



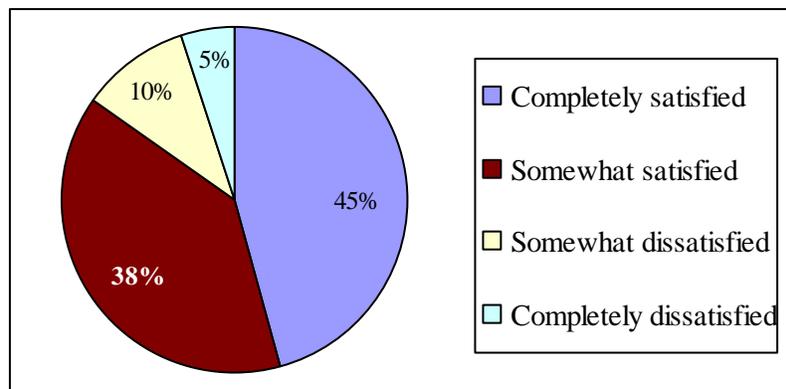
PUBLIC OPINION OF EDUCATION: QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Highlights of the 2006 Statewide Public Poll on the Condition of Education in Delaware

February 2007

Most Delaware parents (83%) say they are completely or somewhat satisfied with the quality of education their oldest child is receiving, and compared with a national sample¹, more Delawareans are completely satisfied with their oldest child's education (45% compared to 33%). This issue of Public Opinion on Education will focus on issues related to the quality of education in Delaware and is the first in the series detailing the results of the 2006 Public Poll on the Condition of Education in Delaware.

How satisfied are you with your oldest child's education?



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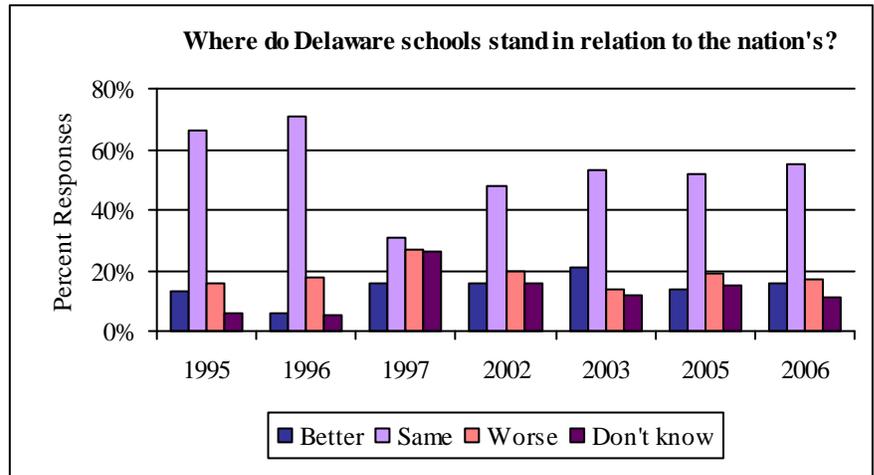
This poll is a collaborative effort of the College of Human Resources, Education and Public Policy at the University of Delaware. The author extends special thanks to the Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research for conducting the telephone interviews, Delaware Education Research and Development Center staff member Linda Grusenmeyer for her editing assistance.

For more information on the 2006 Public Poll, please contact the R&D Center by email at ud-rdc@udel.edu or by phone at (302) 831-4433. The briefs and full technical report will be available online at <http://www.rdc.udel.edu> later this year.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN DELAWARE

Poll Results

Delaware residents were asked about their opinion on where Delaware's schools stand in relation to the nation. Fifty-five percent of the respondents indicated that they are about the same, 16% said that Delaware's schools are better, and 17% said that Delaware's schools are worse. At a more personal level, most Delaware parents (83%) say they are completely or somewhat satisfied with the quality of education their oldest child is receiving.



