

Parent Attitudes about Education in Arizona: 2006

Third Annual Survey

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Introduction

Parent Attitudes about Education in Arizona: 2006 is the third-annual study of the opinion of Arizona parents on the issues facing public schools. The study is conducted by the Arizona Education Policy Initiative (AEPI), a collaboration of Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, and the University of Arizona, and it is a systematic effort to capture and track parental opinion over time. Parents, more than any other group, have the most at stake in the condition of Arizona's schools; the annual AEPI survey gives Arizona parents an opportunity to make their voices heard on major public education issues.

As in previous years, the 2006 survey was administered via telephone. The survey was conducted between March 18 and March 27, 2006. The respondents represent a statewide random sample of 410 Arizona parents that have children in public schools and an additional statewide sample of 101 Hispanic public school parents. Results are disaggregated by Anglo and Hispanic parents, making it possible to compare differences in opinion between Arizona's two largest racial/ethnic groups. In past years, the opinions

of Anglo and Hispanic parents varied little from each other. In 2006, however, we observed a sharp divergence in the opinion of these two parent groups. The differences are discussed throughout the report and highlighted in a special section.

Overview of Results

Many important aspects of parental opinion remain consistent since the first AEPI Arizona parent opinion survey in 2004. Parents continue to be pleased with their children's schools and teachers, and they believe that public schools do a good job teaching basic academic skills. Parents regard inadequate funding as the biggest challenge facing Arizona public schools. Also, Parental support for publicly-funded, full-day kindergarten has remained steadfast.

Parents favor the use of standardized testing to hold schools accountable and to evaluate schools. When schools are "underperforming" parents would rather provide assistance than impose sanctions. Of Arizona's two school accountability systems, more parents are aware of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) system than Arizona LEARNS. Despite the substantial criticism of NCLB, a majority of parents hold a favorable view of the federal school accountability system.

In addition, the majority of parents continue to oppose private school vouchers and parents that support other forms of public funding for students to attend private schools, such as tuition organizations and tuition tax credits, are in the minority. Parental opinion of private school tuition vouchers may be affected by the fact that most parents believe there is sufficient choice within the public school system to select the best school for their child.

There are notable changes in parental opinion as well. The percentage of parents who are supportive of students passing AIMS as a prerequisite to receive a high school diploma has increased substantially over the last year despite the fact that the AIMS graduation requirement is approaching this spring. Also, in a reversal of the 2004-2005 results, parents consider placing English Language Learners in classrooms where both English and their native language are spoken as the most beneficial strategy to teach students English.

A number of new issues were added for the 2006 survey. Parents, for example, expressed a commitment to public education by preferring to change the existing public school system rather than find to alternatives from outside the system. Parents also

believe strongly that closing the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students is an important public policy issue.

Finally, the opinions of Hispanic parents compared to Anglo parents show a trend toward a higher degree of dissatisfaction with Arizona public schools and Hispanics support more stringent accountability policies.

Survey Results

The *Parent Attitudes about Education in Arizona: 2006* survey consists of 48 questions covering some of the most important policies and issues in public education. The complete survey and responses are in the technical appendix (available on the AEPI website at: http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsl/AEPI/AEPI_2006_annual_survey.htm). For this report, the survey results are grouped into nine sections:

1. Educational Quality
2. Standardized Testing
3. School Accountability
4. School Choice
5. Minority Student Education
6. Language Acquisition
7. Early Education
8. School Report Cards
9. Special Section: The Divergence of Hispanic Parent Opinions

In the tables that follow, all numbers represent percentages. Please note, the differences between the 2004, 2005, and 2006 survey results are *not* statistically significant unless noted otherwise.

Educational Quality

In rating their children's schools, Arizona parents continue to exhibit opinions in a pattern consistent with parents nationally.¹ Arizona parents rate the schools that their children attend more favorably than Arizona public schools in general. Seventy-two percent of Arizona parents grade the school their oldest child attends an "A" or a "B" while only 34 percent of Arizona parents grade Arizona public schools in general an "A" or a "B."

