



ISSUE No. 3:
**IS SUPPORT FOR STANDARDS
AND TESTING FADING?**

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A Public Agenda Initiative to Build Momentum for Improving American Schools

REALITY CHECK 2006



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This is the third in a series of reports from *Reality Check 2006*, an ongoing set of tracking surveys on education issues. *Reality Check* surveys attitudes among public school parents, students, teachers, principals and superintendents on a regular basis. The series also includes periodic surveys of employers and college professors.

Jean Johnson, Ana Maria Arumi and Amber Ott prepared this report.

More information about the findings in this report, including full question wording and results, can be found at:

PUBLICAGENDA.ORG

Regular updates and new reports will be available at this location throughout the year.

IS SUPPORT FOR STANDARDS AND TESTING FADING?

Introduction by Jean Johnson

Necessary, but not sufficient might be one way to sum up attitudes about standards and testing five years into No Child Left Behind and over a dozen years into the so-called standards movement in American education. Based on results from Public Agenda's 2006 "Reality Check" opinion surveys, there is strong belief in the intrinsic value of standards and testing and broad support for key elements such as high school exit exams. But as of now, every group surveyed by Public Agenda – parents, students, teachers, principals and superintendents – considers other educational issues more urgent. Among parents, concern about low academic standards in local schools has dropped over the last decade.

So far, so good

Public Agenda has been monitoring Americans' views on academic standards, standardized testing, No Child Left Behind and other key elements of the standards movement for more than a decade.

Our Reality Check surveys and other research have shown repeatedly that support for raising standards is broad and heart-felt, and based on the 2006 data, that core of support remains intact. In multiple findings, parents, teachers and students say standards and testing are

necessary.¹ Parents and teachers give local districts high marks for pursuing standards-based reform carefully and reasonably.

How much is enough?

But Reality Check 2006 also shows quite convincingly that relatively few parents, teachers, principals or superintendents see more of the same as the best course for the future. In this year's survey, respondents were asked to choose among four hypothetical candidates for the local school board – one running on a platform of

Among parents, a hypothetical standards and testing candidate ranks a distant second to one calling for smaller classes and more money for schools.

standards and testing, a second backing vouchers, a third backing charter schools and a fourth calling for more money for schools and smaller classes. Among parents, the standards and testing candidate ranks a distant second to the candidate calling for smaller classes and more money for schools. Fewer than one in four parents (22%) chooses the standards candidate.

Among the educators, support for a school board candidate focusing primarily on more standards and testing is in the single digits.

It's not a backlash to testing

This tepid support for more standards and testing is not a rejection of the idea itself, nor is it the

¹ "Where We Are Now," Public Agenda 2003: online at publicagenda.org/research/research_reports_details.cfm?list=1

long-anticipated and much-feared “backlash to testing.” Neither parents nor students report significant concern about the number or kinds of tests youngsters currently take. The majority of teachers are troubled and frustrated by testing, but even here, the concern is the amount of testing and how tests are used – not whether testing can be useful in and of itself. More than 8 in 10 teachers back a high school exit exam covering either basics (62%) or more advanced learning (24%).

Nor is the negative response grounded in broad hostility to No Child Left Behind, although just 15 percent of teachers say the law is improving local education.

Relatively few principals (22%) and superintendents (9%) say meeting the law’s requirements is their most pressing problem. Among parents, knowledge about and attention to the law is still sparse. Over half of parents admit that they don’t know enough about the law to say whether it is hurting or helping. Among those who are familiar with it, the reviews are split.

Other things need attention

Instead, the lack of enthusiasm for standards and testing as a top priority for the future comes from two sources. One is the judgment among most parents, students, teachers and school administrators that standards and testing are not the be all and end all of school reform. They see other issues as equally pressing. Not surprisingly perhaps, educators say funding is a higher priority, but they are not alone. About four in ten (39%) parents say that it’s a “very serious” problem in

their community that “schools are not getting enough money to do a good job.” Among black (49%) and Hispanic parents (52%), the numbers are substantially higher.

Similarly, all groups cite problems related to student behavior, motivation and cooperation as more urgent than low standards. This focus on discipline and school climate is not new. Public Agenda’s “First Things First” report in 1994 outlined the broad belief that unless schools are safe, calm, respectful and purposeful, teaching and learning are unlikely to thrive.² Most teachers give schools good marks on discipline issues, but 76 percent say

Just 15 percent of teachers say No Child Left Behind is improving local education. Among parents, attention to and knowledge about the law is still sparse.

they could teach more effectively if they didn’t have to spend so much time dealing with disruptive students; 85 percent say the school experience of most students suffers at the expense of a few chronic troublemakers.³ Among parents, 73 percent say that the most pressing problems in local high schools are social problems and kids who misbehave. Just 15 percent say low academic standards and outdated curricula are more urgent. Since the standards movement, with its strong emphasis on academics and testing, touches on these concerns only peripherally, it is not surprising that people are beginning to yearn for something that addresses them more directly.

² “First Things First,” Public Agenda 1994.

³ “Teaching Interrupted,” Public Agenda 2003.

How high is high enough?

The second source of the cool response, especially among parents, is a different sense of what “the standard” needs to be. This gap between parents’ views on optimal standards and those of key business, government and educational leaders emerged strongly in an earlier Reality Check 2006 report, “Are Parents and Students Ready for More Math and Science?”⁴ Many in leadership believe that standards in American high schools need to be raised dramatically to insure the country’s economic prosperity in a more competitive world.⁵ Meanwhile most parents, especially white parents, are quite satisfied with the academic portion of their children’s education. Majorities of all parents (65%) believe the work their child does in school is harder than what they themselves studied when they were younger.

The strong focus on standards and testing is beginning to strike key segments of the public as a “Johnny-One-Note” approach.

It is probably worth remembering that much of the public’s initial support for raising standards grew out of anxiety over basics and the fear that too many youngsters were floating through the system without mastering even fundamental reading and math skills. Consequently, the strong calls for higher standards, more testing, more solid graduation and promotion requirements touched a

⁴ “Reality Check 2006,” Public Agenda 2006: online at publicagenda.org/specials/realitycheck06/realitycheck06_main.htm

⁵ Examples include: Business Roundtable press release, “Business Roundtable Encourages Focus on Math and Science in Initiative for Teacher Excellence,” June 6, 2005. Also, the official statement on “Math & Science” on the website of the Center for Corporate Citizenship of the United States Chamber of Commerce, available on the website of the Business Education Network.

responsive chord with many segments of the community. But as promotion standards toughened, as graduation standards were raised, as parents began to see their own children doing harder work than they did when they were in school, the problem of “low standards” began to lose its edge.

Where do we go from here?

For leaders who are convinced that American schools and students need to strive for much higher levels of learning, these findings suggest a two-pronged agenda. One essential goal for

leaders is to get their own message out more effectively. If leaders believe that it is imperative to arm the next generation with top-notch skills in math and science, in foreign languages and other areas, they need to move beyond panel discussions at business conferences and “get out there.” The Committee for Economic

Development, for example, has launched a major effort to raise public awareness of the need to increase foreign language and international studies.⁶ Since major employers and local entrepreneurs often have a special credibility in their own communities, it could well be time for them to put that credibility to use.

But leadership may also need to broaden its agenda. Based on the results here, the strong focus on standards and testing is beginning to strike key segments of the public as a “Johnny-

⁶ “Education for Global Leadership,” Committee for Economic Development 2006.

One-Note” approach. Among different groups there is unease about school funding, class size, school climate, student cooperation and motivation, family support and social problems that seep into the schools. Teachers seem especially troubled about the current course, and majorities say they feel left out of discussions on how to improve schools and learning.⁷ Some of the teachers’ doubts and frustrations may be affecting progress. After all, few generals would choose to go into the field with a demoralized, unconvinced fighting force.

The Reality Check 2006 results pose a fundamental strategic question for leaders who believe higher standards are essential. Just how long will communities continue to support the movement without hearing some serious discussion of their other pressing issues as well?

