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COLORADO PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

Sixth Annual Public Opinion Survey

2002

Conducted by
Wells Fargo Public Opinion Research Program of the Graduate School of Public Affairs
University of Colorado - Denver

In cooperation with
The Colorado Association of School Boards
The Colorado Association of School Executives

Sponsored by



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School Performance and Education Policy: 2002 Sixth Annual Survey: Key Findings

For each of the last six years, a statewide public opinion survey has been conducted to ascertain citizens' views on:

- C how well schools and school districts are performing and
- C what should be done by legislators and school board members on key policy issues.

This year's survey provides citizens the opportunity to grade their schools, to assess the job performance of various categories of people responsible for public education and to rate school districts on their performance of key functions. It also examines state standards and testing, the new federal "No Child Left Behind" law, and various issues related to finance.

The survey is a project of the Wells Fargo Public Opinion Research Program. It is done in cooperation with The Colorado Association of School Boards and The Colorado Association of School Executives and it is sponsored by George K. Baum Investment Bankers.

Research Methods

The survey was conducted by telephone between November 7 and 18, 2002 using a random sample of registered voters. We started after the election to ensure that the results would not be affected by the election campaigns. The survey was conducted by trained and experienced interviewers employed by the University and by Voter Consumer Research, a professional interviewing firm. Every effort was made to maximize the proportion of completed calls. While most calls were completed on weekday evenings, efforts were made to contact the sample during weekend and daytime hours as well. Interviewers made a minimum of six attempts to contact each person on the sample list. This approach maximizes the response rate and reduces the possibility of sample bias.

In total 615 interviews were completed from a list of 2130 persons with valid phone numbers. Of these, 879 were never contacted despite repeated attempts. Of the 1251 names with a call disposition, 615 completed the interview and 636 refused. A conservative estimate of the sampling error for 615 completed surveys is +/- 4.1%. This means that for any given question, the results could vary by 4.1% in either direction if it were asked of a different sample from the same population.

The Wells Fargo Public Opinion Research Program

The Wells Fargo Public Opinion Research Program is an initiative of the Graduate School of Public Affairs, University of Colorado at Denver, and is founded on the premise that public opinion research is essential to an enlightened, democratic society. The Program brings together the broad understanding of

governance and public issues found in GSPA with specialized skills and technology needed in public opinion research and analysis. Staff specialize in all aspects of survey research including research design, sample selection, questionnaire development, survey administration via phone or mail, data analysis, and strategy development.

As its centerpiece, the Program conducts *The Mind of Colorado*, an annual statewide survey of the values, attitudes, and opinions of Colorado registered voters. *The Mind of Colorado* strives to examine the components of public trust in the basic societal institutions of our state. It provides the baseline data for the compilation and interpretation of survey research on significant issues of public policy in Colorado.

For more information, contact Dr. Peggy Cuciti, Program Director at (303)820-5664 or Tom McCoy, Program Assistant at (303) 820-5628.

Key Findings

Performance Assessment

About 59% of Coloradans give their schools an overall grade of A (18%) or B (41%). Only 9% assign a grade of D or F. This year's grades are slightly higher than last year's, continuing the trend of slow but steady improvement.

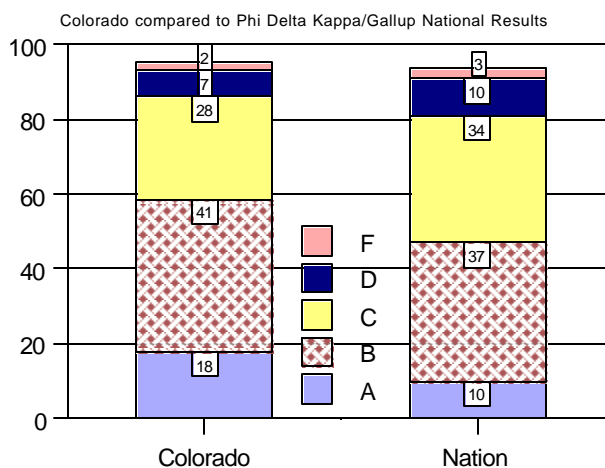
Schools in Colorado rate significantly better than those elsewhere. The Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll reports that in 2002 only 47% of respondents nationally (and 40% within the West) graded school performance within their districts as an A or B.

