



University of Delaware Education Research & Development Center

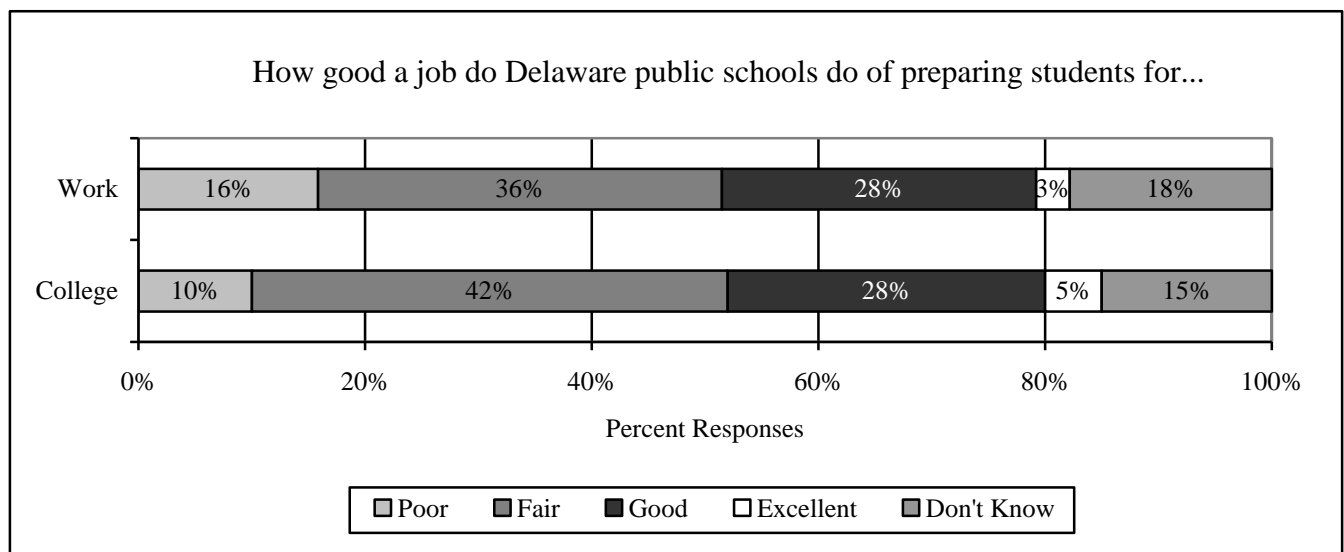


PUBLIC OPINION OF EDUCATION: QUALITY OF EDUCATION

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

February 2006

Most Delaware citizens believe public schools are doing a good or fair job preparing students for college (70%) and work (64%). This issue of Public Opinion of Education focuses on what Delawareans believe about issues related to the quality of education.



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

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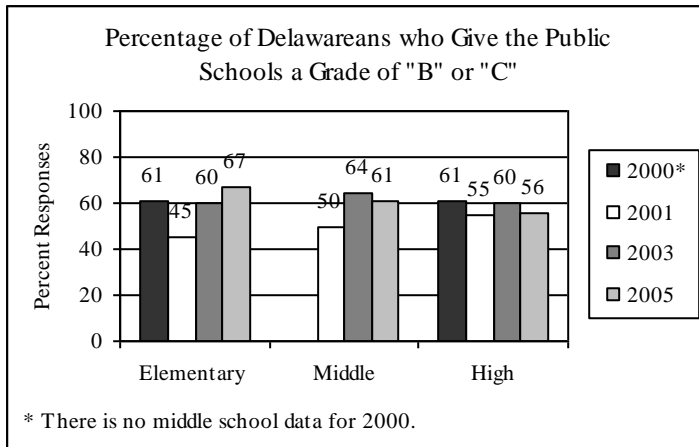
This poll is a collaborative effort of the College of Human Services, Education and Public Policy at the University of Delaware. The author extends special thanks to the Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research for conducting the telephone interviews, Delaware Education Research and Development Center staff member Heidi Sweetman for her assistance with the literature review and Steve Fifield, Linda Grusenmeyer, and Heidi Sweetman 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 technical report are available on the WEB at <http://www.rdc.udel.edu>

GRADING THE SCHOOLS

Poll Results

While significantly more parents (30%) than non-parents (21%) say they are very well informed about the public schools in their communities, both groups report very similar opinions about the quality of the schools in Delaware. Most Delawareans give elementary (67%), middle (61%), and high schools (56%) throughout the state grades of “B” or “C.” However, a large minority of residents, 16% – 22%, feel they do not know enough to grade the schools. Delawareans were also asked what the most important things were to help public schools earn an “A.” The top four categories of responses were curriculum and standards (37%); teacher quality, accountability and authority (27%); parents, community and public support (19%); and sufficient resources including teacher pay (17%).



