

# 2009 Statewide Public Poll on Education in Delaware



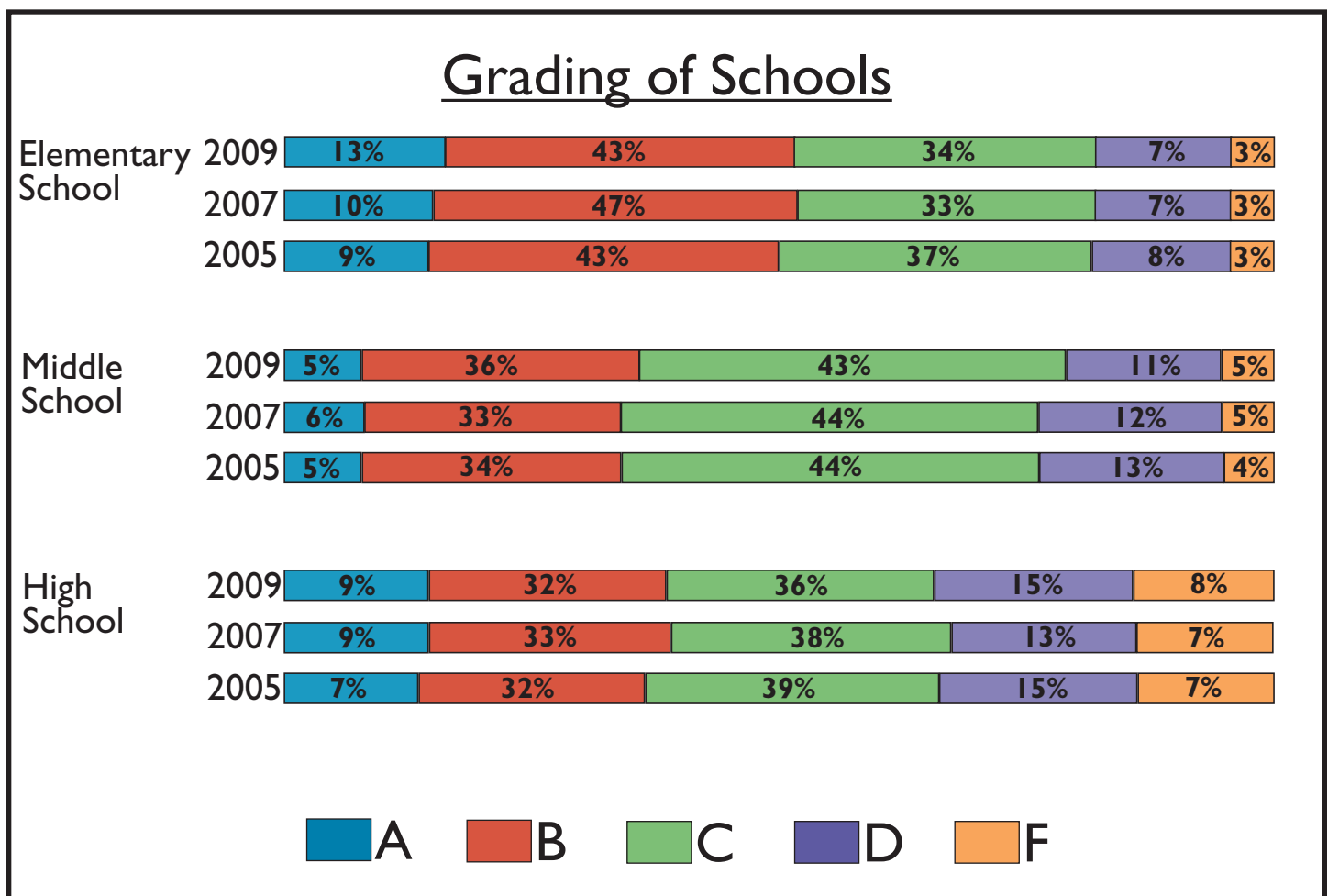
presented by the Delaware Education  
Research & Development Center at the University of Delaware