When each level of school is rated separately, **elementary schools** receive the highest grades. Two-thirds give them either an A (25%) or B (42%). Only 6% assign them a grade of D, and a few respondents report that their elementary schools deserve a failing grade. **Middle schools** receive the fewest As and Bs (48%). At the other extreme, 13% give middle schools a D or F. More than half (53%) grade their **high schools** as an A (15%) or B (39%), but 15% give them a D or F.

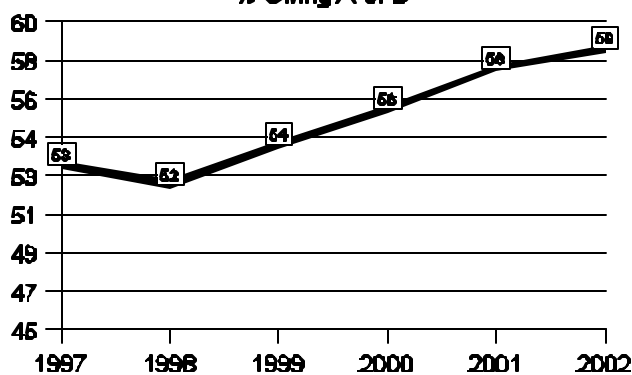
At all three levels of schooling, the percentage of respondents giving high grades has increased over time. At the same time, however, more respondents are giving Ds and Fs now than they did in prior years.

Of all those involved in education, teachers receive the highest performance ratings. Seventy percent (70%) give teachers an excellent or good rating. Sixty percent (60%) use these same terms to rate principals in their district. A majority also rate the performance of students (52%) and superintendents (50%) as either excellent or good. School Boards receive somewhat lower ratings – 41% say their performance rates highly. This proportion is down from 44% last year and 54% in 2000.

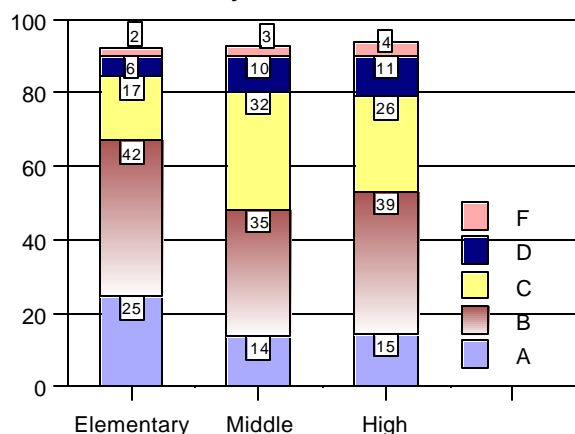
Grade Given to District's Schools



Grades Improve Over Time % Giving A or B



Grades by Level of School



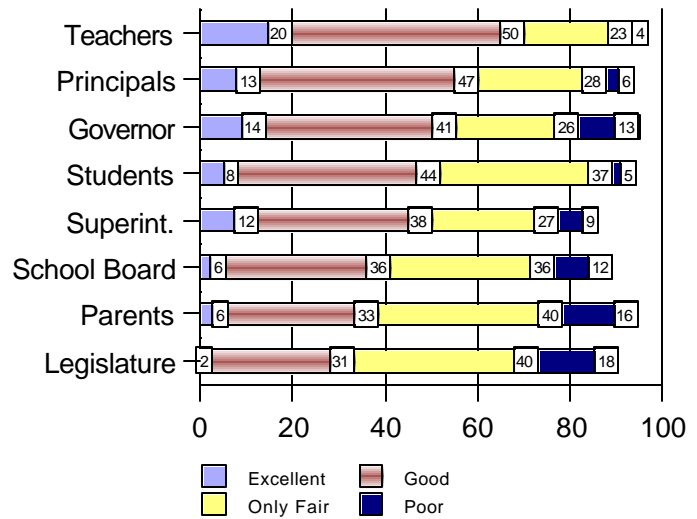
Satisfaction with the job the governor is doing on education continues to rise, with 55 % saying he is doing an excellent or good job, compared to 48% last year and just 33% in 1999. Thirty-three percent (33%) rate the state legislature’s performance on education as excellent or good, placing it at the bottom of the list. However, the legislature’s rating improved slightly this year compared to last and is up substantially from 1999 when only 21% gave an excellent or good rating.