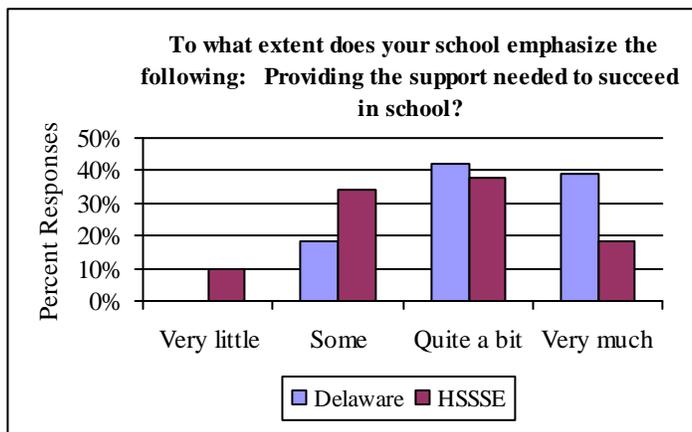
Putting it in Context

Public opinion regarding how Delaware schools compare to the nation's has been rather stable since the question was asked in 1995. With the exception of 1997, significantly more Delaware residents believed Delaware schools were the same as the nation's instead of better or worse, and the actual percentage seeing no difference has varied from a low of 48% in 2002, to a high of 71% in 1996.

Results of the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show average math and reading scores for both fourth and eighth graders in Delaware improved over previous years. Average math^{2,3} and reading scores^{4,5} for Delaware's fourth and eighth graders were higher than the Nation's average public school scores. While, achievement gaps are closing for some Delaware groups, the gaps remain for minority and low socioeconomic students in Delaware, according to the 10th edition of Editorial Projects in Education's annual Quality Counts⁶ report.

Special Feature: Student Voice

When Delaware students were asked about the quality of education they were receiving, 88% said it was good or very good. In addition, a large majority (81%) reported that their school emphasizes providing the support they need to succeed in school (very much or quite a bit) and that their school provides an educational environment to



suit their needs (78%) (very much or somewhat). However, Delaware students were not in agreement about whether all children in their schools have an equal chance of getting into the hardest classes: 50% indicated that students in their school do have an equal opportunity, while 39% of students disagree.

Students participating in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), the largest national database on the subject, addressed issues similar to those in the Delaware poll.⁷ More than half (56%) of students reported that their school emphasizes providing the support they need to

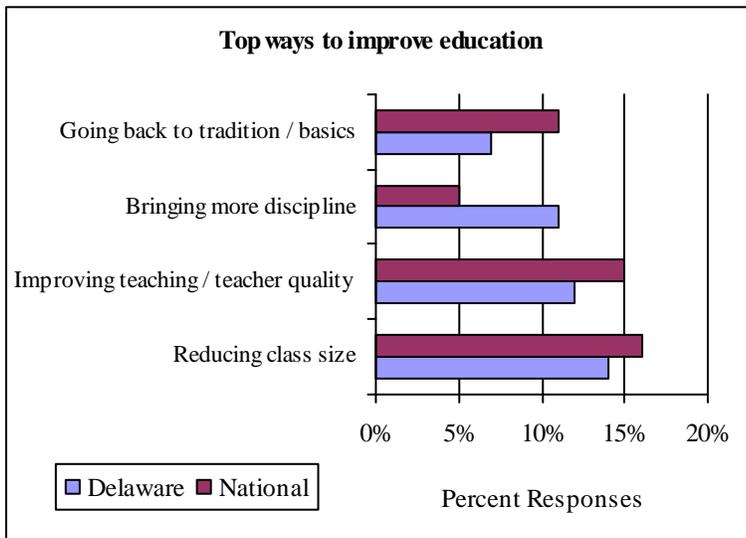
succeed (very much or quite a bit). This is significantly less than the strong agreement of Delaware students (81%). In addition, almost two-thirds (64%) of students nation-wide said they feel supported and respected by teachers and half (50%) of students reported that their schools emphasize treating students fairly.

IMPROVING K-12 EDUCATION

Poll Results

Forty-one percent of Delawareans believe that children today get a better education than they did, which is about the same percent as believe children get a worse education today (40%). When residents were asked their opinion on the best way to improve K-12 education in the United States today, five themes were mentioned by at least 9% of Delawareans interviewed: reducing class size (14%), improving teaching or teacher quality (12%), bringing more discipline (11%), increasing parental involvement (9%), and redoing or updating the curriculum (9%).

