; that is, after a two- or three-year trial period, school administrators must ensure a policy that a teacher be given a formal legal review before they can be terminated. Do you approve or disapprove of this policy?

	National totals '09 %	National totals '09 %
	"Lifetime contract"	"Legal review"
Approve	26	66
Disapprove	73	34
Don't know	1	-

TABLE 17. Would you like to have a child of yours take up teaching in the public schools as a career?

	National Totals		
	'09 %	'80 %	'69 %
Yes	70	48	75
No	28	40	15
Don't know	2	12	10

TABLE 18. Suppose you could choose your child's teachers. Assuming they all had about the same experience and training, what personal qualities would you look for?

	National Totals	
	'09 Rank	'83 Rank
Dedication to teaching profession, enthusiasm	1	6
Caring about students	2	9
Intelligence	3	8
Ability to communicate, to understand, to relate	4	1
High moral character	5	4
Friendliness, good personality, sense of humor	6	5
Ability to discipline, to be firm and fair	7	3
Patience	8	2
Ability to inspire, motivate students	9	7

TABLE 19. Would you favor or oppose the idea of establishing a national set of standards for the certification of public school teachers?

	National Totals
	'09 %
Favor	74
Oppose	25
Don't know	1

The results of the following two questions are shown side-by-side to point out that most people believe teachers' salaries should be higher than they are thought to be.

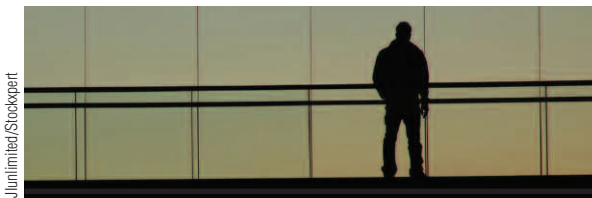
TABLE 20. What do you think the annual salary *should be* for a beginning public school teacher in this community with a bachelor's degree and teaching certificate?

TABLE 21. What do you think the annual salary *actually is* in this community for a beginning public school teacher with a bachelor's degree and teaching certificate?

	National Totals	
	Think salary should be '09 %	Think salary is '09 %
Under \$25,000	3	14
\$25,000 - \$34,999	19	43
\$35,000 - \$44,999	38	25
\$45,000 - \$54,999	24	6
\$55,000 - \$64,999	7	2
\$65,000 - \$74,999	2	1
\$75,000 or more	2	-
Don't know	5	9

TABLE 22. If your local schools needed teachers in science, math, technical subjects, and vocational subjects, would you favor or oppose these proposals?

	National Totals	
	'09 %	'86 %
Increasing the number of scholarships to college students who agree to enter teacher training programs in these subjects?		
Favor	90	83
Oppose	10	11
Don't know	-	6
Relaxing teacher education and certification plans so more people could qualify to teach these subjects?		
Favor	29	18
Oppose	71	74
Don't know	-	8



DROPOUTS

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, almost 7,000 students become dropouts every day in America. U.S. Census Bureau statistics estimate that a high school dropout annually earns almost \$10,000 less than a high school graduate. Not only are school dropouts less likely to earn as much income, statistically, they're more likely to be unemployed, abuse substances, and even be imprisoned. The Learning First Alliance, an umbrella organization for 17 education associations, last year urged the federal government to fund efforts for successful reform strategies including dropout prevention (www.learningfirst.org/news/pressrelease2009/lfafederalrolepressrelease.doc). This year, PDK developed four new questions to gauge if Americans agree that not completing high school is a serious problem, and what might be done to reduce the number of dropouts.

FINDINGS

- Almost nine out of 10 Americans believe the dropout rate in the U.S. is either the most important or one of the most important problems facing high schools today.

- Dropping out of school isn't perceived to be as much of a problem locally, as only 59% called it the most important or one of the most important problems in their community's high school.

- When asked what contributes to the dropout rate, eight out of 10 Americans linked it to students failing too many classes or leaving school to take a job or be a parent.

- Offering more interesting classes was the suggestion offered most often by Americans when asked what could help reduce the dropout rate.