Methodology

The findings in “Reality Check 2006: Is Support for Standards and Testing Fading?” are based on two focus groups each with parents and teachers and telephone interviews with a national random sample of:

- 1,379 parents of children now in public school;
- 1,342 public school students in grades 6 through 12;
- 721 public school teachers;
- 254 school district superintendents and 252 school principals.

Interviews with parents were conducted between October 30 - December 18, 2005, interviews with students were conducted between October 30 - December 29, 2005 and interviews with teachers, principals and superintendents were conducted between November 19, 2005 - March 7, 2006. The margin of error for the sample of parents is plus or minus 3.8 percentage points; the margin of error for the sample of students is plus or minus 3.4 percentage points; the margin of error for the sample of teachers is plus or minus 4 percentage points; and the margin of error for principals and superintendents is plus or minus 6 percentage points. It is higher when comparing percentages across subgroups. Selected survey results can be found at publicagenda.org.

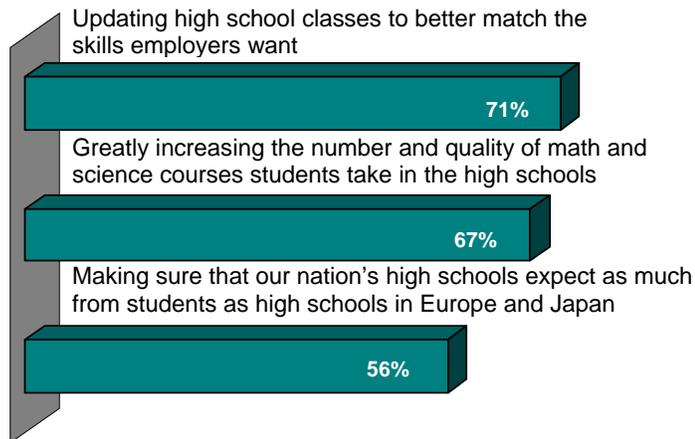
⁷ Seventy-six percent of teachers say they are often made the scapegoats for all the problems facing education (“Stand By Me,” Public Agenda 2003.). A large majority (70%) also say they feel “left out of the loop” when it comes to district decision-making (“Just Waiting to be Asked,” Public Agenda 2001.).

FINDING ONE: PARENTS AND STUDENTS SUPPORT STANDARDS AND TESTING

The vast majority of parents and students continue to voice strong support for raising academic standards. Most say updating classes to match the skills employers want would improve American high schools. Eight in ten students say that requiring students to meet higher standards for graduation and promotion is a good idea. Most parents (86%) say their own district has been “careful and reasonable” in its efforts to raise standards and virtually none (1%) believe schools would be better if districts returned to the policies of the past.

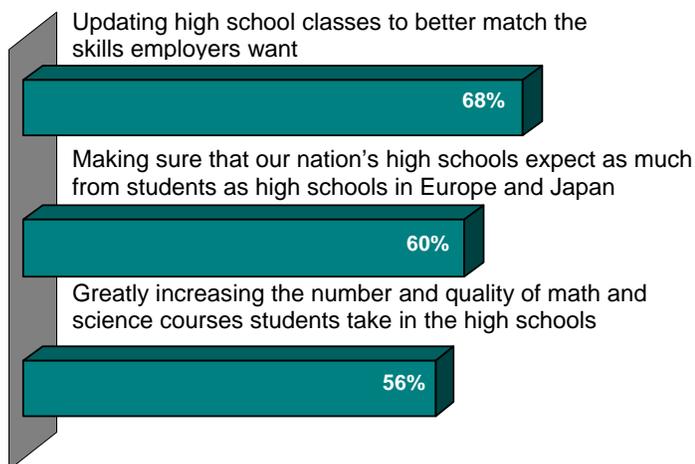
Most parents support proposals to make high schools more competitive internationally

% of parents who say the following proposals will improve high school education in the United States:



Students too want schools to prepare them for good jobs in a competitive world

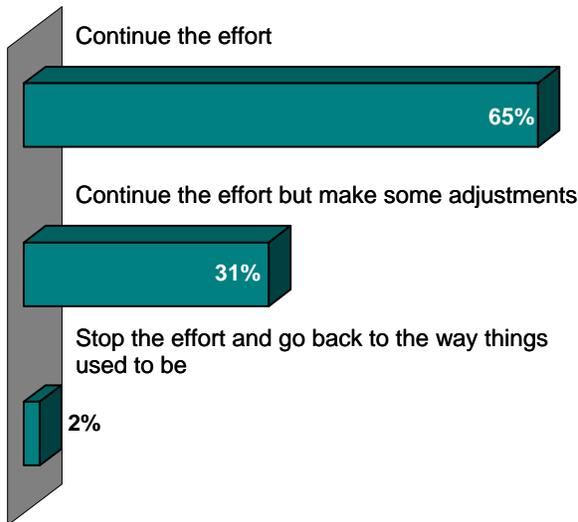
% of students who think each of the following proposals will improve high school education:



Most parents support continuing to raise standards

When it comes to raising academic standards, do you think your school district should?

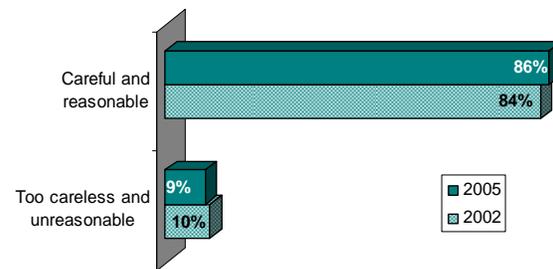
Based on parents whose public schools are making an effort to raise standards



Large majorities of parents say local schools have been careful and reasonable in raising academic standards

Overall, would you say that the schools are careful and reasonable in putting in place the higher academic standards, or are they being too careless and unreasonable?

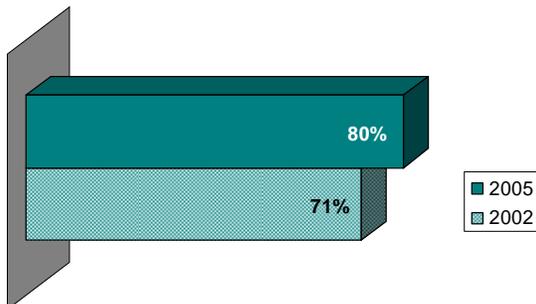
Based on parents whose public schools are making an effort to raise standards



Note: These differences are not statistically significant

Most students say requiring them to meet higher standards for promotion and graduation is a good idea

% of students who say that requiring students to meet higher standards in order to be promoted or to graduate is a good idea:⁸



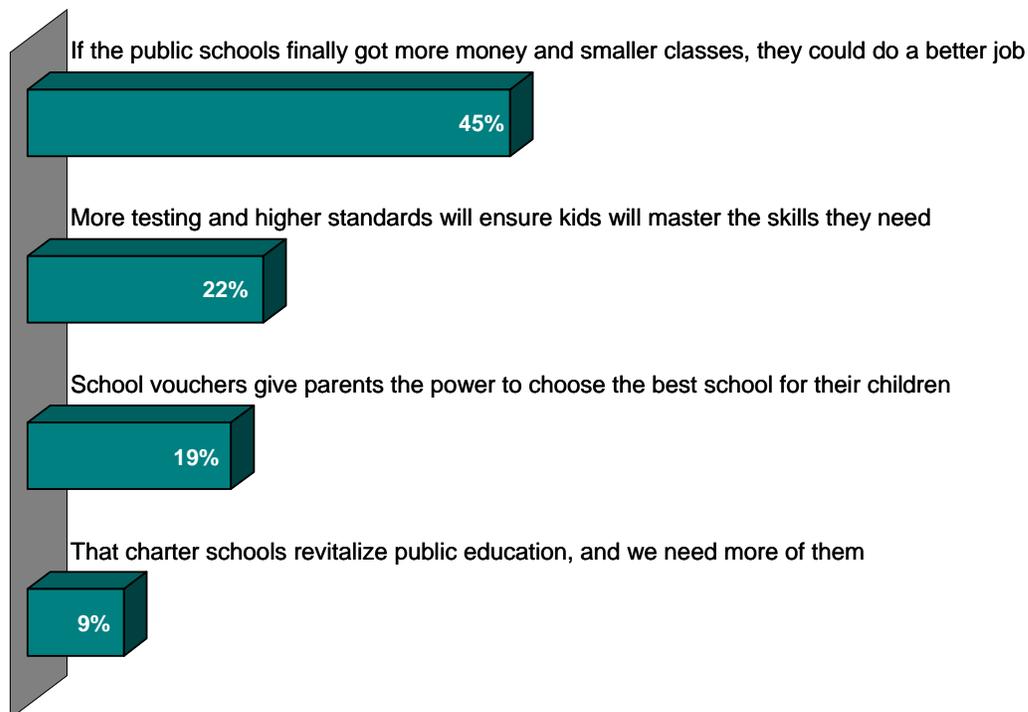
⁸ Question wording in 2002 was: "The schools should use standardized test scores along with teacher evaluations to decide if students should be promoted or graduate."