Putting it in Context

There was a significant increase in the percentage of Delawareans surveyed who gave elementary and middle schools a “B” or “C” from 2001 to 2003, and

this increase is maintained in 2005.¹ When compared with a national sample that was asked to grade all schools as a group, significantly fewer Delawareans gave the schools an “A” (4%-7% vs. 12%) and significantly more felt they did not have enough knowledge to answer (16%-22% compared to 9%).² However, even the national percentages are not glowing. “The last year that even a slight majority of Americans (53%) told Gallup they had either a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the public schools was 1979”.³

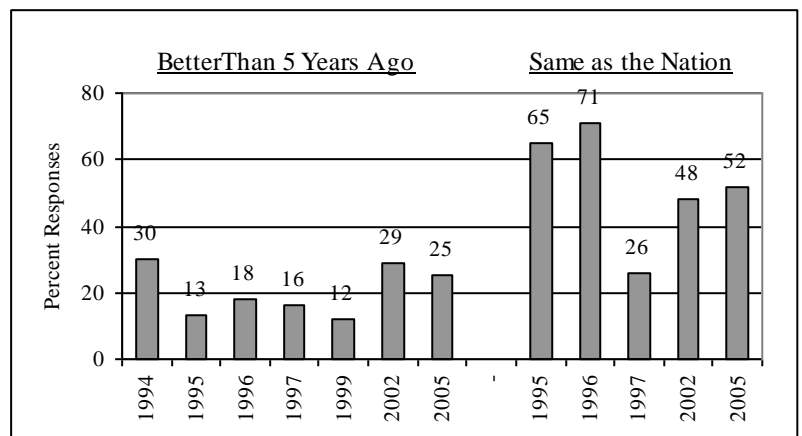
PERFORMANCE COMPARISONS

Poll Results

Residents of Delaware were asked to make two comparisons regarding educational performance in the state. Twenty-five percent of Delawareans surveyed believe public schools in their district have improved compared to five years ago. When asked where Delaware schools stand in relation to the nation, 52% of residents indicated that they are about the same, 14% said Delaware is better, and 19% said we are worse.

Putting it in Context

Public opinion has varied a great deal since these questions were asked several years ago. There was a significant drop from 1995 to 1997 in the percentage of Delawareans who believe our schools are the same as the nation’s (65% and 26%, respectively). Since then, public opinion of Delaware schools has improved and now about half of Delawareans believe our schools are better than the nation’s. The significant increase in the percentage of Delawareans who believe their schools have improved from 1999 to 2002 is maintained in 2005.¹



The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results show significant improvement in math, but not in reading for grades four and eight.⁴ They also show that significant achievement gaps remain for minority and disadvantaged students. Looking further back, the *Quality Counts at 10* report, a report detailing the past 10 years of standards-based education, Delaware scored equal or better in areas of standards and accountability, efforts to improve teacher quality, school climate, resource equity, and overall grade compared to national averages.⁵ In addition, Delaware's performance on the NAEP indicates that compared to performance in 1992, Delaware reading and math scores for grades four and eight have improved across minority and disadvantaged groups; and all achievement gaps have either remained the same or decreased. When comparing Delaware to the nation, Delaware students score the same or higher than the national average in fourth and eighth grade math and reading, for groups of minorities and economically disadvantaged students. Delaware also showed smaller or equal achievement gaps compared to the national average.

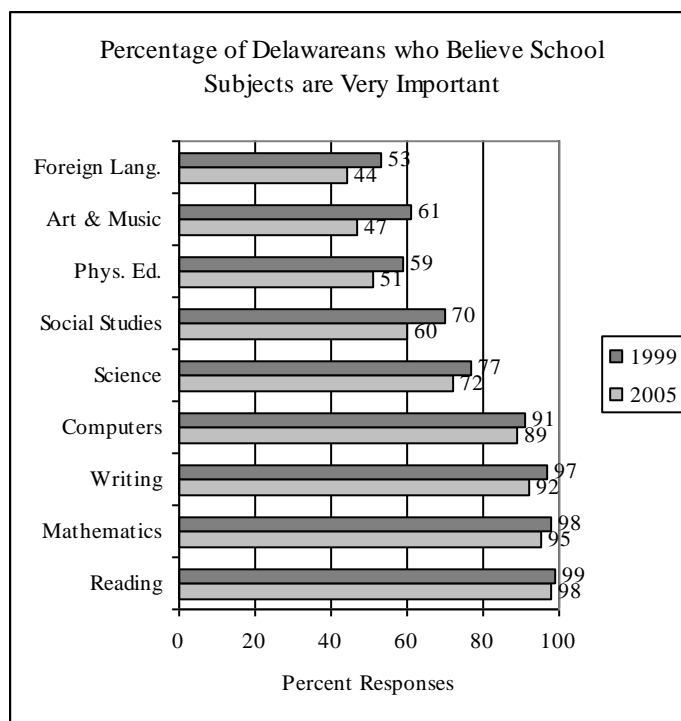
IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL SUBJECTS

