

Poll: Integration aids Black students

WASHINGTON (AP) - Nearly three-fourths of Americans say integration of the nation's schools has improved the quality of education for Black students, according to an Associated Press poll that found the view more prevalent among Whites than Blacks.

Four in five in the poll, however, oppose transferring students to more distant schools to achieve racial balance.

The public perception about improved education for Black children comes at a time when Black students continue to trail White students in performance on tests for reading and math.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act, passed in 2001, aimed to close that gap by requiring top teachers in all core classes, higher annual achievement by students in all major groups and other improvements. The law has come under fire from critics, who argue that it requires expensive improvements without supplying enough money to pay for them.

Four in five parents of school-age children prefer schools with Black, White and Hispanic students over ones with students of the same race or mostly from another race, according to the poll

conducted for the AP by Ipsos-Public Affairs.

"People like the idea of racially mixed schools," said Charles Clotfelter, author of the new book "After Brown" on the historic court decision that desegregated schools. "They don't like the idea of children being bused across town."

That Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, declared 50 years ago next month that "separate but equal" public school segregation was unconstitutional.

By a 2-1 margin, Whites said public schools are doing a good job of serving all children equally, regardless of race. Blacks were evenly split on that question.

People have grown more convinced over the past three decades that public school integration has increased the quality of education for both Black and White students.

Almost three-fourths now say integration has improved the quality of education received by Black students. Only four in 10 felt that way in a 1971 Gallup poll.

Three-fourths of Whites said in the AP-Ipsos poll that integration has improved the education of Black students, and more than half of Blacks felt that way.

Half said it has improved

the quality of education for White students, while almost that many said it had not. In 1971, about a fourth said integration has improved the quality of education for White students.

For 21-year-old Lena Pons, a junior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the biggest diversity problem in her Maryland high school involved language, not race.

A third of the students at Albert Einstein High School in Kensington, Md., were Hispanic, which created a language barrier, said Pons. "As far as problems like violence or racial tension," she said, "we didn't experience that."

She now attends a university with a much smaller minority population and says some White classmates "don't know what they're supposed to do. They compensate by being overly politically correct."

Parents' views on integration often depend on how it affects their families.

Robert Bivona, the White father of two elementary school children in Richardson, Texas, says attending an integrated school is good for them because "all kinds of races are given the opportunity to learn as much as possible about each other."

Cheryl Coffman, a Black

41-year-old mother of six from Columbus, Ohio, said keeping children in their neighborhood is a top priority for her because sending them to a school far away cuts down on her school involvement. "I don't think it's worth it," she said.

The level of racial separation in public schools dropped sharply between 1970 and 1990, but researchers say that trend has shifted in the last decade because of court decisions relaxing standards and shifting authority back to school districts.

"We've definitely made progress since the late 1960s," said Chungmei Lee, a researcher at the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. "But we're seeing a lot of the progress being reversed."

Research has shown that as strict court supervision has waned, the level of integration has receded slightly.

Schools are doing a better job of treating children equally now, even with the recent decline in desegregation, said Clotfelter, adding:

"There is reason to see the glass half-full."

The poll of 1,000 adults was conducted April 16-18 and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Rising grades raise academic concerns

WASHINGTON (AP) - Math teacher Ilyssa Rothman grades on the basics: scores on tests and quizzes, participation in class, the quality of the homework her students hand in. But maintaining objectivity in her grading, she says, means fending off outside pressures. School administrators want to see A's and B's. Parents often want answers from her when their children's grades slip. Students themselves make appeals.

"They will come up and say: 'Oh, I have an 88.9. Can I have an A?'" said Rothman, a teacher at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School in Maryland. Her response: "No. You earned the 88. Work harder next quarter."

Nationwide, the grades of high school graduates keep climbing, reaching a B average in the latest count. But less clear is whether those marks are inflated, as pressures grow on schools and students to turn out impressive grades.

High school seniors in 2000 finished with a cumulative grade point average of 2.94 out of four possible points, with four equaling an A on the scale schools use, a new study shows. A decade earlier, the typical grade point average was 2.68, and it rose throughout the 1990s.

