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**From:** Kellyanne Conway, President and CEO  
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**Date:** September 7, 2005

**Re:** Data Analysis: Statewide Survey of Adults in New Jersey

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## Introduction and Methodology

the polling company™, inc. is pleased to present to the **Center for Education Reform (CER)** these data and analysis from a recent statewide survey of 501 adults (18+) in New Jersey.

The sample was drawn utilizing a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) method where phone numbers were generated by a computer to ensure that every household in the state had an equal chance to be surveyed.

The survey contained 11 questions, including seven demographic inquiries. The four substantive questions were identical to questions included in a lengthier nationwide survey of 800 adults conducted on behalf of CER in January 2005. Sampling controls were used to ensure that a proportional and representative number of people were interviewed from such demographic groups as age, gender, race and ethnicity, and geographic region.

The margin of error for the statewide survey is calculated at  $\pm 4.5\%$  at the 95% confidence level, meaning that the results obtained would differ by no more than 4.5 percentage points in either direction even if the entire adult population nationwide were to be surveyed. Margins of error for subgroups are higher.

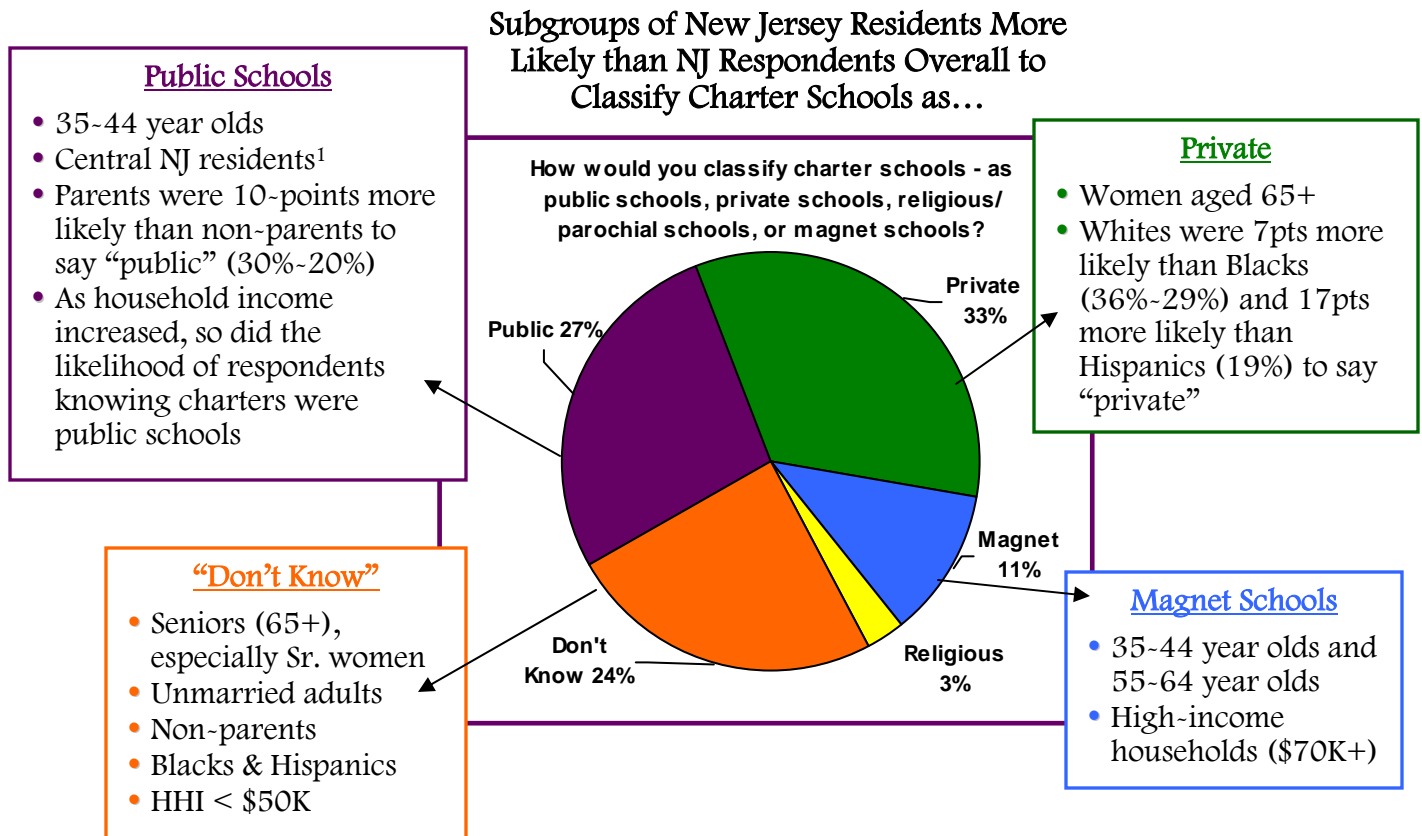
The survey was fielded September 2-5, 2005 at a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) phone facility using live callers. The final questionnaire was approved by authorized representatives of CER prior to fielding.