Poll Results

When Delaware residents were asked about the importance of several school subjects, the greatest percentage indicated that reading (98%), mathematics (95%), writing (92%), and computers (89%) were very important. For the remaining subjects, between 44% and 72% of Delawareans said they were very important. Also, significantly more parents believe social studies (66% vs. 55%) and foreign language (51% vs. 39%) are very important.

Putting it in Context

Significantly fewer Delawareans in 2005 than in 1999 indicated that foreign language (44% vs. 53%), art and music (47% vs. 61%), physical education (51% vs. 59%), and social studies (60% vs. 70%) were very important.¹ While the Delaware data indicates that there is stronger support for what are often called "basic courses," there appear to be three levels of support in 1999 and 2005. The highest level includes reading, writing, math, and computers. The middle level includes science and social studies. The third, and lowest level, includes physical education, the arts, and foreign language. While it can not be definitively stated that Delaware opinion is running counter to national opinion, there has been a significant increase in public support at the national level over the past 25 years for diverse course offerings instead of basic courses only.³



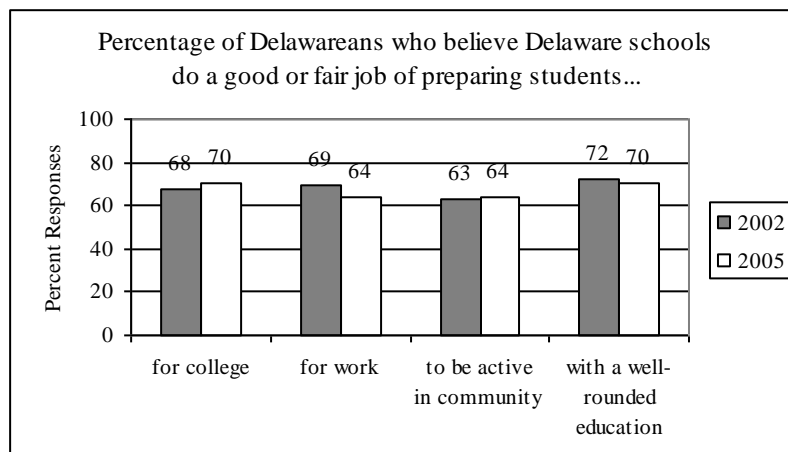
STUDENT PREPARATION

Poll Results

Most Delaware residents (64%-70%) indicated that the public school system is doing a good or fair job preparing students for college, work, active involvement in their community and society, and is providing them with a well-rounded education.

Putting it in Context

This year's results are similarly positive to those found in 2002.¹ However, two national surveys of students, employers and professors believe more needs to be done in the public schools to prepare students for the world of work and for college. A 2005 Public Agenda Poll revealed that 51% of African American and 39% of Caucasian students believe that teachers should have done more to prepare them for college.⁶ In addition, the majority of professors and employers in another national survey believe that a diploma does not guarantee that students know "the basics".⁷



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.

References

- ¹ Ackerman, C. M. (2006). *2005 Statewide public poll on the condition of education in Delaware*, at www.rdc.udel.edu.
- ² Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (2004). Retrieved April 4, 2005, from <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0409pol.pdf>
- ³ Rose, L. C., & Gallup, A. M. (2005). The 37th annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the public's attitude toward the public schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 87(1), 41-57. <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0509pol.pdf>
- ⁴ National Center for Educational Assessment. (2005). *The nation's report card*. Retrieved February 1, 2006 from <http://nces.ed.gov/national/reportcard/states>.
- ⁵ Editorial Projects in Education. (2006). *Quality counts at 10 – Delaware: A decade of standards-based education*. Retrieved February 2, 2006 from www.epe.prg/rc.
- ⁶ Public Agenda (2005). Life after high school: Young people talk about their hopes and prospects. Retrieved May 17, 2005 from <http://www.ecs.org/html/offsite.asp?document=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Epublicagenda%2Eorg%2Fresearch%2Fpdfs%2Flife%5Fafter%5Fhigh%5Fschool%2Epdf>
- ⁷ Public Agenda (2001). Education: People's chief concerns. Retrieved May 17, 2005 from http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/pcc_detail.cfm?issue_type=education&list=6.

* These error ranges used a 95% confidence interval.