



*“Kids don’t ask to be born in this world. They don’t pick their parents. I really wanted the best education for my daughter but I couldn’t afford it. Then I heard about the scholarship program and there was hope.”*

**Joyce Thompson, Cleveland, Ohio**

## Public Opinion Polls

In independent public opinion surveys conducted during the last several years, Americans have expressed consistent support for school choice programs. Support is notable even in polls whose design might be questionable or expected to elicit negative views.

Here are examples of national independent polls conducted last year and in 2000.

**Blacks and Hispanics** — The strongest support for school choice comes from low-income parents, especially African Americans and Hispanics.

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies conducts research on issues of special concern to black Americans and other minority groups. In its latest survey, a “majority (57 percent) of African Americans ... supported school vouchers. Among blacks, those under 35 (75 percent) ... and those from households with children (74 percent) are most supportive...”<sup>1</sup>

A July 2001 poll of Hispanic adults, conducted for The Latino Coalition & Hispanic Business Roundtable, found 73% agreeing that “the government should provide taxpayer funded vouchers to help low-income families send their children to a better public, private, or church run school.”<sup>2</sup> The Latino Coalition conducts research on issues involving Latinos’ overall economic, cultural and social development.

**General Public** — School choice was a prominent issue in the 2000 presidential campaign. Representative findings of public opinion are illustrated in the following polls.

### ***Washington Post/Kaiser/Harvard: 2000 Election Values Survey***<sup>3</sup>

“Do you favor or oppose providing parents with tax money in the form of school vouchers to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools?”	<b>For</b> <b>49%</b>	<b>Against</b> <b>47%</b>
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<sup>1</sup> “2000 National Opinion Poll,” [www.jointcenter.org](http://www.jointcenter.org).

<sup>2</sup> “The Latino Coalition & Hispanic Business Roundtable National Survey of Hispanic Adults,” July 24, 2001, [www.thelatinocoalition.com](http://www.thelatinocoalition.com).

<sup>3</sup> September 7-17, 2000.

***Pew Research Center/Princeton Survey Research Associates***<sup>4</sup>

“I’d like your opinion on some programs and proposals being discussed in this country today. Please tell me if you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose each one... Federal funding for vouchers to help low-and-middle-income parents send their children to private and parochial school?”

	<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>
53%		44%

***NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll ((8/10/00)***<sup>5</sup>

“Let me read you two positions on school vouchers. Between these positions, which do you tend to side with more? Position A: Government should give parents more educational choices by providing taxpayer-funded vouchers to help pay for private or religious schools. Position B: Government funding should be limited to ... public schools.”

	<b>Pos. A</b>	<b>Pos. B</b>
56%		38%

**Other Measures** —Public opinion surveys often report different answers to seemingly similar questions. This reflects such factors as: how a question is asked, including specific words; the tone in which the question is asked; the overall context of the survey; and the sequence of questions. Illustrating this point, The Gallup Poll News Service says, “Americans’ responses to school voucher programs vary significantly depending on the way in which the programs are described within survey wording.”<sup>6</sup> For example, consider a widely publicized poll that Gallup itself conducted.<sup>7</sup> Here are two questions from the poll:

- “[T]o improve public education in America, some people think the focus should be on reforming the existing public school system. Others believe the focus should be on finding an alternative to the existing public school system. Which ... do you think is preferable — reforming the existing public school system or finding an alternative to the existing public school system?”
- “Which one of these two plans would you prefer — improving and strengthening the existing public schools or providing vouchers for parents to use in selecting and paying for private and/or church-related schools?”

Such questions define vouchers as antithetical to public education and thus might convey a negative impression about vouchers to respondents.

Having been presented with the above information, respondents to the survey then were asked if they favor allowing “parents to send their school-age children to any public, private, or church-related school they choose. For those parents choosing nonpublic schools, the government would pay all or part of the tuition.” In response:

- 52 percent of public school parents said yes.
- 44 percent of all respondents said yes.

**Following a description of vouchers that could appear to be adverse, such levels of support are especially noteworthy.**

<sup>4</sup> August 24-September 10, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> August 10-11, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> [www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr010115.asp](http://www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr010115.asp)

<sup>7</sup> August 2001 survey for Phi Delta Kappa, an organization whose mission is “to promote quality education, with particular emphasis on publicly supported education.” [www.kiva.net/~pdkintl/kappan/k0109gal.htm](http://www.kiva.net/~pdkintl/kappan/k0109gal.htm)