The results of the following two questions are shown side-by-side to demonstrate the difference between the public's perception of the nation's schools at large and their views of the schools in their own communities.

TABLE 23. Just your opinion, how important a problem is the high school dropout rate in U.S. public high schools?

	Nation's schools %	National Totals '09 Community's schools %
Most important problem	18	13
One of the most important problems	71	46
Not that important a problem	10	28
Not a problem	1	12
Don't know	-	1

TABLE 25. Now, in your opinion, which of the following reasons do you believe is a contributing factor to the national public high school dropout rate?

	Yes, contributes %	No, does not contribute %	Don't know %
Classes are not interesting to students	61	39	-
Student has failed too many classes	83	17	-
Student was suspended or expelled	64	35	1
Student left to get a job or become a parent	80	19	1

TABLE 26. Now I am going to read several ideas that have been suggested to help reduce the national dropout rate and keep more students in high school until graduation. For each, tell me if you think it would be very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective, or not effective at all?

	National Totals '09 %
Allow students to attend high school part time so they can work part time	
Very effective	31
Somewhat effective	45
Not very effective	15
Not effective at all	9
Don't know	-
Encourage students to attend a non-traditional high school	
Very effective	23
Somewhat effective	51
Not very effective	18
Not effective at all	7
Don't know	1
Make high school classes more interesting	
Very effective	52
Somewhat effective	37
Not very effective	8
Not effective at all	3
Don't know	-
Promise students college scholarships if they graduate	
Very effective	44
Somewhat effective	35
Not very effective	15
Not effective at all	5
Don't know	1



JL/Unlimited/Stockxpert

EARLY CHILDHOOD/PRESCHOOL

In a 2009 report titled, "A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education" (www.boldapproach.org/report_20090625.html), high-quality early childhood, preschool, and kindergarten education were singled out as important investments. The report concluded that, "every American child should arrive at the starting line of 1st grade ready and able to learn."

The President and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have gone on record supporting investments in early childhood education, and the economic stimulus legislation earmarked more than \$4 billion in additional funds to support these programs.

This year, we wanted to explore Americans' perceptions of early childhood education using questions asked previously, as we specifically looked for changes in the importance Americans assign to assisting children and their families before they enroll in 1st grade.

FINDINGS

- While most U. S. children participate in either half-day or full-day kindergarten, Americans strongly endorse making it compulsory for all children.

- On the other hand, Americans aren't yet prepared to have children start school at age four, a year earlier than is traditional, even though they're more open to this idea than when they were asked 25 years ago.

- Even though they don't favor having children start school at age four, 40% of Americans believe that starting children at an earlier age would improve a child's achievement, with another 41% not sure that it would make a difference.

- Almost six out of 10 Americans would be willing to pay more taxes to fund free preschool programs for those children whose parents are unable to pay for them.

- Eighteen years ago, we asked Americans where preschool programs should be located. Respondents were evenly divided, suggesting public schools, parent's workplace, or special preschool facilities. That's changed significantly, and half of Americans believe preschool programs should be housed in public schools, with parents even more supportive of that idea.

TABLE 27. Some educators have proposed that kindergarten be made compulsory for all children before entering 1st grade. Would you favor or oppose such a program in your school district?

	National totals		Public school parents
	'09 %	'86 %	'09 %
Favor compulsory kindergarten	81	71	84
Oppose compulsory kindergarten	18	22	14
Don't know	1	7	2

TABLE 28. Some educators have proposed that young children start school a year earlier, at the age of four. Does this sound like a good idea or not?

	National totals		Public school parents
	'09 %	'86 %	'09 %
Yes, good idea	38	29	45
No, not a good idea	61	64	55
Don't know	1	7	-

TABLE 29. In your opinion, what effect would starting a child a year younger than is now generally the case have on the child's academic achievement in elementary and in high school? Do you think starting a year younger would improve the child's achievement, make it worse, or wouldn't it make much difference?