That trend comes with other positive news. More students are taking the rigorous math and science courses demanded by colleges and employers, according to the Education Department's sample of 21,000 student transcripts in public and private schools.

From boys to girls, Whites to Blacks, East to West and in all four high school years, grades were up everywhere. But the study and the officials who presented it Wednesday did not draw firm conclusions about how much those higher marks reflected higher learning.

Other achievement measures during the same period showed less rosy results.

Reading scores stayed flat through the 1990s, according to the federal test that tracks trends among 17-year-olds. Math and science scores leveled off after 1992. A different federal test for high school seniors showed dropping math and science scores in 2000. Gains in the SAT and ACT college admissions tests did not match the rise of high school grades.

"My experience tells me that the increase in GPA is probably a reflection of what our students know and are able to do, but it's difficult to be certain because of the way grading is done," said Katy Harvey, principal at the school where Rothman teaches.

States and schools have worked to match up their courses with state standards, trying to ensure that those who do well in class will do the same on tests. But grading comparisons can be tricky. Algebra I may be a very different course from one district to the next. Also, school systems vary widely in their range of offerings and teacher training.

In compiling the study, researchers stuck with the four-point grade scale and did not give additional points for Advanced Placement or other college-level courses. Those courses often get extra weight at schools and can push a student's grade point average above 4.

Over the past 10 years, colleges have placed less weight on grade point averages, said David Hawkins, public policy director for the National Association for College Admission Counseling. It ranks third on their list of priorities, behind the strength of students' curriculum and scores on standardized college admissions tests, Hawkins said.

Job Fair

(Continued from Page 1) 3,400.

"I have a variety of positions," Hudson said under a tent at the May 1 job fair. "I have actual postings. The positions include food services, Culinary Union to corporate level. It's a total variety."

How many will get jobs? "It varies," said Hudson. "We will screen the applications and call those qualified for an interview. We hope to have some success here."

Tracking from past job fairs shows 2 percent of registrants got jobs, Reid said.

"We are registering people who don't get jobs today and will try to connect them with other community resources and direct them to other job fairs," he said.

In December 1994, the Clinton Administration designated nine census tracts in urban Las Vegas Valley as an "Enterprise Community" and awarded a \$3.75-million grant, Debbie Conway, manager of Clark County Business Development. Besides increasing employment opportunities for residents in enterprise communities, the grant funds small business de-



Photo special to Sentinel-Voice

A Circus Circus employee reviews a job application.

velopment, childcare support services, affordable housing, education and job training.

"People call my office all the time," Conway said. "It's such a need for jobs. People are trying to feed their families and find housing."

Other employers at the job fair included the cities of North Las Vegas, Henderson, Las Vegas Valley Water District, Metro Police, Nevada Partners, Super Cuts, Excalibur Hotel and Casino and Caesars, which employs more than 25,000 in Las Vegas, said Tania Whitaker, College and Community Outreach Employment Specialist.

"We currently have 500

openings," said Whitaker, a recent graduate of Howard University. "We are looking to fill all these positions. It's all about customer service. We are looking for people that are all about providing guest services."

Theresa Gaza, a recruiter and police officer for Metro, said the department has about 50 positions other than police officer. Positions range in pay from \$2,000 to \$6,000 per month, depending on job and qualifications.

"People are surprised that we have so many other positions besides police officer," said Theresa Garza, a recruiter and police officer for Metro. "Today we are seeing

a lot of interest in a lot of positions. We test on a regular basis for police and correction officers."

Barbara Cella, recruiter for the city of North Las Vegas, said the city has a diversity policy. "Yes, we have a diversity policy in place," Cella said. "We are trying to achieve a staffing level that reflects the population of our city. We are an equal employment opportunity and affirmative action employer."

North Las Vegas has job openings for inspector, manager of parks maintenance, engineering assistant, court interpreter, temporary public relations intern, deputy fire chief and director of community development.

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