

PROJECT VOTE SMART



2002 Reporter's Source Book

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EDUCATION

Issue in Brief

When asked by pollsters, citizens consistently named education as the most important issue facing the nation during the 2000 election season. Both George W. Bush and Al Gore spoke of their concerns about failing schools and the need to invest in education to keep the nation competitive in the fast-paced, highly-demanding global economy.

Education continues to remain primarily the domain of state and local governments in the United States. State and local governments raise and spend over 90% of the funds allocated for K-12 education each year. In its long history, the federal government has never picked up more than 10% of the K-12 education bill in America. However, federal interest in education is growing at the very time that politicians across the political spectrum have embraced devolution — the idea that whenever possible policy responsibilities should be pushed to lower levels of government — in a host of other domestic policy areas.

These factors suggest that education should be occupying less federal attention, rather than more. However, other concerns about providing equal educational opportunities to all children (the impulse that has driven many federal education laws since 1965) and guaranteeing that the United States maintains a highly-skilled workforce able to compete for good jobs in the global economy have renewed federal interest in this policy area.

As the country prepares for the 2002 midterm elections, education will likely remain one of the most important domestic policy areas that voters will consider. Politicians on both sides of the aisle are betting on this as well. The *Washington Post* reported on May 7, 2002 that House and Senate Democrats are busy organizing “education working groups” to clarify and publicize their views on the issue. And just one week earlier, Fox News quoted a Republican strategy memo that argued “Education is the issue that demands our greatest attention.”

Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001

By far the most important development in federal education policy in 2001 was the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the foundation of the federal government’s involvement in K-12 education. President Bush entered office in January 2001 promising to reform this federal role and “leave no child behind.” His education proposal

to reauthorize the ESEA was introduced in the Congress as H.R. 1 and S. 1 to underscore its importance. The president’s proposal was based on what he and his aides described as four pillars: accountability, research, flexibility, and choice.

The tragedy of September 11 threw up a seemingly impossible roadblock for completing work on the education bill in 2001. Sensing the need to demonstrate a spirit of bipartisanship and cooperation, however, the Congress seized on the ESEA reauthorization as a place where they could do just that. Work pressed on into the late fall, and early winter, with committee staffers working twelve hour days to try to resolve disagreements. House members John Boehner (R-OH), chair of the conference, and George Miller (D-CA), and Senators Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and Judd Gregg (R-NH) held many closed-door negotiating sessions amongst themselves and members of the Bush Administration.

The House-Senate conference on the ESEA completed its work on December 11. The House promptly passed the bill two days later on a 341 to 41 vote. The Senate followed suit on December 18, with a vote of 87 to 10. President Bush signed the bill into law on January 8, 2002, and remarked, “The fundamental principle of this bill is that every child can learn, we expect every child to learn, and you must show us whether or not every child is learning.”

Key provisions of the law include:

- Beginning in the 2005-06 school year, states must administer annual tests in reading and math to students in grades 3 through 8.
- States will be required to disaggregate test results by race, gender, and other categories as a way to monitor achievement gaps between various student groups.
- All students are to be academically proficient, as defined by state criteria, within 12 years.
- States and local school districts will be required to have a qualified teacher in all classrooms by 2005.
- Parents whose children attend failing schools will be allowed to direct a portion of their school’s Title I money to pay for private tutoring.
- Local school districts and states are allowed greater flexibility with

non-Title I money.

Provisions that received much debate or initial attention, but failed to make it into the final bill include:

- Support for private school vouchers.
- "Straight A's," which would have converted most federal school aid into state block grants. While some flexibility over use of funds made it into the final bill, the full-blown Straight A's provision as originally conceived did not.
- An amendment that would have required the federal government to fully fund (and make mandatory) its financial commitment to special education, as specified in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Student Achievement

Education remains an issue of national concern in part because the performance of American students lags behind others around the world. Many believe that if the United States is to remain competitive in the global marketplace, then the nation cannot tolerate an education system that is simply average. Recent international comparisons have helped to keep these concerns high.