Table 1: Grading Arizona Schools

	A	B	C	D	F	No Opinion
What grade would you give to the school your oldest child attends?	32	40	20	5	2	<1
What grade would you give to the job public schools in Arizona are doing?	7	27	42	13	5	6

Notes: (1) The “A” category includes responses that rated schools either an “A” or “A+.” (2) Percents may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Additionally, parents hold a highly favorable opinion of the Arizona teachers responsible for their children’s education. Seventy-eight percent of parents grade the teachers in the school their oldest child attends an “A” or a “B.”

Table 2: Grading Arizona Teachers

	A	B	C	D	F	No Opinion
What grade would you give the teachers in the school your oldest child attends?	36	42	16	5	1	1

Notes: (1) The “A” response category includes responses that rated schools either an “A” or “A+.”

Parents were asked if there was a specific area where Arizona public schools are doing a particularly good job. Forty percent of parents identified a specific area and their responses were collected using an open-ended question with no pre-determined categories. Overwhelmingly, the parents who identified a specific area felt that Arizona schools are doing a particularly good job “teaching the basics” to include reading and writing.

Table 3: Where Arizona Public Schools Do Particularly Well

Is there one area where you think the public schools in Arizona are doing a particularly good job?	
Teaching the basics (reading, writing, education in general)	35
Providing high-quality teachers	6
Quality arts and extra-curricular programs	6
Schools are doing fine, no other specifics provided	6

Notes: (1) Percentages include only those respondents who identified a specific area where Arizona public schools are doing a particularly good job. Forty percent of all parents identified a specific area. (2) Individuals could provide more than one response and all responses were coded. (3) Percentages calculated based on the number of responses. (4) Percentages do not equal 100 because only the four most often cited responses are listed.

Likewise, parents were asked in an open-ended format to identify the single biggest challenge facing schools in their community. Parents could more easily articulate a problem facing Arizona public schools than identify a specific area to praise: 93 percent of parents stated a specific problem facing Arizona public schools. For the third year in a row, the strongest sentiment among parents is that the biggest challenge facing Arizona public schools is a lack funding and resources. Parents gave examples such as overcrowded schools, large classes, and low pay for teachers as specific funding challenges. A quartet of concerns, including non-English speaking students in the classroom, maintaining high academic standards, lack of discipline and keeping good teachers, are tied as the second biggest concern facing public schools.

Table 4: Challenges Facing Arizona Schools

What do you think is the biggest single challenge that the schools in your community face?	
Lack of funding, resources	20
Non-English speaking students in the classroom	10
Maintaining academic standards	10
Lack of discipline	10
Keeping good teachers	10

Notes: (1) Percentages include only those respondents who could identify a specific challenge facing Arizona public schools. Ninety-three percent of all parents identified a challenge. (2) Individuals could provide more than one response and all responses were coded. (3) Percentages calculated based on the number of responses. (4) Percentages do not equal 100 because only the five most often cited responses are listed.

Standardized Testing

Standardized tests have become the most visible method by which school performance is judged and presented to the public. Standardized tests are the central academic performance indicator in both the state and federal school accountability systems (Arizona LEARNs and NCLB, respectively). These policies continue to receive support as 68 percent of Arizona parents favor the use of standardized test results to judge school performance.

Table 5: Using Standardized Tests to Evaluate Schools

	Favor	Oppose	No Opinion
Do you favor or oppose using statewide tests to determine how schools are performing?	68	28	5

Notes: (1) Percents do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Arizona state leadership has praised Arizona’s school accountability system, Arizona LEARNs, as a more “comprehensive and fair” determinant of school performance than the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).² Many more parents, however, are aware of the federal accountability system than the state accountability system: 66 percent of parents say they are familiar with NCLB and less than 21 percent

of parents say they are familiar with Arizona LEARNS. Despite criticism of NCLB, 57 percent of parents familiar with NCLB hold a favorable opinion of the federal law. Likewise, 60 percent of parents familiar with Arizona LEARNS hold a favorable opinion of Arizona’s school accountability system.

