Great Expectations: Multilingual Poll of Latino, Asian and African American Parents Reveals High Educational Aspirations for Their Children and Strong Support for Early Education

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METHODOLOGY

This public opinion research project is the first multilingual poll of ethnic parents in California on educational issues. To collect this unique sample, Bendixen & Associates interviewed a total of 602 Latino, African American and Asian parents in California between April 20th and May 9th of 2006. Each of the samples was designed to be representative of the parents in California in each of the racial/ethnic groups studied. The 201 interviews with Latino parents were conducted in English or Spanish based on the preference of the respondent. The Asian sample of 201 interviews included Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino and Asian Indian parents. Asian respondents had a choice to be interviewed in English, Korean, Vietnamese, Mandarin or Cantonese. All 200 interviews with African American parents were conducted in English. The total sample also included statistically valid sub-samples of parents who have children that attend public schools and of parents who have children that attend pre-school programs. The poll also included a small but significant number of parents who have enrolled their children in the English Learners program. The margin of error for the total sample is 4 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. There are important demographic and socio-economic differences between Latino, African American and Asian parents in California. These differences must be kept in mind when reviewing the other findings of the poll.

   → Latino parents have the lowest educational level of the three groups studied. The vast majority is Spanish-dominant.

   → In contrast, Asian parents have much higher educational levels than both Latino and African American parents. In spite of this, half of Asian parents indicated that they felt more comfortable in the language of their native country.

   → The percentage of parents that send their children to the public schools of California varies significantly between the three ethnic/racial groups studied. Latino families are most dependent on public education, followed by African American and Asian families.

   → Pre-school enrollment also varies substantially among the three groups studied. While two-thirds of African American parents say their child under the age of five attends a pre-school program, less than half of Asian parents and just a quarter of Latino parents have their children in such a program.

   → Therefore, the three groups of ethnic parents polled have different educational and socio-economic backgrounds, different degrees of English-language proficiency and varied levels of sophistication on the role of public education, parents and pre-school programs in the educational life of a child.
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Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>High School or Less</th>
<th>Some College/Technical School</th>
<th>College Graduate or More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Language of Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish/Cantonese/Mandarin/Korean/Vietnamese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do any of the children that live at home with you attend public schools?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do any of the children that live with you attend a pre-school program or child care center for children under 5 years of age?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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2. Ethnic parents in California have very high expectations for their children, yet maintain a realistic perspective as to the role the public schools play in their children’s lives. Their aspirations reach well beyond the simple hope that their children will earn a high school diploma. The overwhelming majority of ethnic parents would like to see their children attain at least a college degree.

- African American, Asian and Latino parents believe that the quality of the public education system in California and the shortage of affordable housing are the two most important problems facing the state.

- The quality of the public schools in the state garner mixed reviews from ethnic parents in California. Overall, very few parents rate the quality of the schools as “excellent.” And even though a majority of Latino parents rate the public schools as “good,” clear majorities of both African American and Asian parents rate them negatively as either “mediocre” or “poor.”

- Ethnic parents are divided about the major reason why the California school system has so many problems. Asian and African American parents are more likely to say the problems are due to low funding and resources, while Latino parents are more likely to say the problems are due to a lack of parental involvement in the education of their children.

- Ethnic parents want school accountability, not an educational system that simply passes kids along through social promotion. A solid majority of ethnic parents support California’s high school exit exam. They want a high school diploma to have real value.

- A majority of ethnic parents in California expect their children to graduate from a 4-year university and a substantial percentage also expect their children to pursue graduate degrees. Less than ten percent of ethnic parents would be satisfied if their children only graduate from high school.

- Therefore, it is not surprising that most ethnic parents think that the most important objective of a public school education is to prepare their children to enter a college or university. These parents have a realistic perspective on the limitations of what a public education can do for their children – only about a fourth of ethnic parents is “very confident” that the public schools of California can prepare their children for a good job and a successful career.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Latinos</th>
<th>African Americans</th>
<th>Asians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable housing</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of public education</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal immigration</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy and unemployment</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to health care</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic congestion</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public safety</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Overall, how would you rate the quality of public schools in California?

What do you think is the major reason why the California public school system has so many problems?

Testing every high school student in California with an “exit exam” before they are able to receive a high school diploma.

What level of education do you expect your children to reach?

What do you think is most important for children when it comes to their education in the public schools?

How confident are you that the public education system in California will prepare its students adequately for a good job and successful career?

*Very confident* answers only
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3. California’s Latino, African American and Asian parents are very interested and highly involved in the education of their children. They could become an important source of pressure to raise achievement levels in the public schools of California. The hope of parents that their children will exceed their standard of living is alive and well in the ethnic and immigrant communities of California.

A majority of parents in each ethnic/racial group reports that they help their children with homework assignments every night. While the phrase “help with homework assignments” was not specifically defined for respondents, this finding does tell us that these parents are committed to being involved with their children’s education and want to be helpful in spite of the educational limitations of many of them. Less than ten percent of parents reported that they never help their children with their homework.