For example, a report released by the National Center for Education Statistics in December 2001, comparing American 15 year olds with their counterparts in 32 industrialized nations, concluded that U.S. students performed at the international average in reading, math, and science.¹

These results are consistent with past comparisons, such as the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, conducted in 1995. In that study, U.S. students did well during elementary years, but performance dropped off for those closer to graduation. American 4th graders scored above average in mathematics and science, 8th graders were at the international mean in math, and by 12th grade, U.S. performance was near the bottom in both of these subjects, even among the most advanced U.S. students.²

International comparisons are only one aspect of student achievement that has raised concerns. Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also called the "Nation's Report Card," have remained relatively flat in math, science, and reading for the three age groups (9, 13,

and 17 year olds) that have been tested since the early 1970s.³

Gaps in student performance also exist among the nation's students when scores are broken down by race. Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips have pointed out that the gap has narrowed somewhat since 1970 but "the typical American black student still scores below 75 percent of American whites on most standardized tests. On some tests the typical American black scores below more than 85 percent of white students."⁴ These disparities have resulted in calls for everything from more federal and state funding to reduce inequalities between urban and suburban districts, greater school choice, and tougher testing and accountability for all students.

Teachers and Teaching

One analysis from the National Center for Education Statistics estimated that by 2008 the nation will need to hire between 1.7 to 2.7 million new teachers to accommodate growing enrollments and an expected wave of teacher retirements.⁵ What some have called the nation's teacher shortage is really more complicated than simply not having enough teachers to staff the nation's classrooms, however. Shortages tend to be concentrated in particular subjects like math and science, and are due in many cases to relatively young teachers deciding to leave the profession after only a few years of service.

Shortages also tend to be concentrated in the nation's urban districts. Places like New York City, Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles have been forced to adopt stop-gap measures to staff their schools. Sometimes this includes hiring teachers who have not met state certification requirements, or who have undergone accelerated preparation in programs such as Teach for America.

Assuring that students have a well-trained and knowledgeable teacher raises another issue that has led to calls for reform. A recent survey from the National Center for Education Statistics on teacher preparation and professional development is telling in this regard. Of those teachers surveyed, 71% said they were well-prepared to manage and keep order in their classrooms. However, they were not as likely to say the same thing about implementing new teaching methods (43%), teaching state or district curriculum (44%), and using student performance assessments (37%).⁶

Even the harshest critics of the public schools usually recognize that the vast majority of the nation's teachers are hard-working and committed to helping their students succeed. Still, by and large the nation's top college

students, especially those majoring in math and the sciences, choose professions outside of teaching. These high-performers tend to select other vocations like law, medicine, or business. People who do enter education also frequently end up teaching in subjects outside of their undergraduate majors.⁷

Public Perspectives

As in other policy areas, public interest in education dropped off after the attacks of September 11, and the ensuing conflict in Afghanistan. Even so, at the end of 2001, it still remained one of the top ten responses on the Gallup Organization's "most important problem" question, where it continued to eclipse other issues like health care and Social Security reform.⁸ It may be less important in the 2002 elections than it was during the campaigns of 2000. However, the desire of politicians to claim credit for education reform, the high-profile debate over special education funding that occurred in the 2001 ESEA reauthorization, and the growing challenges that states will face as they continue to finance a host of education reforms — even as state budgets remain crunched due to economic recession and lower revenues — will likely keep education on the campaign docket in 2002.

Two of the most comprehensive collections of public opinion about American education come from the Phi Delta Kappa / Gallup Annual Survey of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, and the nonpartisan citizen research organization Public Agenda, which maintains a compendium of education questions from a variety of survey houses. (The data that follow come from one of these two sources, noted PDK or PA, unless otherwise indicated.)⁹

The public is generally more satisfied with the nation's public schools when questions about school performance become more localized.

When asked in 2001, "What grade would you give to the public schools nationally?" 23% of Americans responded A or B. A different version of that question from 1999, which measured public "respect and confidence in public schools," found 36% had a great deal, or quite a lot of confidence, which was down from 58% in 1973. (PDK for first statistic, PA for the second.)

