



P A C E

POLICY ANALYSIS FOR CALIFORNIA EDUCATION

Californians' Views on Education: Results of the PACE 1996 Poll

First Paper in a Series

**Michael W. Kirst
Gerald C. Hayward
Julia E. Koppich
Neal Finkelstein**

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Policy Analysis for California Education

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) is a university-based research center focusing on issues of state education policy and practice. PACE is located in the Schools of Education at the University of California, Berkeley and Stanford University and has an office in Sacramento. General support for PACE is generously provided by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

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Please make checks payable to UC Regents and send to:

**PACE
School of Education
3653 Tolman Hall
University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, CA 94720-1670
(510) 642-7223
FAX (510) 642-9148**

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CALIFORNIANS' VIEWS ON PUBLIC EDUCATION: RESULTS OF THE PACE 1996 POLL

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), in February 1996, conducted a statewide poll on Californians' views on and expectations for the public schools. In particular, the poll was designed to gain insight into the alignment of the public's views with current directions in education policy.

Conducting a poll among Californians is especially relevant because 1) no comprehensive public poll has been conducted in recent memory, and 2) poll results can serve to inform the wide range of policy discussions underway at the state level. State policy makers, for example, are in the process of redesigning a statewide assessment system (AB265) to feature grade-by-grade and subject-by-subject standards. This system has potentially far reaching effects for curriculum design and instruction. In addition, the state is engaged in two reform initiatives—Charter Schools and Challenge Districts—which, in different ways, look to test traditional school governance with new approaches. A new proposal for “opportunity scholarships” that seeks to provide public funds for private and parochial schools is now before the Legislature. Finally, the California Constitutional Revision Commission will be releasing its recommendations in coming months for far-reaching changes on complex issues of local control and home rule. Additional initiatives on school safety, class size reduction, and new instructional approaches are all currently under discussion in Sacramento.

Policy makers are thus confronted with an array of proposals. But what does the public think about California's schools? Does the public think schools are performing as they should? In what areas of education policy do the public's views align with policy makers' and where do they differ?

Before displaying the poll results, we add a caveat. PACE does not believe that education policy should be made using public opinion polls.

Nevertheless, Californians' perceptions of the public school system, and of potential policy changes, need to be considered in policy discussions. The results of this poll, PACE believes, can help to inform and focus the debate on public education.

For purposes of this poll, PACE contracted with Peter D. Hart Research Associates of Washington DC. The telephone survey, administered between February 9 and 29, 1996, was completed by 803 respondents who were at least 18 years old. The overall results of the survey have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percent.

The remainder of this paper is composed of three sections. The first section reports the major findings from the poll. In this section, PACE outlines four broad themes and demonstrates, using the poll results, how these conclusions were drawn. The second section is a policy "side-by-side" that shows the relevance of some poll findings to the current education policy discussion in California. The third section, the tabulations of the poll results, is provided so readers can draw their own conclusions based on the questions and responses.

FINDINGS

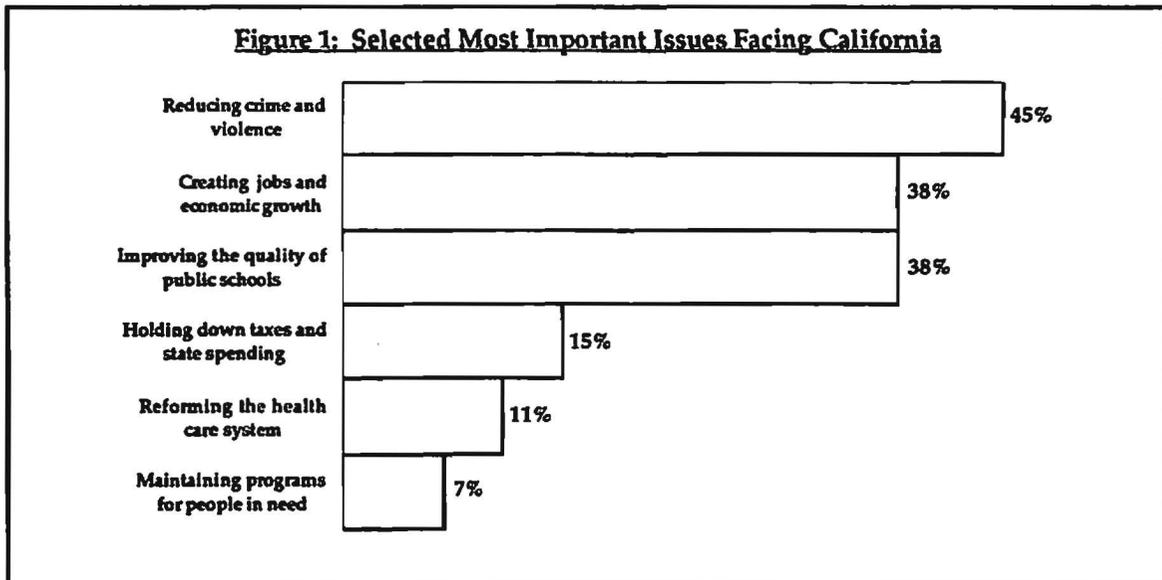
Poll results reveal that the public is deeply concerned about the quality of the state's education system. The public, however, has not given up on reforming public schools. In a number of major education policy areas, the public's view is consistent with current state efforts to improve schools. Poll findings support four major points with respect to public education in California:

- The public cares and is dissatisfied.
- The public has specific views about how to improve education.
- It matters who makes the decisions for reforming schools.
- Fiscal equity and financial adequacy are critical issues.

Results to support each of these broad findings are described below.