Table 6: Opinion of NCLB and Arizona LEARNS

	Very Favorable	Generally Favorable	Somewhat Unfavorable	Very Unfavorable	No Opinion
From what you have heard or read about NCLB, what is your opinion of the act?	19	38	25	15	3
From what you have heard or read about Arizona LEARNS, what is your opinion of Arizona’s school accountability system?	26	34	26	11	5

Notes: (1) Totals include only parents who are either very familiar or somewhat familiar with NCLB and Arizona LEARNS, respectively. (2) Percents may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

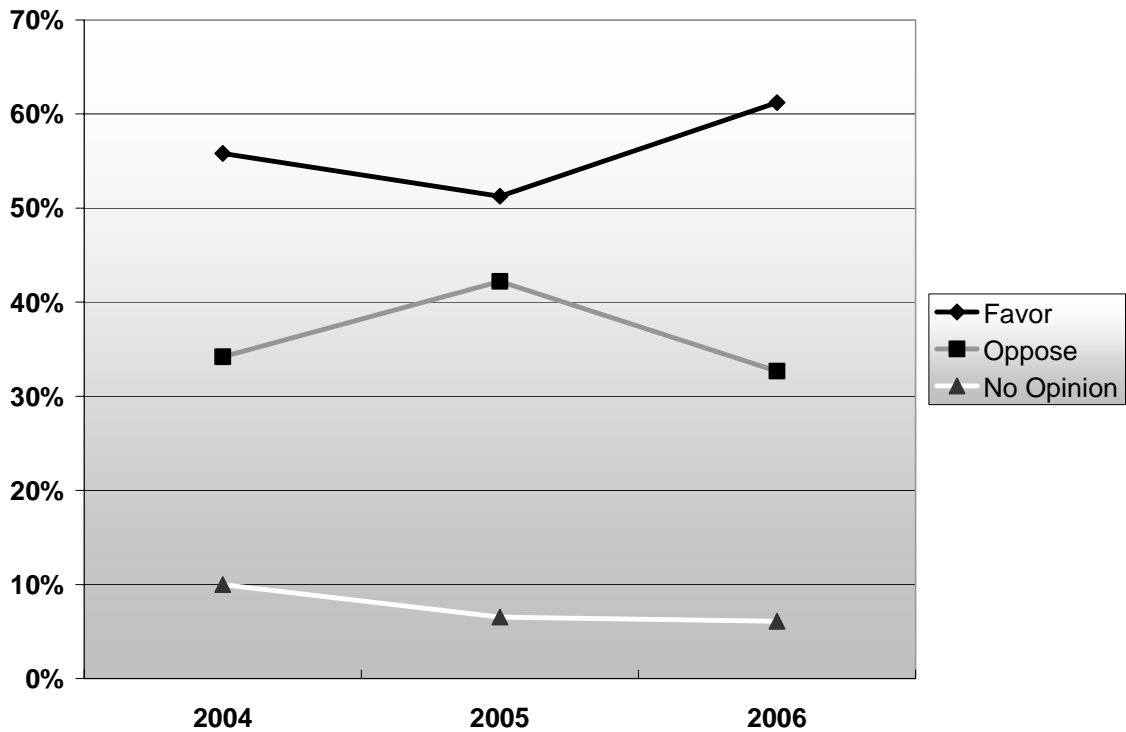
This spring, the Class of 2006 will become the first Arizona students required to pass Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) to graduate from high school. From 2004 to 2005, parental support for the use of AIMS as a graduation requirement declined by eight percent and in 2005 a slim majority of Arizona parents (51 percent) approved of using AIMS to determine whether students should receive a diploma. With the graduation requirement now on the horizon, parental support of AIMS has reversed course with 61 percent of parents now favoring the test as a graduation requirement, a 10 percent *increase* from last year and an 18 percent *increase* from 2004 (see Figure 1).

Since the 2005 parent survey, the legislature has relieved the pressure associated with AIMS as a graduation requirement by allowing course grades to be factored into students’ graduation decisions. As a result, far fewer students are expected to be denied a diploma than had been reported in previous years.³ These more optimistic reports may have helped shift public opinion on the use of AIMS as a graduation requirement.

Table 7: AIMS as a Graduation Requirement

	Favor	Oppose	No Opinion
Do you favor or oppose of requiring students to pass the AIMS test before they graduate from high school?	61	33	6

Figure 1: AIMS as a Graduation Requirement, by Year



School Accountability

State and federal school accountability policies impose sanctions of increasing severity on schools that are classified consistently as “underperforming.” If a school has consistently low test scores, parents favor staffing changes as a means toward school improvement and oppose both state takeovers and converting the schools to charter schools. Parents feel strongly that underperforming teachers should be replaced and are split on whether to replace the principal. Also, one consistent finding across the three annual surveys is that parents prefer to help rather than to punish low-performing schools. Parents favor providing more state funds to low-performing schools and are opposed to withholding funds from these schools.

