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Poll Shows Public Concern Over Emphasis on Standardized Tests

By Lynn Olson

A recent poll suggests that the public may be uneasy with the growing emphasis on using standardized tests to make important educational decisions about students.

The bipartisan poll, released last month by the American Association of School Administrators, found that a majority of voters responding disagreed with the idea that a single test can accurately measure students' progress for a school year. Nearly half did not agree that students should repeat a grade if they failed a state exam.

Four questions related to testing were asked as part of a broader voter survey conducted in May by Republican pollster Frank Luntz and Democratic strategist Jennifer Lazlo-Mizrahi. The survey of 800 registered voters has a margin of error of 3.5 percentage points.

"Right now, high-stakes testing is harming the educational process" for many children, Paul D. Houston, the executive director of the AASA, said at a press conference held in Washington to release the results. Although the administrators' group strongly supports high academic standards and accountability, he said, "educating students for success

in today's society cannot be measured by one test alone."

The results are somewhat similar to those from a recent poll of parents. About half said they supported the use of standardized tests as a factor in determining whether students would graduate. (See *Education Week*, June 21, 2000.)

Out of Step?

The AASA poll found:

- Sixty-three percent of voters did not agree that a student's progress for one school year can be accurately summarized by a single standardized test.

- Forty-nine percent opposed keeping students back a grade if they fail to achieve a passing score on a statewide test.

- While 45 percent of voters agreed that standardized-test scores accurately reflect what children know about the subject, 48 percent disagreed.

- Voters were also split about whether the standardized tests they had taken as students accurately reflected what they knew about the subjects being tested.

"This poll shows that politicians and corporate executives who keep pushing for more and more standardized tests are out of step with U.S. voters," said Monty

Neill, the executive director of FairTest, a Cambridge, Mass.-critic of such tests.

But Edward B. Rust Jr., the chairman of the education task force of the Business Roundtable,

a Washington-based group of leading corporations, said that while student success can't be measured by test scores alone, "many believe, as I do, that the skills required to reach 'basic' or

'proficient' levels on these new state tests are a prerequisite for more advanced learning."

FOLLOW-UP: Results from the poll are available online at www.aasa.org.