



Policy Implications

Of the 39th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll

Of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

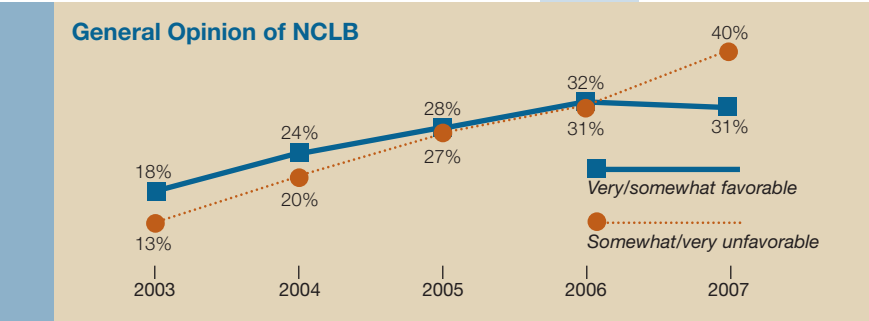
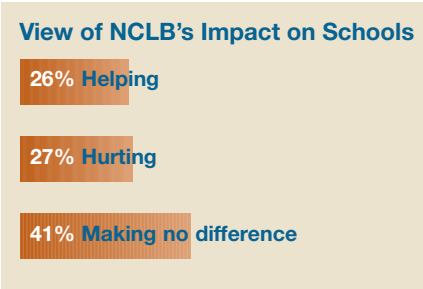
The PDK/Gallup polls provide a snapshot of the public's assessment of its schools and the challenges they face, as well as a measure of what the public will and will not support in terms of program initiatives. Such information can be invaluable in the ongoing policy debates regarding our public schools. However, that information will not be remotely useful unless school leaders consider the implications of the public's views for the operation of the schools. School leaders can bring to bear on school policy the common sense and practical wisdom that were missing from the creation of No Child Left Behind. Here, we offer seven implications of the 2007 PDK/Gallup Poll.

Implication 1

NCLB: An opportunity lost is another door of opportunity opened.

The growing disapproval of NCLB reflects the law's failure to fulfill the public's desire to improve achievement for all students. Schools have the chance to fill this void by embracing NCLB's goals and continuing the effort to bring them to reality.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD NCLB



LESSONS FOR LEADERS

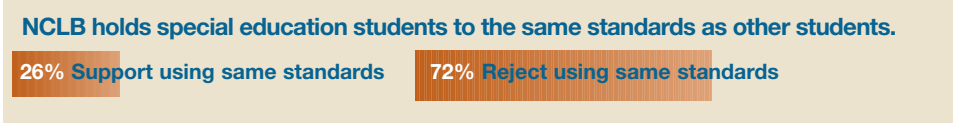
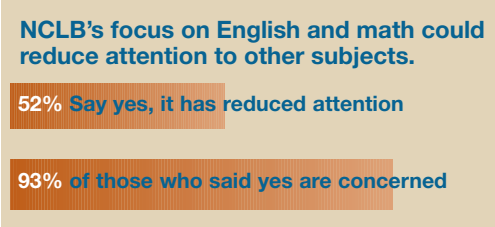
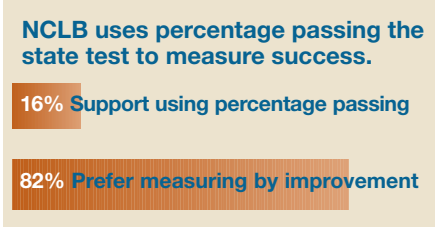
- The public is divided with regard to NCLB's impact, but dissatisfaction is growing.
- This dissatisfaction must be dealt with in the reauthorization of NCLB, and schoolpeople must contribute to this effort.

Implication 2

Weak leaders rejoice in the mistakes of others; strong leaders learn from them.

The flawed strategies used in determining adequate yearly progress (AYP) are causing NCLB to lose favor. Schoolpeople are in the best position to bring to the policy debate an accurate assessment of what it will take to get improvement right.

SELECTED NCLB STRATEGIES



LESSONS FOR LEADERS

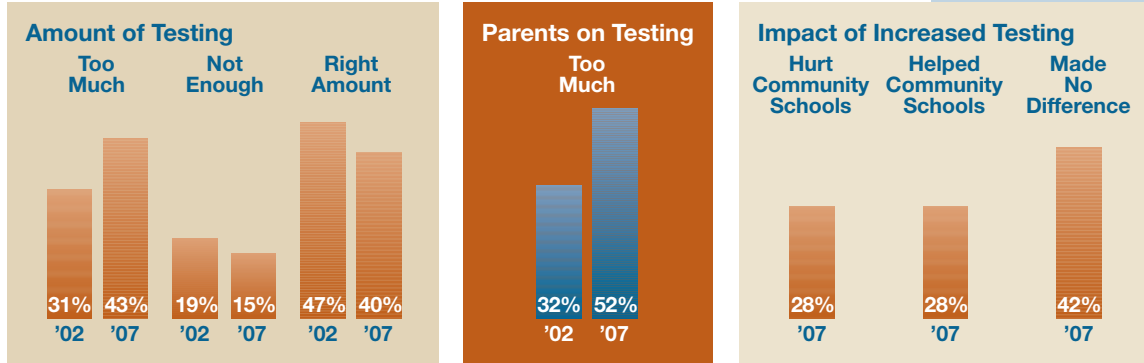
- Ironically, the key to success in fixing NCLB may be doing what the law set out to do, but doing it right by building in flexibility, involving those affected, and focusing on assistance rather than punishment. But the goals of NCLB can only be a guide. Such factors as practicality, level of resources, and staff and community acceptance must also be considered. Change demands creativity.