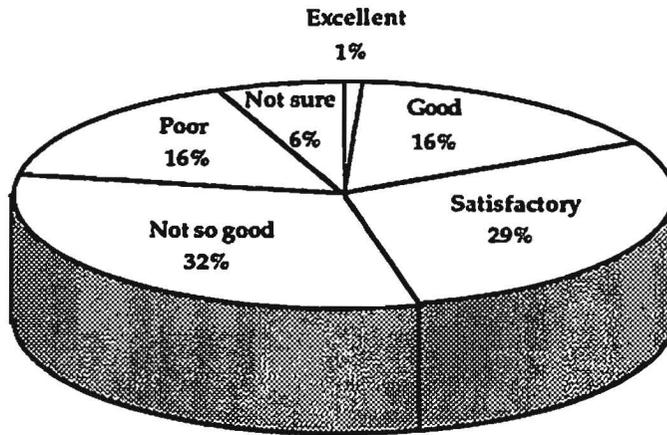
The Public Cares And Is Dissatisfied

As a way of assessing the salience of education as a policy issue, PACE asked the public to compare education to other critical policy areas. Only “Crime and Violence” ranked higher than the quality of public schools in the public’s estimation of the most important issues facing California. “Jobs and Economic Growth” were seen to be as important as education. “Taxes and State Spending,” “Health Care Reform,” and “Programs for the Needy” ranked as less important than the quality of the public schools (Figure 1).



PACE also asked respondents which came closest to their view of the system of public education in the state. A 54 percent majority said the system of public education in California needs a major overhaul; and 37 percent said that minor changes were needed. In a separate question that asked for an overall assessment of California schools, 17 percent said the public schools are excellent or good, 29 percent said the schools were satisfactory, and nearly half (48%) said schools are “not so good” or “poor” (Figure 2).

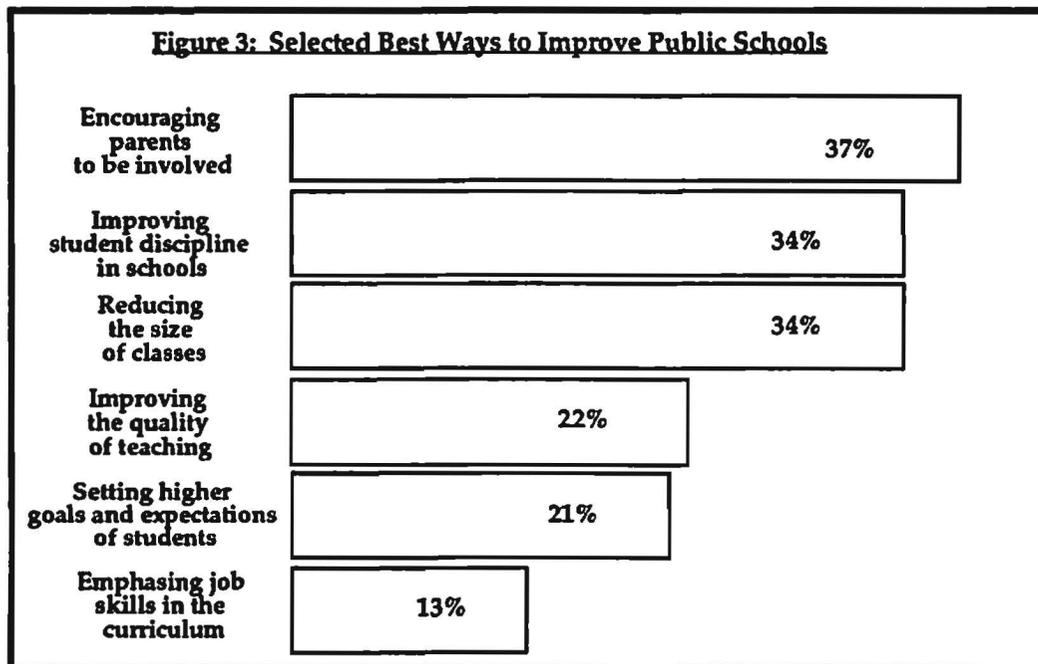
Figure 2: Californians Rate Their Public Schools



The Public Has Clear Views On How To Improve Education

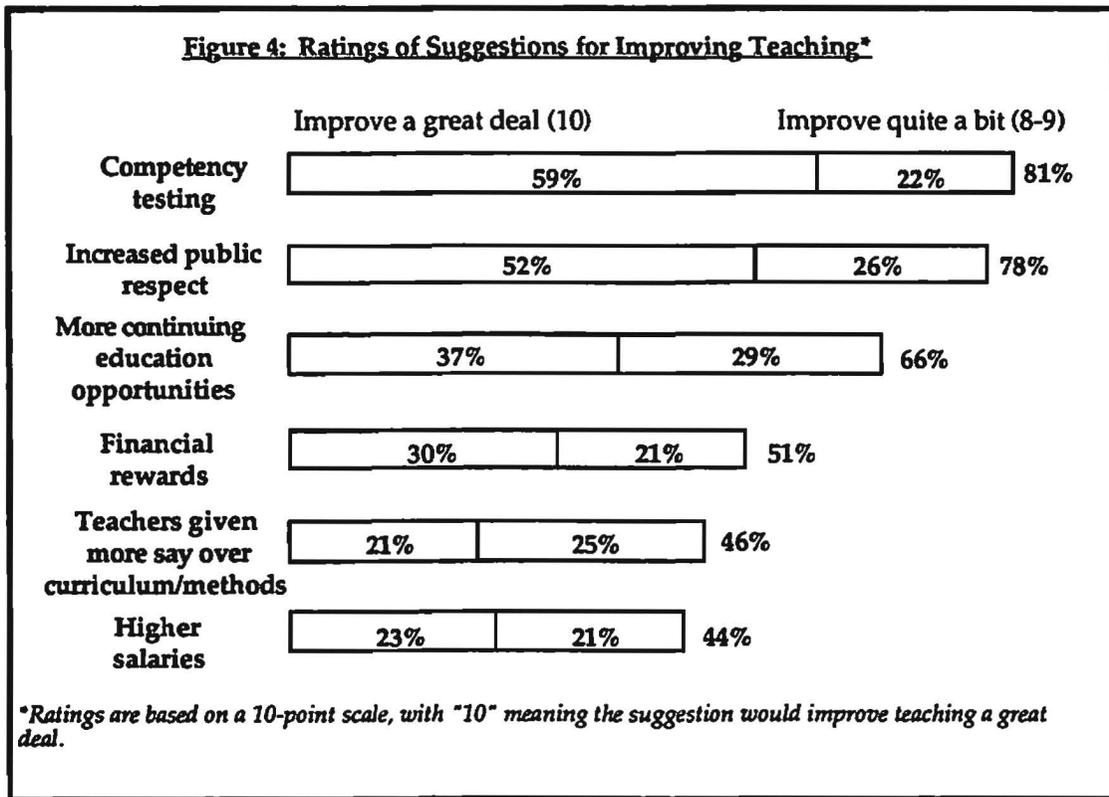
The PACE poll asked respondents to answer a wide variety of questions about what works and what needs fixing in the public schools. When asked specifically about the best ways to improve schools, the public responded get parents involved, reduce class size, and improve discipline (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Selected Best Ways to Improve Public Schools