FINDING TWO: STANDARDS ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Despite broad support for standards as a crucial element of public education, Reality Check shows that most parents see other issues as more urgent. The survey presented respondents with four hypothetical candidates for a local school board election – one calling for more testing and higher standards, one backing more money for schools and smaller classes, one calling for vouchers, and one a supporter of charter schools. Among parents, the standards and testing candidate comes in a distant second to a supporter of smaller classes and more funding. In fact, fewer than one in four parents chooses the standards and testing candidate out of the four options. Parental anxiety about low academic standards has fallen over the last decade. Concern about a lack of emphasis on basic skills has fallen as well.

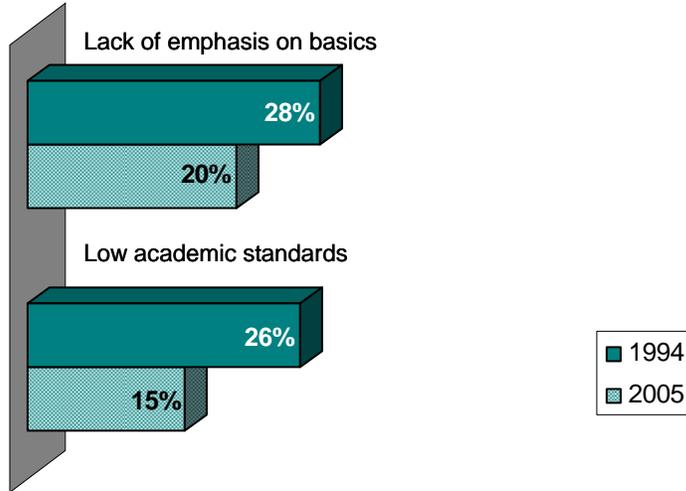
Fewer than one in four parents would support a school board candidate running mainly on a testing and standards platform

Suppose you were voting in a local school board election. Which of the following candidates would you be most likely to support? A candidate who believes:



Parents' concern about low academic standards and teaching of basics has fallen since 1994⁹

% of parents who say the following are a "very serious" problem in their child's school:



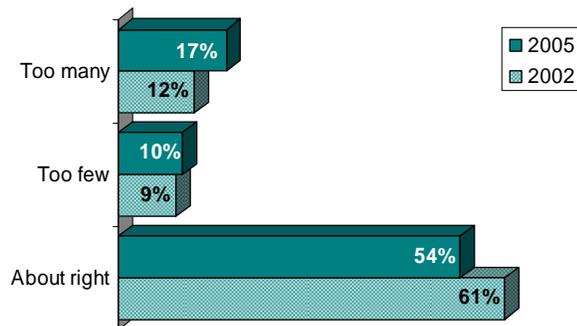
⁹ "First Things First," Public Agenda 1994.

FINDING THREE: NO BACKLASH TO TESTING FROM PARENTS AND STUDENTS

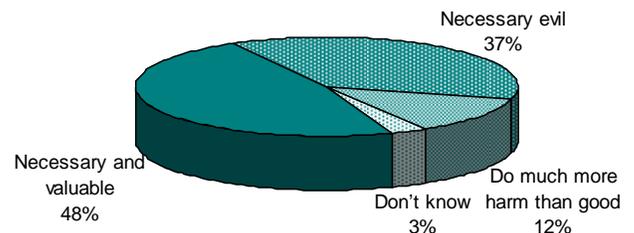
Standards advocates have long worried about a backlash to testing among parents and students as districts increase testing and put more tangible consequences into place. Although teachers are quite concerned about current levels of testing (See Finding Five), Reality Check shows very little evidence of a broad backlash from parents and students. Fewer than 1 in 5 parents complain that their child has to take too many tests. Most students say that the number of tests they take is about right (71%) and that most of the questions are fair (79%). Most students endorse the idea of a high school exit exam, and relatively few say they get so nervous about tests that they can't do their best. Many parents still do not know enough about No Child Left Behind to have an opinion about it.

Relatively few parents complain that their child has to take too many tests or that tests are harmful

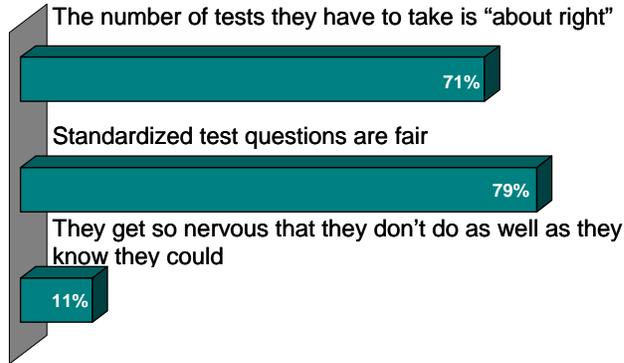
Would you say that your child is required to take too many standardized tests, too few, are things about right or don't you know?



Please tell me which comes closest to your view? Standardized tests: (1) are necessary and valuable – they are a reliable yardstick for measuring student performance, (2) are a necessary evil – ultimately, the schools need some kind of standardized assessment or (3) do much more harm than good – the schools would be better off if they were completely abandoned.

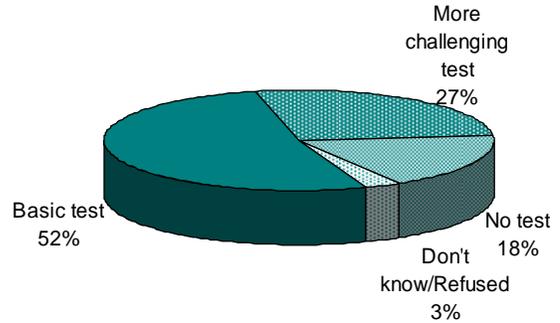


Relatively few students complain about too much testing or say they get overly nervous about them



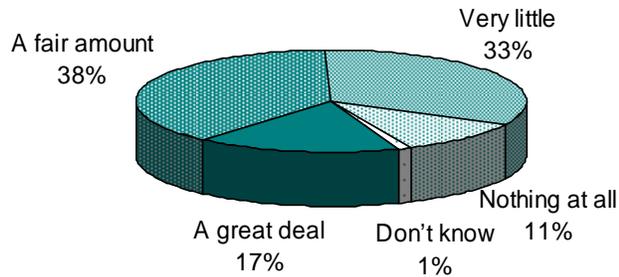
Most students support a high school exit exam

Before students are awarded a high school diploma, would you want your school district to require students to: (1) pass a basic skills test in reading, writing and math, (2) pass a more challenging test showing they have learned at higher levels or (3) kids should not be required to pass a skills test?