	National totals		Public school parents
	'09 %	'97 %	'09 %
Improve achievement	40	37	46
Make it worse	18	24	16
Not much difference	41	37	37
Don't know	1	2	1

TABLE 30. Let's assume that preschool programs are to be paid for only by those parents whose children use the programs. Would you be willing, or not willing, to pay more taxes for funding free preschool programs for those children whose parents are unable to pay for them?

	National totals		Public school parents
	'09 %	'93 %	'09 %
Willing to pay	58	61	57
Not willing to pay	42	36	43
Don't know	-	3	-

TABLE 31. Where do you think these preschool programs should be provided — in the public schools, at parents' place of work, or at special childcare facilities?

	National totals		Public school parents
	'09 %	'92 %	'09 %
Public schools	50	29	59
Parents' place of work	7	24	4
Special facilities	40	38	36
Don't know	3	9	1

BARBARA BOWMAN

Early Learning More Accepted



Opinions about early childhood education have changed quite a bit in the past 10 years. A generation ago, compulsory kindergarten and universal preschool weren't even considered, and today, they're accepted in thousands of communities throughout the country. How do we account for the difference? I believe four factors have contributed to the rising approval rating: 1) Penetration into the popular press and news media of neurobiological research communicating the importance of early brain development, 2) education research demonstrating long-term individual and social benefits when children attend model preschool programs, 3) economic analysis showing huge potential social and educational savings if children attend preschool programs, and 4) the increase in working women leading more families to seek affordable child care.

COMMENTARY

Despite the upward trend, there's still some ambivalence about early education. Most respondents aren't sure starting school a year earlier is a good idea, though 40% think children will learn more if they attend preschool. Similarly, respondents are almost evenly divided about whether preschool should be located in schools or special facilities.

Table 30 — showing a decrease in those willing to help fund preschool for low-income children — seems to be a reversal of the trend toward greater approval. However, this may be explained by the recession, which has made Americans wary of tax increases. It may also reflect a generation gap in the amount of information different age groups have about the value of early childhood education.

Barbara Bowman is chief officer for the Office of Early Childhood Education for the Chicago Public Schools.



"Show and tell. I deviated from my prepared text."



JLunited/Stockxpert

INNOVATION: MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Innovation is the new education buzzword. A popular education book in 2008, *Disrupting Class* by Clayton Christensen, Curtis Johnson, and Michael Horn, describes education innovation in stunning terms, and *Kappan* introduced a new column on Innovation this fall.

A report released in December 2006, titled *Tough Choices or Tough Times* (www.skillscommission.org/executive.htm), suggests that the core problem is that our education and training systems were built for another era and that we can get to where we must go only by changing the system itself.

Rather than asking specific questions about innovation, we tried to determine if Americans believe their public schools are moving in the right direction and, if so, what would help them continue to move in that direction and what would hold them back.

FINDINGS

- When asked if public schools are moving in the right or the wrong direction, Americans are evenly split in their response, strongly suggesting that they would be open to more innovation in schools.

- Americans identified two issues as most important in moving schools in the right direction: better teachers and more parental support.

- Lack of money was listed as the number one obstacle to prevent schools from moving in the right direction.

TABLE 32. Overall, do you think public schools in America are moving on the right track or the wrong track in terms of providing quality education?

	National totals '09 %	Rep. '09 %	Dem. '09 %	Ind. '09 %
Right track	48	44	56	42
Wrong track	51	55	42	56
Don't know	1	1	2	2

TABLE 33. I am going to read several factors. For each, tell me how important you think that factor is in keeping public schools moving on the right track?

	National Totals '09				
	Very important %	Somewhat important %	Not too important %	Not at all important %	Don't know %
More funding	62	24	10	4	-
Better teachers	82	16	2	-	-
Better use of technology	63	32	4	1	-
More parent support	85	13	1	1	-
More school choice	38	40	16	5	1

TABLE 34. Which, if any, of the following factors do you believe keep public schools in your community from moving on the right track?

	National Totals '09		
	Keeps from right track %	Does not keep from right track %	Don't know %
Lack of money	71	29	-
Lack of community support	58	41	1
Lack of teacher support	53	46	1
Belief that school education is good enough already	51	48	1

ECONOMIC STIMULUS

It's easy to forget the desperate economic times our nation faced in the months before and following the beginning of 2009. In the face of the economic crisis, Congress passed and the president signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the single largest government investment in the economy. This \$575 billion spending plan included almost \$91 billion for education and related programs.