The public’s assessment of school district performance varies by function. The function that districts perform best is ensuring student safety. Seventy-two percent (72%) of respondents think that schools do an excellent or good job in this regard. Almost as many (70%) think school districts do well at treating children of all races and ethnicities fairly. Coloradans continue to be satisfied with how school districts build and maintain schools, with 61% rating performance as excellent or good. This proportion, however, is four percentage points lower than last year.

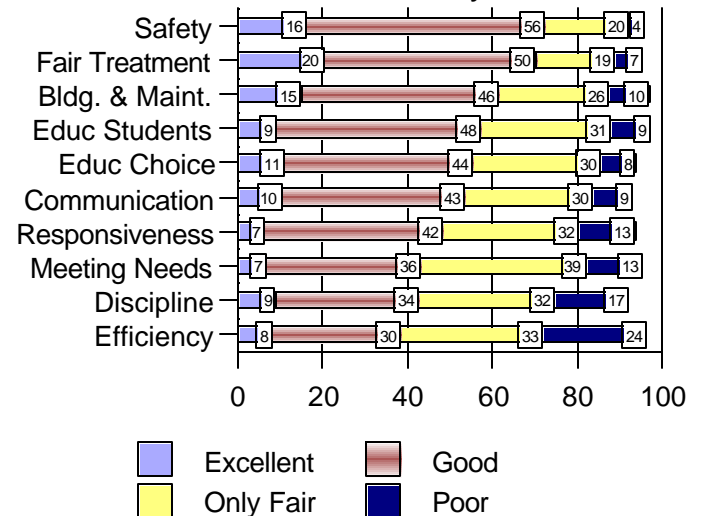
Fifty-seven percent (57%) give a positive rating in regards to the schools’ primary function -- educating students. This is one point higher than last year, continuing the five year upward trend. A majority (55%) also think that the schools do an excellent or good job of offering choices of educational programs and of communicating with parents (53%).

School districts are perceived to do *least well* at using tax dollars efficiently (38%), maintaining discipline in the classroom (42%) and meeting the needs of all students (43%). The efficiency rating deserves a red flag since the score on this item has dropped seven points over two years.

Assessment of Job Performance



Performance Assessment by Function



Meeting Standards

Opinion is very divided as to whether Colorado's strategy of setting standards and holding schools accountable for performance works well. When asked to rate the effectiveness of this strategy on a scale of one to 10, only 24% give a score of eight or higher, indicating they think it is a very effective approach to reform. At the other end of the continuum, more than one-fifth (22%) think this approach is not at all effective (a score of three or lower). These ratings, however, are slightly higher than they were on last year's survey.

The CSAP state standards tests receive a lukewarm endorsement from the public. Only 12% are very confident that they are a good measure of student learning. Nearly half (49%) are somewhat confident. Fully 36% are not confident that the CSAP tests are a good measure of student learning. Consistent with these findings, three-quarters (75%) think that the state needs to use other measures *in addition to* the CSAP in order to assess everything students should be learning.

