

HIGHLIGHTS
PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD K-12 EDUCATION IN OREGON

Introduction

Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall, Inc. (DHM) surveyed 1,800 Oregonians statewide for the Chalkboard Project. Respondents were split into sub-groups representing 6 regions of the state, including Eastern Oregon, Central Oregon, Southern Oregon, Willamette Valley, Coastal Oregon and Portland Metro. (Survey was a general public sampling.) The telephone interviews were conducted April 17-25, 2004 and the margin-of-error for the survey is +/- 2.3%. Respondents were asked about their attitudes, values, and beliefs regarding K-12 education. Chalkboard will consider this information as part of an overall strategy for addressing public education quality, accountability, and financing in Oregon.

The survey findings highlighted below are *statewide* results. Regional findings are currently being analyzed for statistically significant variations and will be reported to Chalkboard at a later date.

Overview of Public Opinion

Oregonians have a more favorable opinion of their local schools than of Oregon schools generally. Fewer than half (45%) rate Oregon schools as very or somewhat good, compared with 62% for their local schools. When asked about concerns they have about their local schools, school funding was mentioned the most (important to note they were split between not having enough funding and not spending funds efficiently) followed by quality of education, and class size.

Oregonians have two main priorities for their public schools: (1) to graduate students who are ready to go to college (42%) and to graduate students who are ready to enter the workplace (33%). A majority (57%) believe that Oregon's K-12 public education system should be among the very best in the country, while 23% think it should be the *very* best and 18% are satisfied with the way it is.

Quality/Student Achievement

INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMMING PRIORITIES

Oregonians clearly value the "basics" in K-12 education. The most urgent instructional programming priority of sixteen that were tested was supporting the basics like reading, math, and writing, followed by helping students develop good values and a strong work ethic.

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

The two highest rated high school graduation requirements among thirteen were: (1) the ability to do addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, and (2) strong English reading, writing, and speaking skills.

CHOICE

Oregonians are split on the importance of increasing program and school choices. However, a strong majority supported allowing Oregon students to attend any public school in the state.

TEACHERS

Oregonians value giving teachers time for preparation and cooperation. Nearly three-quarters considered providing teachers more time for one on one interaction with students an urgent or high priority. Seven in ten said helping teachers to work together is an urgent or high priority.

Accountability

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Student achievement is a high priority. Three-quarters think helping all students meet state academic standards and closing the achievement gap between white or affluent students and minority or poor students is an *urgent or high* priority for their school district. The only more urgent goal was working to secure more funding. Over three quarters agree that too many students are falling through the cracks.

Student testing does not seem to be considered an obstacle to the success of schools nor is removing the CIM and CAM tests considered an urgent priority for their school district.

FINANCIAL

Oregonians are very concerned about waste and inefficiency. A majority agree there is too much of it. A plurality (47%) *disagreed* that most of the waste and inefficiency in their school district has been eliminated. Central administration waste and inefficiency was among the top five of what respondents considered obstacles to school success.

LEADERSHIP

Oregonians generally feel local taxpayers and parents should have more say in decisions affecting their schools, and the federal government and legislature less. Their view of the role their school board should play differed depending on the decision.

PRINCIPALS & TEACHERS

When asked about twenty-three different priorities for their local public school district, ensuring that all schools have effective principals is among the top six and received the greatest number of high ratings.

Highly qualified teachers are valued. Over half strongly agreed that attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers is the key to accelerated teaching and learning and two-thirds agree that not attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers is an obstacle to school success (32% very big, 39% big).

EQUITY

Ensuring equity of facilities and resources among all schools was in the second tier of priority goals for school districts (22% urgent, 50% high). Oregonians also placed a high priority on equalizing resources and opportunities between schools in affluent

and low-income neighborhoods (20% urgent, 51% high). Over half (57%), though, agreed that all students in their community had access to the same quality of schools.

COMMUNICATIONS

A majority of Oregonians agreed that their school district does a good job keeping the public updated on its progress. They placed a fairly high priority on recognizing and publicizing outstanding efforts of teachers and effective schools.

Finances

FUNDING

Oregonians are split on whether schools need more money, with 52% saying they don't have enough and 40% saying they do not have a funding problem and are not spending efficiently. Making sure school district spending directly supports teaching and learning in classrooms was rated an urgent priority by 31% and a high priority by 55%.

Working to secure more funding for schools stood out as the *most urgent* priority goal for school districts for about a third of all respondents. Nearly half felt that lack of stable and adequate funding was a *very big* obstacle to their schools' success.

Considering all the findings, respondents were split on funding issues, with strongly held, but divided opinions.

UNFUNDED MANDATES

Oregonians view unfunded federal mandates for No Child Left Behind and special instructional and language needs as big obstacles to school success.

School Reform and Change

Oregonians are clear that schools need to be doing things differently now than when they were in school (68% agreeing strongly or somewhat). They supported making sure the entire system is improved rather than one school at a time.

Parent and Community Support

Oregonians believe not enough direct parental support of the learning process with their children is one of the two *biggest obstacles* to school success (lack of stable and adequate funding is the other). A substantial 80% *strongly agreed* that active parental support for teaching and learning in the home is essential to a child's success in school.

Three-quarters or more thought helping parents be direct partners in their child's education, creating effective leadership teams of principals, teachers, and parents in every school, and helping parents get involved as leaders in their schools were urgent or high priorities.

A majority agreed (28% strongly, 33% somewhat) that Oregon needs a group of independent, non-partisan organizations to convene to improve the state's K-12 education system. Also, 1 in 3 Oregonians said they would get involved (and they gave us their contact information) in an independent, non-partisan effort to improve the state's K-12 public education system.