# Objective

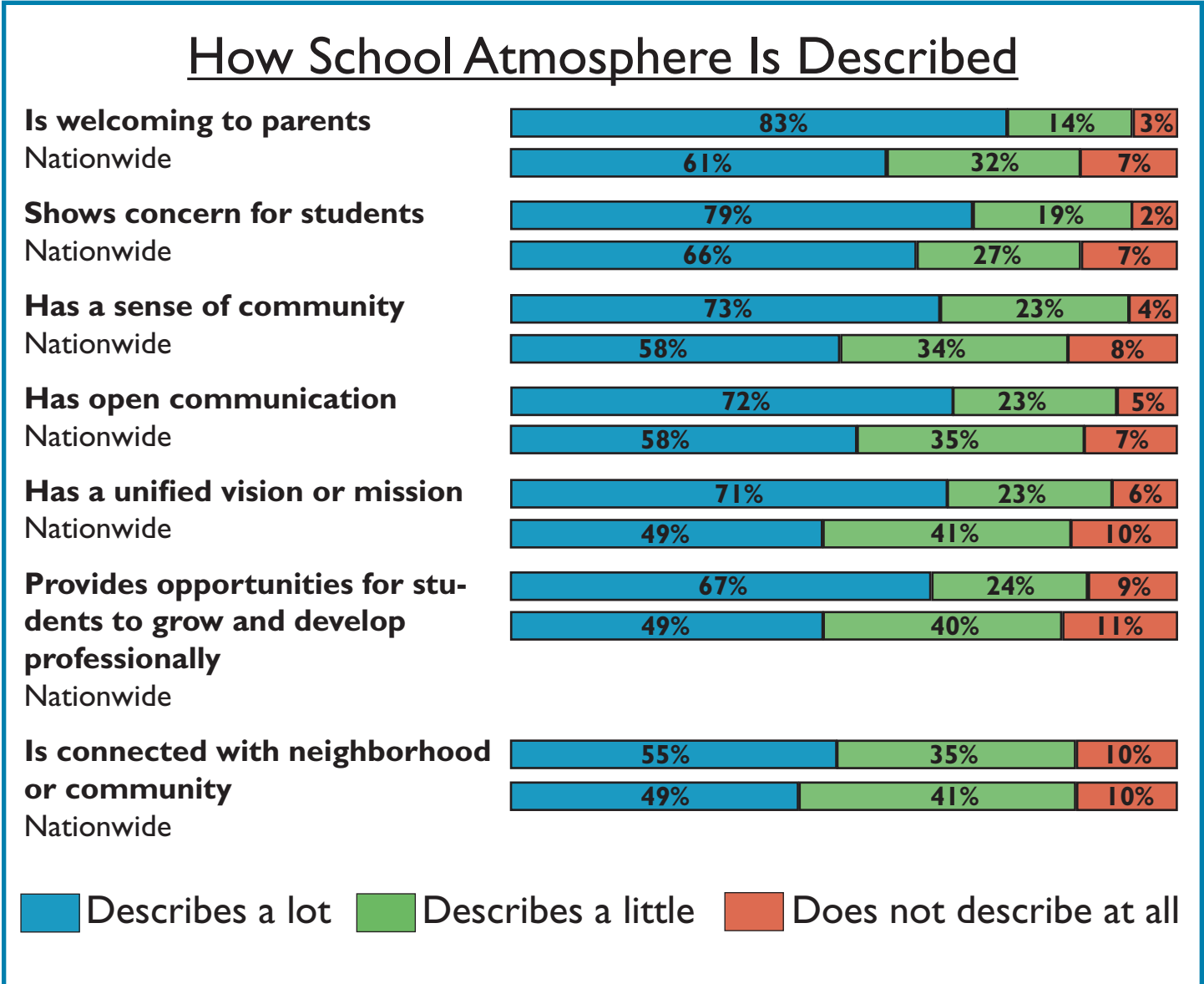
The Statewide Public Poll on Education in Delaware is conducted annually to provide feedback to state policy makers, educators, and others on public opinion about the status of education in Delaware. The poll relies on telephone interviews of approximately 900 citizens. It is conducted by the Delaware Education Research and Development Center at the University of Delaware, with support from the Delaware General Assembly. This report highlights public opinion on school quality, school finance, education policy, and Vision 2015.

## Quality of Delaware Schools

The public's ratings of Delaware public schools have remained fairly stable since 2005. Elementary schools are rated highest, middle schools next, and high schools third. This year's poll showed that 56% of Delaware residents gave elementary schools an A or B, and 41% gave middle and high schools an A or B. Overall, Delaware residents gave their schools higher grades than national ratings (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2008).



Delaware parents were asked to rate their oldest child’s school on a list of statements describing school atmosphere. As shown below, Delaware parents were much more positive than national poll results. For example, 83% of Delaware parents described their oldest child’s school as welcoming to parents, and 79% would say the school shows concern for students. These results show that Delaware parents are more positive than other parents nationally about their children’s schools.



We also asked Delaware parents to describe their oldest child’s school. Delaware parents were more positive in their descriptions of their child’s school than a national parent sample conducted by Harris Interactive (2003). Delaware parents reported that their oldest child’s schools are cooperative (78%, versus 53% nationally), safe (72%, versus 57% nationally), and caring (69%, versus 46% nationally).