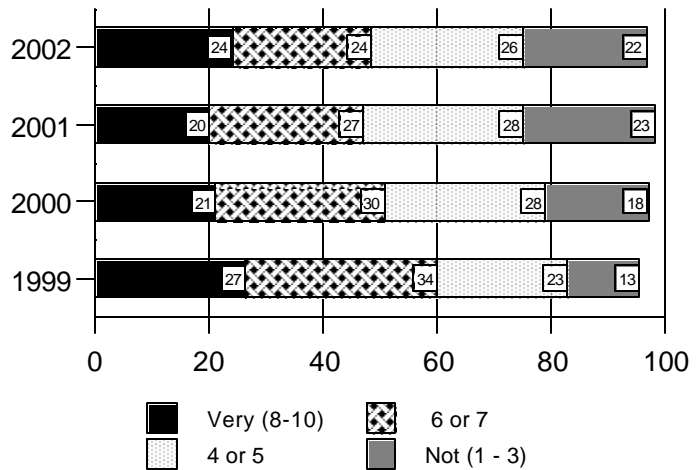
The No Child Left Behind Act

New federal legislation was enacted early in 2002 that increases federal financial support for education while imposing significant new regulations on the state and school districts. Given a brief description of the new law, 53% of Coloradans conclude that the increase in federal government involvement will be a bad thing for public schools, while 39% think it will be good. These results are opposite to those found in a recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup national poll using similar wording; there, 57% thought an increased federal role would be a good thing and 34% thought it would be a bad thing.

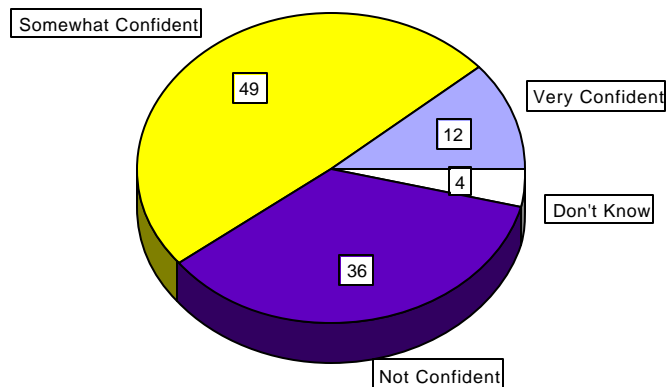
The new federal law requires states to put in place a system of tests similar to what Colorado is already doing with the CSAPs. It also requires states to hold schools accountable for the adequate progress of all

Standards with Accountability

How Effective as Approach to Reform



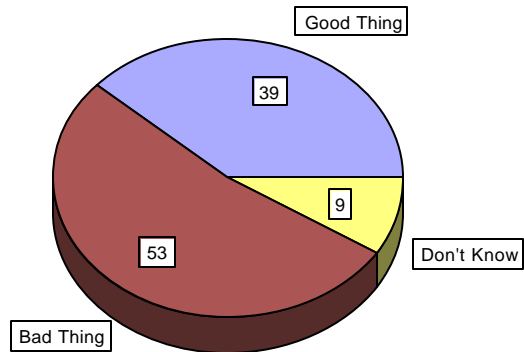
CSAP As Measure of Learning?



students as well as specified groups. As a result of the federal law, Colorado will have to separately report CSAP results for specific groups of students within schools, such as economically disadvantaged or limited English proficiency students. Survey respondents think this extension of accountability is a good idea but they also believe it should be the prerogative of school districts to decide. Fully two-thirds (66%) think it is a good thing to hold schools accountable for the progress of groups such as economically disadvantaged and limited English proficiency students. When asked directly if the decision to hold schools accountable for the progress of specific groups should be made by the federal government, the state or by local school districts, 60% say it should be made by the local school district. Twenty-seven (27%) say the decision should be made by state government, while only 7% want the decision made at the federal level.

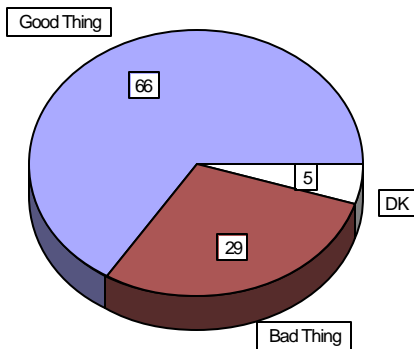
New Federal Law and Involvement

Good or Bad Thing?