Putting it in Context



Both Delawareans and people nationwide agree that reducing class size is the best way to improve K-12 education in the U.S. today.⁸ In Delaware, state law 1705A requires districts to cap class sizes to 22 students in English, math, science and social studies in kindergarten through third grade⁹. Research has shown that class size is related to the quality of education students receive.¹⁰ The landmark study, Tennessee’s STAR Project, a very large randomized experiment, showed that small class size affects student achievement.¹¹ However, the results stipulate that unless class sizes get small enough to be around 15 so that the method of teaching can change to individualized instruction, smaller classes have no measurable academic effect.

In addition, research also suggests that the way class size is reduced is important. Simply adding a paraprofessional to a large class does not have the same results.¹² A recent study examining research on class size over the past several years found that “reducing class size may have little impact on student achievement (p. 309)”¹³ Their results align with other studies that emphasize the importance of what happens in classrooms, more than the structure provided for classroom activities.

THE EFFECT OF MONEY ON THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

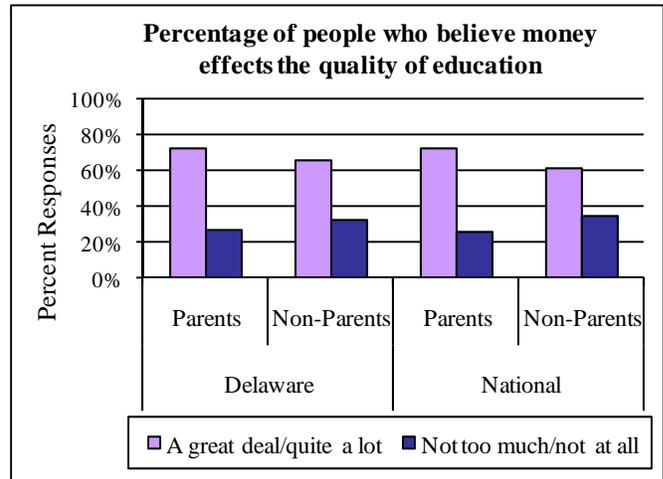
Poll Results

When Delawareans were asked how much the amount of money spent on a public school student’s education affects the quality of education, 65% said a great deal or quite a lot. However, while 72% of the parents say money affects the quality of education a great deal or quite a lot, 63% of the non-parents say so.

Putting it in Context

Results from a national telephone survey of 1,422 American adults conducted by National Public Ratio were similar to Delaware’s. A higher percentage of parents (72%), as compared to non-parents (61%), believe money

affects the quality of education.¹⁴ It is clear from the research that the relationship between funds going into education and the quality of education is complex. The United States is a world leader in education investment; total expenditures per pupil amount to \$8,997¹⁵. As reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, Delaware was one of seven states spending more per pupil than the national average for the 2003-4 school year.¹⁶ However, higher expenditure does not always mean greater school outcomes. For example, according to a U.S. Department of Education article¹⁷, the Jersey City school district, which overspent the New Jersey state average by \$2,000, had double the dropout rate compared to the rest of the state. The District of Columbia, which spends near the top on its K-12 students, has the dubious distinction of having the lowest scores in the nation.



Design, Data Collection, and Sampling Error

From February 9 to March 25, 2005, telephone interviews were conducted with 910 residents throughout the state, 410 parents of school-age children and 500 non-parents. The sampling plan for the polls was scientifically developed and data were collected using random digit dialing to obtain a random sample of residents. All analyses conducted by the R&D Center for the Public Poll involved weighting the data from the sample to reflect the statewide population more accurately. Ninety-three students’ were interviewed after their parents gave consent for them to participate and they assented to participate.

When using a sample, all measurements are subject to sampling error; that is, the extent to which the results may differ from what would be obtained if the entire population of Delaware residents had been surveyed. It is important to remember that small differences may not be statistically significant. The size of the sampling error primarily depends on the number of people surveyed and the response percentage. The sampling error for the poll* ranges from approximately ± 1.4% - 3.3% for the total adult sample, ± 2.7% - 4.5% for the non-parent sample, ± 1.9% - 4.9% for the parent sample, and ± 4.5% - 10.4% for the student sample.

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* These error ranges used a 95% confidence interval for response percentages between 5% and 95%.

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