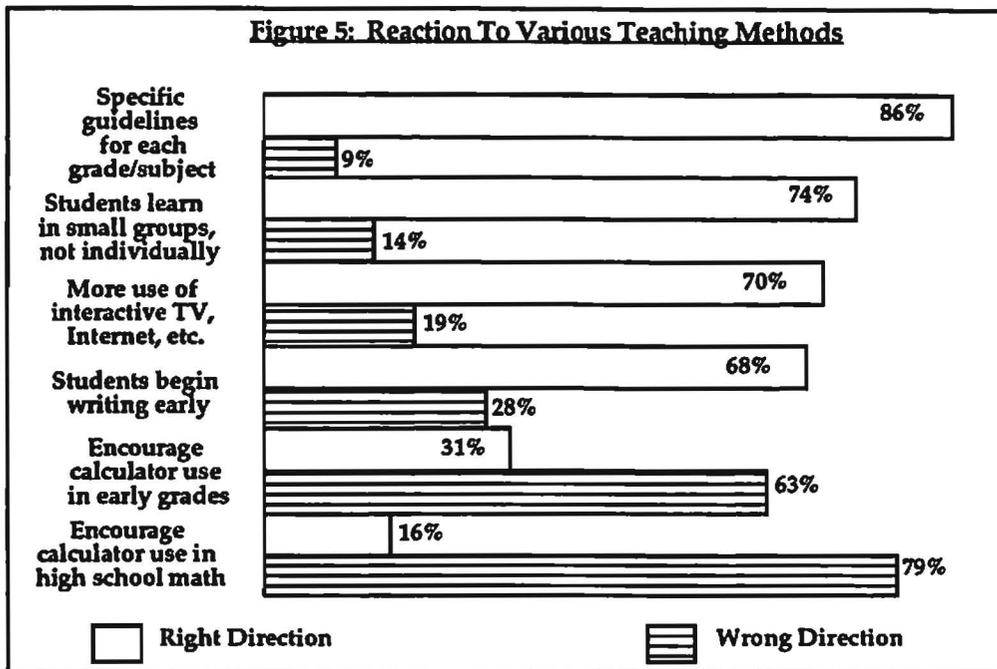
Questions in the categories of standards and accountability, teaching and learning, safety, and integrated services probed for additional information.

In the area of standard setting, the public believes raising academic standards is important. When asked whether raising academic standards would improve student performance or lead to higher dropout rates, the public responded 73 percent to 18 percent that raising academic standards would improve performance. Californians also favor testing to measure achievement and knowledge. Seventy-four percent of those polled said they think using standardized tests to measure achievement and knowledge is a good idea. In addition, the public overwhelmingly supports requiring teachers to pass competency tests in their fields as a strategy for improving the quality of teaching (81%) (Figure 4).



Poll respondents were provided a list of specific teaching methods. The objective in asking these questions was to inform the current debate around teaching and learning strategies. For each of the methods, the respondent was asked whether it represented a step in the right direction or a step in the

wrong direction. Eighty-six percent said specific guidelines for what students should learn in each grade and subject is a step in the right direction (Figure 5).



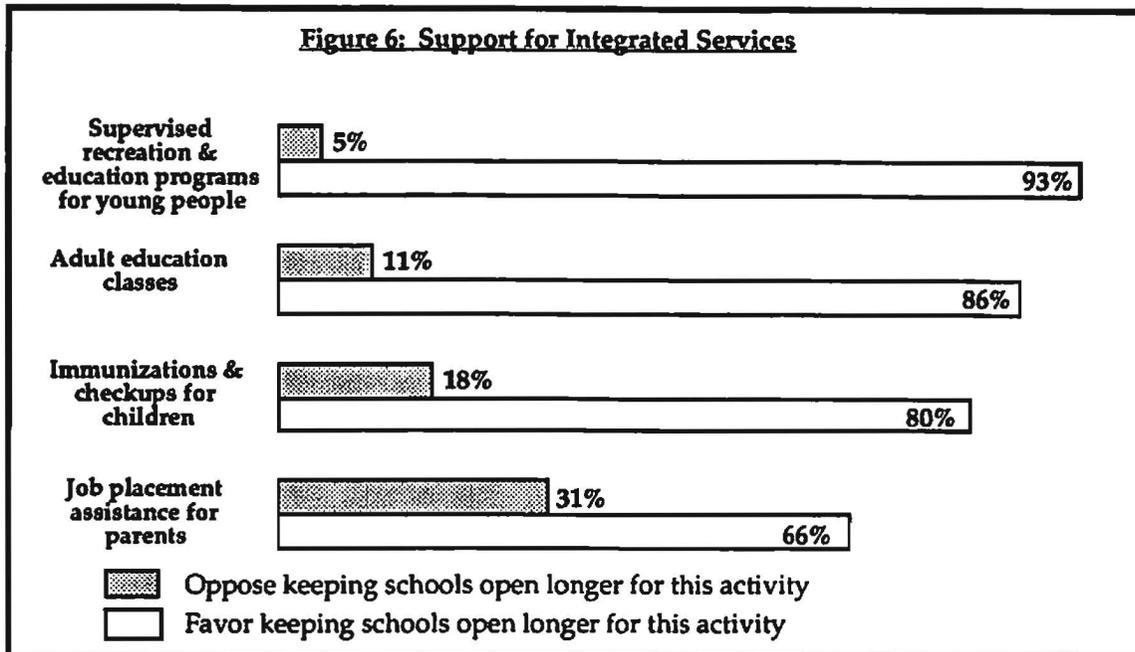
Widespread support was also found for having students learn in small groups, instead of working individually (74%). Making more use of interactive television, the Internet, and other electronic communications in the classroom was also heavily supported as a step in the right direction (70%).