Knowing that these funds would only begin trickling into local economies when the PDK/Gallup poll was administered, we developed two questions to establish benchmark data on Americans' opinions about this legislative investment in public education.

FINDINGS

- Almost 60% of Americans said they knew a great deal or a fair amount about the economic stimulus legislation passed by Congress in January 2009, a response that we believe is high. That's because when we asked Americans about their knowledge of the newly adopted No Child Left Behind legislation in 2002, only 24% of Americans said they knew a great deal or fair amount about that legislation, with 76% saying they knew very little or nothing at all.

- Americans believe that keeping teachers who were slated to be laid off should be the number-one priority in spending the economic stimulus funds, followed by providing support to the lowest-performing schools.

TABLE 35. In January 2009, Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, more commonly known as the economic stimulus legislation. Would you say you know a great deal, a fair amount, very little, or nothing at all about this legislation?

	National totals '09 %	Rep. '09 %	Dem. '09 %	Ind. '09 %
A great deal	8	10	6	8
A fair amount	51	46	51	55
Very little	35	39	37	30
Nothing at all	6	5	6	6
Don't know	0	-	-	1

TABLE 36. As you may know, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides increased funding to education. Which of the following areas in education do you believe should receive the most new funding?

	National totals '09 %	Rep. '09 %	Dem. '09 %	Ind. '09 %
Keep teachers that were planned to be laid off	46	44	45	49
Build new or modernize existing school building	15	19	12	15
Provide more support for the lowest-performing schools	36	34	42	32
Don't know	3	3	1	4



SCHOOLS AND THE NEWS MEDIA

Each year, we ask Americans about their attitudes toward their public schools, so it's reasonable to ask them if they feel well-informed about their schools, where they get information, and if they believe the news media is unbiased in reporting about their schools.

FINDINGS

- Almost 75% of Americans say they are either well informed or fairly well-informed about their schools. This self-rating has remained constant since we asked the same question in 1998.
- Americans get their information about schools from newspapers; school employees, including teachers and bus drivers; and radio and TV, in that order.
- In a less than resounding endorsement, Americans are split on whether they think the news media — that is, newspapers, television, and radio — give a fair and accurate picture of the public schools in their community, with 56% saying yes and 42% saying no.

TABLE 37. Would you say that you are well-informed, fairly well-informed, or not well-informed about the local public school situation?

	National Totals		
	'09 %	'98 %	'87 %
Well-informed	27	31	15
Fairly well-informed	47	42	39
Not well-informed	26	26	41
Don't know	-	1	5

RICHARD COLVIN Traditional Media Will Be Tested



Newspapers, of the ink-on-dead-trees variety, are themselves dying. Annual print and online advertising revenues are off \$10 billion from just three years ago. Newspapers in Denver, Seattle, and other cities have closed. Thirty, including the *Boston Globe*, are up for sale. More than 15,000 jobs have been eliminated industry-wide. The **COMMENTARY** journalists left are Twittering, blogging, and filing updates directly to their news organizations' web sites, in addition to writing print stories.

Newspapers may be headed the way of buggy whip makers, but they're still the main source of education-related news for 40% of those surveyed. Although the schools reporter may be new, the beat is still being staffed. (The Hechinger Institute, which I head, could not accommodate all of the record 50 journalists who applied to attend a July seminar on education.) Wherever they get their news about schools, three out of four respondents think they're well-informed or fairly well-informed.

Public confidence in institutions of all types may have eroded, but the percentage of respondents who say the news media coverage of schools is fair and accurate has risen by a third since 1977. Opinions are stronger today, too. The percentage of respondents saying news coverage is not fair and accurate also is up slightly.

The next two years will be a critical test for the media. The Obama Administration's ambitious spending and reform plans give reporters the opportunity to show they can explain complex policies and monitor results. While they're at it, the journalists and their bosses also have to figure out a new business model that will support their work.

