

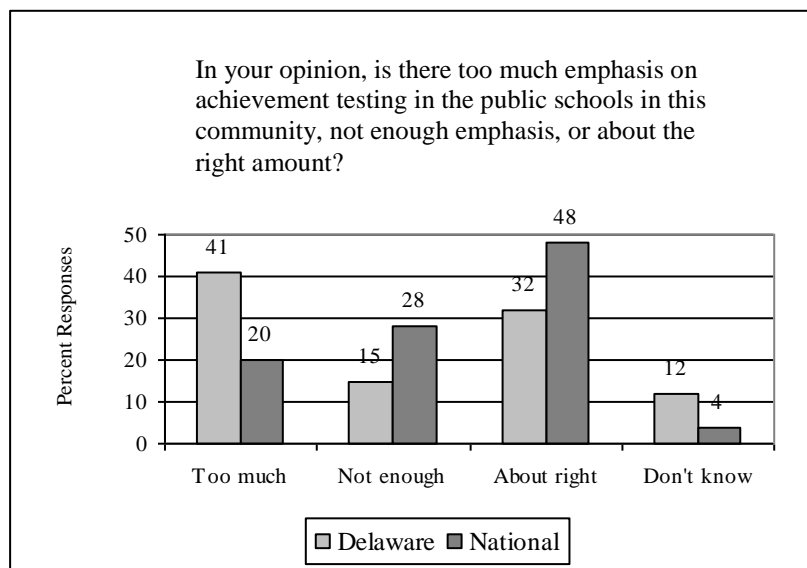


PUBLIC OPINION OF EDUCATION: EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Highlights of the 2005 Statewide Public Poll on the Condition of Education in Delaware

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A large minority (41%) of Delawareans believe there is too much emphasis on achievement testing in the public schools. This issue of Public Opinion of Education focuses on Delawareans' views of student, teacher, and federal educational accountability in Delaware.



For more information or questions regarding the Public Poll, contact:

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This poll is a collaborative effort of the College of Human Services, 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, and to Delaware Education Research and Development Center staff member Margarete Kedzior and Heidi Sweetman for their assistance with the literature review and Steve Fifield and Pamela Stazesky for their editing assistance.

For more information on the 2005 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 report will also be available on the web as they are produced at <http://www.rdc.udel.edu>

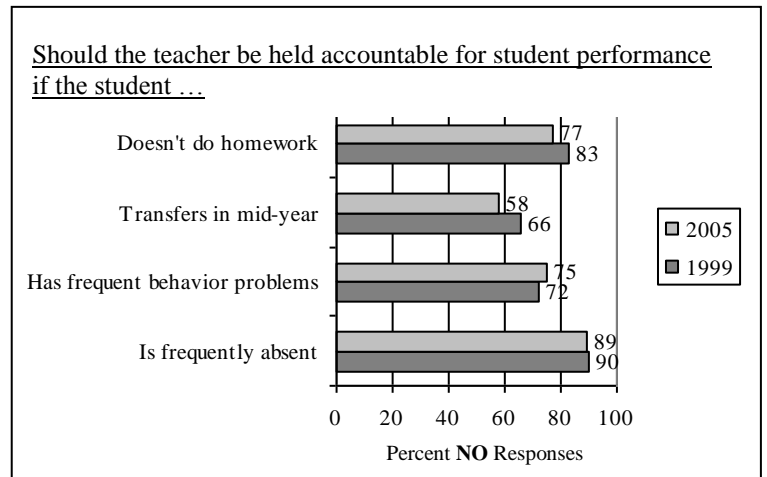
EDUCATOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Poll Results

When asked about teacher accountability, most Delawareans indicated that teachers should not be held accountable for student performance if children are frequently absent, have behavior problems, or do not do their homework.