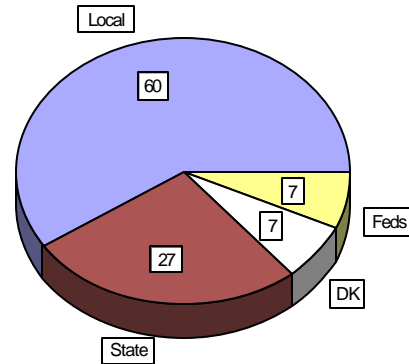


Accountability for Student Group Progress

Good or Bad Thing?



Who Should Decide?



Vouchers

Opinion is divided on vouchers or tax credits designed to make it easier for families to send their children to private or parochial schools. Coloradans are slightly more likely to think that vouchers are generally a good idea (50%) than a bad idea (46%). The level of support has increased by six percentage points since this question was last asked in the 2000 survey.

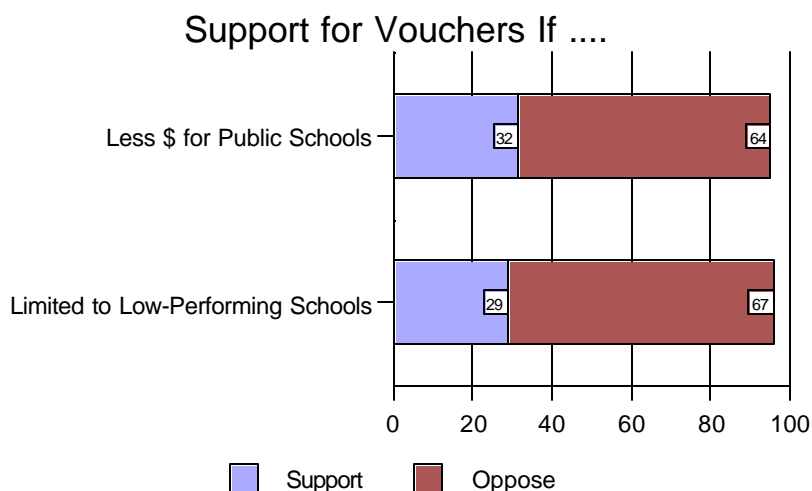
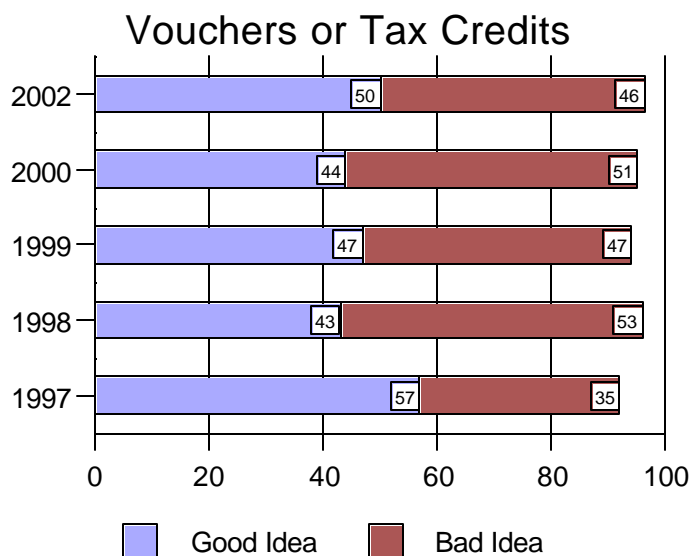
Support for vouchers, however, is relatively soft.

A proposal to initiate a program but limit participation to students currently attending low-performing schools is supported by only 29% of respondents. More than half of those who like the idea of vouchers (57%) oppose the more limited proposal.

Support for vouchers also falls off if a program means there will be less money for public schools. Only 39% of those who said vouchers were a good idea would still support a voucher program in this situation. Overall, 64% of respondents say they would oppose a voucher or tax credit program if it meant there would be less money for public schools in their area.

Consistent with support for accountability in public schools, the great majority – 84% -- thinks that private schools benefitting from vouchers should be required to report on student performance using the same CSAP tests that are required in the public schools. A majority (56%) of those who oppose mandating CSAPs think that schools receiving vouchers should be required to report on student performance in some other way. The two major suggestions for measuring performance are a standardized test other than the CSAP, and a measure of student progress over the school year. Only 5% (33 respondents) think private schools shouldn't formally be held accountable for student performance.