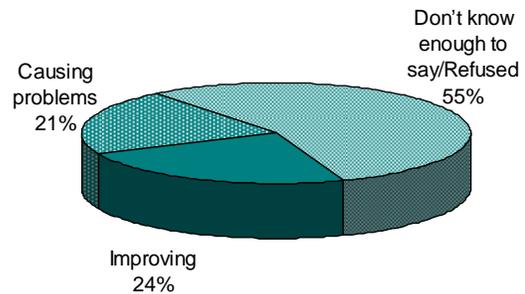


Parents' knowledge about No Child Left Behind is still low

How much, if anything, would you say you know about the No Child Left Behind Act – the federal education bill that was passed by Congress in 2001 – a great deal, a fair amount, very little or nothing at all?

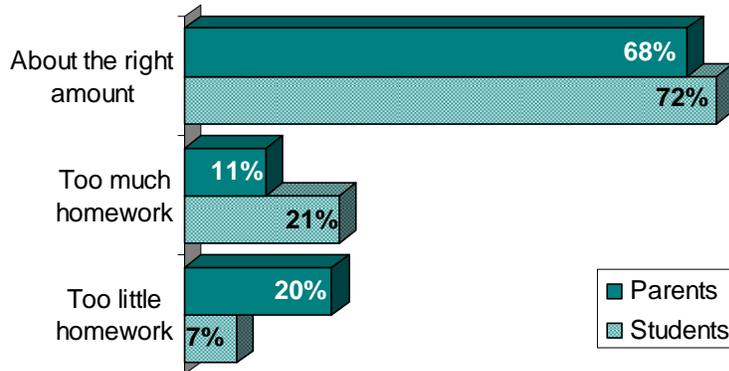


From what you have heard or read about public schools in your community, is the No Child Left Behind Act improving local public education, causing problems or don't you know enough to say?



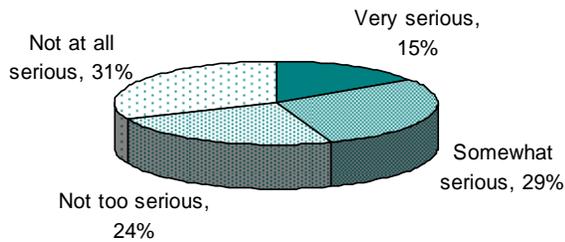
Relatively few parents and students voice serious complaints about too much homework

Overall, do you feel that you/your child is getting too much homework, too little or about the right amount?



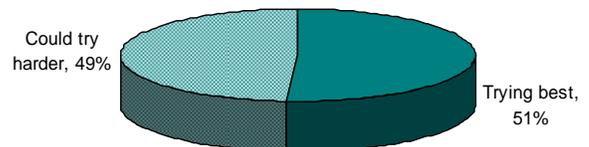
Relatively few students say too much academic pressure is a “very serious” problem

% who say it’s a serious problem that there is too much pressure to make good grades in classes and on tests:



Only half of students say they are working as hard as they could in schools

When it comes to school work, would you say you are trying your very best to do well in school, or do you think you could try a little harder?

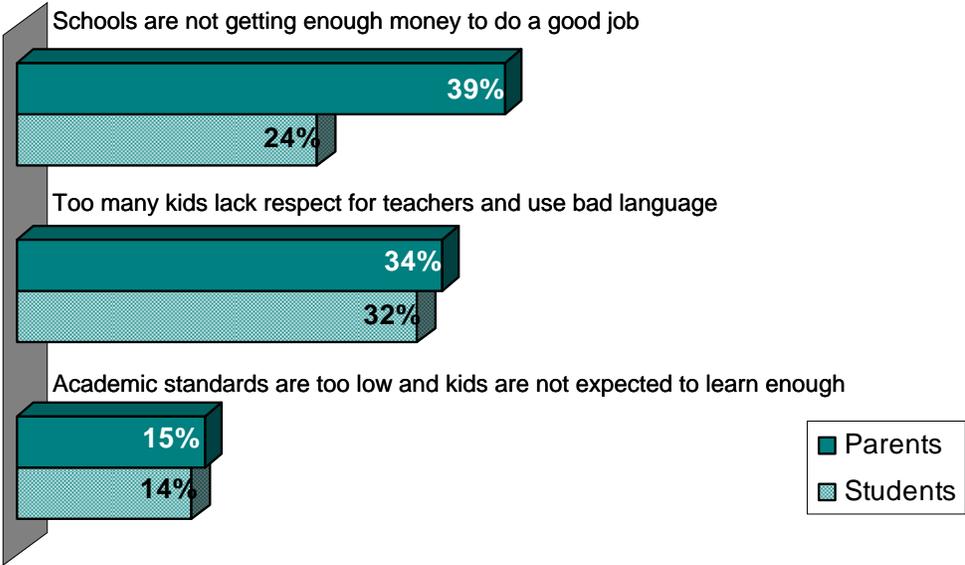


FINDING FOUR: STANDARDS ARE NOT THE PRIORITY

When asked about a range of issues facing local schools, relatively few parents or students say low academic standards are a “very serious” problem in their area. Parents are twice as likely to choose lack of money (39%) and lack of respect for teachers and profanity (34%) as “very serious” problems over low standards (15%). Students too say that schools not getting enough money and lack of respect are the more serious issues based on what they see. Adding to the sense that low standards are not a top priority item now is the judgment of most parents that schools are better and the material studied is harder than when they themselves went to school.

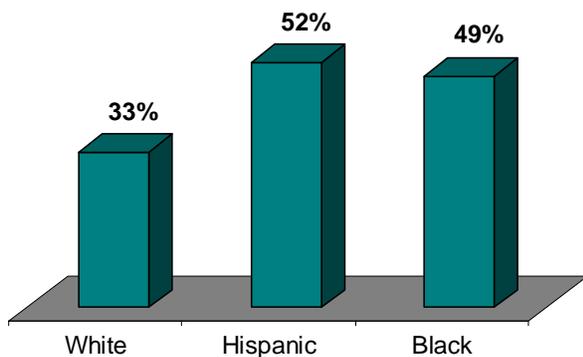
Parents and students see lack of money and disrespect for teachers as more serious problems than low standards

% of parents and students who say it’s a “very serious” problem that:



Black and Hispanic parents are especially worried about too little money for schools

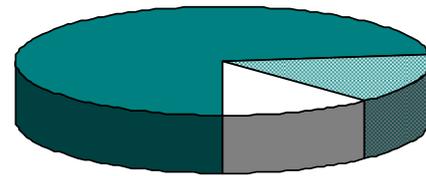
% of parents who say their schools don't have enough money to do a good job is a "very serious" problem:



Large majorities of parents say social problems and misbehaving students are more pressing problems for high schools than low standards

Do you think that the most pressing problems facing the high schools in your local community come from:

Social problems and kids who misbehave 73%

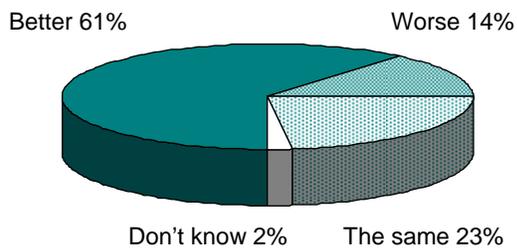


Don't know/
Refused 12%

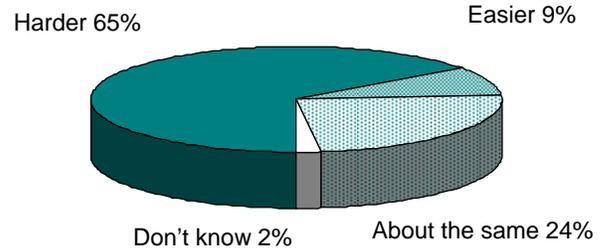
Low academic standards and
outdated curricula 15%

Most parents say schools are better and harder than when they went to school

Is the education your child is getting at school, better or worse than the education you got at his/her age?



In general, do you think the material they are learning is harder, easier or about the same as when you were in school?

