

2006 Michigan Education Poll

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Methodology

In January–February of 2006, Public Sector Consultants Inc. (PSC) conducted the Michigan Education Poll. The survey has been conducted every 2–3 years since 1982. The 2006 survey polled 600 randomly selected Michigan adults; it has a sampling error (margin of error) of ± 4.0 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. The poll covers a number of topics related to public education in Michigan—quality, accountability and performance, early childhood education, funding, and new curriculum standards.

How Are the Schools Doing?

Overall, Michigan residents give their local schools good marks for quality:

- More than half (60 percent) give their local schools an overall grade of A (20 percent) or B (40 percent).
- More than half (55 percent) give their local schools a grade of A (12 percent) or B (43 percent) for the academic skills of graduating seniors.
- Nearly half (45 percent) give their local schools a grade of A (11 percent) or B (34 percent) for the employability skills of graduating seniors.
- Nearly half (45 percent) give their local schools a grade of A (11 percent) or B (34 percent) for preparing graduating seniors to become active and engaged citizens.

Accountability and Student Performance

Michigan residents say that teachers and parents have the greatest impact on student achievement:

- 92 percent rate the impact of the quality of teachers as 5 (74 percent) or 4 (18 percent) on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “no impact” and 5 means “greatest impact.”
- 91 percent rate the impact of parental involvement and support as 5 (73 percent) or 4 (17 percent) on a scale of 1 to 5.
- 84 percent rate the impact of students’ own motivation for learning as 5 (62 percent) or 4 (22 percent) on a scale of 1 to 5.
- 81 percent rate the impact of school district leadership as 5 (51 percent) or 4 (30 percent) on a scale of 1 to 5.

Education Funding

Michigan residents believe that tax dollars spent on local schools represent a good buy, and they reject the contention that lower taxes are more important than maintaining educational services and programs:

- 80 percent say they strongly agree (46 percent) or somewhat agree (34 percent) that there is a need to maintain local educational services and programs even if it means higher taxes.

- 22 percent say they strongly agree (9 percent) or somewhat agree (13 percent) that there is a need to keep taxes as low as possible even if it means cuts to local educational services and programs.
- 92 percent say they strongly agree (71 percent) or somewhat agree (21 percent) that they would like to see schools work creatively to manage finances and control costs.

More than three fourths of Michigan residents say they would be likely to support proposals for tax increases to pay for a wide range of educational purposes:

- 87 percent would support tax increases to replace or repair unsafe buildings.
- 83 percent would support tax increases to improve technology.
- 83 percent would support tax increases to fund special education programs.
- 82 percent would support tax increases to fund vocational and technical education.
- 81 percent would support tax increases to maintain or enhance programs.
- 76 percent would support tax increases to fund early childhood education.

New Curriculum Standards

Michigan residents strongly support a statewide curriculum for high school students:

- Over three-fourths (77 percent) say there should be a single, statewide set of requirements for all high school students. Eighteen percent oppose a statewide curriculum and 5 percent are undecided or have no response.

Arguments pro and con have little effect on people's positions:

- 21 percent) say they are less likely to support a statewide curriculum on hearing the argument that stiffer requirements would mean more students would have difficulty doing well in school, or even graduating. Two-thirds (61 percent) say they are more likely to support the curriculum on hearing this.
- More than four out of five (82 percent) say they are more likely to support a statewide curriculum on hearing that stiffer requirements would make Michigan high school seniors more competitive with students in other states and countries. One out of ten (10 percent) say they would be less likely to support the curriculum on hearing this.

Michigan residents rate computer classes and English as the most necessary classes in the curriculum:

- Nine out of ten (91 percent) rate technology and computer classes as very necessary for preparing students for their future.
- Almost as many (90 percent) rate English as very necessary.
- Three out of four (75 percent) rate algebra as very necessary.
- Almost as many (72 percent) rate civic education (U.S. history, government or law) as very necessary.
- About two out of three (63 percent) rate advanced mathematics as very necessary.
- Almost as many (61 percent) rate advanced science (chemistry or physics) as very necessary.
- Five out of eight (60 percent) rate social studies as very necessary.

- Three out of five (58 percent) rate biology as very necessary.
- Just over half (52 percent) rate a foreign language as very necessary.
- About two out of five (40 percent) rate physical education as very necessary.
- One out of three (35 percent) rate drama, music, or art as very necessary.

Conclusions

- The public continues to value education and hold a generally positive view of the state of education in Michigan.
- The public believes that children entering kindergarten have had ample opportunity to become prepared for school, but it also believes that many of these children are not prepared to succeed in school in spite of the perceived opportunity.
- Sizable majorities claim they will support increased taxes to pay for a wide range of educational purposes.
- Safety continues to be the most persuasive reason for raising taxes, followed closely by improving technology, special education, and vocational education.
- The public believes the state needs a single, statewide curriculum for high school students.
- Most people are not concerned that this might make it more difficult for some students to do well in school, or even to graduate.
- Most people are concerned that Michigan's seniors become more competitive with students from other states and countries.