

Statewide Survey of 700 Adults in California on Charter Schools

Introduction and Methodology

the polling company™, inc. is pleased to present to the **Center for Education Reform** the results and analysis of a statewide telephone survey of 700 adults in California and a nationwide survey of 800 adults in the United States of America. Interviews were conducted January 5-11, 2005 at a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) facility by telephone and with live callers.

The survey sample was drawn utilizing a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) method where phone numbers were generated by a computer to ensure that every household had an equal chance to be surveyed. Once a household was selected for participation, a trained interviewer asked to speak with a person over the age of 18.

The original survey instrument contained 47 questions, including 2 open-ended and 21 demographic questions, and was approved by the client prior to data collection.

Interviewers administered the same survey to all participants. Sampling controls were used to ensure that a proportional and representative number of people were interviewed from such demographic groups as age, race, and gender. Topline data is attached as Appendix A.

The margin of error for the California survey is $\pm 3.7\%$ at a 95% confidence interval, meaning that the data obtained would not differ by any more than 3.7 percentage points in either direction had the entire population of adults had been surveyed. The margin of error for the national survey was $\pm 3.5\%$. Margins of error for subgroups in each of the surveys are higher.

Executive Summary & Analysis

A Penny for their Thoughts. In order to capture Californians' top-of-mind, unbiased thoughts and opinions about charter schools, survey respondents were asked, in open-ended fashion, to reveal the first thing that came into their minds after hearing the term "charter schools." They were then further probed and invited to offer more details, explanations and definitions of "charter schools."

The most common response to this query was no response at all—28% of Californians either declined to answer or claimed they did not know enough about the schools to venture a guess. More than one-quarter (26%) of respondents offered a description of the **structure** of charter schools—some more accurate than others. Another 25% attempted to define the **type of school** they believed charters to be, but only 3% correctly identified charters as "public schools" while 10% deemed them "private." One in five (20%) had something **positive** to say about the schools, five times the number who made a **negative** remark (4%). A final 5% referenced **money** or **funding**.

The responses revealed the lack of factual information and the preponderance of misconceptions surrounding charter schools in California.

Open-ended question: When you hear the term "charter schools" what is the first thing that you think of? How would you define or explain a "charter school"?

Selected Verbatim Responses of Interviewees in California

"I think it's a school funded by private money, where the elite would go."

"Charter schools offer a more focused education."

"Charter schools are set up by parents who don't want to be responsible for what's going in the public schools. So they start their own school with their own rules."

"I think charter schools are where parents and teachers work together for the welfare of the child."

"Excellent administrations and faculty dedicated to the productivity of the children."

"A school where they follow the state's curriculum but yet they have their own standards as well."

"A private school that is an additional expense to parents."

"I don't like Charter Schools. They take money away from public schools."

"Charter Schools are independent. They do things their own way; they are smaller and have more one-on-one teaching."

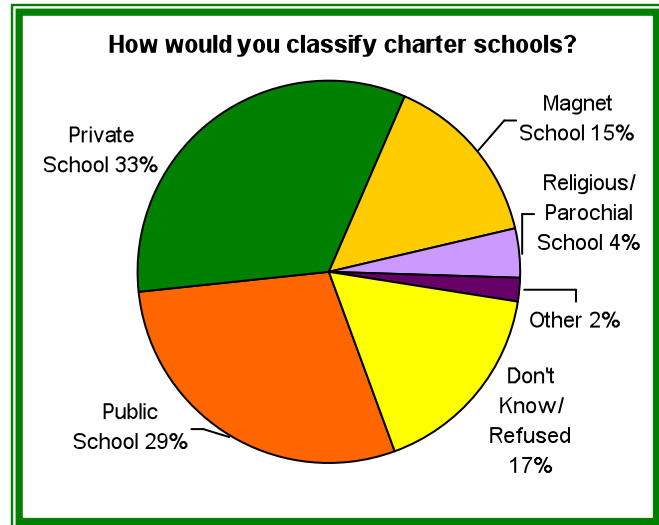
"A charter school is a public school. I think it is more important to fix the public schools that we have, rather than try to create new schools, each with different standards, for each neighborhood or community."

"I believe that charter schools are schools that have heavy interaction and involvement with the parents. Parents are part of the educational process and children are given more attention."

"I think of innovation not regulated by bureaucracy of public school administration."

Back to Basics: Learning the ABC's of Charter Schools. Less than one out of every three respondents correctly identified charters as “public schools” (29%).

“Private schools” was the most common, albeit incorrect, answer at 33%, followed by “magnet schools” (15%). Californians were fairly confident that charters were not “religious schools” as only 4% selected that option. A sizeable 17% indicated that they simply did not know—even when provided with a list of answer choices.



- Groups more likely than most to know (or correctly guess) that charters were **public schools** included Hispanics, women, 45-54 year olds, senior citizens, college graduates, parents with children in private school, those who did not work outside the home, students, registered Democrats and self-identified liberals.
- Knowledge of the correct classification of charters as “public schools” increased with household income:
 - 19% of those earning less than \$30,000 per year;
 - 23% of those earning \$30,000-\$49,999 per year;
 - 28% of those earning \$50,000-\$89,999; and,
 - 35% of Californians earning more than \$90,000 per year identified charters as public.
- Those more apt than respondents overall to believe charters were **private schools** included respondents earning less than \$30,000 per year, Blacks, 35-44 year olds, single parents—especially single moms, and blue-collar workers. Unfortunately, this result shows that some of the stereotypes about charters have been imprinted in the minds of the very groups who could benefit the most from charters.
- Californians were significantly better informed than other adults nationwide: 38% of national adults believed charters were private schools, compared to 33% of Californians, while just 20% of Americans in general correctly identified charters as public schools versus 29% of Californians.

Communities Taking Charge of their Children's Education. Though most Californians were uninformed or ill-informed about charter schools and their structure at the start of this survey, it took nothing more than a straightforward explanation of the nature, structure and “charter” of these new public schools to rally support among Golden Staters. **In fact, 81% of Californians supported “allowing communities to create new public schools—called charter schools—that would be held accountable for student results and would be required to meet the same academic standards/testing requirements as other public schools but not cost taxpayers any additional money, a description that was both objective and comprehensive.”** The intensity of this support was pronounced, as a sound majority (56%) indicated they were “strongly” in favor of the idea. Just 13% would oppose allowing communities to form charter schools.