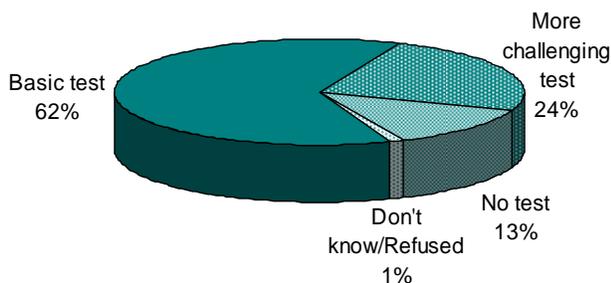


FINDING FIVE: TEACHERS BELIEVE IN STANDARDS, BUT...

Among all the groups Public Agenda has surveyed, teachers have historically had more concerns about the standards movement than parents, students or administrators. Even so, most teachers do not question the intrinsic value of standards and testing. More than 8 in 10 teachers back a high school exit exam covering either basics (62%) or more advanced skills (24%). Few teachers (19%) say standardized tests do more harm than good, and most give their local district pretty good marks for being careful and reasonable in putting higher academic standards in place. But 7 in 10 teachers say their students have to take too many tests. Most teachers also say that No Child Left Behind is causing problems in local schools (70%), not improving them (15%).

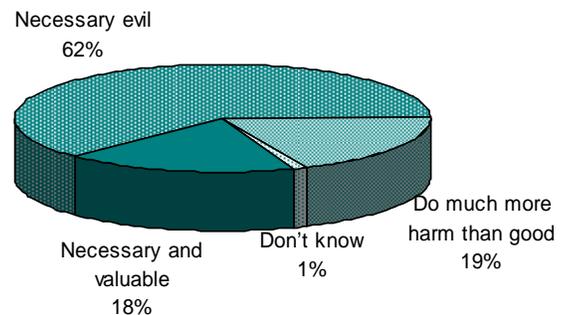
Most teachers back a high school exit exam

Before students are awarded a high school diploma, would you want your school district to require students to: (1) pass a basic skills test in reading, writing and math, (2) pass a more challenging test showing they have learned at higher levels or (3) kids should not be required to pass a skills test?



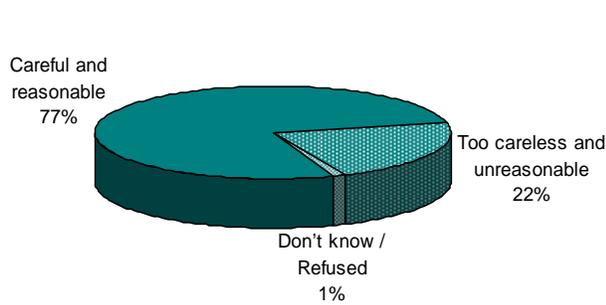
Relatively few teachers reject standardized testing outright

Please tell me which comes closest to your view? Standardized tests: (1) are necessary and valuable – they are a reliable yardstick for measuring student performance, (2) are a necessary evil – ultimately, the schools need some kind of standardized assessment or (3) do much more harm than good – the schools would be better off if they were completely abandoned.



Most teachers say district has been careful and reasonable in raising standards

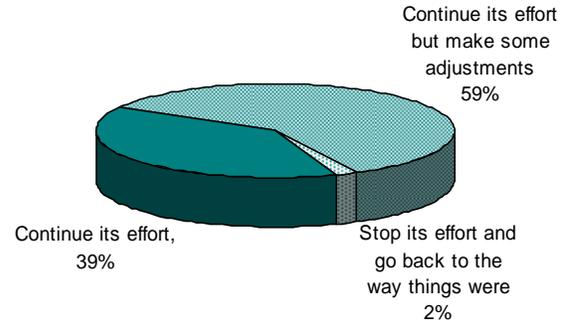
Overall, would you say that the schools are careful and reasonable in putting in place the higher academic standards, or are they being too careless and unreasonable?



Few teachers want to return to policies of the past

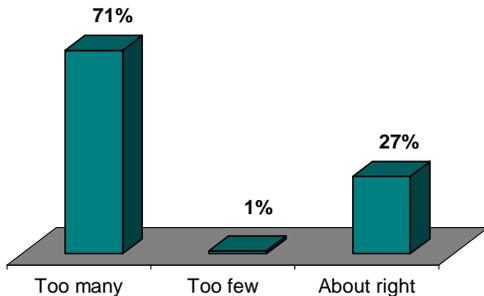
When it comes to this effort toward higher academic standards, do you think your school district should:

Based on those whose public schools are making an effort to raise standards



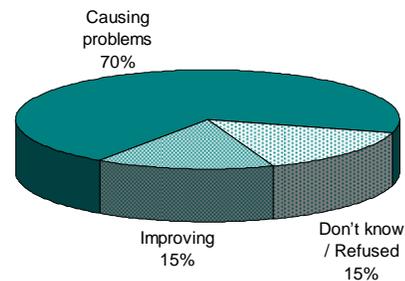
But large majorities of teachers say there is too much testing

Would you say that students in your school are required to take too many standardized tests, too few, are things about right or don't you know?



And the majority of teachers say No Child Left Behind is causing problems in local schools

From what you know about public schools in your community, is the No Child Left Behind Act improving local public education, causing problems or don't you know enough to say?

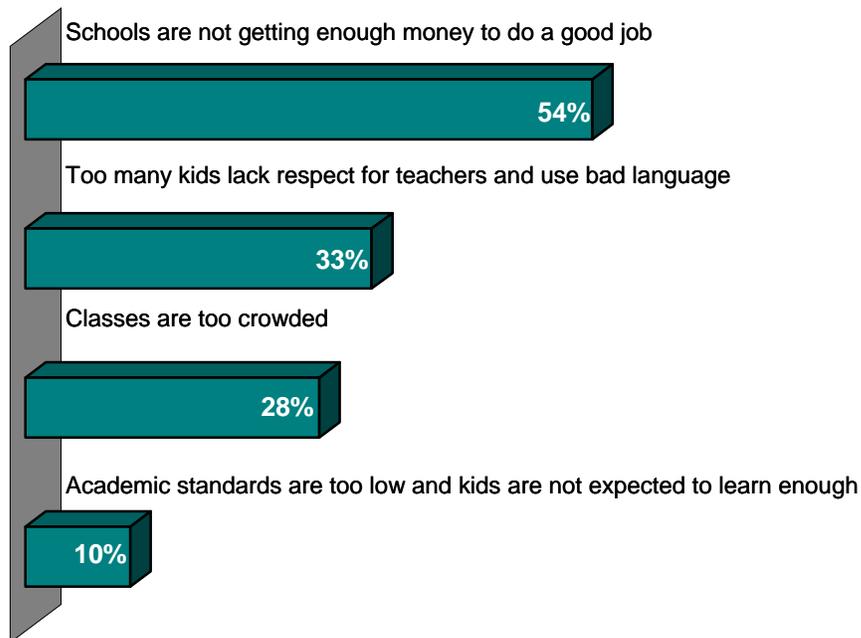


FINDING SIX: MORE MONEY, SMALLER CLASSES, MORE RESPECT

Like parents and students, most teachers see other issues as more important than low standards in local schools. Over half of teachers (54%) say that schools “not getting enough money to do a good job” is a “very serious” problem in their community. Many also see lack of respect and crowded classrooms as “very serious” issues. Just 10 percent of teachers say low academic standards are a “very serious” problem where they teach. Only one percent of teachers would back a school board candidates running on a more standards and testing platform. Nearly 9 in 10 (88%) would back a candidate calling for more money and smaller classes as the way to improve local schools.