Additionally, the public supports the idea that students begin writing early, even before they learn grammar and spelling (68%). In the area of learning mathematics, the public was asked whether encouraging students to use calculators to solve math problems was a step in the right or wrong direction. Specifically for early grade students more than three-quarters (79%) think it is a step in the wrong direction. For high school students as well, 63 percent of those polled also believe encouraging students to use calculators is a step in the wrong direction.

The public also favors professional development for teachers as a way to improve schools. Sixty-six percent of those polled support more opportunity for teachers to keep up with the latest teaching methods. In addition, slightly more than half (51%) support financial rewards for the best teachers (See Figure 4).

In a series of questions related to school safety, Californians responded that student discipline in the public schools currently is not strict enough, and they support new approaches to deal with the problem (78%). The public strongly supports (75%) a “zero-tolerance” policy that automatically expels students who bring drugs, guns or other weapons to school. In addition, when asked whether students who repeatedly disrupt classes should be educated in alternative settings, or suspended from school, three-quarters of respondents (75%) prefer placement and continued education in alternative settings.

Finally, the public not only wants to improve the quality of education, but also wants to use the public schools as the focal point for a variety of related services for parents and children. Californians firmly support multiple uses of schools: to offer supervised, after school recreational programs for young people (93%); to offer parenting and other adult education classes (86%); for doctors and hospitals to provide immunizations and regular checkups for children (80%); and to provide job placement assistance for parents (66%) (Figure 6).



It Matters Who Makes The Decisions For Reforming Schools

PACE asked Californians a series of questions about who should make decisions regarding the public schools. Some of the questions were about choices parents make for their own children. Of course the catalyst for these questions is the ongoing debate in California about vouchers. Other questions were about choices educators make regarding how schools operate.

The public, by a two-thirds margin (66%), favors giving *parents* the ability to choose among public schools for their children. At the same time, a majority (56%) opposes a choice program that would use some of the money now spent on public education to help parents pay for the cost of sending their children to the private or parochial school of their choice.

A majority of Californians believes that determinations of competency standards for teachers (59%) and promotion and graduation standards for students (51%) are decisions that should be made by the *Superintendent of Public Instruction* and the *California Department of Education* (Table 1).

Table 1: The Scope of Education Policies

	<u>Statewide Policy</u>	<u>Local Policy</u>	<u>By Each District</u>	<u>By Each School</u>
Competency standards for teachers	78%	20%	14%	6%
Promotion and graduation standards	61%	38%	20%	18%
Selection of textbooks	47%	50%	27%	23%
Maximum class sizes	45%	51%	26%	25%
Student discipline policies	40%	58%	28%	30%
Teaching methods	35%	62%	31%	31%

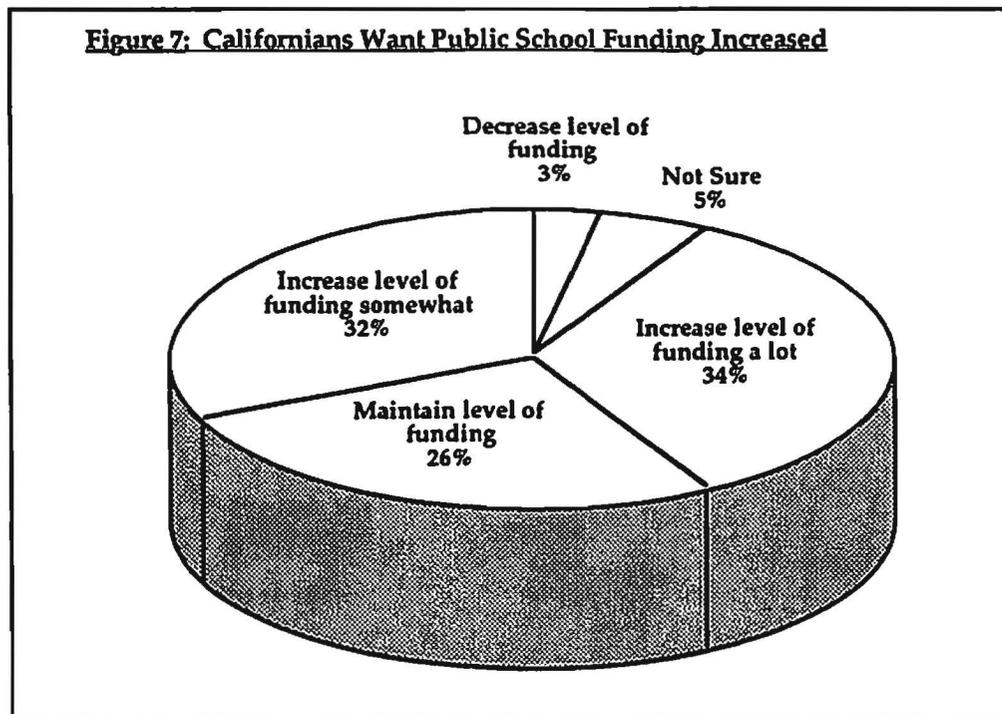
Teachers are trusted by the public to make decisions about what teaching methods to use (57%), maximum class sizes (46%), and what textbooks to use (46%). Looked at another way, Californians did not select the state Legislature when asked whom they trust the most to make decisions about education matters including establishing student discipline policies, promotion and graduation standards, competency standards for teachers, teaching methods, and selecting textbooks (Table 2).

Table 2: The Locus of Education Decision-Making

	<u>Superintendent/ Department of Education</u>	<u>State Legislature</u>	<u>Teachers</u>	<u>Parents</u>
Competency standards for teachers	59%	21%	8%	5%
Promotion and graduation standards	51%	13%	24%	6%
Selection of textbooks	35%	7%	46%	7%
Maximum class sizes	32%	10%	46%	5%
Teaching methods	27%	5%	57%	5%
Student discipline policies	25%	5%	36%	28%

Fiscal Equity And Fiscal Adequacy Are Critical Issues

School finance continues to complicate any proposal for reform. The results of the PACE poll suggest that issues of fiscal equity and fiscal adequacy are critical in Californians' minds, nearly 30 years after these debates began in precedent setting legal actions. According to the poll results, there is a much greater level of concern among Californians that there is sufficient funding for poor communities than that well-to-do communities are held back by inadequate funding (72% to 8%). When asked which was most important—to increase, maintain, or decrease the level of funding—two-thirds (66%) of those polled support increasing the level of funding for the public schools (Figure 7).