- Single moms (86%) and parents with children who attended private schools (87%) were the parent groups most strongly advocating the formation of charters. Not-Yet-Moms¹ were among staunchest supporters of any demographic group studied (85%).
- Other groups enthusiastic about the concept included those earning less than \$30,000 per year, rural residents, adults with less than a high school education, white-collar workers, blue-collar workers, students and those not registered to vote.
- Low-income Hispanics, Asians and Whites (less than \$30,000 per year) were all among the most supportive groups with respect to income. The strongest support in the Black community came from those earning between \$30,000 and \$50,000 per year.
- Though every demographic group supported the formation of charters by a huge majority, there were a few more likely than respondents overall to oppose them including junior seniors (those aged 55-64), parents of children who attended religious schools, part-time workers, the unemployed, and self-identified liberals.
- Californians were a bit more likely to embrace this idea than adults nationwide (81%-78%).

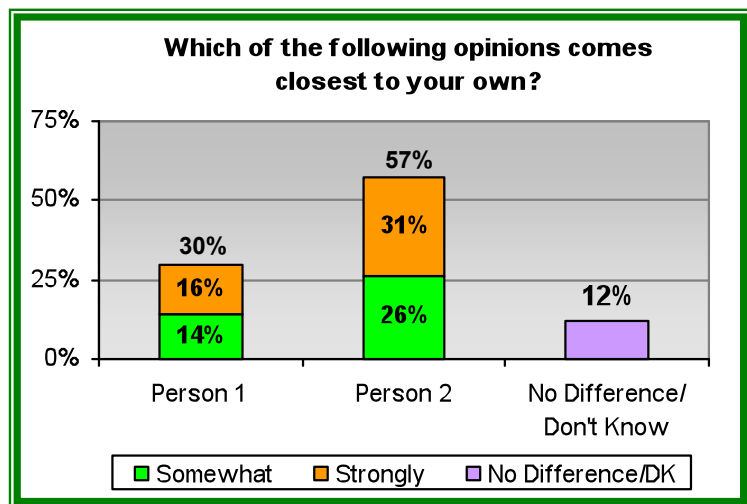
¹ Women who do not currently have children, but indicate that they are very or somewhat likely to have them within five years.

A Healthy Amount of Skepticism. Lately, groups campaigning against charter schools, with the help of the national media, have attempted to denigrate the quality of the schools and sensationalize some government data that suggests some charter school students are lagging behind in performance compared their traditional public school peers. Californians, however, remain largely unconvinced.

In order to evaluate the sway these federal data hold on the public, respondents were told that, “*Recently there have been reports, based on information collected by the federal government, of students’ academic performance in conventional public and charter schools. These data show that students in charter schools are sometimes slightly behind students in other public schools academically.*” They were then asked to indicate their feelings on what they had just been told through agreement with one of the two following statements:

Person 1: “Reports from the government that some charter school students are performing less well compared to conventional public school students concerns me when thinking about the quality of charter schools.”

Person 2: “There is other, more reliable information about charter schools besides government-based data that should be considered when thinking about the quality of such schools.”



Californians aligned themselves with Person 2 over Person 1 by nearly a 2:1 margin—**57% believed that sources more reliable than government data should be considered when evaluating the quality of charter schools** (Person 2), while **30% were alarmed upon learning that there was government data questioning student performance in charter schools** (Person 1). Therefore, it would be wise to supply additional data and pieces of information. CER, the alternative educational movement, and charter school proponents should be the messengers for these information points.

An “intra-parents” gap emerged within the demographic distinctions, these included:

- Parents were 15-points more likely than non-parents to look to other, non-government data when evaluating the quality of charter schools (Person 2) (62%-47%).
- Specific parent groups most likely to be of the mind to seek other sources (Person 2) included those with children attending religious schools (77%), single parents generally (72%), single moms (68%), and divorced parents (67%).

- Not-Yet-Moms were among the groups most likely to admit being concerned by the government data on charter schools (Person 1) (46% vs. 29% respondents overall and 37% of all non-parents).
- *Across the broader demographic spectrum*, those more likely than average to remain unconvinced by the government studies' findings (Person 2) included Hispanics, Whites, Californians earning greater than \$90,000 per year, those who attend religious services on a monthly basis, and registered Republicans (with Republican women most stalwart in their support).
- Groups more likely than most to indicate concern over the government findings (Person 1) included those earning \$70,000-\$89,999 per year, Blacks, 18-34 year olds, those who attend weekly religious services, blue-collar workers, registered Independents—especially Independent men, and those not registered to vote.
- Results from this survey were similar to the nationwide survey: Californians split 57%-30% in favor of Person 2 while adults nationwide were 55%-31% in favor of Person 2.

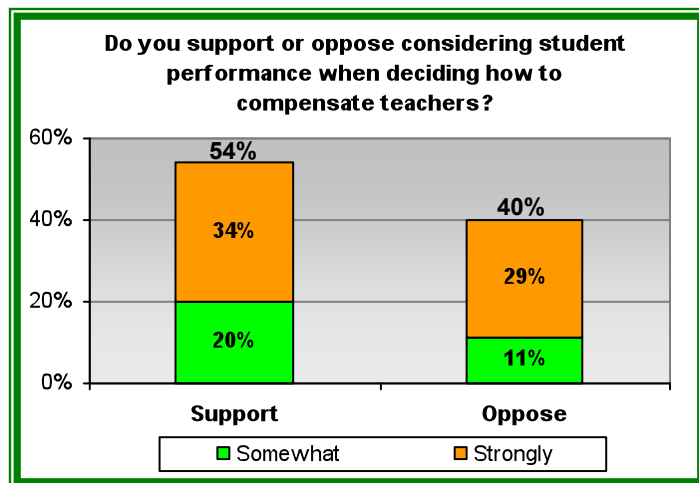
Urging Teachers to Earn their Keep. For most working Americans, the amount of money they take home each year is directly correlated with their on-the-job performance—those who produce results are paid more than those who do not.

Californians believe teachers' salaries should be determined, in part, by the same standards. **More than half of all respondents (54%) supported**

“considering student performance when deciding how to compensate teachers. Under this plan, a teacher whose students actually perform well would receive a higher salary and additional financial rewards.”