Table 8: Actions Directed Toward Underperforming Schools

If a school one of your children is attending consistently scored low on the statewide tests, would you favor or oppose each of the following:			
	Favor	Oppose	No Opinion
Replace underperforming teachers	82	14	4
Withhold funds from the school if they don't improve	19	80	1
Provide more state funds to the school	67	25	7
Replace the principal	40	41	20
State Takeover	28	63	9
Convert to charter school	21	66	13

Note: Percents do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

School Choice

Arizona parents have more public school choice options than any other state.⁴ Charter schools, open enrollment, and a public and private school tuition tax credit are all part of Arizona's educational landscape. Based on the public school choice options currently available, 62 percent of Arizona parents feel that sufficient choices are available to select the best school for their child. The percentage of parents who are satisfied with their school choice options in 2006 is consistent with the 2005 results.

Table 9: School Choice Options

	Yes	No	No Opinion
Do you feel you have sufficient choices available to choose the best school for your child?	62	36	2

To learn more about school choice preferences, the 36 percent of parents who felt that they did not have sufficient choices available were asked to identify the type of

school they would choose for their child. Most commonly, these parents said they would, if possible, remove their child from public schools to attend a private school.

Table 10: The Favored School Choices of Parents Who Report Not Being Satisfied With the Choices Currently Available to Them

What type of school, which is currently not available, would you choose for your child?	
Private school	41
Charter school	17
Religious school	12
College preparatory	5

Notes: (1) Percentages include only those respondents who stated that the school choices available to them were insufficient for choosing the best school for their child. Thirty-two percent of all parents felt that the available public school choices are insufficient to select the best school for their child. (2) Individuals could provide more than one response and all responses were coded. (3) Percentages calculated based on the number of responses. (4) Percentages do not equal 100 because the four most often cited responses are listed.

Interestingly, 17 percent of parents who reported being dissatisfied with current choices available to them indicated they would choose a charter school for their student if available. This represents a small sub-set (6 percent) of all Arizona parents. These parents may, however, be particularly well informed because the majority of Arizona parents remain unfamiliar with charter schools. In 2005, sixty-six percent of parents had no opinion of charter schools. Therefore, this year we asked parents if they were familiar with charter schools before assessing their opinion. Fifty-five percent of parents did not consider themselves familiar enough with charter schools to provide an opinion of how charter schools are performing. The lack of familiarity among parents about charter schools has remained a constant finding across all three years of the survey. This finding remains surprising because Arizona’s charter school initiative has been in place for more than ten years and Arizona has the highest percentage of students attending charter schools of any state.⁵ Of the parents who were familiar with charter schools, 58 percent grade charter schools an A or B.

Table 11: Grading Charter Schools

	A	B	C	D	F	No Opinion
What grade would you give to charter schools?	22	36	25	10	4	3

Notes: (1) Totals include only parents who consider themselves familiar enough with Arizona charter schools to provide a grade. Forty-five percent of all parents report being familiar enough about charter schools to provide a grade. (2) The “A” response category includes responses that rated schools either an “A” or “A+.”

The 45 percent of parents who are familiar with charter schools also were asked about their impression of the standards that charter schools are held to in comparison to other public schools. By design, charter schools are held to different requirements than other public schools because they are granted autonomy from many state laws and regulations in return for increased accountability through both parental choice (charter schools that fail to attract students would be forced to close) and a performance contract with a chartering agency. Seventy-two percent of parents who said they are familiar with charter schools believe that charter schools are held to either higher or the same academic standards as other public schools.

Table 12: Charter Schools Held to Same Academic Standards as Other Public Schools

	Higher	Same	Lower	No Opinion
In your opinion, are charter schools held to higher academic standards than other public schools, lower academic standards than other public schools, about the same academic standards as other public schools?	38	34	24	3

Notes: (1) Totals include only parents who consider themselves familiar enough with Arizona charter schools to provide a grade. (2) Percents do not equal 100 due to rounding.