Support for the public schools increases when the focus is on "the schools here [in your community]." In that form of the question, 51% gave their schools A or B in 2001. (PDK)

A similar but slightly more favorable pattern results when the sample of respondents is limited to parents with children in the public schools. In 2001, 25% of these parents gave the nation's public schools an A or B, while 62% gave the schools in their community these grades. Parents indicated slightly higher satisfaction when asked about the "school your oldest child attends." That specific question had 68% offering either A or B. (PDK)

No single problem with the public schools appears to dominate in the minds of American citizens.

Citizens identified a number of areas in 2001 when asked about the biggest problem that the public schools of their community must deal with: 15% said lack of financial support, funding, or other money problems; 15% said lack of discipline or more control; 10% said fighting, violence, or gang troubles in schools; 10% said overcrowding; 9% were most concerned with drug use; while 6% stated concerns about quality teaching. (PDK)

Even though worries about school violence were mentioned by only one tenth of the respondents in this poll, the Columbine High School shootings and the (NYC) Martin Luther King, Jr. High School shootings in January 2002 may have moved this topic up in the public concern. One indication of the public's latent concern about violence is a finding from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, which indicated that the March 2001 school shootings in San Diego were the 15th most followed news event of the year.¹⁰

Citizens continue to support local control of education, but see a growing role for intergovernmental (federal, state, and local) approaches to education governance and reform.

With one federal government, fifty state governments — which contain different power arrangements between governors, state legislatures, state education agencies, and state boards of education — and over 15,000 local school boards, formulating and carrying out reform efforts is quite a challenge. This is compounded by the fact that the public has come to see success in American education as requiring a blend of federal, state, and local government efforts.

Citizens still tend to prefer local control. In a 2000 poll, the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut, and the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers asked respondents

“Who do you think should be primarily responsible for improving education?” The top answer was local school districts/local government (29%), followed by state government (19%), federal government (18%), parents (14%), with the remaining respondents offering some combination of the four (with the exception of 1% saying “don’t know”).

The specific question of the achievement gap between white and minority students illustrates this federal-state-local tension quite well. In 2001, 45% of Americans believed that it was the responsibility of government to close the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students; 52% said it was not government’s responsibility, and 3% said they did not know. Those who said it was the government’s responsibility were asked to identify whether federal, state, or local government should be responsible for closing the gap. Responses in that order were almost evenly divided: 34%, 35%, and 29% respectively (with the remaining 2% saying “don’t know”). (PDK)

The public generally supports mandatory testing, with some important caveats regarding how test results should be used.

Mandatory, statewide testing in math and reading for grades 3 through 8 is one of the cornerstones of the 2001 ESEA reauthorization. Generally speaking, Americans see student testing as a useful tool for a variety of purposes. In a 2000 poll, an overwhelming majority, 86%, agreed that statewide tests are very useful for schools to evaluate how well their own students are performing. Similar results emerge regarding the use of these same tests for helping parents and the community to evaluate their local schools (83%), for helping parents to track the progress of their own children (78%), and for schools to evaluate their teachers (75%). (PA)

Despite that enthusiasm, citizens do not see statewide student testing as a magic pill to cure all that ails the nation’s schools. While being generally supportive, citizens also have expressed reservations about their use. For example, in 2001, 81% agreed that states should not necessarily rely on student tests because some children perform poorly on tests even if they know the material being tested. Another 71% agreed that statewide tests cannot measure all of the important skills that parents or others may value, while 65% agreed that a narrow focus on “teaching to the test” may lead to sacrifices in other important aspects of the school curriculum. (PA)

On the specific question of high-stakes testing, or tests that carry significant consequences for students not passing, the public in 2001 was almost evenly divided over relying on a single test for high-stakes deci-

sions. For example, 53% believed that a single standardized test should be used to determine whether a student should be promoted from grade to grade. A slightly higher number, 57%, favored using a single test for awarding high school diplomas. (PDK)

When asked a different way, a poll from 2000 found that 62% of the public strongly agreed and 17% somewhat agreed with the statement “It’s wrong to use the results of just one test to decide whether a student gets promoted or graduates.” (PA)

Support for academic standards is strong, but less agreement exists over what should be done with schools that fail to meet them.