To benefit from vouchers or tax credits, respondents also want private schools to be required to admit any student who applies so long as space is available. Nearly three-quarters (74%) say schools receiving payments through vouchers should have an open admission policy.



Support for School Bonds and/or Tax Increases

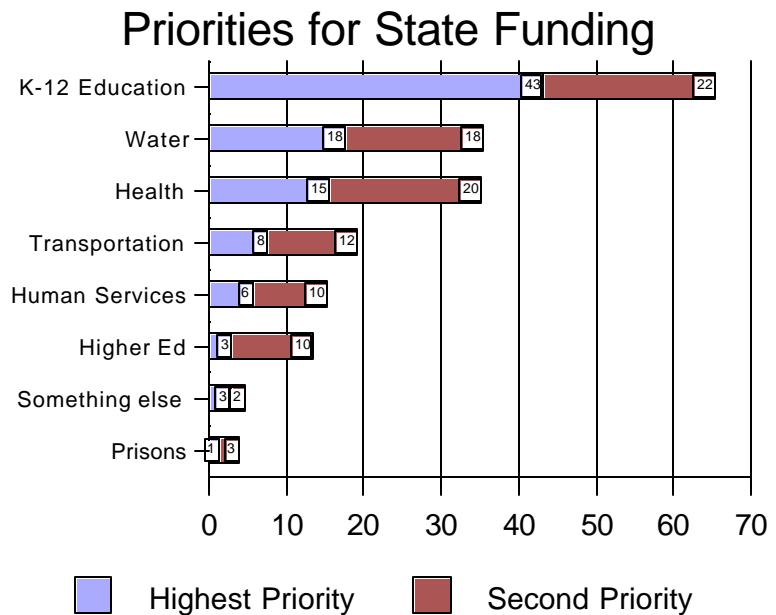
Slightly more than one-third (35%) say that their school district had a school tax or bond issue on the ballot in the November election. Of this group, 61% said they supported increasing the school tax or bond, while 32% say they opposed it. The major explanations offered by respondents for their vote are summarized in the table below.

Supporters say:	Opponents say:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C Schools lack adequate funding; C Buildings are old and in need of improvements; C Students should get a better education; C Teachers need support – higher salaries or fewer students; C Schools are overcrowded; C Smaller class sizes are desirable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C Money is not spent wisely; C Taxes are too high already; C Districts are not accountable

State Budget Priorities

When asked their highest priority for state funding from among seven possible choices, the greatest proportion – 43% -- say K-12 education. An additional 22% say that K-12 education is their second highest priority for state funding. When first and second priorities are combined, a total of 66% cite public education.

Water is the next budget priority, with 35% rating it as their highest (18%) or second highest (18%) priority. Health is valued equally, with 35% saying it is either their highest (15%) or second highest (20%) priority. Other spending areas including transportation, human services, college-level education, and prisons have less support.



Survey with Frequencies

Hello. My name is <first name> and I am calling from the University of Colorado at Denver. We are conducting a survey about public education and a few other public policy issues facing Colorado. Since state and local taxes are used for education, we need the opinions of all people regardless of whether or not they have children. Could you take a few minutes and assist in this survey?

Assessment of Quality of Public Education

1. We're interested in your views regarding the quality of public education in your local school district. Thinking about kindergarten through high school public education, how would you assess the overall performance of your district's public schools? Would you give the schools a grade of A, B, C, D or F for fail?

A	B	C	D	F	Can't Say (<i>Don't prompt</i>)
17.9%	40.8%	27.5%		7.0%	2.4% 4.4%

2. Now, think about the different levels of schools. How would you assess the overall performance of your district's elementary schools, that is, kindergarten through 5th grade? Would you give the schools a grade of A, B, C, D or F for fail?

A	B	C	D	F	Can't Say (<i>Don't prompt</i>)
24.6%	42.3%	17.4%	5.9%	2.0%	8.0%

3. And how would you assess the overall performance of your district's middle schools, that is, grades 6, 7 and 8? Would you give the schools a grade of A, B, C, D or F for fail?

