

THE Center for Education Reform



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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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POLL FINDS 63% OF AMERICANS FAVOR SCHOOL CHOICE *Other surveys find growing support*

(Washington, D.C. 8/20/02) Public support for school choice – often referred to as vouchers or scholarships – remains high, with the strongest support found among African Americans, according to a new Center for Education Reform survey conducted by Zogby International Polling.

In July, 1204 adults were surveyed on two questions:

1) *How much do you support or oppose providing parents with the option of sending their children to the school of their choice – either public, private or parochial – rather than only to the school to which they are assigned?*

and

2) *How much are you in favor of or against allowing poor parents to be given the tax dollars allotted for their child's education and permitting them to use those dollars in the form of a scholarship to attend a private, public or parochial school of their choosing?*

How the public responded

The first question was designed to gauge public sentiment on the basic notion of school choice as it has long-existed in the United States, asking, essentially, “all other issues aside how do you feel about school choice?” At this basic conceptual level 76 percent of respondents supported the proposition and 20 percent opposed it.

The second question was more specific regarding citizens' use of their tax dollars to send their children to non-public schools. It was presented in as precise a manner as possible, so

as to make clear who would receive money and from where it would come (e.g. “poor parents” rather than, simply, “parents,” and rather than “taxpayer-funded” the source of the funds was more accurately described as “the tax dollars allotted for their child’s education”). The question was also stripped of loaded phrases (e.g. “at public expense”) and of words around which choice opponents have built strong negative connotations, most notably the word “vouchers” which was replaced with the more neutral word “scholarships.”

CER’s poll stands in sharp contrast to the results of the annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll, which uses clearly negative questions to elicit lower support for reforms such as school choice and the even less controversial idea of charter schools. However, PDK’s 2002 poll found an incredible jump of 12 percentage points supporting school choice, despite the negatively posed question, “Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?” A more detailed question from the PDK/Gallup poll found 52 percent in favor of school choice proposals.

“Support for giving parents – not school systems – control over their child’s education continues to grow, despite the best efforts of well-funded opponents like the PDK group to distort the views of most Americans,” said CER president Jeanne Allen.

A complete summary of the CER/Zogby poll is available at http://www.edreform.com/school_choice/2002poll.htm or by calling the Center at (202) 822-9000.

Additional analysis of the PDK/Gallup Poll is available at <http://www.edreform.com/press/2002/pdkpoll.htm>

Other recent polls found similar majority support, go to: <http://www.edreform.com/update/2002/020807.html>

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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 <http://edreform.com>.