## Analysis of Findings

### *New Jerseyans Reveal a Lack of Knowledge About Charter Schools.*

Less than three-in-ten (27%) survey respondents in New Jersey were able to correctly classify charters as “public schools” when presented with a list of several options. In fact, a full one-third (33%) of Garden State residents believed charters to be “private schools,” while just 11% analogized them to “magnet” institutions and even fewer (3%) identified charters as “religious” in nature (3%). A sizeable 24% declared they simply did not know and declined to venture a guess.

The relatively low recognition among New Jerseyans about the public character of charter schools may be due in part to the fact that the state’s 52 charters account for just 2% of the 2,407 public schools there and educate less than 1% of the state’s students. In addition, the ironic, if not disingenuous, criticism of charters by *proponents* of public schools generally omits the fact that charters *are* public institutions and subject to the same standards and accountability.



<sup>1</sup> **North Jersey:** Sussex, Passaic, Bergen, Hudson, Essex, Union, Somerset, Hunterdon, Morris, and Warren Counties. **Central Jersey:** Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, and Ocean Counties. **South Jersey:** Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Salem, Cumberland, Cape May, and Atlantic Counties.

New Jerseyans were more familiar with charters than American adults overall by a 7-point margin: just 20% of nationwide respondents correctly identified the schools as “public” in survey conducted earlier this year<sup>2</sup>. By comparison, 38% of respondents nationwide suggested charter schools were “private” institutions, 16% said they were “magnet,” and 5% deemed them “religious.” Nonetheless, most New Jersey residents require a better education on the ABC’s of charter schools.

***Simple Explanation Elicits High Praise for Charter Schools.***

**Seven-in-ten (71%) New Jersey residents declared their support for charters after hearing a succinct, factual description of the community-formed “new public schools.”** In fact, knowing that charter schools “*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,*” led 47% of respondents to offer a “strong” endorsement.

Those who backed charter schools with intensity outnumbered the total number of respondents who opposed them by a margin of more than 3-to-1 (47%-15% strongly/somewhat oppose). Another 11% remained unsure.

- Men in New Jersey were generally more supportive of charters than their female counterparts, but this changed dramatically with age. Senior Women (aged 65+) were actually more inclined to endorse charter schools than senior men (69%-47%).

**Subgroups of New Jersey Residents More Likely than NJ Respondents Overall to...**

**Support Charter Schools—71% overall:**

- Adults under the age of 55
- Households earning more than \$30,000 per year
- Central New Jersey dwellers (*61% of whom “strongly” supported charters*)
- Respondents who knew charters were public schools

**Oppose Charter Schools—15% overall:**

- Blacks
- Women aged 45-64

**Remain Undecided about Charter Schools—11% Overall:**

- Seniors (65+)
- Unmarried respondents
- Households earning less than \$30,000 per year
- Northern New Jersey residents
- Adults who were unsure of how to classify charter schools

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<sup>2</sup> All comparisons to national figures from January 2005 survey of 800 adults nationwide conducted by tpc for CER. MoE +/- 3.5%

### *Charter School Ideology Embraced by the Garden State.*

New Jerseyans were resolute in their support of the “twin pillars” on which charters are built. “*Accountability*” was viewed favorably by 88% of respondents—with an eye-popping 70% “strongly” praising the concept when applied to public education. Just 4% claimed they would not be impressed by a public school that emphasized answerability and standards of achievement, while 8% remained unsure.

The second tenet, “*Innovation*,” (in schools) secured the backing of 82% of New Jersey adults surveyed, and 57% “strongly” so. In contrast, a paltry 6% would look unfavorably on a public school employing new and creative ideas. One-in-ten (11%) of respondents were unwilling or unable to render a final judgment on the idea.

- Both concepts received slightly higher ratings among national respondents than their New Jersey counterparts (92% of Americans favored “accountability,” 88% favored “innovation”), although given these unmistakable levels of support, these are differences without distinctions.