Parents’ opinions are more solidified about private school vouchers. Fifty-five percent of parents oppose providing public money for students to attend private schools. Currently, Arizona does not have a traditional school voucher program in which students are provided money directly to attend private schools. Arizona policy makers, however,

have implemented policies that make public tax dollars available to private schools through tuition tax credits. Legally and politically, providing money to students to attend private schools through an intermediary organization is considered distinct from a traditional voucher program. Arizona parents, however, see little distinction between traditional vouchers and providing public money for private school scholarships through an intermediary organization funded by tax credit revenue. Fifty-one percent of parents oppose policies that provide public money to organizations to provide private school scholarships to students.

Table 14: Support for Tuition Vouchers

	Favor	Oppose	No Opinion
Do you think Arizona should use public money to provide tuition vouchers to students who want to attend private schools?	38	55	7

Table 15: Support for Organizations to Provide Private School Scholarships

	Favor	Oppose	No Opinion
Do you favor or oppose providing public money to organizations which then use the money to provide scholarships for students to attend private schools?	36	51	12

Note: Percents do not equal 100 due to rounding.

As part of the public debate about school vouchers, proponents often argue that school choice will improve public schools by forcing public schools to compete for students and funding. A minority of parents agree with the logic. In fact, 53 percent of parents believe that providing public money to private schools would be detrimental to public schools.

Table 16: Perceived Effect of Private School Vouchers on Public Schools

	Positive	Negative	Little or None	No Opinion
Do you think providing public money to private schools would have a positive effect, a negative effect or little to no effect on public schools?	25	53	14	7

Note: Percents do not equal 100 due to rounding.

In previous surveys, parental opinion of tuition tax credits has been split and a majority of parents have neither favored nor opposed tuition tax credits. Therefore, in 2006 we employed a more nuanced strategy to assess parental opinion of tuition tax credits. First, parents were asked if they were knowledgeable about tuition tax credits, and a substantial percentage of parents are unaware of tuition tax credits. Thirty-four percent of parents did not know about tuition tax credits, and among Hispanics 49 percent of parents were unaware of tuition tax credits. Of the 66 percent of parents who are aware of tuition tax credits, 62 percent are in favor of using tuition tax credits to support sending students to private schools. In total, 41 percent of all parents are well informed about tuition tax credits and in favor of tuition tax credits.

Table 17: Support for Tuition Tax Credits

Do you favor or oppose:	Favor	Oppose	No Opinion
Do you favor or oppose tuition tax credits to support sending children to private schools?	62	31	7

Note: Includes only parents who are aware of tuition tax credits. Sixty-six percent of parents reported being aware of tuition tax credits.

Arizona policy makers designed school choice policies to foster educational opportunities outside the existing public school system in order to improve the public school system through competition. Other states have tried different approaches to change public schools by improving the existing system. Parents were asked to provide their opinion of these two overarching opposing philosophies for improving public education; finding an alternative to the existing system and changing the existing public school system. Nearly two-thirds of parents believe that the focus of public policy should be to improve the existing public school system as opposed to finding an alternative to the existing system.

Table 18: Approaches to Improving the Public School System

	Change the system	Find alternative	No Opinion
In order to improve public education in Arizona, some people think we can continue to change the existing public school system. Others believe that at some point we should start over and develop an alternative to the existing public school system. In your opinion, which approach should be the primary focus?	64	28	8

Minority Student Education

Parents were asked a series of questions about the academic opportunities available to minority students. Statewide, sixty-six percent of parents believe minorities have the same academic opportunities as non-minorities. Hispanic and Anglo parents, however, hold different opinions on this issue. A lower percentage of Hispanic parents than Anglo parents believe that minority students are given the same academic opportunities as non-minority students, and a higher percentage of Hispanic parents than Anglo parents believe that minority students have fewer academic opportunities than non-minority students.

