



Lake Snell Perry Mermin Meadow Gotoff

## THE TARRANCE GROUP

**To: Interested Parties**  
**From: Lake Research Partners and The Tarrance Group**  
**Re: Recent Poll Findings on National Survey<sup>1</sup>**  
**Date: October 11, 2006**

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*Voters value public education because they believe it evens the playing field and gives all children an opportunity to get ahead. However, they do not believe that all children currently receive a good education despite their belief that every child deserves one. In fact, a plurality feel concerned or frustrated with public schools, and three quarters believe elected officials are not held accountable on education. Registered voters believe that candidates are not talking enough about public education and a majority believe national and federal elected officials are not doing enough to improve our public education. They are more divided on state and local elected officials. In the end, voters are not giving up on public schools as very few feel “defeated.” They know that everyone has a role to play to improve public schools and that everyone in the community has responsibility for making sure public officials keep their promises regarding public schools.*

û *Voters believe every child has a right to a good public education, that the majority of children are not currently receiving one, that everyone has a role in improving public schools in their community and that there are real consequences when we do not give every child a quality education.*

- **Virtually every voter agrees that every child has a right to a quality public education and that we owe it to our children to provide them with one** (93% and 97% agree in both cases). In fact, in both instances 90% of voters strongly agree. Without question, voters believe children deserve a quality public education and that we owe it to our children to live up to that right. **The right to a quality public education has become a core value in American society.**
- **Voters also widely agree that everyone has a role to play – not just parents – in improving public schools** (93% and 91% agree, respectively). In fact, 82% of voters disagree when told that if you do not have a child in public schools then you do not really have a role in improving public schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Lake Research Partners and The Tarrance Group recently conducted a nationwide survey among registered voters on behalf of the Public Education Network. The survey reached 1,001 registered voters between September 25 and October 2, 2006. The margin of error on a sample of this size is +/-3.1 percentage points.

- **Just as importantly, voters disagree with the statement that the majority of children receive a quality public education.** Sixty-two percent of voters disagree that most children in *the nation* receive a quality public education and half (53%) disagree that most children in *their state* receive a quality public education. Registered voters are concerned about the trends in public education nationally and locally.
- **Voters know that it matters when we fail to give every child a quality public education.** Ninety-two percent of voters agree that there are real and serious consequences when we do not give every child a quality public education including 83% who strongly agree. This is a bipartisan issue with Democrats (95%), independents (92%), and Republicans (90%) agreeing.



*Voters indicate that public education remains a top personal priority and that it will be part of their vote-decision. Voters also say they hear less this year about public education than they have in the past, and they want to hear more from candidates on this issue during the campaign.*

- **Public education continues to be a top priority for registered voters.** Fifteen percent of voters say public education is the issue most important to them personally, tying with the war in Iraq (also 15%) as the top issues. The rest of the top tier of issue concerns includes social security and retirement (12%) and jobs and the economy (11%). **Even in this environment with the war in Iraq and national security, public education remains a top personal priority for many voters.**
- **Half of voters (56%) say public education will be an important part of their decision when deciding which candidate to vote for** (17% one of the most important, 39% very important). Only 10% of voters say it is not too important (6%) or not important at all (4%). That includes 48% of Republicans, 63% of Democrats, and 62% of independents who say public education will be an important part of their decision.
- However, 40% of voters say they hear less this election from candidates than they have in the past. Only 15% hear more while 35% hear about the same amount as in the past. **Almost two in three voters (62%) say they have not heard enough about the issue from candidates** while only 4% have heard too much about public education (24% have heard about the right amount).



*Half of voters are concerned or frustrated with public schools and most feel schools nationally and in their community are staying the same or are in decline – and they are concerned about it. Voters place a high priority on public education because they see it as leveling the playing field and giving all children a chance or because it will help keep America strong and competitive in the global economy.*

- A third of voters (33%) say they are concerned about public education and a quarter (24%) say they are frustrated. Other voters say they are sad

(6%), confused (5%), or angry (4%). Clearly, however, voters are not giving up: only 2% say “defeated.” Only one in five voters chose a positive phrase to describe their feelings: optimistic (13%) and satisfied (7%).

- As we have seen in the past, voters are more optimistic about schools in their community than nationally, but there is concern about schools at both levels. Voters are divided about their schools locally (28% improved in last five years, 27% declined, 36% stayed the same), while they are pessimistic about schools nationally (39% declined, 21% improved, 30% same). Clearly voters are concerned about the decline (91% concerned about schools locally in decline, 93% nationally). Voters also hear more about the quality of schools in their community (56% have heard) than nationally (45%) but in both case most of what they hear is negative (46% negative about schools in their community, 68% negative about schools nationally).
- **Voters value schools because they “give all children a chance to get ahead and level the playing field” (25%) and “to keep American strong and competitive in the global economy” (22%).** Almost as many (19%) value schools in order “to help strengthen our democracy so all children [can]...participate.”



**Voters believe voting can make a difference for public schools, but they believe elected officials are rarely held accountable on the issue. They also believe all elected officials are currently not paying enough attention to public education.**

- Sixty-one percent of voters believe their vote can make a difference in public schools, including a quarter (26%) who believe their vote can make a lot of difference. Still, more than a third (37%) believe their vote makes little difference including one in five who believe it makes not much difference (20%). **Perhaps some of this is driven by the fact that three in four voters (72%) believe most elected officials are not held accountable for their actions on public education.** Voters take some responsibility for failing to hold elected officials accountable with more than half (58%) saying everyone in the community is responsible for making sure candidates are held accountable.
- **Voters do not think elected officials are doing enough to improve public schools.** They give the highest ratings for their Governor but even then the results are mixed. Forty-three percent of voters say their governor does enough while 43% say the governor does not do enough. Comparatively, 40% say their local elected officials do enough and a third (32%) say their state legislature does enough. National leaders also receive criticism – only 35% say the President does enough (56% not enough) and less than a quarter (22%) say the United States Congress does enough (63% not enough). This includes 73% of Democrats, 50% of Republicans, and 64% of independents who have doubts that Congress is doing enough to improve public schools.

- **Voters indicate confusion and a lack of confidence in their ability and qualifications to weigh in on changing public schools and doubt that schools in their community encourage their involvement.** Only 27% say they completely agree (a “10” rating on a zero to ten scale) that they have the power to hold their elected officials accountable and only 13% completely agree that they have all the information they need in order to know whether public schools in their community are performing well or poorly. Barely half (51%) agree even somewhat that they know where the elected officials in their community stand on public education. Lastly, only 16% completely agree that public schools in their community encourage people to get involved in improving public schools.
- **Voters want to hold elected officials accountable on public education which they see as a key to the country’s future and their children’s future.** This is not just an issue for parents but rather the entire community and country. But campaigns and candidates are not talking enough about the issue nor giving voters information they need to hold elected officials accountable on public education.