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## 'NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND' GETS MIXED GRADES

As Congress prepares to debate reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, Americans express mixed views about the nation's signature education law. Among those who have heard about the law, 34% say the law has made schools better; 26% say it has made schools worse; and 32% say it has had no impact.

Parents of public school children have relatively positive views of No Child Left Behind, which uses annual testing to measure school progress and requires schools to raise reading and math test scores. More than four-in-ten public school parents (42%) who have heard a lot or a little about the law say it has made schools in the country better (compared with 34% of the public). However, just 30% of public school parents say that No Child Left Behind has made *their* children's schools better.

Overall, 45% of the public, and about the same percentage of parents with children in public schools (43%) – say the law overemphasizes standardized testing, based on those who have heard a lot or a little about No Child Left Behind. About three-in-ten in both groups say the emphasis on testing is appropriate, while smaller numbers believe there has been too little emphasis on standardized tests.

The nationwide survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted in April, finds that Americans also are divided in their views of whether the law gives the federal government too much influence over education policy. Nearly four-in-ten (37%) of those who have heard about the law say the federal government has too much influence over

<i>Law has</i>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Public school parents</u>
<i>made schools...</i>	%	%
Better	34	42
Worse	26	25
No impact	32	28
Don't know	<u>8</u>	<u>5</u>
	100	100
<i>Has made your child's school...</i>		
Better	--	30
Worse	--	17
Mixed	--	5
No impact	--	40
Don't know	--	<u>8</u>
		100
<i>Under No Child Left Behind...</i>		
Too much testing	45	43
Too little testing	19	20
Right amount	28	31
Don't know	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>
	100	100

Based on those who have heard a lot or a little about No Child Left Behind (86% of adults).

education policy, 31% say too little, and 22% believe that the law gives the federal government the right amount of influence over education policy.

### What's Right - and Wrong - With 'No Child'

People who say No Child Left Behind has made schools better often cite the premise of the law -- that no child will be left behind, or that struggling students will be brought up to the level of their peers -- as the reasons they support it. Overall, 20% of those who say the law has changed schools for the better cite the law's stated objective or say that under the law students get more individual attention.

Other supporters point to improvements in school performance, including test scores, as the reason they think the act has helped schools (12%). An additional 11% say the law makes schools more accountable. And 10% say it has improved teachers' performance by giving them guidelines for performance or by establishing new requirements for teachers.

There is greater agreement about the negative effects of No Child Left Behind. Three-in-ten of those who believe the law has made things worse cite testing – specifically the excessive focus on testing, or the fact that teachers must “teach the test.” Nearly one-in-five (18%) of those who say the law has made things worse say that standards are being lowered. Another 10% say that the law does not work for all students, including special education students, and 9% say the law provides insufficient funding or, alternatively, costs too much.

#### No Child Left Behind: Evaluating Pros and Cons

% <u>How the law has made schools better...</u>	
20	Means no child left behind/students get more individual attention
12	Test scores/performance already improved
11	Accountability
10	Gives teachers guidelines/requirements
6	Sets same standards for all schools/students
5	Raises awareness of education problems
4	More programs for students
4	Harder to promote failing students
3	More money for education
26	Other
8	Don't know
% <u>How the law has made schools worse...</u>	
30	Too much testing/Teaching the test
18	Standards are being lowered
10	No 'one size fits all'
9	Not enough funding/costs schools too much
5	Brighter students ignored
5	Burdens teachers/teachers don't like it
3	Too many rules/Too much paperwork
2	Too much federal control/too little local
30	Other
2	Don't know

Percentages based on those who believe schools are better or worse because of No Child Left Behind. Figures add to more than 100% because multiple responses were allowed.

## Partisan Views of Education Policy

In general, Republicans express more favorable views of the No Child Left Behind Act than do Democrats or independents. About half of Republicans (48%) say that the law has made public schools better. This compares with about a third of independents (32%) and slightly fewer Democrats (28%). Twice as many Democrats as Republicans say No Child Left Behind has made schools worse.

Democrats and independents are more likely than Republicans to say that the education law overemphasizes testing. Nearly half of Democrats (49%) and independents (47%) say under the law there is too much emphasis on standardized testing, compared with 38% of Republicans.

There are virtually no differences among partisans when it comes to opinions about the federal government's role in education policy under No Child Left Behind. Four-in-ten independents, and slightly fewer Democrats (36%) and Republicans (35%), say there is too much federal influence over the schools under No Child Left Behind.

<i>Law has made schools...</i>	Rep	Dem	Ind
	%	%	%
Better	48	28	32
Worse	16	32	25
No impact	29	33	34
Don't know	<u>7</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>9</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Emphasis on testing is...</i>			
Too much	38	49	47
Too little	19	19	18
Right amount	35	25	27
Don't know	<u>8</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Federal gov't influence is...</i>			
Too much	35	36	40
Too little	30	33	29
Right amount	29	21	21
Don't know	<u>6</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>
	100	100	100

Based on those who have heard a lot or a little about No Child Left Behind.

## Blacks Favor Greater Federal Role

Overall, blacks assess the impact of No Child Left Behind in about the same way as whites. Nearly four-in-ten African Americans (37%) say it has made schools better; 22% say it has made schools worse; and 32% say it has had no impact. Among whites, 33% say better, 27% worse, and 32% no impact.