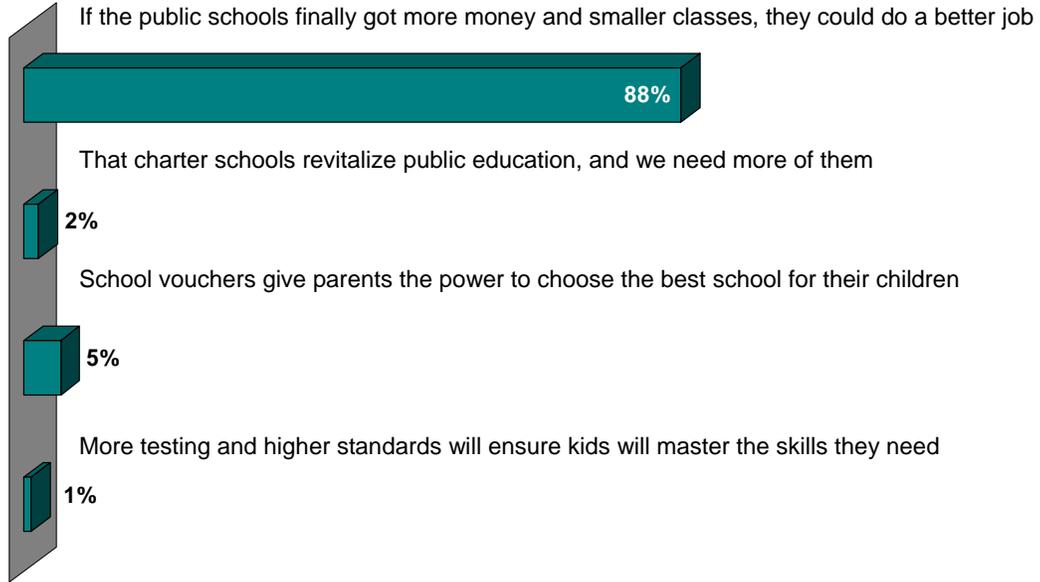
Most teachers see lack of money and student behavior as more pressing problems than standards

% of teachers who say the following are “very serious” problems in their schools:



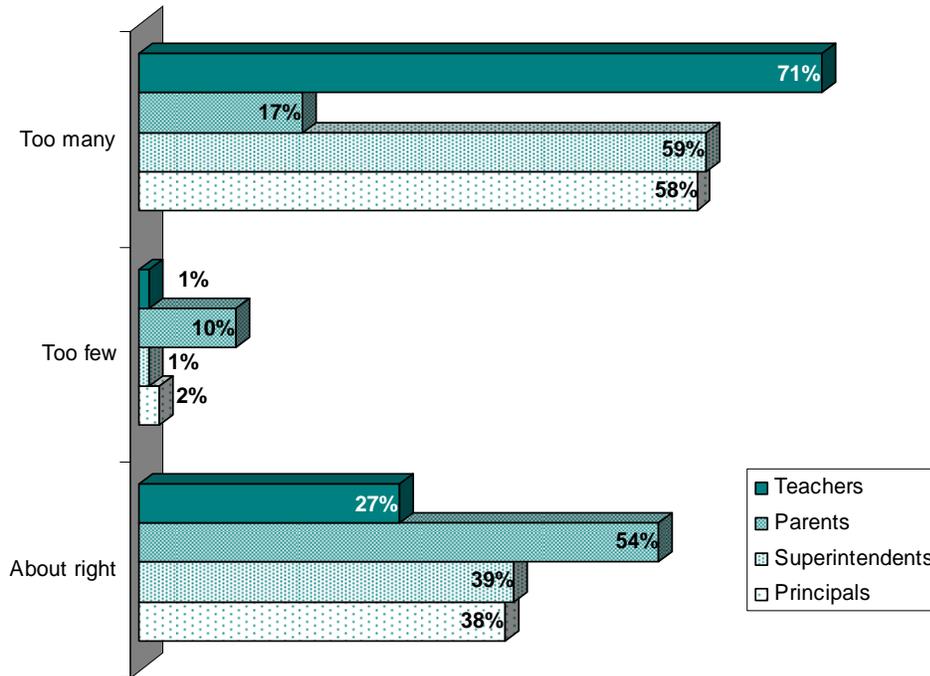
Nearly all teachers would back a candidate urging more money for schools and smaller classes

Suppose you were voting in a local school board election. Which of the following candidates would you be most likely to support? A candidate who believes:



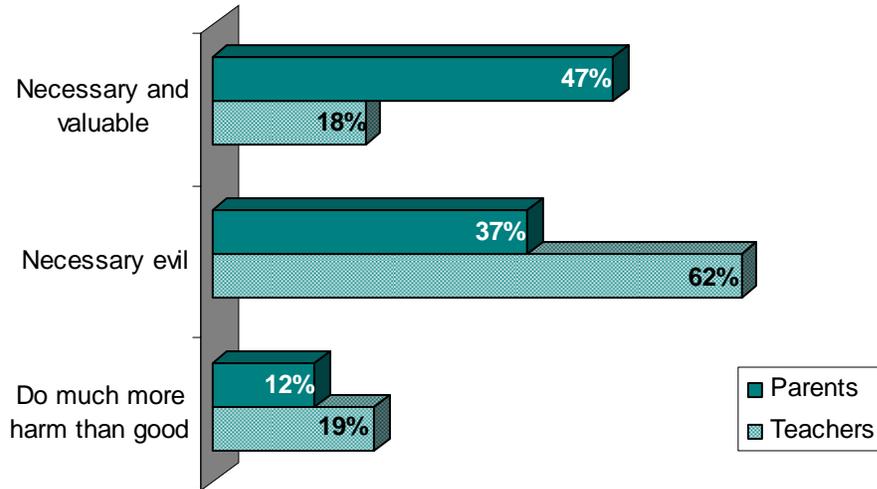
Teachers are more concerned than parents and administrators about the amount of testing

Would you say that students are required to take too many standardized tests, too few, are things about right or don't you know?



Teachers are also less likely to see standardized testing as valuable

Please tell me which comes closest to your view? Standardized tests: (1) are necessary and valuable – they are a reliable yardstick for measuring student performance, (2) are a necessary evil – ultimately, the schools need some kind of standardized assessment or (3) do much more harm than good – the schools would be better off if they were completely abandoned.