Putting it in Context

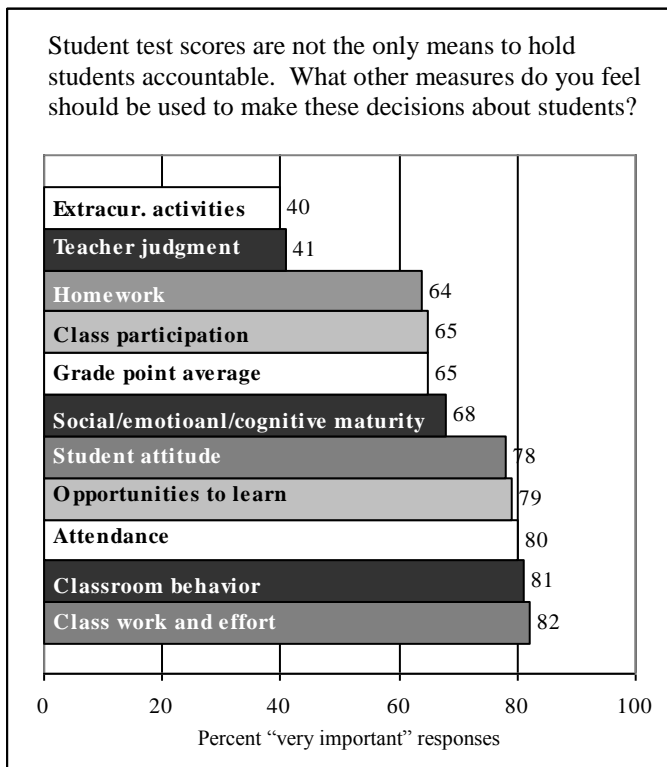
Delawarean views on teacher accountability are the same now as they were in 1998, that teachers should not be held accountable for student performance if students are frequently absent, have frequent in-class behavior problems, or do not complete homework.¹



STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Poll Results

Few Delawareans (15%) reported that there is too little emphasis placed on achievement testing in the public schools: Most believed there is the right amount (32%) or too much (41%). In addition, Delawareans strongly support using a variety of measures other than achievement testing to hold students accountable, several of which are non-academic. Between 78% and 82% of survey respondents indicated that class-work and effort, opportunities to learn, attendance, classroom behavior, and class participation are very important to use when making decisions about student accountability. Extracurricular activities (40%) and teacher judgment (41%) received the least support.



More than one-third of Delaware residents (37%) believe student achievement should be measured either solely or mostly by improvement in performance over time. Another 40% supported a combination of improvement over time and using an absolute benchmark for performance (40%).

The vast majority of Delaware parents think it is important to know how their children are progressing in school (96%) and in specific subject areas (93%). Fewer parents are concerned with how their children compare with other children in the state (86%) or nationally (79%). Also, nearly two-thirds of parents (63%) believe their children's DSTP reports are useful.

Putting it in Context

There appears to be rather different opinions about whether the current emphasis on achievement testing is appropriate. In a national sample 20% of United States residents felt there was too little emphasis placed on

achievement testing in the schools², which is half that of Delawareans (41%). Reality Check 2002 reported on the

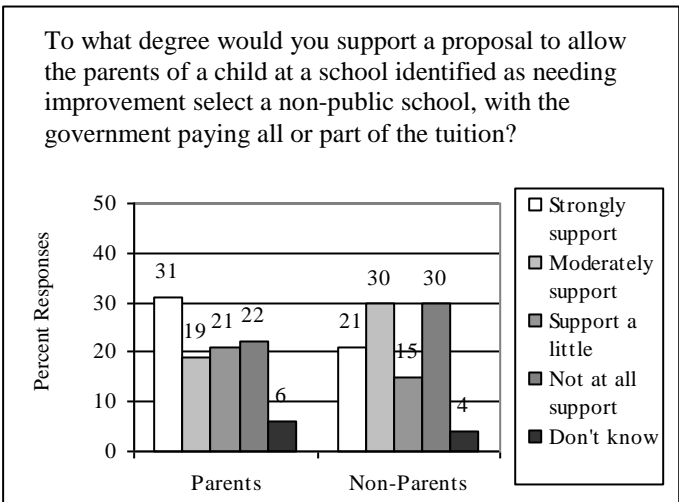
student perspective; 45% of public middle school and high school students surveyed believed that there was too much emphasis on standardized achievement tests.³ Consistent with the Public Poll results in 2003 the majority of Delawareans believed that using improvement over time should play a large role in measuring student achievement.⁴ The many studies examining the relationship between high-stakes testing and improving student and school performance fail to clearly demonstrate that testing improves performance.⁵

Regarding standardized tests and their use in determining promotion and/or graduation, Reality Check 2002 found that 78% of parents and 91% of teachers indicated that it was inappropriate to use the results of only one test to determine if students should be promoted or should graduate. Instead of simply using standardized test results, 83% of parents and 80% of teachers agreed that standardized tests, in combination with teacher evaluations, should be used to inform promotion and graduation practices.⁶

THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT (NCLB)

Poll Results

About half (49%) of the Delawareans surveyed indicated that they know a fair amount or a great deal about the No Child Left Behind Act. The NCLB Act requires schools to report their standardized test results for as many as 33 distinct groups to determine if a school is making adequate yearly progress (AYP). More than half of Delawareans (59%) indicated that they believed it was unfair to identify a school as in need of improvement if only one group did not meet the AYP criteria. However, about the same percent of the Delaware residents surveyed (57%) thought the school ratings, based on DSTP scores, provided meaningful information about the schools in their community. Furthermore, parents and non-parents showed similar support for the use of government funding to send children to non-public schools if the schools they are attending have been designated as needing improvement by NCLB.