More than one-third (34%) did so with strong intensity.

However, four-in-ten (40%) Californians rejected this notion, 29% of them “strongly.”



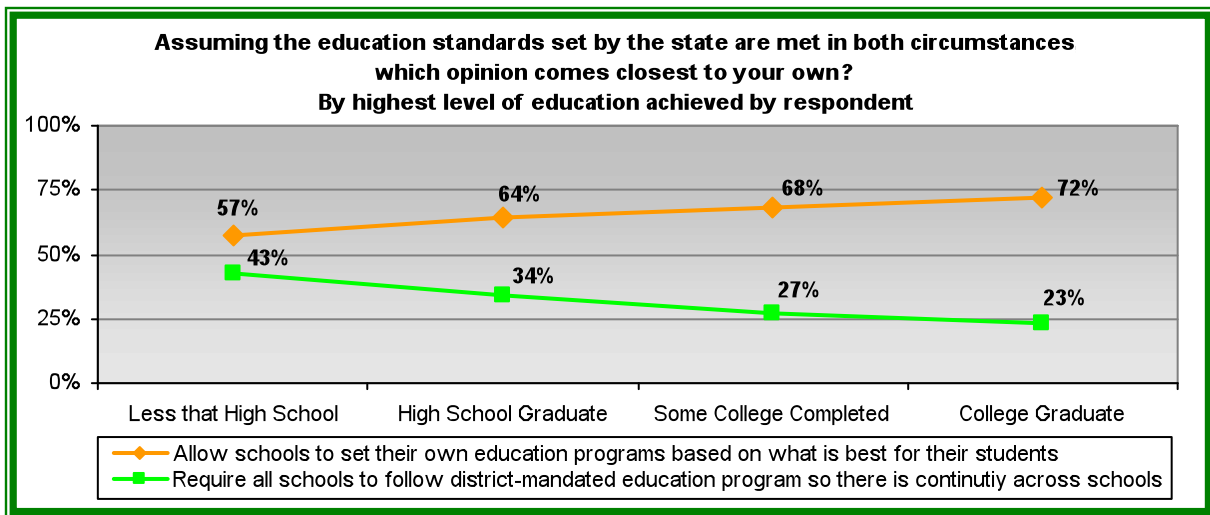
- Non-parents were 6-points more likely than their child-rearing counterparts to favor performance-based pay for teachers (58%-52%). Single parents were the only parent-group top non-parents in their support of tying teachers' paychecks to student achievement (62%)
- Divorced parents (47%) and Not-Yet-Moms (60%) were most outspoken in their opposition to the concept.

- *Across the broader demographic spectrum*, groups more likely than most to support this method of teacher compensation included men, those earning less than \$30,000 per year, Blacks, Asians, 18-34 year olds, those with less than a high school education, those who had completed some college coursework, white collar workers, blue-collar workers, students, registered Republicans—men in particular, those not registered to vote, and self-identified conservatives.
- Groups more likely than average to oppose linking teacher pay to student performance included Whites, women, 35-44 year olds, junior seniors, college graduates, executives, registered Democrats (especially female Dems) and Independents, and self-identified liberals.
- Californians, who supported the measure 54%-40%, are a slightly tougher audience than Americans as a whole, since 59% of them favored it and 34% opposed it.

Flexible Curricula, Rigid Standards. Californians were absolutely clear in their demand for all schools to meet government standards. When it comes to the methods employed to achieve these goals, however, respondents demonstrated considerable flexibility. **Nearly seven-in-ten (69%) residents of the Golden State asserted that, “as long as the school still meets the standards set by the state, schools should have the opportunity to select their education programs based on what might be best for the students, even if it differs from other schools in their area.” A robust 46% felt so “strongly.”** By comparison 27% believed that, “*in order to meet the required state standards, all schools should use the same educational program that is mandated by their local district or state so that there is continuity among schools and students.*”

- Single parents (76%) and single moms (73%) were among the only parent groups more likely than average to advocate allowing schools to set their own educational programs.
- Other proponents included those earning greater than \$90,000 per year, Whites, Hispanics, 18-34 year olds, college graduates, Protestants, those who attend religious service a few times per year, part-time workers, and self-identified liberals.
- While support among Whites was concentrated among those aged 35-44 and 55-64, **the Hispanics most in favor of flexible curricula were aged 18-34.**

- The likelihood of a respondent embracing the idea of giving individual schools the power to control their own education programs was linked with the respondent's own level of schooling. As the following chart illustrates, the more educated one was, the more likely he or she was to support this type and degree of flexibility.



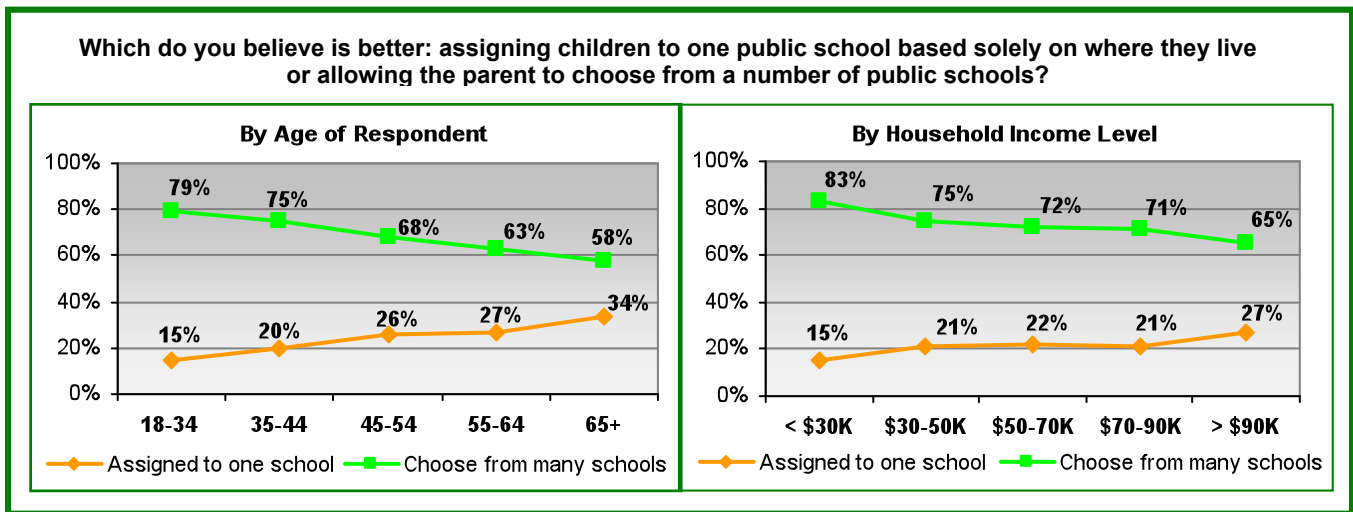
- Californians were more likely than Americans overall to support allowing schools to employ different methods, so long as they met government standards (69%-63%)

Residence Should Not be a Restriction. Short of having the means and the desire to relocate one's family to another neighborhood—and therefore another school district—parents are virtually powerless with respect to the public school that educates their child. Californians agree that this is simply not right.