Table 19: Academic Opportunities for Minority Students

	Same	More	Fewer	No Opinion
In general, do you think minority students in the school your oldest child attends are given the same academic opportunities as non-minorities, more opportunities or fewer opportunities?	66	16	13	5

Table 20: Academic Opportunities for Minority Students, by Race/ Ethnicity

	Anglo		Hispanic	
	Same	Fewer	Same	Fewer
In general, do you think minority students in the school your oldest child attends are given the same academic opportunities as non-minorities, more opportunities or fewer opportunities?	72	10	65	19

The achievement gap between minority and non-minority students has been a persistent public policy issue for decades. Parents believe strongly that closing the achievement gap remains a priority; 89 percent of parents consider closing the achievement gap between minority and White students as either very important or somewhat important. Only seven percent of parents believe that closing the achievement gap is not important.

Table 21: Importance of Closing the Achievement Gap between Minority and White Students

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not too Important	Not Important at all	No Opinion
Minority students generally score lower on standardized tests than white students. In your opinion, how important do you think it is to close the academic achievement gap between these groups of students?	66	23	4	3	3

Note: Percents do not equal 100 due to rounding.

Language Acquisition

Arizona policy makers and stake holders vigorously debate the issues of language and schooling. Since the passage of Proposition 203, English Language Learners are required to be placed in classrooms where only English is spoken after one year of English immersion. Previously, Arizona policy allowed for students to be provided

instruction in their native language in addition to English. According to a majority of parents surveyed this year, it is most beneficial to have students in classrooms where both English and the students’ native language are the language of instruction as opposed to classrooms where only English is spoken. This finding is in direct contrast to the 2005 results where a majority of parents felt that it was most beneficial for student to be instructed in English only.

Table 22: Beneficial Use of Language in the Classroom

	Both English and Native Language	English Only	Don’t Know
Which do you think is most beneficial to the education of students’ whose language is not English, putting them in classrooms where both English and the student’s native language are spoken or classrooms where only English is the language of instruction?	56	38	6

The implementation of Arizona’s complex language policies has required a tremendous amount of interpretive work by state policy makers and educators. State laws are clear that English is to be the language of instruction. Other implementation issues remain, however, such as when students are learning English should ELL students be educated in separate classes or included in classes with other students (also called mainstreaming). Of these two instructional strategies, parents overwhelmingly believe that ELL students should be instructed in separate classes as they learn English rather than mainstreamed into classes where only English is spoken Anglo and Hispanic parents, however, disagree on the best classroom strategy for students to learn English. Hispanic parents are more in favor of mainstreaming as opposed to separating ELL students while they learn English.

Table 23: Separating or Mainstreaming ELL Students

	Separate	Mainstream	No Opinion
As a strategy for students who are learning English, do you think it is most beneficial for English Language Learners to be placed into separate classes not to exceed one year and given intensive English language instruction or placed into mainstream classes immediately where only English is spoken?	72	24	5

Note: Percents do not equal 100 due to rounding.

Table 24: Separating or Mainstreaming ELL Students, by Race/Ethnicity

	Anglo			Hispanic		
	Separate	Mainstream	No Opinion	Separate	Mainstream	No Opinion
Do you think it is most beneficial for English Language Learners to be placed into separate classes not to exceed one year and given intensive English language instruction or placed into mainstream classes immediately where only English is spoken?	74	21	5	62	31	7

Over the past several months, Arizona lawmakers have struggled with funding for ELL students in response to a federal court order to improve education for these students. In a political context, the issue of ELL funding is debated in a competitive environment where funding to meet the court mandates affect the share of a finite resources available for all state programs. To simulate such a competitive atmosphere, parents were asked about their support for additional funding for ELL students given that ELL students may receive more funding than some other students. When ELL funding is framed in such a manner, parents are split on providing additional money to ELL students with a slightly larger percentage of parents favoring additional funding but there is no majority opinion on this issue.

Table 25: Funding for English Language Learner Programs

	Yes	No	No Opinion
Do you agree that the state should provide additional money to English Language Learners even if it means that schools will receive more money for English Language Learners than some other students?	47	41	12

Early Education

Full-day kindergarten remains a heated legislative issue in the state legislature. The issue is largely divided along party lines. Democratic Governor Napolitano has repeatedly advocated for universal, voluntary full-day kindergarten and the Republican legislative leadership stands in opposition. Among all parents—not just those with students in early education—publicly-funded, full-day kindergarten is a popular policy option. Seventy-three percent of parents are in favor of full-day kindergarten.