Putting it in Context

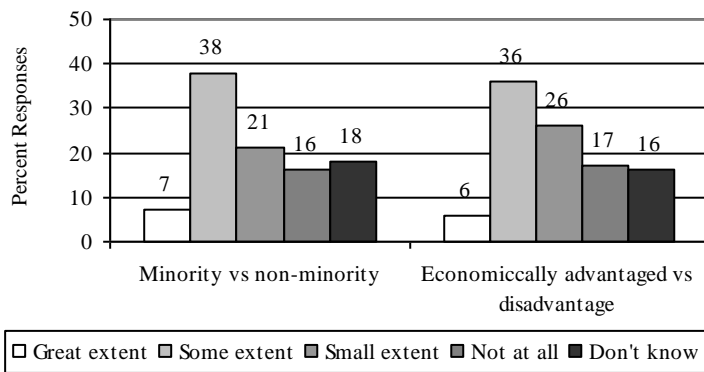
According to Phi Delta Kappa’s 36th Annual Gallup Poll, 24% of respondents indicated they know a fair amount to great deal about NCLB, which is significantly lower than in the Delaware sample (49%). This Poll also examined one of the 33 distinct groups considered when making decisions about AYP; the state test performance of special education students. They found that “the public rejects holding special education students to the same grade-level standards as other students, rejects their inclusion in the base for determining if a school is in need of improvement, and rejects deciding a school’s status on the basis of special education students’ performance alone”(p. 47).⁷

ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Poll Results

A large majority (89%) of Delawareans surveyed indicated they thought closing the academic achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students was very or somewhat important. A large majority (89%) of Delawareans surveyed indicated they thought closing the academic achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students was very or somewhat important. When asked how much they felt the federal accountability plan would reduce this gap, 45% of residents said the plan would reduce the gap to some or a great

To what extent do you think the federal accountability plan will reduce the achievement gap between minority and non-minority children and between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students?



extent. Responses were similar when asked how much the plan would reduce the achievement gap between economically advantaged and economically disadvantaged students.

Eighty-one percent of Delaware residents report that minority children in their community have the same educational opportunities as white children. However, when asked what factors cause the gap between these groups, several responses suggest that opportunities may not be the same. For example, home life/environment (35%), economic advantage/disadvantage (25%), lack of parent involvement (18%), and language and cultural differences (18%) were the top four reasons cited by Delawareans explaining the achievement gap.

Putting it in Context

The 2004 Gallup Poll reported 88% of U.S. residents felt that closing the academic achievement gap is a very or somewhat important issue. In addition, 56% percent of those surveyed indicated that it is the responsibility of the public school to close the gap. This poll also found that about 80% of citizens nationwide believe minority and white children's educational opportunities are the same.⁸ A nearly identical percent of Delawareans reported the same beliefs in 2003⁹ and 2005.

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.

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 depends largely on the number of people surveyed. The sampling error for the poll* ranges from $\pm 2.0\%$ - 3.3% for the total sample, $\pm 2.7\%$ - 4.5% for the non-parent sample, and $\pm 3.0\%$ - 4.9% for the parent sample.

* These error ranges used a 95% confidence interval.

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- ² Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (2004). Retrieved April 4, 2005, from <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0409pol.htm>
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- ⁵ Amrein, A. L., & Berliner, D.C. (2003). Effects of high-stakes testing on motivation and learning. *Education Leadership*, 60(5), 32-39.
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- ⁷ Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (2004). Retrieved April 4, 2005, from <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0409pol.htm>
- ⁸ Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (2004). Retrieved April 4, 2005, from <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0409pol.htm>

⁹ Ackerman, C. M. (2004).). 2003 Statewide public poll on the condition of education in Delaware. Newark, DE: Delaware Education Research and Development Center. College of Human Services, Education, and Public Policy, University of Delaware.