But there are substantial racial differences in views about the education law's emphasis on standardized testing, and whether it gives the federal government too much influence over schools. Nearly a third of blacks (31%) say the law places *too little* emphasis on testing; among whites, just 16% express this view. In addition, a plurality of blacks (45%) say the federal government has too little influence over public schools under No Child Left Behind. The plurality view among whites (40%) is that the education law gives the

<i>Emphasis on testing is...</i>	White	Black
	%	%
Too much	47	38
Too little	16	31
Right amount	28	23
Don't know	<u>9</u>	<u>8</u>
	100	100
<i>Federal gov't influence is...</i>		
Too much	40	28
Too little	27	45
Right amount	24	13
Don't know	<u>9</u>	<u>14</u>
	100	100
Number of cases	1,111	122

Based on those who have heard a lot or a little about No Child Left Behind.

federal government too much influence over the schools.

### College Grads Skeptical of Testing

Americans who have different levels of education also have notably different views about No Child Left Behind. Many more college graduates than those with less education say the law places too much emphasis on standardized testing: 64% of college graduates express this view, compared with 44% of those who have some college, and 32% of those with a high school education or less. In addition, nearly half of college grads (48%) say there is too much federal influence over schools under No Child Left Behind, compared with 37% of those with some college, and 30% of those with a high school degree or less.

College Grads Fault Law's Emphasis on Testing			
	Coll grad	Some coll	H.S. or less
<i>No Child has made schools...</i>	%	%	%
Better	29	37	36
Worse	34	23	21
No impact	32	30	34
Don't know	<u>5</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>9</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Emphasis on testing is...</i>			
Too much	64	44	32
Too little	10	18	25
Right amount	21	31	32
Don't know	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>11</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Federal gov't Influence is...</i>			
Too much	48	37	30
Too little	20	31	39
Right amount	24	22	20
Don't know	<u>8</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>
	100	100	100

Based on those who have heard a lot or a little about No Child Left Behind.

## **ABOUT THIS SURVEY**

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a nationwide sample of 1,508 adults, 18 years of age or older, from April 18-22, 2007. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

## **ABOUT THE CENTER**

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**APRIL 2007 POLITICAL SURVEY**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**April 18-22, 2007**  
**N=1508**

**ASK ALL:**

Q.32 In 2001, Congress passed a bill called the 'No Child Left Behind' Act that sets national standards and goals for education. How much, if anything, have you heard about this law and how it has affected schools?  
**(READ)**

42	A lot
44	A little
13	Nothing at all
<u>1</u>	No answer/Don't know <b>(VOL. DO NOT READ)</b>
100	

**IF HEARD 'A LOT' OR 'A LITTLE' (1,2 IN Q.32) ASK [N=1318]:**

Q.33 Based on anything you may have seen or heard, do you think that the No Child Left Behind Act has made schools in America better, worse, or had no impact?

34	Better
26	Worse
32	No impact
<u>8</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

**IF 'BETTER OR 'WORSE' (1,2 IN Q.33) ASK:**

Q.34 Why do you think it has made things (better/worse)? **[OPEN-END: CODE UP TO THREE RESPONSES. PROBE FOR CLARITY, BUT DO NOT PROBE FOR ADDITIONAL]**

**BASED ON "MAKE SCHOOLS BETTER" IN Q.33 [N=425]:**

20	Means that no child may be left behind—students get more individual attention, especially students who are deprived/behind
12	Test scores/performance are up/Schools are better
11	Brings accountability to schools, including through testing
10	Gives guidelines to teachers/Makes teachers responsible for individual students' performance/Improves teachers/Puts pressure on teachers
6	Sets same standard for all schools and students
5	Brings awareness of education problems/importance
4	Brings programs (including after-school programs) that keep students in school/off streets
4	Makes it more difficult for students to be promoted without deserving to be
3	Provides more money/resources for education
26	Other
8	Don't know/Refused

**Q.34 CONTINUED...**

**BASED ON “MAKES SCHOOLS WORSE” IN Q.33 [N=344]:**

30	Too much focus on testing/Teachers must teach to the test and ignore other things/Stifles teaching
18	Standards get lowered so more students will pass/Kids getting pushed along without learning/More promotions for students who aren't ready to move on
10	Not possible for all students to meet the standards/Students learn at their own paces/Same standard won't work for all, especially special-education students
9	Not enough funding/Costs too much/Don't like tie between school performance and funding
5	Brighter students lose out because focus is on getting slower students up to standards
5	Too much burden on teachers/Teachers don't like it
3	Too many restrictions and rules/Too much paperwork
2	Too much federal/non-local involvement in schools/Not enough local control
30	Other
2	Don't know/Refused

**IF HEARD ‘A LOT’ OR ‘A LITTLE’ (1,2 IN Q.32) ASK [N=1318]:**

Q.35 Under the ‘No Child Left Behind’ Act, do you think the federal government has too much, too little, or the right amount of influence over education policy in America?

37	Too much
31	Too little
22	Right amount
<u>10</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

Q.36 Under the ‘No Child Left Behind’ Act, do you think there is too much emphasis on standardized testing, too little, or the right amount?

45	Too much
19	Too little
28	Right amount
<u>8</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

**IF HEARD ‘A LOT’ OR ‘A LITTLE’ (1,2 IN Q.32) AND IF CHILD IN SCHOOL (2,3 IN SCHOOL) ASK [N=324]:**

Q.37 Thinking about the (school/schools) your (child/children) attend(s), has the No Child Left Behind Act had any impact on your (child's school/children's schools) or not?

**IF ‘YES’ (1 IN Q.37) ASK:**

Q.38 Overall, would you say it made your (child's school/children's schools) better or worse?

49	Yes
28	Better
16	Worse
3	Mixed ( <b>VOL.</b> )
2	Don't know/Refused
43	No
<u>8</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	