

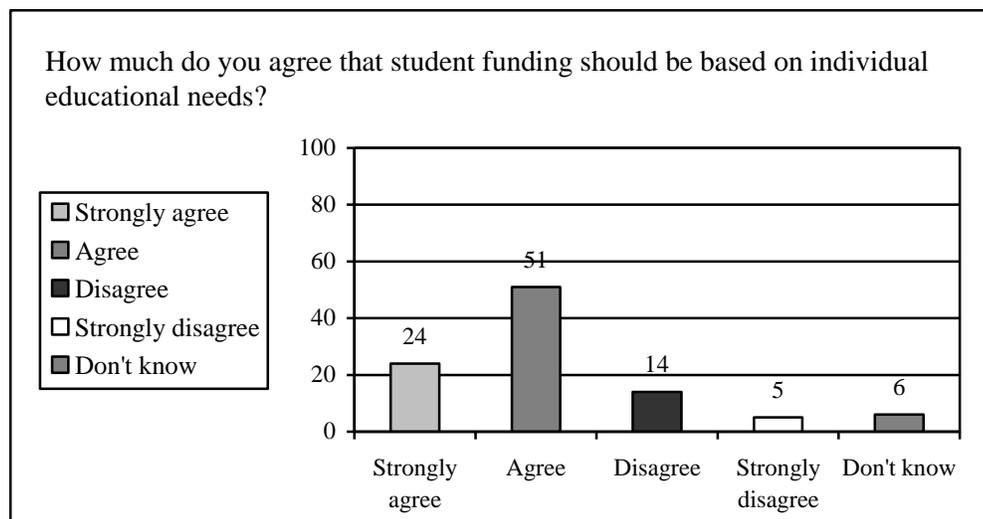


PUBLIC OPINION OF EDUCATION: GIFTED EDUCATION, FINANCE REFORM, & PARENT INVOLVEMENT

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

February 2006

Three-fourths of Delaware residents surveyed believe individual educational need should be the basis for student funding. This issue of Public Opinion of Education focuses on three important educational issues, gifted education, finance reform, and parent involvement, and what Delawareans believe about them.



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 Heidi Sweetman for her assistance with the literature review and Dariel Janerette for her assistance conducting qualitative data analyses.

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 are available on the web at <http://www.rdc.udel.edu>

GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION

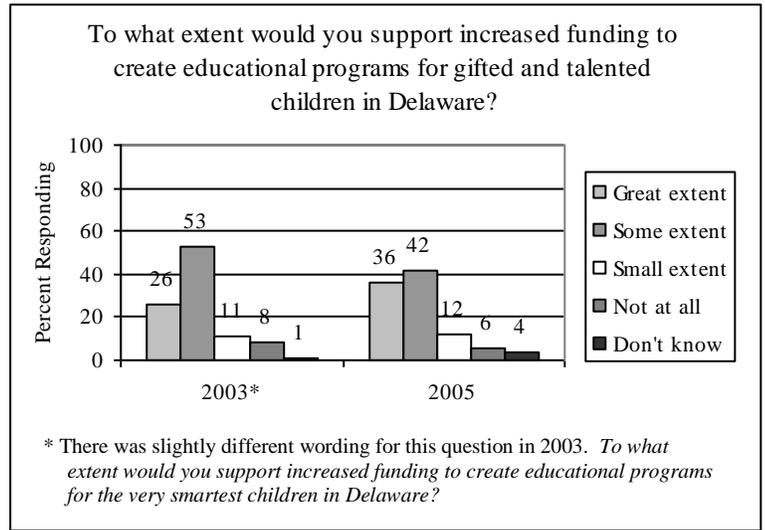
Poll Results

While 84% of Delawareans surveyed believe that gifted and talented students have special educational needs, only 14% indicated they thought these needs were being met in the public schools. In addition, there was strong support (78%) to increase funding to create educational programs for gifted and talented children in Delaware.

Putting it in Context

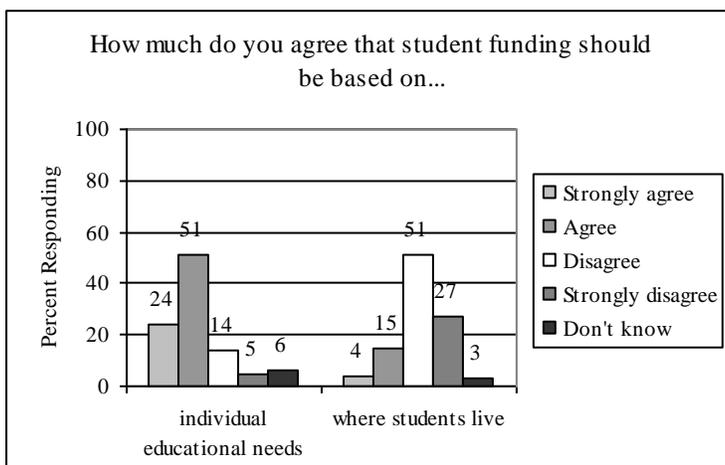
In 2003¹ and 2005 nearly four out of five Delaware residents greatly or somewhat supported providing more funds to create such programs (79% and 78%, respectively). As detailed in an Education Policy Brief on

Gifted and Talented Education, “the state of Delaware is one of 12 states identified by the [Davidson Institute for Talent Development] that have no mandate to identify and serve gifted and talented students and no funding specifically targeted to gifted and talented programs” (p. 3).² Rogers (2002) reported that many gifted children do not excel in school without differentiated programming and that the diversity among gifted children requires careful consideration of how to meet their individual educational needs.³ (For more information on gifted education in Delaware and nationally, see the complete policy brief).