When told that, “currently, children attending public schools are assigned to the school they attend by the school district based on where they live. Some have suggested, however, that parents should have the option to send their children to a number of different public schools, with no additional cost, based on which is the best match for the child.” **In response to this, 71% preferred having additional choices, rather than those who opted for assigning to one school, by more than a 3:1 margin (22%).**

- Non-parents were 5-points more likely than parents to advocate choice from a number of schools (75%-70%), while parents were 8-points more than those without children to feel assigning children to one school was the better way (24%-16%).
- Single parents (80%), single moms (78%), and divorced parents (75%) supported choice at greater rates than other parents. Not-Yet-Moms (82%), who are not yet affected, were also firmly in favor of giving parents options.

- Groups more likely than most to endorse the idea of providing parents a choice for their children to attend a number of public schools included Blacks, Asians, high school graduates, blue-collar workers, those who worked outside the home part-time or not at all, and registered Independents.
- Two demographic characteristics emerged as reliable predictors of a respondent's support for either a choice of many public schools or assigning children to a single school: household income and age. **As the following graphs show, the tendency of a respondent to wish to keep the current restrictions in place increased with that respondent's age and household income.**



- Californians differed in support (71%-22%) by just two points from adults nationwide (69%-24%).

Tough Choices, Transformative Events. The center of the alternative education movement adheres to the core concept, if not governing American value, “choice.” The idea is simple: the fundamental freedoms that attach to all individuals in this country should not be abandoned once one becomes a parent and places their children in a public school.

The situations that may lead a parent or guardian to remove a child from a school encapsulate a wide range of school failings. In order to evaluate these situations, respondents were asked to imagine a child they knew or cared for in each of nine common situations and individually evaluate the likelihood that such a circumstance would lead them to pull that child from a particular school.

Each interviewee was asked to evaluate each stand-alone hypothetical situation, which were rotated to avoid order bias. What follows is an analysis of all nine situations, rank-ordered from highest to lowest in terms of the number of respondents who would transfer a child after learning that information about his or her school.

Parental Threshold

Question: Please think for a moment about the public schools in your area. For each of the following statements, please tell me whether knowing this fact would make you very, somewhat, just a little bit or not at all likely to move your child out of that school after learning this information. If you do not currently have children, please imagine a niece, nephew or child of a friend...

- The child feels unsafe while at school.
- You are not able to regularly communicate with the teachers.
- The school is not meeting the standardized test score requirements set by the government.
- The school building and facilities are not well-maintained or in need of repair.
- The child expresses an interest in changing schools.
- The child is performing poorly academically.
- There is negative media coverage of the school.
- There are not enough after-school activities.
- Other parents are transferring their children to different schools.

1. “The child feels unsafe while at school.” 83% Likely to Transfer

If a child does not feel secure at school, that chance that he or she will be able to learn and grow in such an environment is severely diminished. **By a 7:1 margin, Californians deemed a child feeling unsafe at school enough justification to transfer with 83% saying they would move a child from such a school compared to just 12% who would not.** This reaction came with pronounced intensity, as 68% of respondents indicated they would be “very likely” to remove a child from a school where he or she felt unsafe. Resonance with this circumstance notably exceeded that with any other: likelihood of transfer was 8-points greater than second ranked situation, and 12-points greater than the third.

- Though parents generally were slightly *less* likely than non-parents to report they would transfer a child who felt unsafe (82%-85%), parents with children who attended private schools (91%) and parents of two children (87%) were more likely to act along with the parents of the future, Not-Yet-Moms (96%).

- Others more likely than respondents overall to remove a child from a school where he or she felt unsafe were 35-44 year olds—including 100% of Blacks, 94% of Asians, and 92% of Whites aged 35-44, those earning \$50,000-\$69,999 per year, rural residents, those who attend religious services daily or weekly, part-time workers, those who do not work outside the home, registered Republicans, especially Republican women, and registered Independents.
- Californians were 5-points more likely than adults nationwide to transfer a child in this situation (83%-78%).

***II. “You are not able to regularly communicate with the teachers.”
75% Likely to Transfer***

Perhaps one of the most effective and efficient ways for parents to be aware and involved with their child’s education is through frequent interaction with the child’s teachers.

Three-quarters of Californians surveyed (75%) stated that the inability to regularly communicate with a child’s teachers would lead them to transfer a child out of that school. In fact, nearly half of all respondents (46%) would be “very likely” to do so. By comparison, just 21% would not move a child out of a school under this circumstance.

- Interestingly, as the number of children a parent had increased, the less likely that parent was to transfer those children due to a lack of teacher communication: 79% of those without children, 76% of parents of one child, 75% of parents of two children, and 67% of those with three children would move a child from his or her school in this situation.
- Parents with children in private schools (89%), single parents (81%), single moms in particular (88%), and Not-Yet-Moms (80%) were all more likely than most to deem a lack of contact with teachers unacceptable.
- Other groups more likely to remove the child from school included Blacks, 35-44 year olds, those earning less than \$30,000 per year, particularly Asians, Blacks and Hispanics in this income group, part-time workers, the unemployed, and adults not registered to vote.
- Residents of the Golden State were five-points more likely to transfer than adults nationwide (75%-70%).