Selected PACE Poll Results and the Current State Policy Discussion: A Side by Side Comparison

In the next section, some of the poll results have been repeated, and assessed within the context of current policy discussions. This section illustrates a number of examples where the views of the public align with current, or recently passed, legislation.

STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Poll Finding

Current Policy Discussion

Raise academic standards

Standard setting is one of the major components of AB 265 which was signed into law in 1995. The focus of AB 265 was on statewide assessment, but the law requires academic standards be established before the assessment instrument can be designed. At this time, state funding for the design and implementation of the academic standards is pending before the legislature.

Standardized testing for achievement and knowledge

AB 265, passed in 1995, calls for the immediate use of currently available tests for use in assessment. Over time, new statewide assessments will be developed, as noted above.

Set guidelines, grade by grade and subject by subject.

The assessment law, AB 265, passed in 1995, calls for grade by grade standards. As noted above, funding for the design of these standards is pending before the legislature.

California has had a long history in developing subject by subject curriculum frameworks. They were designed with the purpose of setting statewide curriculum standards, by subject. The frameworks have been adopted, and are always being reviewed and updated.

Require teachers to pass competency tests

As part of the credentialing process, teachers in California are currently required to pass the California Basic Education Skills Test (CBEST) which tests reading, writing, and mathematics competency. At this time, a court case has been brought against the state arguing that the CBEST is racially biased.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Poll Finding

The public favors reduced class sizes

Current Policy Discussion

California currently has the largest ratio of pupils to teachers in the country, about 24. It has been estimated that the teacher salary cost alone of reducing this ratio to the national average, 17, would cost approximately \$3.7 billion per year. This excludes costs for benefits and necessary facilities to accommodate more classes.

Currently, a bill is before the legislature that proposes reducing the pupil/teacher ratio in California, beginning in the elementary grades.

The Legislative Analyst has made a recommendation in 1996 to reduce the pupil/teacher ratio in kindergarten through grade 3.

Interactive television, the Internet, and electronic communications in the classroom are supported.

California has the fewest computers per child of any state in the country. It is estimated that for every 21 students, only one computer is available in California's schools.

SAFETY

Poll Finding

The public strongly supports a "zero-tolerance" policy that would automatically expel students who bring drugs, guns, or other weapons to school.

Current Policy Discussion

California has a "zero-tolerance" policy that was partially funded in 1995-96 (\$10 million). The policy strengthens suspension and expulsion requirements for pupils who commit certain weapon or drug-related offenses on school campuses. The majority of the funding supports alternative placements in community schools for offenders. An increase of \$10 million has been proposed in the Governor's 1996-97 budget.

INTEGRATED SERVICES

Poll Finding

The public wants to use the public schools as the focal point for a variety of related services for parents and children (i.e. immunizations, job placement services, adult education)

Current Policy Discussion

Healthy Start is a statewide program that provides a range of integrated services for families and children. Early evaluations show positive results from the program which has continued to secure state funding since 1991. The legislature is currently considering additional funding for Healthy Start.

DECISION-MAKING

Poll Finding

School Choice: The public favors giving parents the ability to choose between public schools for their children. At the same time, a majority opposes a choice program that would use some of the money now spent on public education to help parents pay for the cost of sending their children to the private or parochial school of their choice.

Particular issues in running schools need to be considered by specific decision-makers (i.e. teachers, parents, the Superintendent of Public Instruction)

Current Policy Discussion

Proposition 174, a school voucher initiative on the statewide ballot was overwhelmingly rejected by voters in 1993. More recent efforts to place a voucher initiative on this years ballot failed.

Intradistrict and interdistrict choice mechanisms are included in current law. The extent to which these choice mechanisms are used, and the barriers associated with them are not well known.

As a reaction to state-level regulation of schools, several bills have been considered by the legislature to drastically reduce the Education Code. This change would presumably grant greater authority to school-level personnel. None of these bills passed in the 1995 session, however, new proposals are under consideration including one supported by Governor Wilson.

California passed Charter School legislation in 1993. The law created relatively autonomous schools that operate free from most state education laws and rules. The legislature originally set a limit of 100 charters. Proposals to raise the limit and alter other provisions were not successful in the 1995 legislative session, but several new bills are under consideration.

EQUITY AND ADEQUACY

Poll Finding

The public believes that not enough funding for poor communities to create adequate schools is a bigger problem than holding back well-to-do communities from creating good schools.

Increasing the level of funding for the public schools.

Current Policy Discussion

School finance and the related equity issues have a long and complex 30 year history in California. With some significant exceptions, the state uses redistributive mechanisms to distribute funds to pupils equally across the state. See PACE's *Conditions of Education in California, 1994-95* for a complete description of school finance in California.

As of the beginning of school in fall 1996, California ranked 42nd in the nation in per pupil funding.

PACE Poll: Californians' Views on Education

Questions and Poll Results (Final Revised Tabulations, April 1996)

Question 1

Does anyone in this household work for a radio station, a television station, a newspaper, or an advertising agency?

No.....	100%
Yes.....	0%
Not sure.....	0%

Question 2

Generally speaking, do you feel that things here in California are going in the right direction these days, or do you feel that things are pretty seriously off on the wrong track?

Right Direction.....	30%
Wrong Track.....	54%
Not Sure.....	16%

Question 3a

When it comes to important issues and problems facing California these days, which one of two of the following would you say are the most important issues or problems facing the state? (ACCEPT UP TO TWO RESPONSES.)

Reducing crime and violence.....	45%
Creating jobs and economic growth.....	38%
Improving the quality of public schools.....	38%
Holding down taxes and state spending.....	15%
Reforming the health care system.....	11%
Maintaining programs for people in need.....	7%
All.....	11%
None.....	1%
Not sure.....	--

Question 3b

Thinking now just about the public schools in California, I'd like you to rate how important you personally feel it is to improve the quality of public education. We'll use a ten-point scale on which a "10" means you feel it is absolutely essential to improve the quality of public education in California, and a "1" means it is not that important. You may use any number between one and ten, depending on how important you feel it is.