Table 26: Support for Full-Day Kindergarten

	Favor	Oppose	No Opinion
Do you favor or oppose publicly-funded, full-day kindergarten programs?	73	22	5

The long-term benefits of full-day kindergarten programs are a major contention of the legislative debate surrounding this issue. To interject parental opinion into this debate, the parents who favor publicly-funded full-day kindergarten were asked an open-ended question about what they consider the primary benefits of these programs. Parents believe full-day kindergarten benefits students both educationally and socially by exposing them to schooling at a younger age and for a longer period of time.

Table 27: Benefits of Full-Day Kindergarten

In your opinion, what is the primary benefit of full-day kindergarten?	
Educational benefits of getting started earlier	35
Additional class time to adjust to school	35
Allow parents to work, more flexibility	12
Allows more time each day to learn	11

Notes: (1) Percentages include only those respondents who favor full-day kindergarten. Seventy-three percent of parents support full-day kindergarten. (2) Individuals could provide more than one response and all responses were coded. (3) Percentages calculated based on the number of responses. (4) Percentages do not equal 100 because only the four most often cited responses are listed.

School Report Cards

The Arizona Department of Education publishes School Report Cards as an information source for parents about school policies and academic performance. Sixty-five percent of parents have reviewed a School Report Card, but the number of Anglo parents reviewing the School Report Card is significantly higher than the number of Hispanic parents who report doing so. While 68 percent of Anglo parents have viewed a School Report Card, only 52 percent of Hispanic parents have done so. Hispanic parents may be less likely to have viewed a School Report Card because they are primarily distributed online and only 69 percent of Hispanic parents report having access to the internet compared to 95 percent of Anglo parents. If the School Report Card is the primary state-sponsored information source about schools, then the discrepancy between Hispanic and Anglo parents points to the need to make the School Report Cards available in multiple formats. A large majority of parents who have viewed a School Report Card hold a favorable opinion of them.

Table 28: Opinion of School Report Cards

	Very Favorable	Generally Favorable	Somewhat Unfavorable	Very Unfavorable	No Opinion
What is your opinion of the School Report Cards?	29	49	13	6	4

Note: Percents do not equal 100 due to rounding.

The Divergence of Hispanic Parent Attitudes

Each year the AEPI parent opinion survey includes an “oversample” of Hispanic parents in order to compare the view of Hispanic parents on the issues facing public education to the view of Anglo parents. The Hispanic oversample, consisting of approximately 100 parents annually, is used to track how the opinions of Arizona’s largest and fastest growing minority group have changed over time.

In 2004, no significant differences existed between the opinions of Hispanic and Anglo parents on any of the issues presented in the survey. By 2005, Hispanic and Anglo parents exhibited differences on some issues, but no identifiable trends emerged.

This year, the opinions of Hispanic parents have diverged from Anglo parents in a clear and consistent direction. Hispanic parents expressed a greater dissatisfaction with the Arizona public school system and favored more stringent accountability policies than Anglo parents. All of the following differences between the opinions Hispanic and Anglo parents are statistically significant.⁶

When asked about two major options for improving public education—changing the existing public school system or creating an alternative system—Hispanic parents are more likely to favor creating an alternative system than changing the existing public school system. Sixty-nine percent of Anglo parents favor changing the existing system compared to 49 percent of Hispanic parents whereas 42 percent of Hispanic parents favor creating alternatives to the existing system versus 29 percent of Anglo parents.

Table 29: Approaches to Improving the Public School System, by Race/Ethnicity

In order to improve public education in Arizona, some people think we can continue to change the existing public school system. Others believe that at some point we should start over and develop an alternative to the existing public school system. In your opinion, which approach should be the primary focus?		
	Anglo	Hispanic
Change existing system	69	49
Develop alternate system	25	42
No opinion	6	9

Hispanic parents also are less likely to believe that they can choose the best school for their child within the existing public school system. Fifty-five percent of Hispanic parents compared to sixty-seven percent of Anglo parents believe that sufficient choices are available to select the best school for their child.