III. “The school is not meeting the standardized test score requirements set by the government.” 71% Likely to Transfer

There are many ways to judge the quality and achievement of a school, but none as popular or lauded as standardized test scores. Not only do these scores capture the attention of parents and teachers, but also of the media and the government. As a result of the societal importance placed on standardized test scores, **more than seven-in-ten (71%) respondents would move a child out of a school that failed to meeting the test score requirements set by the government—and 44% would be “very likely” to do so.** Just one-quarter (25%) did feel this circumstance was justification for transfer.

- While there was no difference in likelihood of transfer between parents and non-parents (each 71% likely), within the subgroup of parents there was a 9-point spread between parents of one child (76%), parents of two children (71%), and parents of three children (67%).
- Parents with children in private schools (87%), single parents (79%), single moms in particular (86%), and Not-Yet-Moms (78%) were all more likely than most to remove a child from a school not meeting test score requirements.
- Groups more likely than most to transfer include Blacks, especially Blacks earning less than \$50,000 per year, 35-44 year olds—most notably Black and Hispanic 35-44 year olds, those earning less than \$30,000 per year, those who attend religious services a few times a year, and students.
- Californians were 6-points more likely than national adults to indicate they would pull a child from a school not meeting these government requirements.

IV. “The school building and facilities are not well-maintained or in need of repair.” 71% Likely to Transfer

Though probably not unsafe or directly linked to a child’s ability to learn, the thought of crumbling school buildings makes Californians cringe. **In fact, 71% indicated they would move a child out of a school whose buildings and facilities were in a state of disrepair and 44% were adamant in this decision.** A much smaller 26% of respondents did not deem this situation a compelling reason to transfer a child.

- Non-parents were 8-points more likely than parents to be upset by school buildings in need of renovation. Remaining stalwart in their refusal to accept anything less than exceptional were single parents (83%), single moms (90%), Not-Yet-Moms (92%), and parents with children in private school (80%).
- Others more likely to move a child out of such a school included Blacks (particularly Blacks earning less than \$30,000 per year and those aged 44 and younger), 18-34 year olds, high school graduates, part-time workers, those who do not work outside the home, students, the unemployed and those not registered to vote.

- While registered Independents overall did not vary significantly from the overall results, Independent women were 10-points more likely to transfer than their Independent male counterparts (73%-63%).
- A trend emerged across the income spectrum for this situation: the higher one's annual household income, the less likely he or she was to remove a child from a school with facilities in need of repair.
- Californians were slightly more likely than nationwide respondents to transfer under this circumstance (71%-68%).

V. "The child expresses an interest in changing schools." 57% Likely to Transfer

When determining what school best meets a child's needs, a sizeable number of Californians are willing to consider the child's own opinions; 57% of respondents indicated they would likely move a child from a school if that child expressed an interest in doing so. The intensity in this declaration, however, was notably lacking as just 24% would be "very likely" to transfer the child compared to 33% who would be just "somewhat likely." More than one-third (35%) of Californians reported they would be unlikely to act on the child's wishes.

- Respondents without children were 14-points more likely than their child-rearing counterparts to consider transferring a child who expressed such an interest (66%-52%), indicating that those who are actually parents adhere more stringently to the notion that parents know best.
- Those more likely than most to cede some control over where a child attends school to the child him or herself include Blacks, in particular Blacks aged 35-54, 45-54 year olds, the unemployed, and students.
- Californians were more open to a child's input than other Americans overall (57% likely to transfer-53% nationwide).

VI. "The child is performing poorly academically." 56% Likely to Transfer

Though demanding that schools meet government standards regarding performance on standardized tests, respondents did not place as high a priority on an individual child's achievement—**56% of Californians would transfer a child from a school if that child were performing poorly academically** (compared to the 71% who would move a child out of a school whose test scores were lagging), with 30% "very likely" to do so. By comparison, 35% would not pull a child from his or her school for this reason and 24% would be "not at all" inclined to transfer.

- Single moms and parents of children who attended private school were among the only parent groups more likely than others to transfer a child in this situation (66% and 70%, respectively)

- Blacks, women, those earning \$50,000-\$69,999 per year, rural residents, 45-54 year olds and juniors seniors, Catholics, those who attend religious services just a few times per year, those who stay at home, retirees, Californians not registered to vote, and self-identified liberals were all more likely than most to move a child out of a school for this reason.
- Though Republicans as a whole did not differ significantly from respondents overall, Republican women were 12-points more likely to transfer than their male counterparts (60%-48%).
- Californians were 3-points more likely than adults nationwide to pull a child out of a school where he or she was not performing well (56%-53%).

VII. “There is negative media coverage of the school.” 53% Likely to Transfer

Though the media may no longer be the bastion of integrity it once was, Californians are still reticent to send their children to a school criticized by the press. **A slim majority (53%) reported they would likely remove a child from a school receiving negative media coverage.** This majority was of mixed intensity, as 26% would be “very likely” to transfer and 27% just “somewhat.” Nearly four-in-ten (40%) of respondents proclaimed they would not pull a child from a school under these circumstances with 28% “not at all” likely to do so.

- Non-parents were significantly more likely to be upset by negative press about a school (62%-48%). Single moms were an exception to that rule (62% likely to transfer). Not-Yet-Moms would be similarly ruffled by the media (73%).
- Groups most likely to transfer a child as a result of unflattering news reports included those with household incomes less than \$30,000 per year or between \$50,000 and \$69,999 per year, Blacks, Asians, 18-34 year olds, part-time workers, blue-collar workers and students.
- An interesting trend emerged across the age spectrum: the older a respondent was, the less likely he or she was to view media criticism as a reason to move a child out of a particular school.
- Golden State residents were 5-points more likely than adults nationwide to pull a child out of a school receiving negative media attention (53%-48%).

VIII. “There are not enough after-school activities.” 41% Likely to Transfer

Though certainly a benefit, after-school activities are clearly not a requirement for Californians as **just four-in-ten (41%) would pull a child out of a school that did not offer enough after-hours extra-curriculars and only 17% reported being “very likely” to do so.** A majority of respondents (55%) did not view the lack of activities justification enough to send the child to a different school (41% were adamant in this judgment).