(10).....	56%
(8-9).....	25%
(1-7).....	17%
Cannot rate.....	2%

Question 4a

Generally speaking, what is your overall assessment of the public schools throughout the state – would you say that the public schools are excellent, good, satisfactory, not so good or poor?

Excellent.....	1%
Good.....	16%
Satisfactory.....	29%
Not So Good.....	32%
Poor.....	16%
Not Sure.....	6%

Question 4b (1)

Why do you feel that way about the public schools in California? (Open ended response.)

Most Frequent Favorable Responses:

Teachers are doing a good job.....	7%
Children are doing well, satisfied with school system.....	5%
Good learning opportunities.....	5%
Innovative curriculum, using computers, kids learning about technology.....	3%

Most Frequent Unfavorable Responses:

Curriculum not right, stressing unnecessary subjects, go back to basics.....	11%
Lack of funding.....	11%
Teachers don't care, need better teachers.....	11%
Kids are not being taught, kids can't read or write.....	10%
Lack of discipline.....	9%
Don't know; no response.....	10%

This subset of responses will not add to 100%.

Question 5a

Which comes closer to your own view of the system of public education in California—that it currently provides quality education, that it needs minor changes, or that it needs a major overhaul?

Provides quality education.....	5%
Needs minor changes.....	37%
Needs a major overhaul.....	54%
Not sure.....	4%

Question 5b

Compared to five years ago, would you say the public schools in California have been getting better, getting worse, or staying about the same? And would you say the public schools have been getting somewhat (better/worse), or a lot (better/worse).

A lot better	1%
Somewhat better.....	10%
Staying the same	35%
Somewhat worse.....	26%
A lot worse.....	18%
Not sure.....	10%

Question 6

Let me read you a few ways in which the quality of education in California's public schools might be improved. Please tell me which one or two you feel would do the most to improve the quality of public education in California? (ACCEPT UP TO TWO RESPONSES.)

Encouraging parents to be more involved.....	37%
Improving student discipline in schools.....	34%
Reducing the size of classes.....	34%
Improving the quality of teaching	22%
Setting higher goals and expectations for students.....	21%
Emphasizing job skills in the curriculum.....	13%
All	10%
None.....	1%
Not sure.....	--

Question 7a

Which of the following do your feel is the most important thing for the California public schools to teach?

Academic skills, like science, history, and literature	20%
Vocational skills, like electronics and mechanics.....	8%
Personal values, like respect and responsibility	13%
Basic skills, like reading, writing, and math	46%
None of them	1%
All of them.....	11%
Not sure.....	1%

Question 7b

And of the remaining things, which do you think is second more important for the California public schools to teach?

Academic skills, like science, history, and literature.....	23%
Vocational skills, like electronics and mechanics.....	17%
Personal values, like respect and responsibility.....	23%
Basic skills, like reading, writing, and math.....	22%
None of them.....	--
All of them.....	--
Not sure.....	2%
None/All/Not sure.....	13%

Question 8

Which do you think is the bigger problem in California’s public schools—that good students don’t receive the education they deserve, that weak students don’t get the education they need, or that average students don’t get the attention they should?

Good students don’t get the education they deserve.....	12%
Weak students don’t get the education they need.....	25%
Average students don’t get the attention they should.....	33%
All equally.....	22%
Not sure.....	8%

Question 9

Now thinking about your own community, what is your overall assessment of the public schools in your community—would you say the public schools are excellent, good, satisfactory, not so good, or poor?

Excellent.....	8%
Good.....	28%
Satisfactory.....	29%
Not so good.....	19%
Poor.....	9%
Not sure.....	7%

Question 10a

Would you tend to favor or tend to oppose a program that would allow parents to send their children to any public school in their district or in the state, even if they live outside the city or school district in which the school is located? Would you definitely (favor/oppose) or probably (favor/oppose) such a program?

Definitely Favor.....	44%
Probably Favor.....	22%
Probably Oppose.....	13%
Definitely Oppose.....	15%
Not Sure.....	6%

Question 10b

Would you tend to favor or tend to oppose a program that would use some of the money now spent on public education to help parents pay for the cost of sending their children to the private or parochial school of their choice?

Definitely Favor.....	25%
Probably Favor	14%
Probably Oppose.....	13%
Definitely Oppose	43%
Not Sure	5%

Question 11a

Let me focus for a few minutes on the way public schools—kindergarten through high school—are financed here in California. Do you feel that the current way in which public education is funded in California is working very well, working fairly well, not working that well, or not working well at all?

Working very well.....	3%
Working fairly well.....	34%
Not working that well	34%
Not working well at all.....	19%
Not Sure	10%

Question 11b

Let me read you a few ways in which people might judge the way public schools are funded here in California. For each one, please tell me whether you feel the current system for funding California's public schools is working very well, working fairly well, not working that well at all?

1. Providing adequate funds for public education:

Working very well.....	4%
Working fairly well.....	36%
Not working that well	35%
Not working well at all.....	19%
Not Sure	6%

2. Making sure that everyone pays their fair share:

Working very well.....	6%
Working fairly well.....	32%
Not working that well	28%
Not working well at all.....	19%
Not Sure	15%

3. Distributing funds fairly among all school districts:

Working very well.....	4%
Working fairly well.....	26%
Not working that well.....	28%
Not working well at all.....	22%
Not Sure.....	20%

Question 11c

Which do you feel is the bigger problem with the way schools are funded here in California—that well-to-do communities are held back from spending enough money to create good schools, or that poor communities are not provided with enough funds to create adequate schools?

Well-to-do communities held back.....	8%
Note funding for poor communities.....	72%
Both equally.....	8%
Not Sure.....	12%

Question 12a

From what you know, which of the following is the main source of money for the public schools from kindergarten through high school in California—the state income tax, the state sales tax, the state lottery, or local property taxes?

State income tax.....	22%
State sales tax.....	6%
State lottery.....	14%
Local property tax.....	40%
Not sure.....	18%

Question 12b

And which type of tax do you feel would be the best way to fund public education from kindergarten through high school—personal and corporate income taxes, sales taxes, or property taxes?