Most ethnic parents also report having open and frequent communication with their children’s teachers. The overwhelming majority say they meet with their children’s teachers two or more times in a school year.

A small but significant percentage of Latino and Asian parents reported having a problem communicating with their children’s teachers because of language barriers. Most Latin American and Asian immigrants in California speak a language other than English at home.

Since the start of the school year, how many times have you met with the teachers of your children?*

- Latino: Never 3%, Once 6%, Two or more times 91%
- African American: Never 0%, Once 9%, Two or more times 85%
- Asian: Never 7%, Once 17%, Two or more times 73%

*Asked only of respondents with children in the public schools.

Have you ever had a problem communicating with your children’s teachers because they do not speak your language?*

- Latino: Yes 8%, No 92%
- Asian: Yes 19%, No 81%

*Asked only of respondents with children in the public schools.
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4. There is strong support for pre-school programs among California’s ethnic parents. Respondents report having an understanding of the importance of pre-school, a recognition of its educational function and a need for more pre-school facilities in their communities. Ethnic parents clearly see the connection between a good pre-school education and a child’s later chances of having a successful career.

It is important to note that those most ethnic parents did not attend a pre-school or child care center prior to kindergarten themselves.

The overwhelming majorities of Latino, African American and Asian parents in California disagree with the statement that “children under 5 are too young to be attending any type of school program; they should be at home with family.” They believe that their children need to attend an educational program before the age of five to prepare for kindergarten.

Moreover, ethnic parents believe that programs for pre-school children should focus on creating positive educational activities that prepare them for kindergarten rather than recreational activities that merely keep them entertained.

Even though ethnic parents see pre-school as playing an important educational role for their children, less than thirty percent of parents with children under the age of five have enrolled them in such a program. Half of Latino parents, a third of African American parents and a quarter of Asian parents say there are no quality child care or day care centers in their neighborhood or town that they can afford.

There is strong support for bilingual pre-school programs among ethnic parents. Latino parents are strongly supportive of bilingual programs over programs entirely in English or Spanish. Surprisingly, African American parents also show significant support for pre-school bi-lingual programs. Asian parents were more divided. Those interviewed in Korean, Vietnamese, Mandarin and Cantonese support bilingual pre-school programs while those interviewed in English prefer English-only programs.
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What would you say is most important about child care or day care centers for children under the age of five?

- Latino: Recreation and activities so children are entertained (82%), Education activities so children get ready for kindergarten (18%)
- African American: Recreation and activities so children are entertained (81%), Education activities so children get ready for kindergarten (19%)
- Asian: Recreation and activities so children are entertained (62%), Education activities so children get ready for kindergarten (38%)

Are there quality child care or day care centers in your neighborhood or town that you can afford?

- Latino: Quality child care centers in your neighborhood or town that you can afford (48%), Others (52%)
- African American: Quality child care centers in your neighborhood or town that you can afford (32%), Others (68%)
- Asian: Quality child care centers in your neighborhood or town that you can afford (23%), Others (77%)

Do you think that pre-school programs for four year old children should be offered entirely in English, entirely in _____*, or in both languages?

- Latino: Entirely in English (81%), Entirely in ___* (11%), Both languages (8%)
- African American: Entirely in English (68%), Entirely in ___* (21%), Both languages (11%)
- Asian: Entirely in English (49%), Entirely in ___* (47%), Both languages (4%)

*Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Vietnamese
CATHERINE ATKIN is president of Preschool California and an attorney in the area of early care and education. Prior to joining Preschool California, she was the principal of a consulting firm specializing in strategic research, a directing attorney at Public Counsel Law Center in Los Angeles and minority subcommittee counsel for the Banking and Financial Services Committee of the United States House of Representatives. She holds a bachelor's degree from Stanford, a law degree from UC Berkeley's Boalt Hall and a Masters in urban planning from UCLA.

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New America Media (NAM) is the country’s first and largest collaboration of ethnic news organizations founded in 1996 by the non-profit Pacific News Service. NAM’s goal is to promote the editorial visibility and economic viability of this critical sector of American journalism as a way to build inclusive public discourse. With this mission, NAM has pioneered multilingual polling to bring ethnic, immigrant and minority voices into the public forum. NAM also holds a national awards ceremonies and expos for ethnic media, produces and aggregates editorial content from and for the ethnic media; and develops culturally specific social marketing campaigns. www.newamericamedia.org

Bendixen & Associates (LOGO)_Bendixen and Associates is a public opinion research, management, and communications consulting firm based in Miami, Florida. Founded in 1984, the firm has grown from a company with roots in political campaigns and polling into an international consulting company that incorporates many disciplines and sectors. Bendixen & Associates has managed projects throughout the U.S., as well as in Central and South America and has designed and executed hundreds of studies and exit polls on Latino public opinion and electoral trends for major media organizations. Bendixen & Associates has partnered with NAM in pioneering of multilingual polls that yield a depth and richness of opinion unattainable in English-only polling. www.bendixenandassociates.com

THANK YOU


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