A	B	C	D	F	Can't Say (<i>Don't prompt</i>)
13.8%	34.5%	32.0%	9.8%	2.8%	7.2%

4. How would you assess the overall performance of your district's high schools, that is, grades 9 through 12? Would you give them a grade of A, B, C, D or F for fail?

A	B	C	D	F	Can't Say (<i>Don't prompt</i>)
14.5%	38.7%	25.9%	11.1%	3.7%	6.2%

Many people are responsible for the quality of public education. What kind of job do you think each of the following is doing in your district? READ EACH AND ASK: Are they doing an excellent, good, only fair or poor job?					
	Excellent	Good	Only Fair	Poor	Can't Say
5. The school board	5.5%	35.6%	35.6%	12.4%	10.9%
6. The Superintendent of schools	12.4%	37.6%	27.3%	8.6%	14.1%
7. School principals	13.0%	47.0%	27.6%	6.2%	6.2%
8. Teachers	19.7%	50.2%	23.3%	3.6%	3.3%
9. Students	8.3%	43.7%	37.1%	5.2%	5.7%
10. Parents	5.9%	32.7%	39.8%	16.1%	5.5%

11. What kind of job do you think the governor is doing on education? Is it (*Read responses*)

1	Excellent	14.1%
2	Good	41.3%
3	Only fair	26.3%
4	Poor	13.2%
9	Don't know (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	5.0%

12. What about the state legislature? Is it doing an excellent, good, only fair, or poor job on education?

(*Read responses*)

1	Excellent	2.4%
2	Good	30.7%
3	Only fair	39.8%
4	Poor	17.6%
9	Don't know (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	9.4%

What type of job is your school district doing in each of the following areas? READ EACH AND ASK: Is your district doing an excellent, good, only fair, or poor job?					
	Excellent	Good	Only Fair	Poor	Can't Say
13. Using tax dollars efficiently	8.0%	30.4%	33.2%	24.4%	4.1%
14. Maintaining discipline in the classroom.	8.9%	33.5%	32.0%	17.4%	8.1%
15. Responding to community concerns	6.5%	41.8%	31.9%	13.3%	6.5%
16. Building and maintaining schools	15.0%	46.2%	26.0%	9.6%	3.3%
17. Educating students	9.1%	48.0%	30.7%	9.3%	2.9%
18. Meeting the needs of all students	6.8%	36.1%	38.9%	13.3%	4.9%
19. Ensuring student safety	16.4%	55.6%	19.8%	4.1%	4.1%
20. Treating children of all races and ethnic backgrounds fairly	20.2%	49.8%	18.5%	6.7%	4.9%
21. Communicating with parents	10.4%	42.8%	30.4%	9.1%	7.3%
22. Offering choices of educational programs	11.2%	44.1%	30.1%	8.1%	6.5%

Meeting Standards

23. Colorado has been working to improve education by requiring all students to take the state standards test, called the C-SAP, and then holding both students and schools accountable for performance. How effective do you think this approach to school reform is? Please use a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not at all effective and 10 is very effective.										
<i>Not at all effective</i>						<i>Very effective</i>				DK
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	2
8.3%	5.4%	8.0%	11.1%	15.3%	10.9%	13.5%	15.6%	4.4%	4.1%	3.6%

24. How confident are you that the C-SAP tests are a good measure of student learning? (*Read*

Responses):

1	Very Confident	11.5%
2	Somewhat confident	48.9%
3	Not confident	35.8%
9	Don't Know (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	3.7%

25. Do you think the state needs to use other measures in addition to the C-SAP in order to measure everything that students should be learning?

1	Yes	75.0%
2	No	16.9%
9	Don't know (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	8.1%

26. Last year, the federal government passed a major education law. In return for additional federal funding, states must show that all students are making adequate progress toward achieving a state-defined standard of proficiency. Schools that fail to make adequate progress will face penalties. This new national education legislation will greatly increase the federal government's involvement in local public school affairs. In your opinion, will this be a good thing or a bad thing for the public schools in your community?

