



1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 204, Washington, DC 20036

Tel 202-822-9000
Fax 202-822-5077

Back-to-School Alert

2nd in a series from CER

ANNUAL BACK-TO-SCHOOL POLL RESULTS BELIEVE DISSATISFACTION PUBLIC TO POLLSTERS: "I CAN'T GET NO ... SATISFACTION"

(Washington, DC 8/22/00) On their affection for existing public schools, to their support for testing, the public believes U.S. schools need a lot of improvement and more accountability. That's the real story in this year's Phi Delta Kappa (PDK)/Gallup poll, but it's not the story the authors are telling.

How is it — many are asking — that the annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll boasts "public approval of the public schools at an *all time high*" when 2 percent fewer people give the schools in their community As and Bs and more people give their schools a C this year than last?

With more information available than ever before from state to national assessments, the public's approval of public schools in the nation as a whole declined. Fully 4 percent fewer people give the nation's public schools As and Bs.

In their press release, PDK/Gallup paint a rosy picture of support for the status quo and growing opposition to vouchers and even charter schools. Yet a close look at the poll results — and the questions that produced the results — shows that on average, fully half of all Americans view the schools as mediocre at best. When parents normally argue that they want the best education for their child, viewing their schools as average or worse suggests anything but satisfaction. The poll's slant influences the outcomes.

For example, when defined, charter schools are said to be opposed by 47 percent of respondents. The poll narrowly defines charters as schools that "operate under a charter or contract that frees them from many of the...regulations imposed on public schools." The poll neglects to say that charters are started by parents and teachers, operate on a *performance* contract and are open to parents by choice.

Finally, PDK/Gallup offers a word scramble when asking the public their views towards full school choice, or vouchers. First they ask a devil's bargain question: "...would you prefer improving and strengthening the existing public schools or providing vouchers..." as if it's really an either/or proposition. In other voucher questions, the wording is loaded, eliciting in one case only 39 percent support for the concept and in another 45 percent support. More objective questions asked by more objective organizations yield far greater results:

- The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies poll (1999) found that 53 percent of the general population and 60 percent of the black population support a voucher system.
- The highly regarded Public Agenda Foundation found in its study *On Thin Ice* that 57 percent of the general public favor the idea of parents being given a voucher and 70 percent would seriously consider or definitely use a voucher to send their child to a private school.

More analysis of the attitudes of the public toward education reform has been prepared by the Center for Education Reform and is available at our website at www.edreform.com, along with CER's own *Survey of American's Attitudes Toward School Reform*.

#

The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools. For further information, please call (202) 822-9000 or visit our website at www.edreform.com.