



University of Delaware Education Research & Development Center

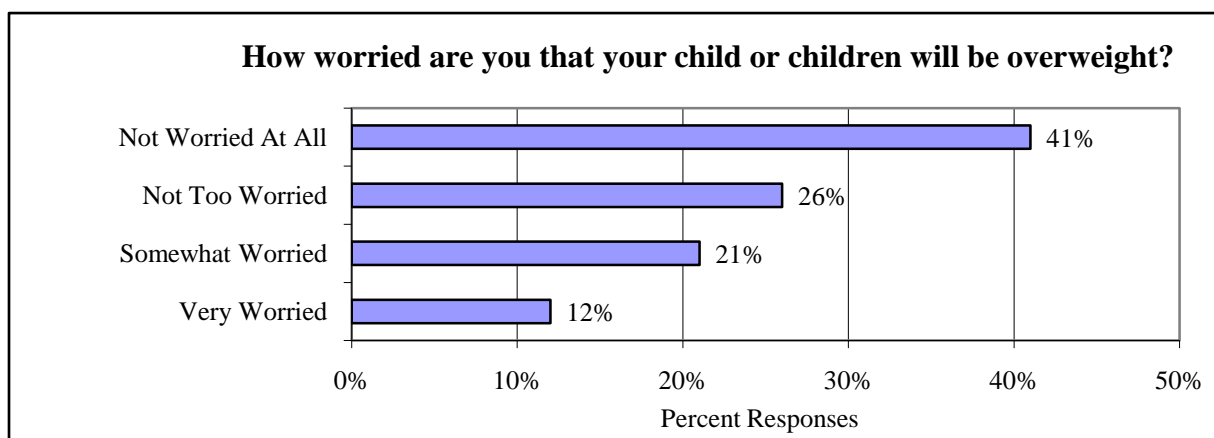


PUBLIC OPINION OF EDUCATION: CHILDHOOD OBESITY AND TEACHER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

Highlights of the 2006 Statewide Public Poll on the Condition of Education in Delaware

April 2007

This issue of Public Opinion of Education focuses on two important topics: childhood obesity and teacher recruitment and retention. While only 12% of parents in Delaware are very worried that their children will be overweight, 41% are not worried at all. Nationally, approximately 16% of children ages 6-19 years old are obese;¹ and in Delaware 14% of youth are overweight and 17% are at risk for becoming overweight.²



For more information or questions regarding the Public Poll, contact:

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This poll is a collaborative effort of the College of Human Services, Education and Public Policy at the University of Delaware. The author extends special thanks to the Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research for conducting the telephone interviews.

For more information on the 2006 Public Poll, please contact the R&D Center by email at ud-rdc@udel.edu or by phone at (302) 831-4433. The briefs and full report will be available on the web at <http://www.rdc.udel.edu> later this year.

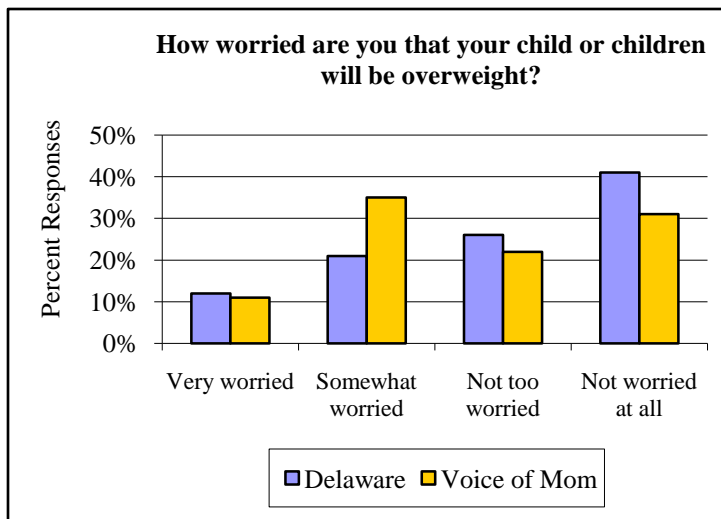
CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Poll Results

Three questions on this year's poll addressed how much Delawareans believe childhood obesity to be a serious problem at the family, state and national level. A large proportion of Delawareans (41%) are not worried at all

that their children will become overweight.

However, when asked, "On a scale from 1-10, where 1 is not a problem and 10 is a very serious problem, how much of a health problem do you think obesity is in the state of Delaware", the majority of Delawareans (64%) rated obesity as a 7 or greater. Finally, the overwhelming majority of Delawareans (95%) believe that childhood obesity, in general, is a very serious or somewhat serious problem.



