



**2002 PDK/GALLUP POLL**  
*Skewed Questions Continue to Dictate Responses*  
**A CER Analysis**

(Washington, D.C. 8/20/02) As in previous years, the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll has sought to assess Americans' views on education issues: grading the neighborhood public and community schools; charter schools; the use of testing to assess school accountability; teacher qualifications and more. Again this year, PDK has skewed the questions to elicit responses that fall more in line with PDK's, and not the public's, attitudes toward education reform. While there are more than 40 questions, the following are the clearest illustrations of where PDK's questions and their analysis of the responses are most representative of bias:

- 1) **On School Choice:** A majority (52 percent) of those questioned support the ability of parents to send their children to a public, private or church-related school of their choice, but PDK uses in its press releases the question where respondents are asked whether they support people making choices "at public expense." Those numbers rose this year, but still fall short of the majorities other surveys find. The reasons are clear: The words "public expense" suggest that public institutions get hurt when people are allowed to direct their choices. This is simply not true.

Another example is in the poll's section on school improvement, where PDK and the Gallup organization ask respondents if they'd prefer vouchers over fixing the existing schools, as if the concept of school choice means that the public will not also be working on school reform. The reality is that choice programs go hand in hand with other school reform approaches, and lead to school improvements wherever they've been executed.

- 2) **Charter Schools:** Four questions portray charters not as public schools that operate with the consent of parents and that are on a performance contracts, but as "outlaws" that operate outside the law.

At the start, PDK questions individuals of their knowledge of "so-called" charter schools, as if their very legitimacy is in question. The poll continues by offering a poor description of charters' operating principles implying

charter schools are accountable to no one, and finally, portraying cyber charters something that might disrupt the “community.” It is no surprise that PDK’s support numbers are low for charter schools (44 percent). It is surprising that PDK would portray the relatively modest public school reform effort known as charters in such a negative way.

- 3) **Testing:** Respondents believe that the emphasis on testing in their schools strikes the right balance. But PDK describes testing as merely a tracking tool rather than a means to assess the success or failure of schools. This misses the main purpose of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, which uses testing as a tool not just to track student progress, but to pinpoint and help students in failing schools. Still, PDK found large majorities support testing in grades 3-8, demonstrating approval of the No Child Left Behind Act. (More information can be found on the CER website at <http://www.edreform.com>).
- 4) **Grading Schools:** Each year PDK argues that the majority of Americans think highly of their schools, and uses such data to underscore their other “findings” that Americans would prefer maintaining the status quo of their own schools rather than implementing broad-based reforms that embrace choice or higher standards and testing. But only a bare majority of the public view their community’s public schools as worthy of an A or B grade, and only 24 percent would give As or Bs to the nation’s public schools as a whole. However, 26 percent respondents give their own schools Cs and Ds.

This year’s PDK/Gallup poll—and CER’s analysis—mirror the surveys and findings of past years. For a glimpse of last year’s analysis, go to <http://www.edreform.com/>.