Income taxes.....	24%
Sales taxes.....	33%
Property taxes.....	21%
Combination.....	11%
Other taxes.....	2%
Not sure.....	9%

Question 13a

Thinking about the level of funding for the public schools in California, which do you feel is most important—to increase the current level of funding, to maintain the current level of funding, or to decrease the current level of funding for the public schools? Do you feel the current level of funding should be increased somewhat, or increased a lot?

Increase level of funding:

A lot.....	34%
Somewhat	32%
Maintain level of funding.....	26%
Decrease level of funding.....	3%
Not sure.....	5%

Question 13b (Form B)

Why do you feel that way about funding the public schools in California?

Most frequent best reasons to increase funding:

More, better equipment, materials, supplies.....	16%
Because children are our future, we need to take care of them.....	14%
Better programs, activities for children.....	14%
Teachers need a raise	9%
More qualified staff, need to hire better teachers.....	9%

Most frequent best reasons to maintain or decrease funding:

Money is usually not well spent, improper allocation of funds.....	16%
Things working fine with funding they have.....	8%
Lack of funding not the problem	3%
Taxes will go up	2%
Don't know; no response	15%

This subset of responses will not add to 100%.

Question 14

From what you know, do you think the state's share of funding for public education has gone up significantly in the past few years, gone up a little, stayed about the same, gone down a little in the past few years, or gone down significantly?

Gone up significantly.....	7%
Gone up a little	20%
Stayed about the same	23%
Gone down a little.....	20%
Gone down significantly	11%
Not sure.....	19%

Question 15

Now, I'm going to read you a list of teaching methods. For each one, please tell me whether you feel it is a step in the right direction, or a step in wrong direction?

A. Having specific guidelines for what students should learn in each grade and subject:

Step in right direction.....	86%
Step in wrong direction.....	9%
Some of both	2%
Not sure.....	3%

B. Having students learn in small groups, instead of working individually:

Step in right direction.....	74%
Step in wrong direction.....	14%
Some of both	8%
Not sure.....	4%

C. Making more use of interactive television, the Internet, and other electronic communications in the classroom:

Step in right direction.....	70%
Step in wrong direction.....	19%
Some of both	5%
Not sure.....	6%

D. Having students begin to write early, even before they learn grammar and spelling:

Step in right direction.....	68%
Step in wrong direction.....	28%
Some of both	1%
Not sure.....	3%

E. Encouraging students in high school to use calculators to solve math problems: (Form B)

Step in right direction.....	31%
Step in wrong direction.....	63%
Some of both	3%
Not sure.....	3%

F. Encouraging students in the early grades to use calculators to solve math problems: (Form A)

Step in right direction.....	16%
Step in wrong direction.....	79%
Some of both	2%
Not sure.....	3%

Question 16

Thinking now just about students who do not speak English, would you favor a system in which each local school district decided for itself how best to teach English language skills to its students, or would you favor a system in which there was a uniform statewide policy regarding the way non-English-speaking students are taught English language skills?

Favor each local school district deciding for itself	46%
Favor uniform statewide policy for teaching non-English-speaking students.....	46%
Not sure.....	8%

Question 17a

Overall, how would you rate the core subjects in the public schools in California when it comes to preparing California students to compete successfully in college and in the job market with students from across our country and from other countries—excellent, good, satisfactory, not so good, or poor?

Excellent.....	3%
Good.....	16%
Satisfactory.....	32%
Not so good	28%
Poor.....	15%
Not sure.....	6%

Question 17b

Now, let me read you two statements about academic standards for students. Please tell me which one comes closer to your own point of view.

Statement A: Raising academic standards in the public schools would improve student performance and increase what the students learn

Statement B: Raising academic standards in the public schools would lead to higher dropout rates and discriminate against students from culturally disadvantaged backgrounds.

Which statement comes closer to your own point of view - Statement A or Statement B?

Statement A/Raising standards increases what students learn.....	73%
Statement B/Raising standards would increase dropout rates	18%
Some of both	6%
Not sure.....	3%

Question 17c

Do you think it is a good idea or a bad idea to test students in California using standardized tests to measure their level of achievement and knowledge?

Good idea	74%
Bad idea.....	20%
Not sure.....	6%

Question 18

Because of the purpose and location of public schools, some people favor keeping them open longer for various kinds of activities, even if it increases energy and maintenance costs. For each of the following uses, please tell me whether you would favor or oppose keeping public schools open longer for that purpose.

A. For supervised after-school recreational and educational programs for young people:

Favor.....	93%
Oppose	5%
Depends.....	1%
Not sure.....	1%

B. To offer parenting and other adult education classes

Favor.....	86%
Oppose	11%
Depends.....	1%
Not sure.....	2%

C. For doctors and hospitals to provide immunizations and regular checkups for children

Favor.....	80%
Oppose	18%
Depends.....	1%
Not sure.....	1%

D. To provide job placement assistance for parents

Favor.....	66%
Oppose	31%
Depends.....	1%
Not sure.....	2%

Question 19a

In general, do you think that student discipline in the public schools in California is too strict, about right, or not strict enough?

Too strict.....	2%
About right.....	15%
Not strict enough.....	78%
Not sure.....	5%

Question 19b

Let me read you two statements about student discipline policy, and after you hear them, please tell me which one comes closer to your own point of view.

Students who repeatedly disrupt classes should be placed in alternative settings, so that schools can continue trying to educate them without their disrupting the education of others.....75%

Students who repeatedly disrupt classes should be suspended from school as punishment for their behavior and to keep them from disrupting the education of others.....21%

Neither.....3%

Not sure.....1%

Question 20a

Would you tend to favor or tend to oppose a “zero tolerance” policy that would automatically expel students who bring drugs, guns, or other weapons to school? Do you feel strongly about that, or not?

Tend to favor—feel strongly75%

Tend to favor—do not feel strongly.....6%

Tend to oppose—do not feel strongly.....5%

Tend to oppose—feel strongly10%

Not Sure4%

Question 20b

How safe do you feel the schools are in your local community for the students who attend them—very safe, fairly safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?