Putting it in Context

This year, significantly fewer Delawareans believe childhood obesity is a moderately severe to severe problem in Delaware (74% in 2003 and 67% in 2006). Delawareans seem less concerned than a

national sample that their children will become overweight. According to the Health Pulse of America Survey conducted in September of 2005, 41% of parents with children under the age of 18 living with them are very concerned or somewhat concerned about their children's weight³, as compared to 31% of Delawareans. Similarly, according to the Voice of Mom's Survey in 2005, 47% of mother's are very worried or somewhat worried that their child will be overweight.⁴

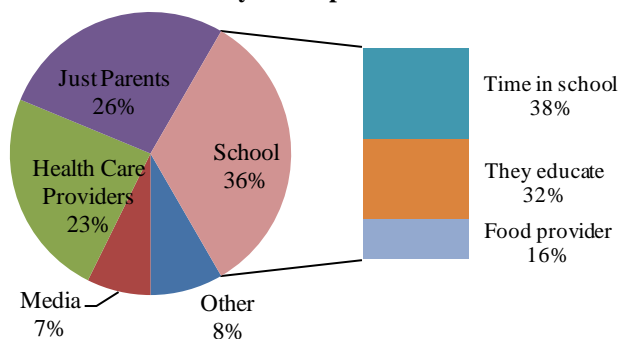
Childhood obesity is cause for concern. It has been shown to lead to reduced self-esteem⁵, and decreased academic performance⁶. In addition, childhood obesity has been linked to increased rates of health problems such as asthma, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, orthopedic complications and sleep apnea.⁷

RESPONSIBILITY FOR EDUCATING CHILDREN ABOUT OBESITY

Poll Results

To better understand who Delawarean's believe should take responsibility for teaching children about obesity, respondents were asked, "Aside from parents, who do you think should have the main responsibility for teaching children to avoid becoming overweight?" Over a third of respondents (36%), indicated that aside from parents, schools should have the main responsibility for teaching children to avoid becoming overweight, followed by just parents (26%), and health care providers (23%). Respondents who indicated schools should have the main responsibility for teaching children to avoid becoming overweight were

Aside from parents, who do you think should have the main responsibility for teaching children to avoid becoming overweight? If, schools, why should they be responsible?



asked why they believed schools should bear this responsibility. Their responses fell into three main categories. The largest percentage of responses (38%) indicated that school should be responsible because students spend so much of their time there. The second largest percent of responses (32%) were related to the school's role as educator and the large amount of influence schools have. Finally, a small, but substantial proportion of respondents (16%) indicated that because schools provide food, they have a responsibility to educate students about obesity prevention.

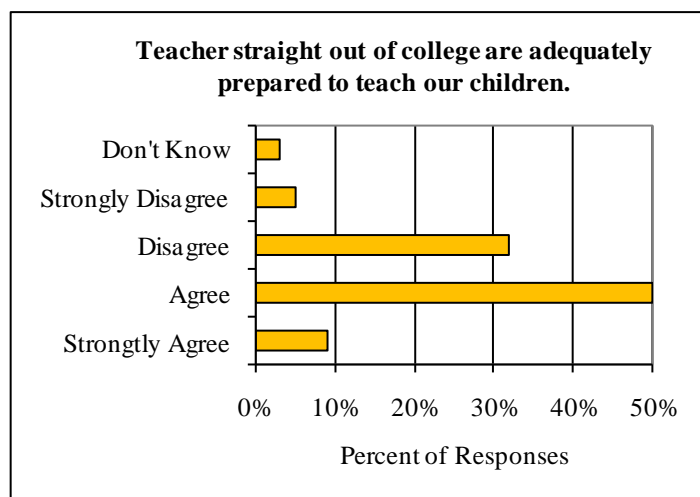
Putting it in Context

According to the Health Pulse of America Survey (2005), 55% of individuals polled believed that after parents, schools should have the main responsibility for teaching children how to avoid becoming overweight, which is significantly more than the percentage of Delawareans.⁸ The Center for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that better health education, more physical education and physical activity and healthier school environments are all possible solutions to the obesity problem in Delaware.⁹ However, in 2003, Delaware residents were rather divided regarding what food should be provided in the school environment.¹⁰ Approximately one-third supported each of the following: replacing soda, candy, and chips with healthy food choices (37%), leaving existing food items and adding healthy choices (32%), and removing all vending machines from schools (30%).

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Poll Results

Delawareans were asked if they believed teachers straight out of college are adequately prepared to teach our children. About 59% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that teachers they are. Delaware residents were



also asked if they would be willing to support incentives to attract qualified candidates to math, science, and special education positions, areas that Delaware has had a shortage in recently. Most respondents (61%) strongly support incentives to attract qualified candidates in these areas. On the topic of teacher retention, an overwhelming majority of Delaware residents (81%) support three strategies for increasing teacher retention: team teaching, increased compensation, and improved staff development.