FINANCE REFORM

Poll Results



Delaware residents were asked two questions about how much they support two ways to determine student funding: individual need vs. where students live. There is an enormous difference between the level of support for the two methods of distributing funds. Seventy-five percent support funding based on individual student need while only 19% support funding based on where students live.

Currently, there are large funding gaps between school districts in Delaware. When Delawareans were asked what funding sources should be used to help reduce these gaps, the

most common suggestion was taxes (26%), including school, property, corporate, and cigarette, with more than double the response rate of any other suggestion. The second most common response related to how funds should be distributed, not new sources of funding. Twelve percent of Delaware residents suggested either distributing funds equally to all schools or distribution based on financial need. Other suggestions

included miscellaneous revenue sources, gaming revenue, and state sources. It is interesting to note that nearly one-third (31%) of residents interviewed offered no suggestions.

Putting it in Context

Delaware's school district funding gaps are not unique. An article published by the *American School Board Journal*, states that the wealthiest school districts in some states are able to spend up to 10 times more on public school than the poorest schools districts in the same states.⁴

An Educational Testing Services (ETS) survey found that 65% of adults surveyed believed that it would be acceptable to redistribute tax funds raised in one area to schools in low-income areas. Sixty-eight percent of policy makers, according to ETS, supported this redistribution of tax revenue.⁵ ETS also found that people were willing to pay more for public education *if* they could be assured that the money would go toward existing unmet needs and would not be wasted. In the online anthology, *School Spending*, Lawrence O. Picus notes that the conversation concerning school finance reforms has shifted from a discussion of equity and inputs to a discussion of adequacy and outputs. People are becoming more interested in whether children are receiving a satisfactory education, instead of how much money the schools are receiving.⁶

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

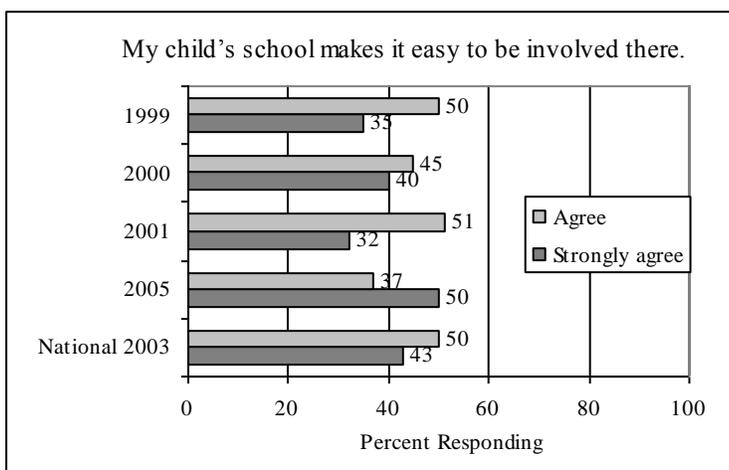
Poll Results

Most (87%) Delaware parents surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that their children's school makes it easy to be involved there.

When asked what types of things parents should be doing, both in and out of school, to participate in their children's education, five major themes emerged. These themes were: communicate with school (40%), homework (36%), parental involvement and communication with children (33%), volunteering at school (20%) and attendance at school activities and meetings (20%). All other themes had less than a 5% response rate.

Putting it in Context

Since 1999, Delaware parents have been fairly consistent in their opinions about whether their children's schools make it easy for them to be involved. For each year that the question was asked, more than 80% indicated that they either agree or strongly agree that their child's school makes involvement easy. However, this year, 10% more parents strongly agree with this issue.^{7,8,9} In a national sample, parents around the country responded similarly to Delawareans with the vast majority (93%) indicating it was easy to be involved at their children's school.¹⁰



Researchers agree that children whose parents are involved in their education learn more and achieve at higher levels.^{11,12} According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), three things influence how much a parent is involved in his or her child's education: the role that parents believe they are suppose to play in education, the degree to which parents believe their involvement will benefit their children, and the

opportunities and barriers to involvement parents experience.¹³ In addition to the issues Delaware residents reported, research suggests that parents should provide literacy materials, hold high expectations, emphasize effort over ability, and encourage autonomy, to positively impact their children's performance.¹⁴

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.

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* These error ranges used a 95% confidence interval.