**“ACCOUNTABILITY”:  
Subgroups of New Jersey Residents More  
Likely than NJ Respondents Overall to...**

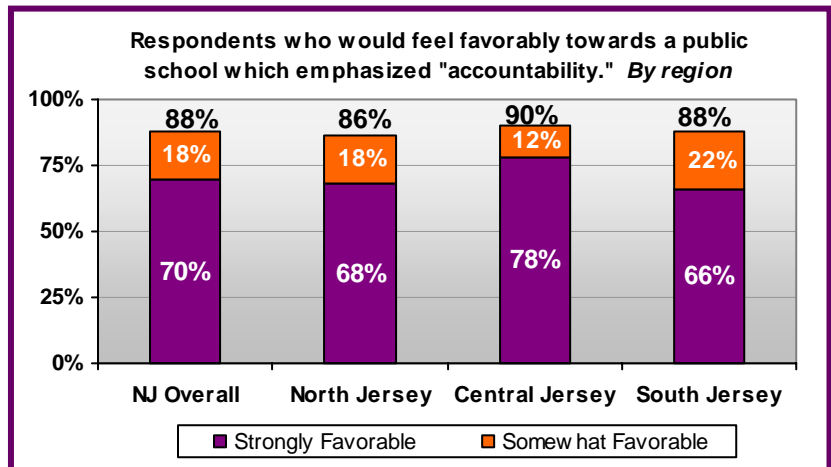
#### Feel Favorably towards “Accountability”—88% overall:

- High-income households (\$70K+)
- Whites and Hispanics were considerably more likely than Blacks to embrace accountability in public schools (89% and 88%, respectively vs. 78%)
- Respondents who supported charter schools were 11-points more apt than those who opposed them to view the concept positively (92%-81%)

#### Be Undecided about “Accountability”—8% overall:

- Blacks
- Households earning less than \$50,000 per year

As the nearby chart indicates, overall favorability towards *accountability* varied only slightly by region. However, when examining the **intensity** of respondents’ praise, Central New Jersey residents proved themselves the staunchest supporters of this charter school attribute.



**“INNOVATION”:**  
**Subgroups of New Jersey Residents More Likely than NJ Respondents Overall to...**

**Feel Favorably towards “Innovation”—82% overall:**

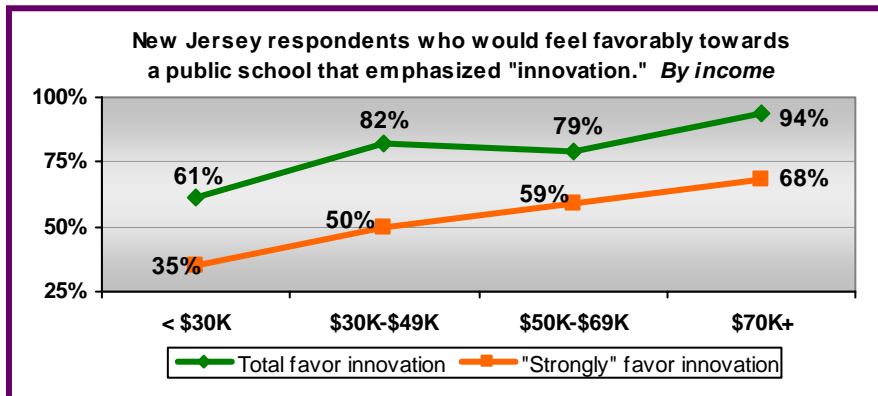
- 45-54 year olds
- Married parents
- High-income households (\$70K+)
- Central Jersey dwellers

**Be Undecided about “Innovation”—11% overall:**

- Seniors (65+)—seniors were also among the only groups more likely than respondents overall to view innovation *unfavorably*
- Blacks
- Low-income households (less than \$30K)

Regional variance was more easily observed in respondents’ overall opinions of *innovation* than it was in their thoughts regarding accountability. Central New Jersey residents were 13-points more likely than South Jersey dwellers and 12-points more inclined than North Jersey folks to favor this principle (91% vs. 78% and 79%, respectively).

The next chart shows that as household income increased so, too, did favorability toward “*innovation*”. The effect of income was most obvious among respondents who would “strongly” favor innovation in public schools.



## In Conclusion...

***Residents of the Garden State Need to be Schooled on Charters.*** Just 27% of respondents in New Jersey were able to correctly identify charter schools as a part of the state's public education system. A plurality of residents (33%) believed the schools to be "private" which is a hurdle that must be conquered with information in order for the movement to reach out to low-income and minority students and parents (who were both more likely than most to oppose or be unsure about charter schools and their focus).

***A brief explanation of charter schools garnered significant support for the institutions.*** New Jersey residents backed charters by a margin of nearly 5-to-1 once they were informed that the schools prioritized accountability and set academic standards without imposing an additional burden on tax payers.

***Residents of the Central Region of New Jersey demonstrated notably high support for charter schools and their principles.*** This region, which is comprised of Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, and Ocean Counties, currently houses ten of the state's 52 charter schools and could become an ideal launching pad for future advances in the charter school movement. High-income households were also more likely than most to be "already on board."