Table 30: School Choice Options, by Race/Ethnicity

Do you feel you have sufficient choices available to choose the best school for your child?		
	Anglo	Hispanic
Yes	67	55
No	32	43
No opinion	2	2

Note: Percents may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Possibly as a result of their dissatisfaction with public schools, Hispanic parents favor more stringent accountability policies for students and schools than Anglo parents. A higher percentage of Hispanic parents than Anglo parents support AIMS testing. Eighty percent of Hispanic parents compared to seventy-one percent of Anglo parents favor the use of AIMS testing to hold schools accountable and 70 percent of Hispanic parents compared to fifty-seven percent of Anglo parents believe that students should pass AIMS as a prerequisite to graduating from high school.

Table 31: Standardized Testing Policies, by Race/Ethnicity

Do you favor or oppose of requiring students to pass the AIMS test before they graduate from high school?		
	Anglo	Hispanic
Favor	71	80
Oppose	29	20

Do you favor or oppose using statewide tests to determine how schools are performing?		
	Anglo	Hispanic
Favor	57	70
Oppose	37	25
No Opinion	6	5

Hispanic parents also hold a more favorable opinion of NCLB, the federal school accountability system. Of the parents familiar with NCLB, 71 percent of Hispanic parents compared to 53 percent of Anglo parents hold either a favorable or generally favorable opinion of the policy.

Table 32: Opinion of NCLB, by Race/Ethnicity

From what you have heard or read about NCLB, what is your opinion of the act?		
	Anglo	Hispanic
Very Favorable	18	19
Generally Favorable	36	52
Somewhat Favorable	30	22
Very Unfavorable	17	6

Note: Percents do not equal 100 due to rounding.

Finally, while the preponderance of Anglo parents oppose state takeover to improve underperforming schools, Hispanic parents are mixed on their opinion of state takeover as a school reform strategy.

Table 33: State Takeover of Underperforming Schools, by Race/Ethnicity

If a school one of your children is attending consistently scored low on the statewide tests, would you favor or oppose state takeover?		
	Anglo	Hispanic
Approve	25	39
Oppose	68	49
No Opinion	7	12

Summary

The highlights of the *Parent Attitudes about Education in Arizona: 2006* survey reveal both consistency and change in the views of Arizona’s parents. Arizona parents continue to think their schools and teachers are doing a good job and parents feel there are sufficient options to choose the best school for their child. Across all three years, parents identified “lack of resources” as the biggest challenge facing public schools. The use of standardized testing in school accountability policies, such as Arizona LEARNs and NCLB, continues to receive a high level of parental support. A majority of parents remain opposed to policies to allow students to attend private schools with public funds. Finally, parents remain strongly supportive of full-day kindergarten programs.

Parents have changed their opinion on other issues. With the AIMS graduation requirement approaching in only a few months, parent support for AIMS as a graduation requirement increased significantly. Parents also reversed course on language issues and now support instruction in both English and the students’ native language as the most beneficial instructional method. Most notably, in comparison to Anglo parents, Hispanic parents expressed more dissatisfaction with the public school system and greater support for stringent accountability policies.

Notes and References

- ¹ Rose, L.C. & Gallup, A.M. (2005, September). The 37th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*. Retrieved April 6, 2006, from <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kpollpdf.htm>
- ² Arizona Department of Education. (2004, September 1). *Arizona schools chief announces 82 percent of Arizona schools makes adequate yearly progress (AYP)*. Phoenix: Author. Retrieved April 14, 2005, from <http://www.ade.az.gov/pio/Press-Releases/2004/pr09-01-04.pdf>
- ³ *Arizona Republic* (2006, March 27). AIMS results won't hold many seniors back., B9.
- ⁴ Greene, J.P. (2001). *Education Freedom Index*. New York: Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. Retrieved April 14, 2005, from http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_24.htm
- ⁵ Lake, R.L. & Hill, P.T. (Eds.) (2005, November). *Hopes, fears and reality: A balanced look at American charter schools in 2005*. University of Washington: National Center for Charter School Research. Retrieved April 4, 2006, from http://www.crpe.org/ncsrp/pubs/2005_HopesFears.shtml
- ⁶ For all 2x2 tables, $p < 0.05$ according to Fisher's Exact χ^2 test. For all other tables, $p < 0.10$ according to Pearson's χ^2 test.