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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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ANTI-REFORM GROUP RELEASES ANNUAL EDUCATION POLL *Public School Approval Mixed*

An Analysis

(Washington, D.C. 8/22/01) A poll released today shows conflicting attitudes about education proposals, according to an analysis by the Center for Education Reform (CER). For five years CER has analyzed surveys and polls on Americans' attitudes toward school reform proposals. This poll, the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools by Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup, (PDK) has been criticized for selectivity and bias in its polling.

For example, PDK announces that that the "public approval ratings [of public schools is] at an all time high." Yet a bare majority think their schools warrant honor roll status — cold comfort to the other 20 million children in schools to which even their parents award Cs, Ds or worse. More than 65 percent of those same parents believe that the schools in their state vary a great deal, a recognition that education quality in America is at best, uneven.

Three other themes emerge from the PDK/Gallup poll:

- 1) **School Choice:** A majority of public school parents (52 percent) support proposals that allow parents to choose any school (i.e. vouchers).

Rather than use this finding, pollsters boast of a decline in support for school choice, based on two misleading questions. One of those is a devil's bargain, asking whether people would rather reform the existing system or find an alternative to it. Finding alternatives to the status quo or reforming it is not an either-or proposition. Support for choice is clear in this and other polls.

(more)

2) **Solutions to the teacher shortage:** Another indication of PDK bias is revealed in the questions on teaching.

An important option such as allowing accomplished professionals from other fields to teach — alternative certification — is posed as a negative. Pollsters ask whether people favor “permitting persons with bachelor’s degrees to become teachers without requiring preparation,” to which only 31 percent are in favor. In reality, alternative certification requires more vital coursework and that candidates prove their ability. Other options offered to solve the teacher shortage are, contrary to research, focussed on monetary rewards alone.

3) **Accountability:** Support is high for holding schools accountable, but people appear conflicted about how tests should be used, a result more of the complexity of the issue than a set of hard and fast beliefs.

Although 53 percent of the public and 48 percent of public school parents support using a single test for promotion, 81 percent want schools held accountable for student learning. A solid majority wants standardized tests used to measure progress and greater authority for states in deciding how to spend federal funds.

These preferences for results-based accountability are not evident in other questions about accountability, because of the content of the questions. Pollsters ask: Should charter, private and “church-related” schools “be accountable to the state in the way regular public schools are accountable?” The answer is a resounding yes. But the meaning of the term “accountable” is not clear at all in this question. Private and charter schools are accountable in different ways and are required to demonstrate results to stay in business. Asking people if private and charter schools should be accountable the same way as public schools is intentionally misleading.

Conclusion

Information is power and good information can be very powerful. This annual PDK/Gallup poll continues to misrepresent not only the issues that are most responsible for today’s renewed drive towards improving schools but the popular sentiments behind them. Responsible journalists and political leaders will see through the rhetoric. Regardless of polls, U.S. schools still fail to educate a majority of its children to a level that is satisfactory. And no poll can change that fact.

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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>.