

**Kaplan Educational Centers/Newsweek Poll K-8 Parents
Princeton Survey Research Associates**

FINAL SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

March 13, 1998

It's a Tough World out There -- The Problems Children Face:

Parents of children in Kindergarten through 8th grade overwhelmingly believe their children have more problems to deal with than they themselves did when they were young (78%). Two in ten (18%) say their kids face the same number of problems and only 3% say their kids face fewer problems. Black parents are especially likely to say their children are facing more problems (90% vs. 78% of whites), as are those with less education (83% no college vs. 69% college graduates).

Although the survey did not specifically ask what these problems are, it does suggest some possibilities. A significant minority of parents, when asked what concerns them most about their child's education, cite peer pressure involving sex and drugs (20%). Similarly, when asked what they would do differently vis-a-vis their child's education, two in ten (19%) mention keeping their kids away from troublemakers.

Divisive School Wide Issues -- Uniforms, Class Composition, National Standards:

Parents are divided about school uniforms. Roughly a third (32%) think uniforms should be required, a third (28%) think they should be optional, and the remaining third (34%) think schools should not have uniforms. Nonwhite parents (52%), and parents with older children in their families (36%), are more interested in requiring school uniforms than whites (28%) and those whose kids are all in 4th grade or younger (27%).

Parents are also divided about whether school children should be separated into classes based on ability (48%) or grouped together across ability levels (46%). Younger parents (those under 35) lean more toward separating kids according to ability (55%), rather than grouping kids of different ability levels together (38%).

Lastly, parents are divided about whether national standards, like those championed by President Clinton, would improve the educational system a lot (39%) somewhat (34%), a little (10%) or not at all (13%). Parents without any college experience, and those with incomes under \$30,000 are more likely to think standards would help a lot (48% and 46% respectively).

If such standards are adopted, a slight majority of parents (56%) say students who fail to meet the standards should be allowed to advance grades nonetheless, but should be provided with extra help. A significant minority, however, says those who don't make the cut should be held back (39%).

Tempered Satisfaction:

Most parents of children in grades K-8 are satisfied with, though not ecstatic about, the quality of the education their child is receiving. A third (31%) say their child is getting an excellent education, half (53%) say it is good, and 16% say only fair or poor. Parents with children in private or parochial schools are far more likely to say excellent (68%) than those with kids in public schools (25%). Among parents whose children attend public schools, those who feel they had a hand in choosing the school are more likely to say their child is getting an excellent education than those whose child was assigned a school (29% vs. 19%). Parents with kids in grades K-4 are more enthusiastic than those with kids in later grades (38% vs. 20% excellent). Interestingly, there are only minor differences in satisfaction based on income or race. Parents are, on average, satisfied enough that if they had a choice of sending their child to any public school in their area they would keep the child at his or her current school.

Among those parents who send their child to public school, a slight majority (57%) say they were able to choose the school their child attends. This number appears inflated given how few school districts actually allow parents to select their child's specific school. Parents clearly feel they have a stake in their school and feel they had some role in selecting it, perhaps by choosing to live where they do.

Concerns and Frustrations:

When asked which of a list of possible problems *concerns* them most about their child's education, a plurality of parents cite the quality of the teachers (43%). Significant numbers also mention the availability and quality of supplies like textbooks and computers (21%) and peer pressure (20%). Not surprisingly, parents of kids in grade 5-8 are somewhat more likely than those with younger kids to say peer pressure is their most significant concern (24% vs. 17%). Very few parents say that school safety (6%) or the effectiveness of the principal (3%) is their primary concern.

When asked which of a list of possibilities they find most *frustrating* about their child's education, the most frequent answer is finding time to be involved in your child's education (39%). Parents with kids in K-4 are especially likely to cite this frustration (43%). Two in ten (22%) parents say communicating with teachers and school officials is most frustrating; parents of kids in higher grades mention this more frequently (28%). Many parents point to their child's own lack of interest or effort as their biggest frustration (16%). Parents of older children (22% 5-8 grade) and boys (24%) are more likely than those with younger kids (13%) and girls (8%) to label this their primary frustration. Reflecting their underlying satisfaction with the education their child is getting, very few parents say the main frustration is the school not being good enough (5%).

Homework:

A two-thirds majority of parents (65%) say their child gets about the right amount of homework, 23% say their child gets too little, and 10% say too much. Parents with children in grade 5-8 are more likely than those with younger children to say their child is not assigned enough homework (29% vs. 18%). Those with children in private or parochial schools are more likely than those parents whose kids are in public school to say their kid gets *too much* homework (20% vs. 8%).