1	Good thing	38.7%
2	Bad thing	52.5%
9	Don't know (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	8.8%

27. Currently, Colorado measures the progress of schools as a whole. The new law requires schools to show that adequate progress is being made by specific groups such as economically disadvantaged and limited English proficiency students. Do you think it is a good or bad thing to hold schools accountable for the progress of groups of students?

1	Good thing	66.2%
2	Bad thing	28.5%
9	Don't know (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	5.4%

28. Do you think holding schools accountable for the progress of groups [**Interviewer - if asked, this refers to the same groups as q. 27 above**] is a decision that should be made by the federal government, or should it be made by the state or by local school districts?

1	Federal government	6.7%
2	State government	26.7%
3	Local school district	59.5%
4	Some combination (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	4.2%
5	None (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	.7%
9	Don't know (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	2.3%

School Finance

29. There have been a number of proposals for governments to provide vouchers or tax credits to make it easier for families to send their children to private or parochial schools. Do you think such proposals are generally a good or a bad idea?

1	Good idea	50.1%
2	Bad idea	46.2%
9	No opinion/don't know (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	3.7%

30. Would you support or oppose a voucher or tax credit program if it were **only** available for students who currently are attending low performing schools?

1	Support	28.8%
2	Oppose	67.0%
9	No opinion/don't know (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	4.2%

31. Would you support or oppose a voucher or tax credit program if it meant there would be less money for public schools in your area?

1	Support	31.5%
2	Oppose	63.6%
9	No opinion/don't know (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	4.6%

32a. To benefit from vouchers or tax credits, should private schools be required to report on student performance using the same C-SAP tests that are required in the public schools?

1	Yes SKIP TO Q. 33	83.7%
2	No ASK Q. 32b	13.7%
9	Don't know (<i>Don't prompt</i>) ASK Q. 32b	2.6%

32b.**IF NO OR DON'T KNOW:** Should private schools receiving vouchers or tax credits be required to report on student performance in some other way?

1	Yes How?	55.6%
2	No	33.3%
9	Don't know (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	11.1%

33. To benefit from vouchers or tax credits, do you think private schools should be required to admit any student who applies so long as space is available?

1	Yes	73.7%
2	No	22.6%
9	Don't know (<i>Don't know</i>)	3.7%

34. In the recent election, did your school district have a school tax or bond issue on the ballot?

1	Yes ASK Q. 35 and Q. 36	35.3%
2	No SKIP TO Q. 37	54.8%
9	Don't know (<i>Don't know</i>) SKIP TO Q. 37	9.9%

35. **IF YES:** Did you support or oppose increasing the school tax or bond?

1	Support	60.6%
2	Oppose	31.5%
9	Don't know (<i>Don't prompt</i>)	7.9%

36. What are the major reasons you voted that way?

Other Policy Issues

37. As the State considers its budget, which of the following is your highest priority for state funding? <i>Then ask:</i> Which is your second highest priority? ROTATE ORDER (but always read response 8 -- Something else -- last)!			
	Highest	Second	Combined
K-12 Education	43.4%	22.4%	65.8%
College-Level Education	2.9%	10.4%	13.3%
Transportation	7.6%	11.5%	19.1%
Prisons	1.3%	2.6%	3.9%
Health	15.4%	19.7%	35.1%
Human Services	5.7%	9.6%	15.3%
Water	17.6%	17.7%	35.3%
Something else	2.8%	1.8%	4.6%

39. Do you have any school-age children?

1	Yes	42.0%
2	No	57.9%

Thank you for your time! **INTERVIEWER: RECORD INFORMATION FROM SAMPLE SHEET.**

40. Region:	Denver	12.0%
	Other Metro	38.4%
	Other Front Range	22.4%
	Outstate	27.2%

41. Age:	Under 35	6.0%
	35-49	39.0%
	50-64	35.9%
	65 plus	18.9%

42. Gender:	Male	47.0%	Female	52.8%		
43. Party Affiliation:	D	29.6%	R	43.1%	U and others	27.3%