Putting it in Context

The national annual teacher demand has averaged about 230,000 teachers; of this about half of the

teachers are right out of teacher preparation programs.¹¹ The nation as a whole produces far more new teachers than it needs, but teachers for children with disabilities, limited English proficiency, mathematics and physical science do experience shortages. Likewise increased demand for special education and bilingual education teachers has produced shortfalls in many states and localities.¹² As reported by district personnel directors in the Delaware Teacher Supply Survey Analysis Report, the state of Delaware hired 1,116 new teachers for the 2004-2005 school year. Most district personnel directors found that math (90%), special education (79%) and high school science teachers (63%) were the hardest teachers to hire.¹³

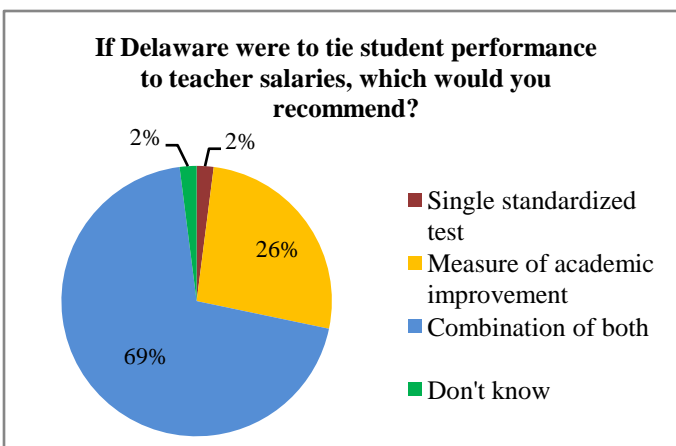
One study suggests that retirement makes up a small part of teacher attrition; half left to take other jobs and/or were dissatisfied with teaching.¹⁴ An Education Commission of the States report on teacher recruitment and

retention indicates that research provides strong support that compensation plays a key role in the recruitment and retention of teachers and increasing compensation results in increased teacher retention rates.¹⁵

PAY-FOR-PERFORMANCE AND TEACHER SALARIES

Poll Results

Pay for performance, also known as merit pay, knowledge-and-skill based pay or individual or group incentive pay, has been a hot topic throughout the nation. Delaware residents were divided when asked if a measure of a teachers ability should be based on how well their students perform on standardized tests, with similar proportions saying yes and no. However, if teacher salaries were tied to student performance, over two-thirds (69%) of Delawareans supported using a combination of a single standardized test and a measure of academic improvement to measure student performance. Only two percent supported using a single standardized test alone. Delaware residents were also asked how student performance should be tied to teacher salaried. More than half (57%) of Delawareans support providing supplemental pay to teachers whose students perform well, compared with 19% who support directly tying all teachers' pay to student performance, and 21% who do not support either approach. In addition, most respondents (62%) thought that raising the salaries of teachers would raise the quality of education in our schools a fair amount or a great deal.



Putting it in Context

National Gallup Poll Results from 2004, indicate that 49% of respondents believe that a measure of a teacher's ability should be how well the students perform on a standardized test,¹⁶ however, according to Education World, few districts have adopted or piloted 'pay for performance' type programs.¹⁷ However, 30 out of 50 states have passed legislation requiring some type of performance pay or some portion of teacher pay tied to performance. In Delaware, the Delaware State Education Association agreed in the spring of 2005, to help pilot the Delaware performance Appraisal System II (DPAS II),¹⁸ which ties student performance to teacher pay.

Design, Data Collection, and Sampling Error

From February 13 to April 24, 2006, telephone interviews were conducted with 941 residents throughout the state, 302 parents or school-age children and 639 non-parents. The data collection procedure for the poll was scientifically developed and random digit dialing was employed to obtain a random sample of citizens. All analyses conducted by the R&D Center for the Public Poll involved weighting the data to reflect the statewide population more accurately.

When using a sample, all measurements are subject to sampling error; that is, the extent to which the results may differ from what would be obtained if the entire population of Delaware residents had been surveyed. It is important to remember that small differences may not be statistically significant. The size of the sampling error primarily depends on the number of people surveyed and the response percentage. The sampling error for the

poll* ranges from approximately $\pm 1.9\%$ - 3.2% for the total adult sample, $\pm 2.3\%$ - 3.9% for the non-parent sample, and $\pm 3.4\%$ - 5.6% for the parent sample.



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* These error ranges used a 95% confidence interval for response percentages between 5% and 95%.