- Non-parents were 13-points more likely to transfer a child from such a school than those with children of their own (50%-37%). Parents going it alone—divorced parents (47%), single parents (52%), and single moms in particular (59%)—were more apt to require after-school programs. Not-Yet-Moms were also more apt to look for another school (59%).
- Blacks were far and away the group most likely to transfer a child due to a lack of after-school activities, with Blacks aged 35-44 and those earning less than \$50,000 per year leading the charge.
- Other groups more likely to move a child in this situation included those earning \$30,000-\$49,999 per year, 45-54 year olds, respondents with less than a high school diploma, those attending monthly religious services, part-time workers, blue-collar workers, registered Democrats (particularly Democrat men), and self-identified moderates.
- Californians were a bit less likely than adults nationwide to view a paucity of after-school programs as reason to transfer (41%-43%).

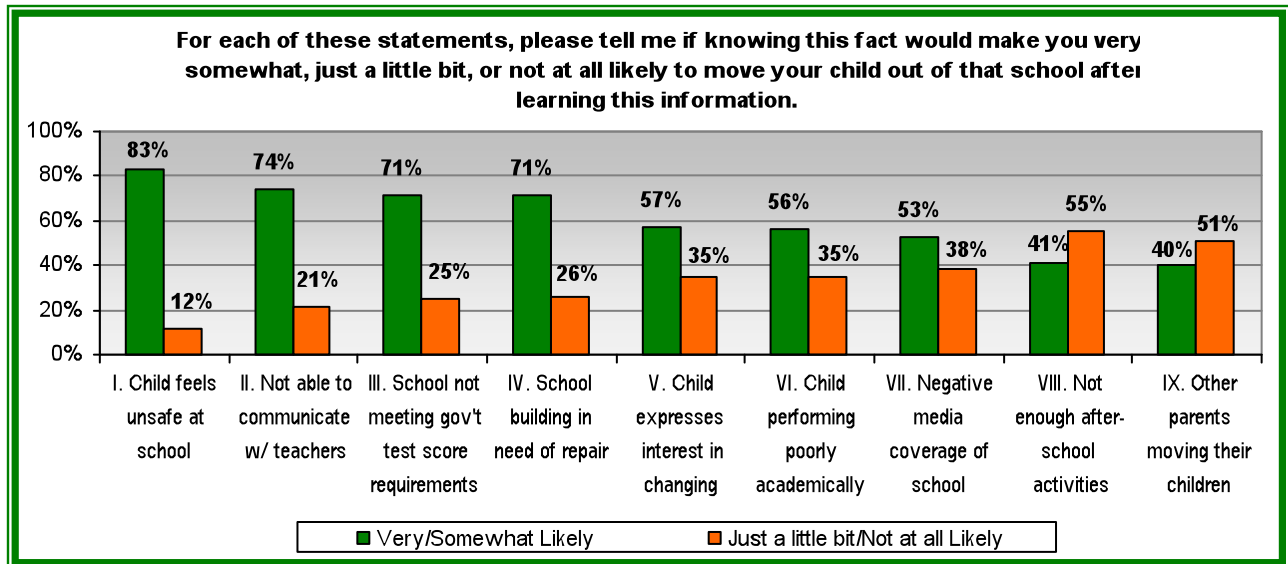
IX. “Other parents are transferring their children to different schools.” 40% Likely to Transfer

Just as parents instruct their children not to justify an action with the excuse that “everybody’s doing it,” adults in California resisted caving into “parental peer pressure” when deciding whether to transfer a child out of his or her current school. **Just 40% admitted they would be likely to move a child out of a school if other parents were doing the same, with only 16% being “very likely” to take action.** A slim majority (51%), reported the decisions of other parents would not affect their own with 39% quite sure of their reply.

- Those without children, specifically non-parents (49%) and Not-Yet-Moms (56%), were far more likely than both parents (35%) and respondents overall (40%) to look to others when making their own decision.
- Those most apt to transfer a child after learning that other parents were doing so included Asians, Blacks, those earning less than \$30,000 per year, blue-collar workers, part-time workers, students, those attending religious services on a yearly basis, and registered Independents.
- There was little difference between Californians likelihood to transfer and that of adults nationwide (40%-39%).

As the nearby chart demonstrates, Californians seemed to arrange the nine situations into four basic groups:

- **Urgent Action Required (I):** 83% Transfer Rate. The threat to the child’s personal safety necessitates immediate attention.
- **High Importance (II-IV):** 74%-71% Transfer Rate. A failure of the child’s current school to meet his or her needs that can be attributed specifically to that school.
- **Medium Importance (V-VII):** 57%-53% Transfer Rate. The link between the child’s current school and the problem is not concrete and the situation may persist even after a child switches schools.
- **Low Importance (VIII-IX):** 41%-40% Transfer Rate. The perceived influence of these situations on the child’s ability to get a quality education is small.



Finding the Message that will get Californians “Buzzing.” Though two words may share the same basic definition, their accompanying associations and connotations can potentially be very different. That is why the formulation of a precise message that is both clear and compelling is so important to the Charter School movement.

In order to uncover the fine distinctions that will convert those sitting on the sidelines into active contributors, respondents were asked to evaluate nine “buzz” words attached to the alternative education movement and indicate whether they would feel favorably or unfavorably towards a public school that emphasized the concept.

Every respondent evaluated each of the nine terms, which were rotated to avoid any order bias. The following points are analyses of each term, rank ordered from highest to lowest by “favorability.”

Level of Impact of “Buzz” Words

Question: I am now going to read to you a list of descriptive terms. For each, please tell me if you would feel favorable or unfavorable towards a public school that emphasized it.

“ACCOUNTABILITY”

“STANDARDS”

“INNOVATION”

“OPTIONS”

“CHOICE”

“REGULATION”

“FREEDOM”

“CONTROL”

“AUTONOMY”

I. “ACCOUNTABILITY” 92% Favorable

Californians overwhelmingly embraced the ideas of responsibility and consequences with their 92% favorability rating of a public school that embraced

“accountability.” Perhaps even more impressive is that 70% reported they would feel “strongly” favorable towards such a school. A negligible 4% of respondents would react negatively—which is the approximate margin of error for the entire survey.

- Parents were four-points more likely overall than non-parents to support a school prioritizing “accountability” (93%-89%) and 6-points more likely to do so “strongly” (72%-66%). Single parents (95%), parents of children who attended private or religious institutions (96%, 98%) were similarly supportive, as were Not-Yet-Moms (96%).
- Though the term enjoyed almost universal appeal, a few groups were a bit more likely than the rest to favor it including, rural Californians, those who had completed some college courses, blue-collar workers, students, and self-identified conservatives.
- Though Republicans overall did not differ significantly from respondents generally, Republican men were 6-points more likely than Republican women to embrace the idea.
- Adults in California were in line with the national counterparts in their reaction to a school emphasizing “accountability,” each with 92% favorability.