Implication 3

When to test? When testing promises to increase achievement!

The public is growing disenchanted with the increased amount of standardized testing. This poses a challenge for schoolpeople who need to gear instruction to standards and individualize instruction as much as possible; some additional testing is required for both accountability and diagnostic purposes.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD STANDARDIZED TESTING



LESSONS FOR LEADERS

► It seems more than coincidental that the growing dissatisfaction with testing comes at a time when the use of test data in guiding high-stakes decisions has exploded. Schoolpeople must be prepared to explain to students, parents, and the community why each test is needed and what purpose it serves.

Implication 4

Authority carries the burden of responsibility.

The public unhesitatingly vests its confidence in the public schools by supporting change through the existing school system. Only charter schools, which are public schools, garner majority support as an alternative. This places a burden on schoolpeople to meet the challenge and bring about the improvement that the public seeks.

WAYS TO CHANGE SCHOOLS

Mode of Improvement

26% Find an alternative system

72% Reform existing system

Support for Alternatives

39% Favor vouchers

31% Favor contracting out operations

39% Favor takeovers by mayors

60% Favor charter schools

LESSONS FOR LEADERS

- The public consistently chooses to bring about change in schools through the existing system.
- Vouchers and alternative ways to manage schools have consistently failed to attract majority support.
- Support for public charter schools reached a majority (53%) in 2006, and that support continues to grow.

Implication 5

"The world is flat." — The public thinks so!

The public's recognition that students need to learn about other nations and need to acquire facility in a second language is laudatory; moreover, meeting those needs would broaden the curriculum at a time when the curriculum has been progressively narrowing.

GLOBAL ISSUES

Time Spent Studying Other Nations

57% Need more

40% Enough time now

Importance of Second Language

85% Very + somewhat important

15% Not very + not at all

LESSONS FOR LEADERS

- Respondents recognize that we live in a world where what happens anywhere can affect us all. The challenge for school leaders is how to respond in a positive way.
- In building support for strong international programs, schools should seek to forge links with and gain support from those who routinely operate in a globalized world.

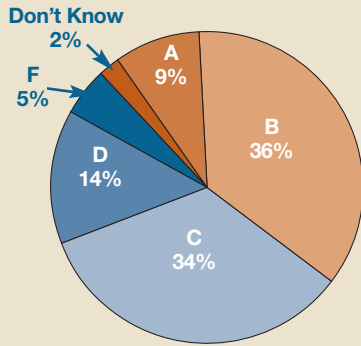
Implication 6

All children must be educated to the limit of their abilities.

While the public expresses general satisfaction with the public schools, the grades assigned and the public's assessment of how well schools are performing specific functions leave room for seeking the improvement necessary to meet the needs of all students.

GRADING THE SCHOOLS

Grades Assigned to Local Schools



Preparation for College and Work

- 60% Students leave high school adequately prepared for college
- 50% Students leave high school adequately prepared for skilled jobs
- 75% Students leave high school adequately prepared for nonskilled jobs

What About High Achievers?

- 17% Schools provide excellent education for high achievers
- 44% Schools provide good education for high achievers
- 29% Schools provide fair education for high achievers
- 7% Schools provide poor education for high achievers
- 2% Schools provide bad education for high achievers

LESSONS FOR LEADERS

- Words such as adequate, average, and acceptable have no place in the vocabulary of school leaders. No goal is worthy of those in the profession except to educate every child to the limit of the child's ability.
- The schools may be far better than they are given credit for being, but they are not nearly as good as they need to be to meet the needs of today's students.
- Schoolpeople will be most effective if they set aside distractions, such as AYP, and do what they became educators to do: the best possible job of educating kids.

Implication 7

Understanding the need is easy; meeting the need is not.

The public understands the link between funding and school improvement and judges funding to be the biggest problem schools face. This provides an opportunity for school leaders, but no assurance that the problem will be solved.

LESSONS FOR LEADERS

- That the public understands that funding is the greatest problem facing the schools will have no practical significance unless we can find ways to translate this sentiment into better funding for schools.
- The day is gone when schoolpeople could concentrate on operating schools and leave others to take care of funding. School leaders, teachers, and parents have no choice but to become lobbyists for their schools. They are the best advocates for public schooling.

BIGGEST PROBLEMS

Lack of funding has headed the list of school problems since the turn of the century