Very safe.....15%

Fairly safe.....43%

Somewhat unsafe.....28%

Very unsafe.....11%

Not Sure3%

Question 21

Let me read you a few suggestions that might improve the quality of teaching in California's public school. For each one, using a scale from one to ten, on which a "10" means it would improve the quality of teaching a great deal, and a "1" means it would not improve the quality of teaching very much at all, please tell me how much you think it would improve the quality of teaching in the public schools. You may use any number between one and ten depending on how strongly you feel.

A. Requiring teachers to pass competency tests in their field:

Would improve (10)	59%
(8-9)	22%
Would not improve (6-7).....	11%
Would not improve (1-5).....	7%
Cannot rate.....	1%

B. Increasing public respect for the teaching profession:

Would improve (10)	52%
(8-9)	26%
Would not improve (6-7).....	8%
Would not improve (1-5).....	12%
Cannot rate.....	2%

C. Providing more opportunities for teachers to keep up with the latest teaching methods:

Would improve (10)	37%
(8-9)	29%
Would not improve (6-7).....	16%
Would not improve (1-5).....	16%
Cannot rate.....	2%

D. Providing financial rewards for the best teachers:

Would improve (10)	30%
(8-9)	21%
Would not improve (6-7).....	14%
Would not improve (1-5).....	33%
Cannot rate.....	2%

E. Raising teacher salaries:

Would improve (10)	23%
(8-9)	21%
Would not improve (6-7).....	17%
Would not improve (1-5).....	36%
Cannot rate.....	3%

F. Giving teachers more authority in deciding what to teach and how to teach it:

Would improve (10)	21%
(8-9)	25%
Would not improve (6-7).....	20%
Would not improve (1-5).....	31%
Cannot rate.....	3%

Question 22 (Form A)

Let me read some of the decisions that have to be made in running the public schools. For each one, please tell me who you trust the most to make that kind of decision - the state legislature, the SPI, the Department of Education, the teachers, or the parents.

A. Set student discipline policies:

State Legislature	5%
SPI/CDE.....	25%
Teachers.....	36%
Parents	28%
None.....	2%
Not Sure	4%

B. Decide on what textbooks to use:

State Legislature	7%
SPI/CDE.....	35%
Teachers.....	46%
Parents	7%
None.....	1%
Not Sure	4%

C. Set Promotion and Graduation Standards

State Legislature	13%
SPI/CDE.....	51%
Teachers.....	24%
Parents	6%
None.....	--
Not Sure	6%

D. Determine Competency Standards for Teachers

State Legislature	21%
SPI/CDE.....	59%
Teachers.....	8%
Parents	5%
None.....	1%
Not Sure	6%

E. Determine maximum class sizes:

State Legislature	10%
SPI/CDE.....	32%
Teachers.....	46%
Parents	5%
None.....	1%
Not Sure	6%

F. Decide on what teaching methods to use:

State Legislature	5%
SPI/CDE.....	27%
Teachers.....	57%
Parents	5%
None.....	1%
Not Sure	5%

Question 22 (Form B)

Let me read some of the areas in which policies have to be made for the public schools. For each one, please tell me whether you think it should be a statewide policy, a policy that should be made by each school district, or one that should be made on a school-by-school basis.

A. Student discipline policies:

Statewide policy	40%
Made by each school district	28%
Made on a school-by-school basis.....	30%
Not Sure	2%

B. Selection of textbooks:

Statewide policy	47%
Made by each school district	27%
Made on a school-by-school basis.....	23%
Not Sure	3%

C. Promotion and graduation standards:

Statewide policy	61%
Made by each school district	20%
Made on a school-by-school basis.....	18%
Not Sure	1%

D. Competency standards for teachers:

Statewide policy	78%
Made by each school district	14%
Made on a school-by-school basis.....	6%
Not Sure	2%

E. Maximum class sizes:

Statewide policy	45%
Made by each school district	26%
Made on a school-by-school basis.....	25%
Not Sure	4%

F. What teaching methods to use:

Statewide policy	35%
Made by each school district	31%
Made on a school-by-school basis.....	31%
Not Sure	3%

Question 23 (Form A)

Suppose you were able to choose an elementary school for your child or grandchild, depending on whether it was close to home, had good teachers, the right kind of curriculum, up-to-date books and equipment, good discipline, small enough classes, and actively involved parents. Let me read this list again, and please tell me which one or two factors would be more important in choosing a school for your own child or grandchild. (ACCEPT NO MORE THAN TWO RESPONSES.)

Good teachers	57%
The right kind of curriculum	30%
Small enough classes.....	18%
Actively involved parents.....	18%
Up-to-date books and equipment.....	15%
Good discipline.....	14%
Close to home.....	12%
All	11%
None.....	--
Not sure.....	2%

Question 23 (Form B)

Suppose you were able to choose a high school for your child or grandchild, depending on whether it was close to home, had good teachers, the right kind of curriculum, up-to-date books and equipment, good discipline, small enough classes, and actively involved parents. Let me read this list again, and please tell me which one or two factors would be more important in choosing a school for your own child or grandchild. (ACCEPT NO MORE THAN TWO RESPONSES.)

Good teachers	49%
The right kind of curriculum	30%
Actively involved parents.....	19%
Small enough classes.....	15%
Good discipline.....	15%
Up-to-date books and equipment.....	13%
Close to home.....	11%
All	17%
None.....	--
Not sure.....	1%

Question 24

Finally, people get information on public education and the schools from a variety of sources. From which two or three of the following sources do you get most of your information on public education and the schools. (ACCEPT UP TO THREE RESPONSES.)

Newspapers.....	42%
Teachers or other people who work in the schools	41%
Television news programs.....	32%
Friends and neighbors.....	27%
Your own children or grand children.....	22%
The PTA or other civic groups	12%
Radio news	10%
All	2%
None.....	1%
Not sure.....	1%

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) is a university-based research center focusing on issues of state education policy and practice. PACE is located in the Schools of Education at the University of California, Berkeley and Stanford University and has an office in Sacramento.

The polling for this study was conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates of Washington, DC. A statewide telephone survey was completed by 803 respondents age 18 or older between February 9 and 29, 1996. The overall results of this study have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percent.