Richard Colvin is director of Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media at Teachers College, Columbia University.

ANATOMY OF AN ANNUAL POLL

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

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| January | PDK solicits issues, topics, and questions for the poll from policy makers and educators. |
| February | An advisory committee convenes to consider suggestions, select topics, and frame questions. |
| April | Poll topics are finalized; the PDK/Gallup poll archives are searched to determine if similar questions have been asked in the past; preliminary wording is written for new questions. |
| May | Gallup assembles and reviews a draft survey instrument to ensure question items are written correctly and free of any ordering bias. Pretest interviews are conducted to ensure respondent comprehension. Gallup constructs sampling frame. |
| June | Final survey questionnaire is programmed for interviewers onto CATI system. Telephone interviews are administered and data collected. All completed surveys are coded and processed, and the final sample is matched and balanced to U.S. census population parameters. |
| July | Detailed tabular analyses (cross-tabulations) are generated. Data are reviewed and analyzed, and the results are written for an article appearing in the September issue of <i>Kappan</i> . |
| August | Results 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> . |

TABLE 38. Where do you get most of your information about what is happening in your community's school?

	National totals '09 %	Under age 40 '09 %	Over age 40 '09 %
Newspapers	43	35	48
School employees	20	20	21
Radio or television	17	14	19
Parents of students	11	11	10
Students	11	12	10
Internet	10	14	8

TABLE 39. Do you think the news media (newspapers, TV, and radio) give a fair and accurate picture of the public schools in this community, or not?

	National Totals	
	'09 %	'77 %
Yes, give a fair and accurate picture	56	42
No, do not	42	36
Don't know	2	22

SUMMARY

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.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The 2009 survey findings are based on 1,003 completed interviews. The completed interviews include an oversample of parents with school-aged children. Fieldwork (data collection) for this study was administered during the period June 2 to June 24, 2009. Due allowance must be made for statistical variation, especially in the case of findings for groups consisting of relatively few respondents. The findings of this report apply only to the U.S. as a whole and not to individual communities. Local surveys, using the same questions, can be conducted to determine how local areas compare with the national norm.

DESIGN OF THE SAMPLE

All findings for the 2009 PDK/Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of adults aged 18 and older. A national cross-section of households was sampled to yield a representative survey across all segments of the population in telephone-owning households. A four-call design was used to

complete an interview with each intended respondent. A Random Digit Dialing (RDD) technique was used to ensure the inclusion of both listed and unlisted telephone numbers.

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.

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.

COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE

Adults	%
No children in school	61
Public school parents	34
Nonpublic school parents	5
Age	%
Over 40	34
40 and under	66
Region	%
East	24
Midwest	20
South	31
West	25
Political Party	%
Republican	28
Democrat	36
Independent	34
Undesignated	2

PAST PDK/GALLUP POLLS

Copies of previously published PDK/Gallup polls are available to PDK members free at www.pdkintl.org. Others can purchase previous polls for \$4.95 each.

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 the 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.

PDK/GALLUP POLL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The following individuals worked with poll co-directors **William J. Bushaw** and **John A. McNeel** to select the topics asked in the *2009 PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*. Phi Delta Kappa International and the Gallup Organization express their appreciation for the guidance provided by panel members.

Curtis Cain, associate superintendent, Shawnee Mission Schools, Kansas.

Sandee Crowther, president, PDK International

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

Jack Jennings, president and CEO, Center on Education Policy

Dane Linn, director, Education Division, National Governors Association

Ron Marx, dean, College of Education, University of Arizona

Scott Montgomery, deputy executive director, Council of Chief State School Officers

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

Judy Seltz, deputy executive director, ASCD

Susan Traiman, director of public policy, Business Roundtable

PDK members are invited to join the discussion about the PDK/Gallup poll results at PDKConnect, the organization's online community.

ATTEND WEBINAR ON 2009 PDK/GALLUP POLL RESULTS

PDK Executive Director and co-director of the PDK/Gallup poll William Bushaw will host a webinar from 7-8 pm EDT Wednesday, Sept. 16. The webinar is sponsored by the PDK Educational Foundation.

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.

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