II. “STANDARDS” 89% Favorable

While some believe all Californians to be of the “hang loose,” surfer-dude mentality, survey respondents are clear that such is not the case when it comes to the education of their children. **Nearly nine-in-ten (89%) would feel favorably towards a school that embraced “standards,” and 66% “strongly” so.** A meager 6% would not respond with the same enthusiasm.

- Parents were a bit more likely than their childless counterparts to support the concept (90%-86%), with parents of children attending private or religious schools (93%, 95%) among the strongest advocates.
- **An eye-popping 100% of single moms would feel favorably towards a school emphasizing “standards.”**
- Others more likely to favor such a school included those earning less than \$30,000 per year, Blacks (including 100% of Blacks under the age of 45 and 100% of Blacks earning \$50,000 per year or more), Catholics, students, and self-identified conservatives.
- Californians differed almost imperceptibly from adults nationwide (89%-90%, respectively).

III. “INNOVATION” 87% Favorable

Proving that they understand that the way of the past is not necessarily the best approach to the future, **California residents would favor a public school that emphasized “innovation” by a margin of more than 14:1.** While 87% prioritized finding new and creative methods and 61% of them did so without reservation, just 6% reported they would feel unfavorably towards schools thinking outside the box.

- Divorced parents (97%) were the only parent group to vary significantly in favorability from parents generally or respondents overall (both 86%).
- Others more supportive of “innovation” included those earning between \$50,000 and \$89,999 per year, 55-64 year olds—most notably White and Asian 55-64 year olds, white-collar workers, part-time workers, and self-identified moderates.
- Californians remained in step with their national counterparts in evaluation of this term (87%-86%).

IV. “OPTIONS” 86% Favorable

While clearly in favor of requiring all schools to live up to the same requirements and standards, respondents were not in favor of a public education dictatorship. **In fact, 86% would feel favorably towards a school that embraced “options,” 54% of them “strongly.”** By comparison just 6% of Californians would find fault with such a school.

- Non-parents were 9-points more likely than parents to favor “options” (92%-83%)—in fact, the likelihood of embracing the concept decreased as the number of children a respondent had increased. Single moms (95%) were among the only parent group more likely than non-parents to feel favorably towards the term, while Not-Yet-Moms tracked their childless-cohorts.
- Those more likely than most to support “options” included Blacks, in particular Blacks under age 55, 100% of whom favored the term, 18-34 year olds, 45-54 year olds, part-time workers, students, and those not registered to vote.
- There was no significant difference in favorability between Californians and adults nationwide (86%-85%)

V. “CHOICE” 81% Favorable

Demonstrating that just because two words share a common definition, they are not always interchangeable, Californians rated “choice” 5-points less favorably than “options.” Still, **a strong majority (81%) would embrace the term in the context of education, and with marked intensity, as 54% would “strongly” favor a school emphasizing “choice.”** A slightly more substantial 11% reported they would feel less positively towards such a school.

- Non-parents were again more apt than their child-rearing counterparts to back a school espousing choice (86%-79%), with Not-Yet-Moms leading the charge (90%). Parents of children who attended religious school (87%) were among the only parent-bloc to deviate from this trend.
- “Choice” was most appealing to Blacks (especially those under the age of 45), 18-34 year olds, those with less than a high school education, part-time workers, students, registered Republicans, and those not registered to vote.
- Californians were a bit less likely than national respondents to look favorably upon the term (81%-84%).

VI. “REGULATION” 78% Favorable

Californians refuse to leave the quality of their children’s education up to chance. Rather, they demand strict guidelines to ensure each child gains the skills and knowledge needed to make it in the real world. **As such, 78% of respondents would feel favorably towards a school emphasizing “regulation,” and 48% of them would do so “strongly.”** Just 12% would eschew a public school governed by this concept.

- Those raising their children without the help of a co-parent—namely divorced parents (85%), single parents (93%), and more specifically, single moms (98%)—were more likely to embrace “regulation” than their married counterparts (75%) and parents overall (78%).
- Others more likely to favor such a school included those earning less than \$30,000 per year, Hispanics, Asians, 18-34 year olds, high school graduates, those who attend religious services weekly or daily, part-time workers, students, registered Republicans (Republican men in particular), and self-identified conservatives.
- Hispanic support was concentrated in adults under 45 years old and those at the upper end of the income spectrum (\$50,000 per year or more).
- On the other hand, Asian support for “regulation” was strongest amongst those aged 35 and older (with those 55 and older most firmly in favor of the concept) and those earning less than \$70,000 per year. In fact, 100% of Asians with household incomes under \$70,000 per year would feel favorably towards a public school emphasizing “regulation.”
- Californians did not back “regulation” with the vigor of other adults across the nation (78%-83%).

VII. “FREEDOM” 78% Favorable

While “regulation” and “freedom” may seem to advocate completely opposite concepts, the terms enjoy the same favorability rating amongst Californians: 78% would support a public school that emphasized “freedom” and 48% would do so “strongly.” This equal acceptance of two very different themes shows how when considering concepts and ideas within a specific context—namely education—people are relying on more than the simple definitions of the terms to render their judgments. Just 11% would look unfavorably upon a school embracing “freedom.”

- Non-parents were a whopping 18-points more likely than parents to favor “freedom” in public education (90%-72%), with Not-Yet-Moms (95%) leading the charge.
- Other groups more likely than most to advocate the concept included 18-34 year olds, those earning \$50,000-\$69,999 per year, Blacks (most notably Blacks 18-34 or 45-54), respondents with less than a high school diploma, those who seldom or never attend religious services, blue-collar workers, the unemployed, and students.

- While overall, there was just a 2-point difference in support for “freedom” in education between adults nationwide and Californians (80%-78%), across the racial groups there was significant variance. In the nationwide survey, Blacks were the racial group *least* likely to embrace “freedom” in schools, while in California they are the racial group *most* likely to do so (71%-82%). On the other hand, support for the concept among Asians nationwide was 12-points higher than among Asians living in California (88%-76%). Results for Whites and Hispanics differed just a few points between the two surveys.