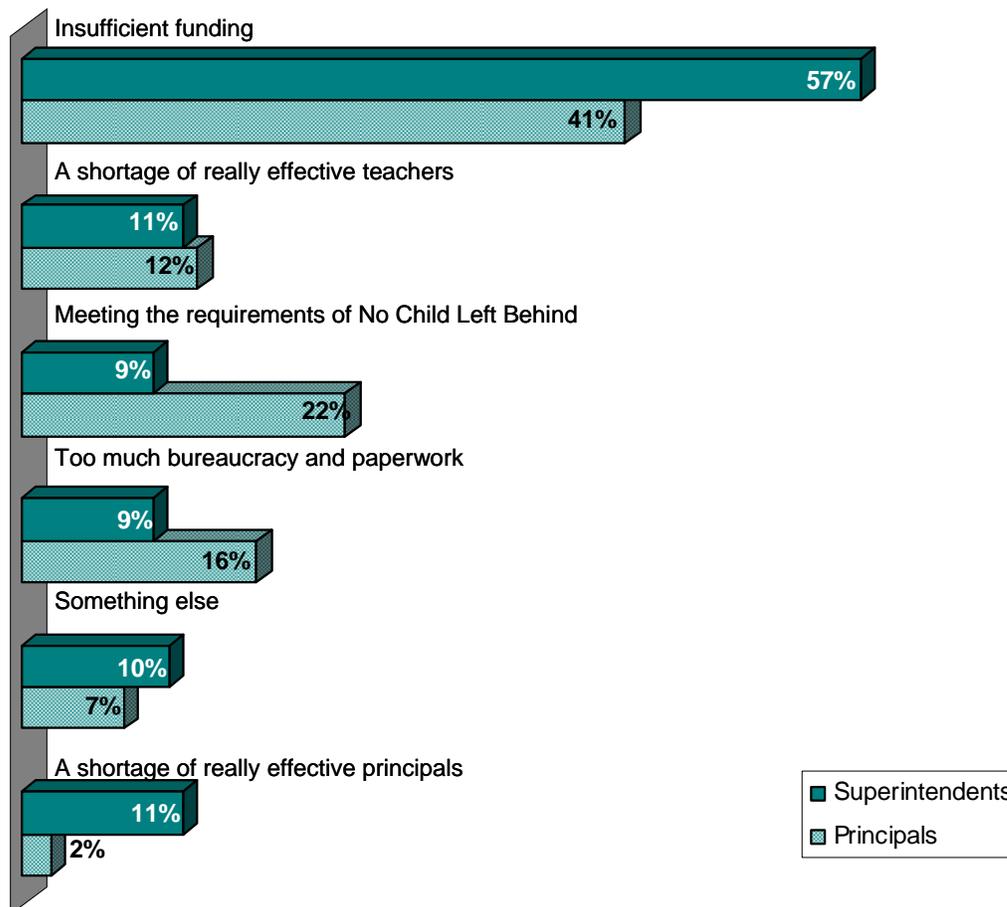


FINDING SEVEN: PRINCIPALS AND SUPERINTENDENTS EMPHASIZE FUNDING

Like teachers and parents, most principals and superintendents see money, rather than low standards, as their priority. The vast majority of administrators (52% of principals and 60% of superintendents) point to lack of adequate funding as a “very serious” problem in their district. In contrast, a negligible number of principals (4%) and superintendents (2%) see low academic standards as a “very serious” problem. Like teachers, nearly all administrators would support a school board candidate focusing on funding and class size. Just a handful would back someone calling for more emphasis on standards and testing.

More superintendents and principals say insufficient funding is their major challenge

What is the most pressing issue facing your school district today?

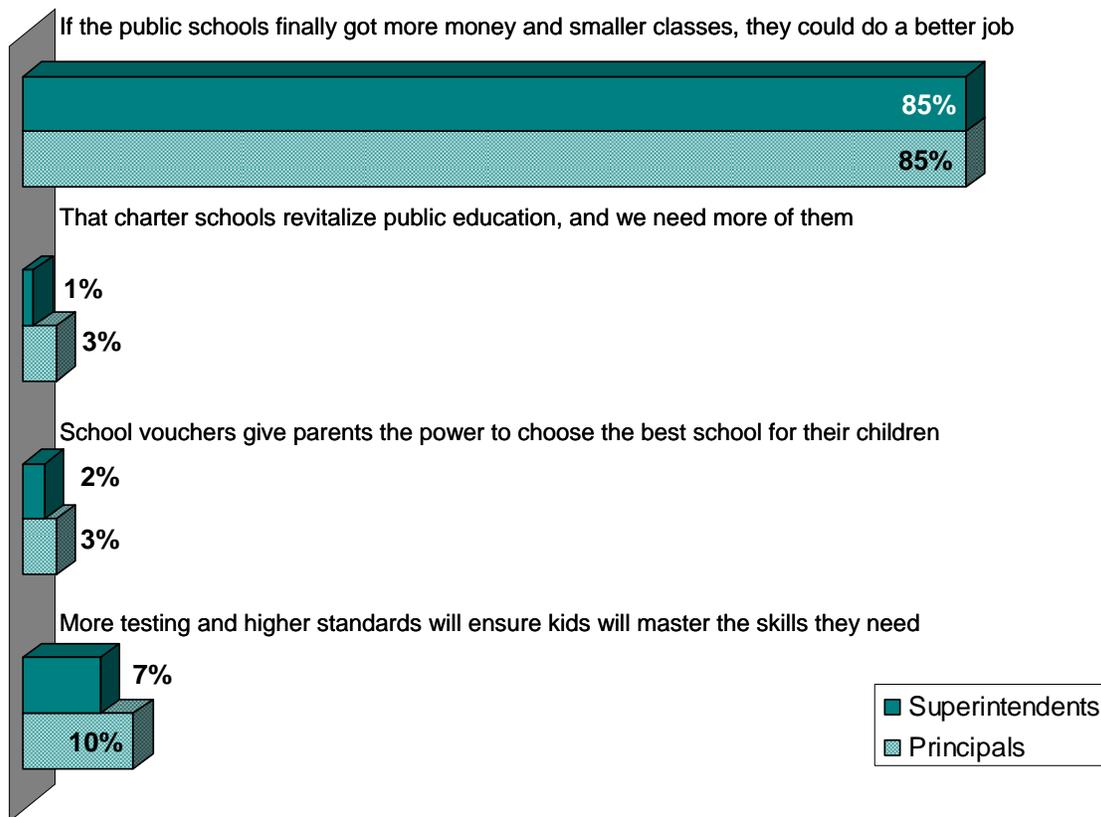


Like teachers and parents, most principals and superintendents rank lack of money and disrespectful students as more serious problems than low standards

% of administrators who say it's a "very serious" problem	Principals	Superintendents
Schools are not getting enough money to do a good job	52%	60%
Too many kids lack respect for teachers and use bad language	19%	9%
There's too much drug and alcohol abuse	10%	9%
Academic standards are too low, and kids are not expected to learn enough	4%	2%

The vast majority of superintendents and principals would back a candidate calling for more money and smaller classes versus one running on a standards platform

Suppose you were voting in a local school board election. Which of the following candidates would you be most likely to support? A candidate who believes:

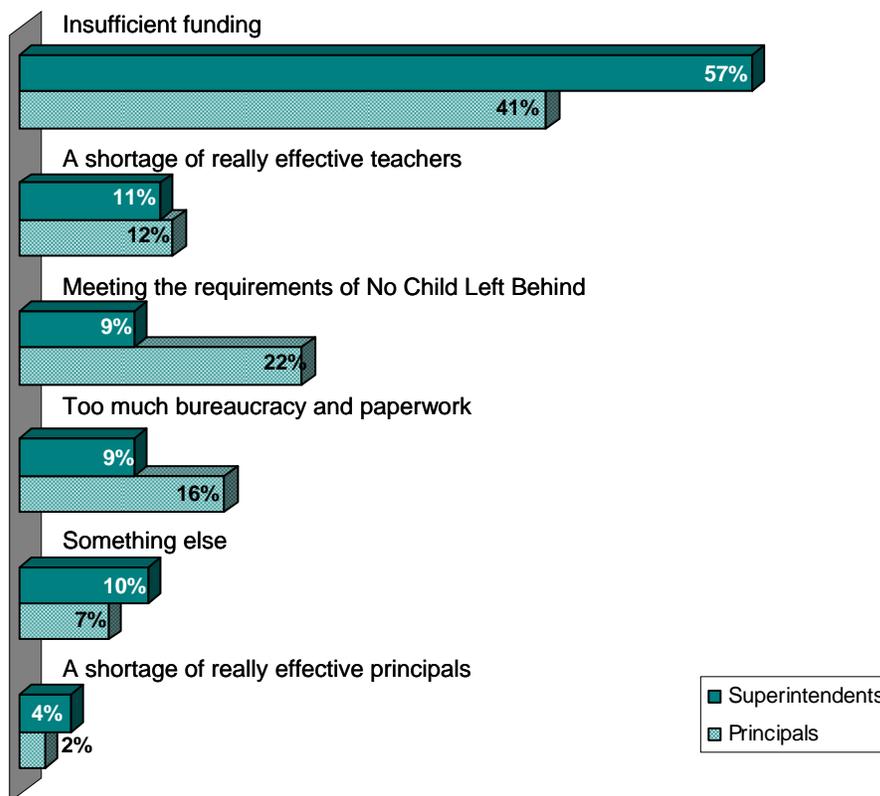


FINDING EIGHT: STUDENT DATA, YES. NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND, MAYBE

Recent Public Agenda surveys of principals and superintendents suggest that most are beginning to live with No Child Left Behind, although relatively few think it will be successful without some adjustment.¹⁰ Relatively few principals (22%) and superintendents (9%) name No Child Left Behind as the major challenge facing them, but fewer than half think the law will actually raise student achievement. Principals and superintendents are divided on the usefulness of breaking out test scores by race and for English-language learners which the law requires. Still, about half of principals (52%) and superintendents (46%) say student data is helpful. Large majorities consider knowing how to use student test data to improve teaching an essential skill for a school leader. Seven in ten principals and superintendents say that making the data available in a timely way would be a good way to improve school leadership.