Homework clearly stresses family bonds. A third (34%) of parents admit dealing with homework causes strain or interferes with family relationships at least sometimes, including one in ten (9%) who say this happens often. Homework related family problems appear to increase with the child's age. Four in ten (40%) parents with kids in grade K-4 say they never experience homework related strain, compared with 27% of those with kids in 5-8. Parents of boys say homework strain occurs somewhat more frequently than parents of girls.

One source of this strain might be busy family schedules. When asked which of a list of possible barriers most often keeps them from helping their kids with homework, two in ten (18%) parents cite busy family schedules, making this the third most prevalent answer. The most frequent responses, however, are parents' preferences that the children do the homework on their own (30%), and children not requesting help (23%). Parents of younger children (K-4) are more likely to cite time pressures and wanting the child to work alone, whereas parents of older kids more often cite the child not asking for help. Single parents and those with lower incomes are more likely to say time pressures keep them from helping with homework.

Computer Use:

According to their parents about half (52%) of children in grades K-8 use a computer every day, four in ten (41%) use them several times a week, and just under one in ten (7%) use them less often than that. Grade and middle school children from different income backgrounds use computers with about the same frequency. However, kids from higher income homes are more frequent users of computers at home, whereas kids from less well-off homes more frequently use, and arguably rely on, school computers. Perhaps most telling is the fact that over half (55%) of the parents with incomes under \$30,000 report their child never uses a computer at home, compared with only 23% of those with incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000, and just 12% of those with incomes over \$50,000 a year.

According to their parents, kids who use home computers most often play computer games (36%). Boys especially spend most of their time playing (49% vs. 22% of girls.) A quarter of kids (26%), and younger ones especially (38%), spend a lot of time using educational software -- arguably the precursor to games. Some kids spend most of their computer time doing writing homework assignments (18%) or doing school related research on the web (12%). Older kids are more likely to use the computer for these kinds of school work. According to their parents, very few kids (5%) spend the lion's share of their computer time surfing the web for fun.

If I Had it to Do Over Again:

When parents were asked which of a list of possibilities they would do over again vis-a-vis their child's education, the largest share (23%) said they would get more involved, echoing concerns mentioned earlier about busy family schedules. Many also said they would identify potential problems earlier (20%) and keep their child away from troublesome kids (19%). Slightly fewer would get their child more supplemental help or tutoring (13%). Reflecting their underlying satisfaction with the child's education very few parents say they would send their child to a different school (5%).

Survey Methodology:

Results are based on telephone interviews with 407 parents of children in grades K-8, conducted March 5-10, 1998. The overall margin of sampling error for questions based on the total sample is plus or minus 5 percentage points. Results based on smaller subgroups are subject to larger margins of sampling error. In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting surveys can also introduce error or bias into poll results.

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TOPLINE RESULTS

N= 407 parents with children in grades K-8

Including: 238 parents with (target) child K-4 and 167 parents with (target) child 5-8

Interviewing dates: March 5-10, 1998

Margins of error:

Plus or minus 5 percentage points for total

Plus or minus 7 percentage points for K-4

Plus or minus 9 percentage points for 5-8

1 . Compared with the ways things were when you were a child, do you think children today face more problems in growing up, fewer problems, or about the same amount of problems?

78 More

3 Fewer

18 Same amount

1 Don't know/Refused

S4 NUMBER OF CHILDREN INHH K-8

55 One
44 More than One
33 Two
11 Three or more
1 Refused

DI. RESPONDENT'S SEX:

45 Male (Father)
55 Female (Mother)

D2. Are you married, LIVING as married, divorced, separated, widowed, or have you never been married?

82 Married
5 Living as married
4 Divorced
2 Separated
1 Widowed
6 Never been married/Single
0 Refused

D3. What is your age?

36 Under 35
47 35-44
17 45+
* Refused

D4. What is the LAST grade or class that you completed in school?

- 4 None, or grade 1 to 8
- 8 High school incomplete (Grades 9 - 11)
- 34 High school graduate (Grade 12)
- 5 Business, technical or vocational school after high school
- 24 Some college, no four-year degree
- 14 College graduate, four-year degree
- 11 Post-graduate or professional schooling, after college
- * Refused

D5. Last year, that is in 1997, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes? Just stop me when I get to the right category.

- 5 Less than \$10,000
- 9 \$10,000 to under \$20,000
- 15 \$20,000 to under \$30,000
- 27 \$30,000 to under \$50,000
- 17 \$50,000 to under \$75,000
- 17 \$75,000 or more
- 3 Don't know
- 7 Refused

D6. What is your race? Are you white, black, Asian, or some other race?

- 82 White
- 11 Black or African-American
- 1 Asian
- 3 Other or mixed race (VOL.)
- 3 Refused

END OF INTERVIEW. THANK RESPONDENT: That completes the interview. Thank you very much for your cooperation.