The word “standards” is often used loosely in discussions about American education, even though the term has multifaceted connotations. Generally speaking, standards are one of three types: (1) content, academic, or curriculum standards specify the skills and knowledge that students ought to know; (2) performance standards identify how well students need to know this material, and are sometimes presented as cutoff scores on tests that specify whether a student is performing above, at, or below some basic level of proficiency; and (3) opportunity-to-learn or school delivery standards that define the resources — both staff and facilities — that students require if they are to succeed.

In a 1998 poll, a variety of Americans were asked if “having guidelines for what students are expected to learn and know helps improve students’ academic performance or not.” Strong majorities of parents (83%), teachers (79%), college professors (90%), and employers (94%) agreed that they did. (PA)

When it comes to deciding what consequences should follow if local schools do not show progress toward meeting state-approved standards for student learning, the public is somewhat divided. When asked about a variety of possible options in 2001, 32% favored withholding state or federal education funds; 65% favored increasing state and federal funds to the school; 54% supported not renewing the principal’s contract; 49% favored not renewing the teachers’ contract; while 51% favored providing parents with education vouchers that could be used at public, private or religious schools. (PDK)

Public opinion about school choice is divided.

School choice, and vouchers in particular, is one of the hot-button issues

in American education today. Despite the fact that statewide ballot initiatives for vouchers fared poorly in the 2000 election season, public opinion on the issue remains divided.

One thing that complicates evaluating opinion about vouchers is that as recently as 1999, most citizens lacked much knowledge about the issue. When asked "How much do you think you know about school vouchers and how they work?" 65% of the general public, 66% of parents, and 60% of parents in Milwaukee and Cleveland (two communities with public voucher programs) admitted that they knew "very little" or "nothing at all" about the issue. (PA)

This self-admitted lack of knowledge is perhaps one of the reasons why changes in question wording about vouchers can lead to noticeable shifts in opinion. For example, in 2001, 34% of citizens favored "allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense." However, support increases to 44% when the question is posed this way: "A proposal has been made that would allow parents to send their school-age children to any public, private, or church-related school they choose. For those parents choosing nonpublic schools, the government would pay all or part of the tuition. Would you favor or oppose this proposal in your state?" (PDK)

When these kinds of questions about vouchers are broken out by race, minorities support vouchers in greater numbers. A 1998 survey of parents, for example, found that 54% of African-Americans thought that the idea of vouchers were an excellent or good idea, while 36% of white parents did. (PA)

Support for charter schools, another version of school choice that has been adopted in some form by almost 40 states, varies depending on the question. When charters are described as freeing schools "from many of the regulations imposed on public schools and permits them to operate independently," 42% favor, and 47% opposed the idea in 2000 (11% said that they did not know). However, when charter schools are described as being free of some regulations, but that they still have to "meet state standards for student achievement," support for charters (those "somewhat" or "strongly" favoring them) increases to 70%. (PA)

#1 - Reauthorizing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA (passed in 1975 as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act), is one of the most

significant federal education laws on the books today. While few disagree with the overall goal of the IDEA, the ensuing rules and regulations that have flowed from the law have sparked critics from all corners of the country, and all political perspectives. Some would say that it is time to reform the law because the current focus in special education is tilted too much toward compliance with rules (i.e. the inputs of policy) rather than student achievement (i.e. the outputs of policy).

Many small and rural school districts can find themselves burdened by the law's requirements, as they lack the economies of scale to respond in an educationally sound and cost-effective way to the needs of the small number of disabled students that typically attend their schools. Special education teachers and school district administrators frequently complain about the paperwork requirements of the law. Disparities in treatment between students of different races has also charged the debate over the IDEA's implementation. The phenomenon of "over identification" of minority students into special education classes led the House Committee on Education and the Workforce to hold a hearing on the subject in the fall of 2001. Special education has also been linked with broader discussions about school climate and discipline. How to balance the educational rights of disabled students who may "act out" as a result of their disability with the need of teachers to maintain orderly and focused classrooms has been a difficult issue for schools and policymakers to address.