Relatively few principals or superintendents see No Child Left Behind as their major challenge

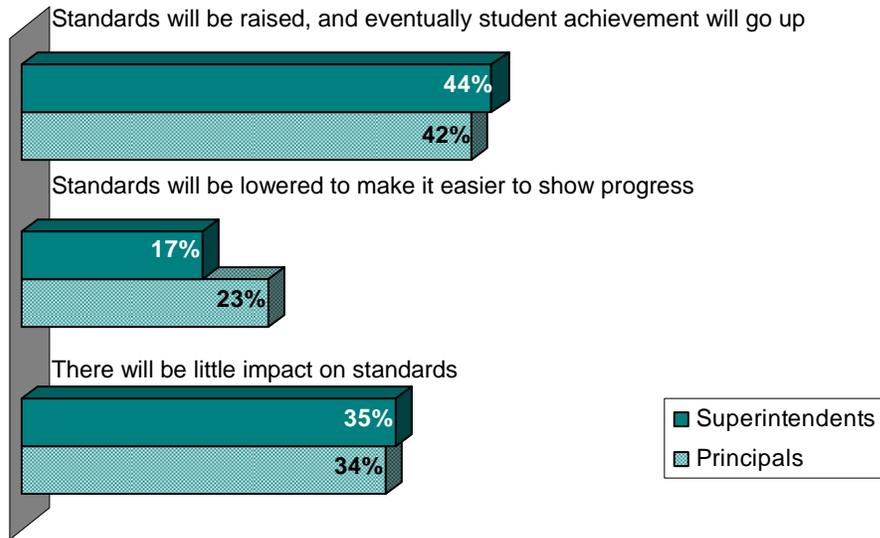
What is the most pressing issue facing your school district today?



¹⁰ In 2003, 61 percent of superintendents and 65 percent of principals said that No Child Left Behind will work if many adjustments are made to the law. In comparison, 33 percent of superintendents and 30 percent of principals said it probably won't work at all ("Rolling Up Their Sleeves," Public Agenda 2003.).

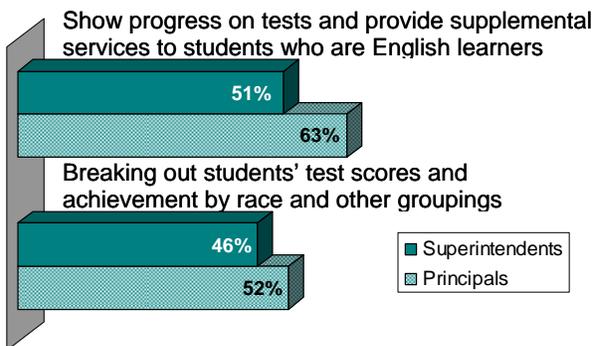
Less than half of superintendents and principals believe NCLB will raise academic standards

% of superintendents and principals who say that ultimate impact NCLB – the No Child Left Behind Act – will have on academic standards in their state will be that:



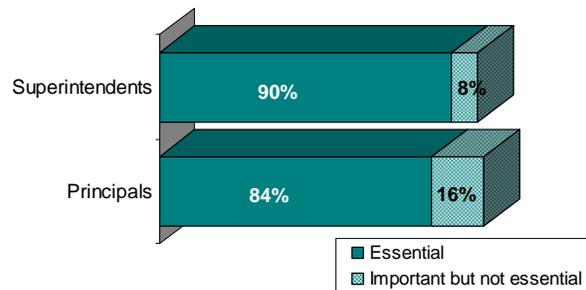
Principals especially are divided on whether the law’s main components are helpful

% of principals and superintendents who say that the following NCLB requirements are helpful:



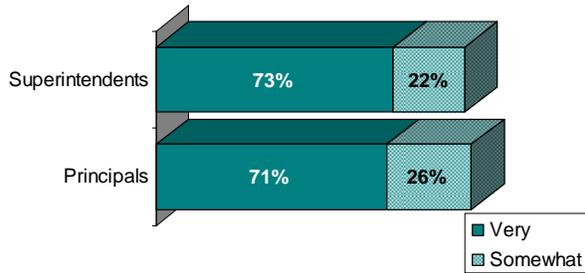
However large majorities say student test data can be useful in improving teaching and learning

% of principals and superintendents who believe student test data can be useful in improving teaching and learning:



Administrators believe having timely student test data can improve education leadership

How effective at improving educational leadership do you think making data from student testing available in a more timely and useful way would be?



RELATED PUBLIC AGENDA PUBLICATIONS

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Reality Check 2006: Issue No. 1, Are Parents and Students Ready for More Math and Science? Supported by the GE Foundation, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and The Wallace Foundation. 2006. 13 pgs. “Of course, just offering students more advanced math and science courses isn’t enough. We have to change the way our students look at these classes as well... A [Public Agenda study] found that 70 percent of high school parents say their children already get enough math and science in school. You and I know why this matters, and we must work together to make sure parents and students do, too.” – U.S. Department of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings. Print Edition Price:\$5.00. ISBN No. 1-89483-81-8.

Life After High School: Young People Talk about Their Hopes and Prospects. Supported by The College Board, GE Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation and KnowledgeWorks Foundation. 2005. Full Report: 42 pgs. Executive Summary: 10 pgs. “A new survey of young adults on their plans after high school finds they understand the limitations of life without a college degree, but often lack the money, motivation or guidance to pursue higher education. The survey, conducted by the nonpartisan research group Public Agenda, also shows that most young people who forgo college find themselves falling into jobs by chance.” – Lou Dobbs on CNN’s Lou Dobbs Tonight. Print Edition Price: \$5.00. ISBN: 1-889483-86-9.

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Stand by Me: What Teachers Really Think about Unions, Merit Pay and Other Professional Matters. Supported by The Broad Foundation, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and The Sidney J. Weinberg, Jr. Foundation. 2003. 64 pgs. “The research group Public Agenda consistently offers insightful studies of education, and its latest report is a winner. *Stand by Me* draws out teachers’ views of the policies that shape their professional lives – what they think about unions, merit pay, tenure, alternative certification, standardized testing and more.” – Scripps Howard News Service. Print Edition Price: \$10.00. ISBN No. 1-889483-82-6.

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About Public Agenda

Founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich, and former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Public Agenda works to help the nation's leaders better understand the public's point of view and to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues. Our in-depth research on how citizens think about policy has won praise for its credibility and fairness from elected officials from both political parties and from experts and decision makers across the political spectrum. Our citizen education materials and award-winning web site publicagenda.org offer unbiased information about the challenges the country faces. Recently recognized by Library Journal as one of the Web's best resources, Public Agenda Online provides comprehensive information on a wide range of policy issues.

About Education Insights

Education Insights is a multi-year initiative launched by Public Agenda to expand community and parent engagement in public education. Building on our extensive opinion research in education and seminal work in developing practical public engagement projects, Education Insights addresses the miscommunication and lack of consensus that sometimes hampers reform. The initiative reflects our belief that the drive to transform American education is at a critical juncture. With astute leadership and genuine community engagement, we believe public education reform can attract broad and sustained support. But without a genuine effort to bring a broader group of Americans into the movement, we fear that the momentum for change could weaken, leaving the country with too many school systems beset with weaknesses and inequities.

About Reality Check

Reality Check is a set of public opinion tracking surveys on important issues in public education. From 1998 through 2002, Public Agenda conducted annual surveys of parents, teachers, students, employers and college professors covering primarily standards, testing, and accountability issues. In 2005 and 2006, Public Agenda revised and updated these Reality Check surveys to cover a broader range of questions, including high school reform, school leadership, teacher preparation and quality, school funding and other key issues. The new Reality Check surveys also include responses from public school principals and superintendents. The tracking surveys will be repeated periodically as a service of Education Insights. The 2005-2006 Reality Check research is supported by the GE Foundation, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and The Wallace Foundation.

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