# Finance

Delawareans are attuned to the current economic climate and its potential impact on education, as 80% of those polled were at least somewhat concerned that the state's budget gap will cause significant spending cuts in K-12 public education. To significantly improve the quality of Delaware's K-12 public schools, 59% of those polled believe we need to use existing state funds more wisely as well as increase the amount of state funding for education. When asked who should have the most control in deciding how money from the state is spent in local public schools, 39% stated teachers and principals and 44% stated the local school district.

Lastly, we asked Delawareans where funds should be protected and where cuts should be made in the education budget if necessary. Respondents felt that funds for teacher salaries; classroom instructional materials, resources, and technology; and tutoring for low-performing students should be protected from cuts. On the other hand, respondents felt that funds for all-day kindergarten, college credit courses for high school students, and after-school programs could be cut. Taken together, these data suggest that Delawareans feel strongly that while more state funds are needed for public education, decisions on how to spend this money should be made at the local level. They also suggest areas where spending cuts would be acceptable and unacceptable.

## Teacher salaries

Classroom instructional materials, resources, and technology

## Tutoring for low performing students

Smaller Class Size

## College credit courses for high school students

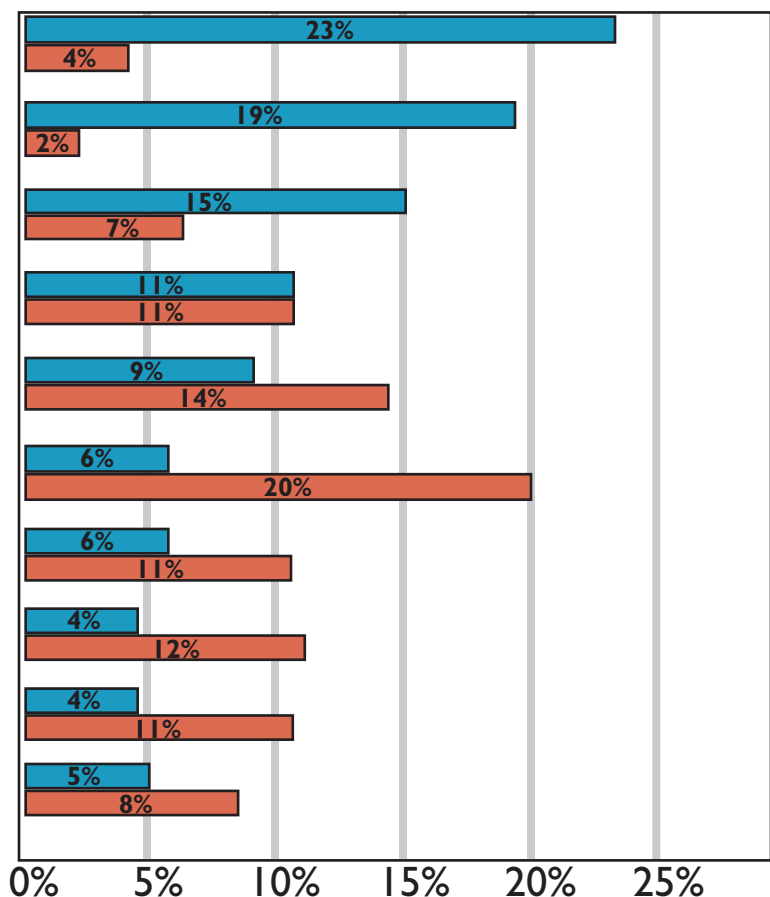
All day kindergarten

## School staff development and training

After school programs

## Athletics

Do not know



# Education Policy Issues

We asked Delaware residents a number of questions related to education policy issues facing the state. The first question focused on whether Delawareans preferred to measure student achievement on national or state standards. Slightly higher percentages of Delawareans (55%) favor national standards over state standards (40%). Nationally, the split is more evenly divided with 50% opting for national standards and 46% state standards (Gallup Poll, 2008). When asked how they prefer to measure a school's performance, 78% of the Delawareans preferred to look at students' improvement over the school year; only 22% favored examining the number of students passing state-mandated tests at the end of the year. These data closely paralleled 2008 national Gallup Poll findings.

Delaware currently does not have a pay-for-performance policy that links teacher pay to student achievement. Our poll shows that 79% of Delawareans support a career and salary system for teachers based upon their demonstrated effectiveness in the classroom. Nationally, the same percentage of people (76%) and public school parents (79%) said that they would support such a plan (Gallup Poll, 2008). Nationwide, seven states have adopted the pay-for-performance policy (EPE Research Center, 2008). The seven states are Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Texas.