VIII. “CONTROL” 74% Favorable

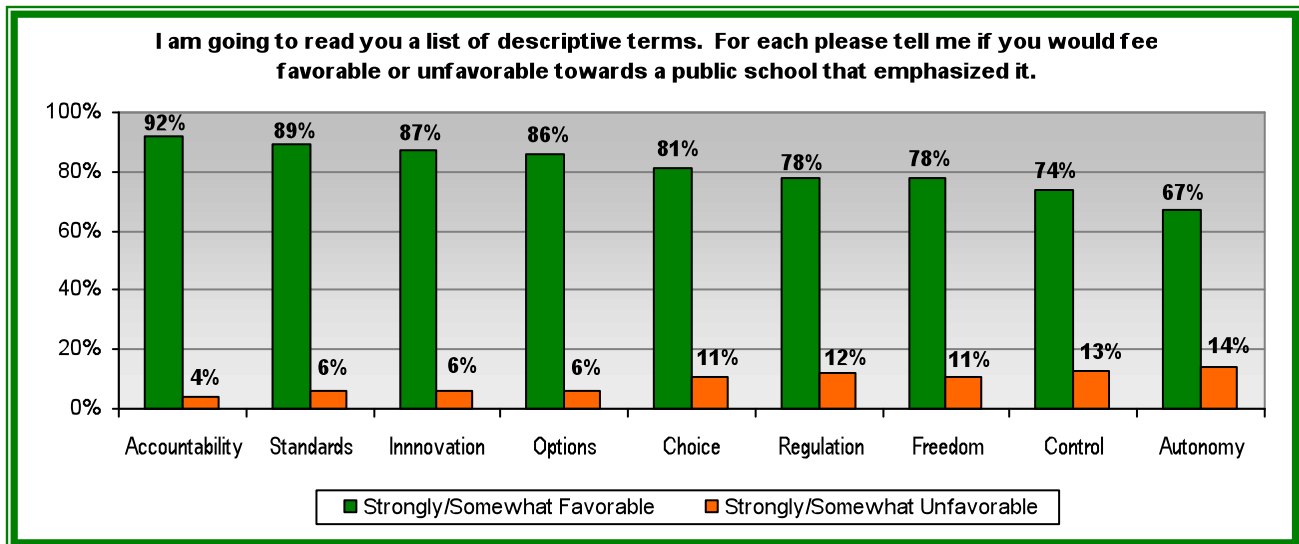
In these somewhat troubled times with so many unknowns looming in the world, the ability to exert power over one’s own life is a security we all seek. **Nearly three-quarters of Californians (74%) would look favorably upon a school prioritizing “control,” and 41% would do so without question. Just 13% would not be quite as supportive.** Though the term still engenders impressive appeal, it definitely appears to pack less of a punch than the other “buzz” words evaluated in the survey: its favorability rating was 20% lower than that of “accountability,” the highest ranked term.

- Single parents were the only parent-group to vary much from the overall results, and even they were just 3-points more likely to advocate “control” (77%-74%).
- Across the demographic spectrum, those more inclined to embrace the concept included those earning less than \$50,000 per year, Hispanics, senior citizens (aged 65 and older), high school graduates, Catholics, part-time workers, students, and self-identified conservatives.
- Support amongst Hispanics was concentrated in the bookends of both the age and income spectrums: Hispanics younger than 45 or older than 65, and those earning less than \$30,000 per year or more than \$70,000 per year were most likely to favor “control.”
- Californians viewed “control” just two-points less favorably than Americans overall (74%-76%).

IX. "AUTONOMY" 67% Favorable

Though the concepts of self-direction and the lack of externally imposed restrictions may appeal to many, this survey did not show that Californians embrace the term "autonomy" with the same vigor. **Two-thirds of respondents (67%) would feel favorably towards a public school emphasizing the idea, but they are of mixed intensity as 36% harbored these feelings "strongly" and 31% just "somewhat."** While 14% expressed explicitly negative feelings about "autonomy," a more sizeable 17% reported being unsure. The number of "Do Not Know" responses to this "buzz" word was 5-points higher than any other word tested and 8-points higher than the average across all the terms. While the lack of identification with the term does present a hurdle, it may also present a unique opportunity to "brand" a word for the Charter School movement that is not commonly associated with any other cause.

- Single moms were the only parent group of note to break from the average favorability rating—but they did so by a huge margin of 15-points (82%-67%).
- Others more likely to support "autonomy" in public education included Asians (in particular Asians aged 35-44 or earning more than \$70,000 per year), college graduates, and students. And to a lesser extent, Blacks, 35-44 year olds, blue-collar workers and part-time workers did the same.
- Californians basically agreed with adults nationwide when it came to "autonomy," their favorability rating just 2-points lower than Americans generally (67%-69%).



Conclusions

- **Charter Schools 101: Californians Need Apply.** Though better informed than their national counterparts, a majority of respondents did not know that charters were public schools. More importantly, in their answers to the open-ended question, many Californians revealed a near total misunderstanding of the structure and mission of charter schools—sometimes describing the schools lacking the standards and values they wholeheartedly embrace.
- **Attacking the Information Gap will Attract Supporters.** When given a straightforward definition of charter schools, 81% of Californians indicated their support for the schools. Additionally, they are in favor of flexible curricula, allowing parents to choose where to send their children from a number of different public schools, and performance-based pay for teachers. Perhaps most importantly, a majority of Californians have not been convinced by the biased interpretations of government studies by charter school detractors and clearly indicated their openness to other, non-government data.
- **Performance-Based Teacher Pay is a Hot-Button Issue.** This aspect of charter schools was supported by 54% of Californians. And while this is 14-points higher than those who opposed tying teachers’ paychecks to the achievement of their students, the majority lacks the intensity of some of the other pillars of the charter movement and many Californians are right on the cusp. Combing those only “somewhat” sure of their opinions on the matter with those who admitted they simply did not know, 36% of Californians have not arrived at a firm decision.
- **Emphasize “Accountability” while Balancing “Innovation” with “Standards.”** Californians have grown weary of students slipping through the cracks of the state’s education system and want schools to be held responsible for the achievement, or lack thereof, of their students. They are open to allowing new and creative methods in pursuit of stronger, more effective schools, but with the provision that these institutions meet the same educational requirements set by the state as those employing a more traditional approach.