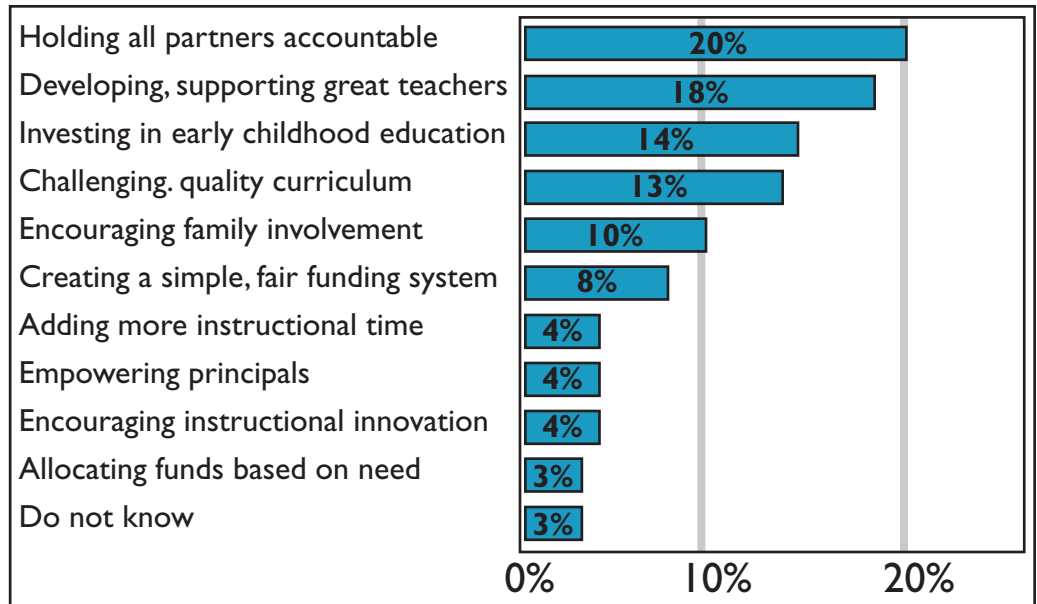
Over half of Delawareans (53%) favor the idea that all high school graduates should complete a curriculum preparing them to attend a four-year college, regardless of whether they plan to attend college. On the other hand, 44% oppose the idea. Delaware percentages are consistent with national polls (Gallup Poll, 2008) in which 51% supported this idea and 45% opposed it.

When asked whether the number of charter schools should be limited in Delaware, 34% responded positively, 59% negatively, and another 7% were unsure. National data show that 35% felt charter schools should be limited, 51% did not, and 14% are unsure (Gallup Poll, 2008). These findings are consistent with President Obama and Vice President Biden's plans to double funding to increase the number of charter schools. The Obama-Biden administration also plans to prioritize funding to help successful charter schools expand to serve more students. Another survey question asked whether the state of Delaware should offer low-interest loans to charter schools for real estate purchases and construction costs; 59% favor such loans and 41% do not.

# Vision 2015 & Beyond

Vision 2015, a collaborative effort among civic leaders throughout Delaware, makes several recommendations for how Delaware schools can become the best in the world. We asked which recommendations respondents thought most important. There has been no change since the 2008 poll, with the recommendations

“Holding all partners accountable” and “Developing and supporting great teachers” being seen as most important.



## Delaware Poll Sample

About 35% of the sample are parents of school-age children, with 22% attending public schools, 6% attending private schools, 3% attending charters, and 4% not attending school. The remaining 65% do not have school-age children. About 56% live in New Castle County, with 16% in Kent and 28% in Sussex counties. Three-fourths of the respondents are between the ages of 30 and 70. Almost four-fifths of the sample are white, 11% are African American, and smaller percentages are Hispanic, Asian, or Native American. The sample is fairly evenly divided among those who completed high school, some college, college, and advanced degrees. About 10% of the respondents report household incomes less than \$25,000, 40% between \$25,000 and \$75,000, and another 33% above \$75,000. Overall, the poll distribution closely parallels state demographic statistics.

## References

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- Harris Interactive (2003). Survey of the American Teacher, 2003: An Examination of School Leadership (18894). Retrieved April 6, 2009, from [http://arc.irss.unc.edu/dvn/dv/odvn/faces/study/StudyPage.xhtml?studyId=2281&studyListingIndex=7\\_c18b7e9ce1f98922c92ab98964ef&rvn=9](http://arc.irss.unc.edu/dvn/dv/odvn/faces/study/StudyPage.xhtml?studyId=2281&studyListingIndex=7_c18b7e9ce1f98922c92ab98964ef&rvn=9)
- Vision 2015: Imagine the best schools in the world for every student in Delaware. <http://www.vision2015delaware.org/>