A preview of one of the coming political debates over the IDEA emerged during the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. By law the IDEA requires the federal government to finance 40% of the costs of special education. However, despite that promise, federal spending in this area has never come close to that amount. Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Chuck Hagel (R-NE) attempted to change that in 2001 when they proposed and the Senate passed an amendment to the ESEA reauthorization that would have made federal support for special education mandatory (rather than discretionary) in order to fulfill this 40% promise. After much debate, the House-Senate conference on the ESEA failed to reach agreement on the amendment, and it was dropped from the final version of the bill.¹¹

The proponents of 40% federal funding claim:

- It has been over 25 years since the federal government made its promise to fund a substantial proportion of special education costs, so federal support is well overdue.

- Some students who are eligible for special education are not fully served by the IDEA because states and localities lack the funds to pay for these students' needs on their own.
- Additional funding would help to create more capacity at the local level to ameliorate some of the IDEA's administrative and paperwork demands.
- All students, disabled and non-disabled alike, would benefit from a fully funded IDEA because states and districts would not have their other valid educational priorities skewed by the funding requirements they face as they try to implement the IDEA.

The opponents of mandatory 40% federal funding claim:

- Even though the 40% target of support has not been hit, federal funding for special education will increase in the budget for fiscal year 2002, by some measures by as much as \$3.5 billion in new funds.
- It makes little sense to commit massive amounts of new resources to special education, which funding the 40% total would require, when there is good reason to believe that many parts of the current IDEA do not work as well as many would like.
- Needed information is forthcoming as President Bush has established a special commission to study special education; between January and April 2002 the commission had held 12 meetings, with additional ones planned. It is scheduled to release its report later in 2002.
- There is nothing magic about the 40% figure because it was the result of political compromises rather than a systematic study of what the appropriate level of federal support should be.

#2 - School Vouchers and *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*

In the fall of 2001 the U.S. Supreme Court announced that it would hear arguments in the case of *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (No. 00-1751), regarding Cleveland, Ohio's school voucher program. The Court's decision to hear the case, which was argued on February 20, 2002, has been hailed as historic by voucher supporters and opponents alike. Prior to *Zelman*, the justices had never heard a case involving a public school voucher program, even though they had an opportunity in 1998 when they refused to hear an appeal from Wisconsin over the constitutionality of the

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program.

The degree to which vouchers increase student achievement, and whether they "cream" the best families from the public schools are two topics that have animated the voucher debate for the last decade. In this particular case, however, the Court addressed a different question: Does the Constitution permit government to provide parents with taxpayer-financed school vouchers that can be used for tuition at religious schools? Today, the programs in Cleveland and Milwaukee both allow parents who receive school vouchers to use them at private schools of their choice, including private religious schools. In *Zelman*, the Supreme Court heard an appeal filed on behalf of the State of Ohio in defense of the program. (A federal appeals court declared the Cleveland program unconstitutional in 2000.)

These controversies over religion, student achievement, and the role of competition in American education will likely continue to drive the voucher debate in 2002.¹²

The proponents of vouchers claim:

- Vouchers will increase parent involvement and inject greater competition into the American education system, and thus improve the performance of individual students and entire schools, especially in urban areas where minority parents tend to support vouchers.
- Because school choice already exists for citizens who can afford to send their children to private schools, citizens of lesser means should be afforded these same opportunities through vouchers.
- School vouchers go directly to parents, which they then use to pay for education, so if anything, government support for religious schooling is indirect.
- Tax dollars in federal student aid programs already supports students' educations at religious colleges, so there is no reason why public money should not support K-12 education as well.

The opponents of vouchers claim:

- The market logic that competition will improve urban education is not illustrated in other areas given that competition has not brought an abundant number of grocery stores or branch banks to inner cities.

- School vouchers will take financial resources from the public schools, which need them to meet the educational needs of many difficult students who private schools can refuse to take.
- Even though Cleveland parents can use their vouchers at sectarian or non-sectarian private schools, the program there has the effect of promoting religion given that over 80% of the schools participating are religious institutions, a number that is projected to grow in the future.
- Support for public education, which caters to students of all religious backgrounds, helps to bridge the cultural gaps between the diverse elements in American society.

#3 - Student Testing

Mandatory and annual state testing in math and reading for students in grades 3 through 8 is one of the main components of the 2001 ESEA reauthorization. While testing is not required to begin until 2005, the rules that govern the new law's testing regime have started to emerge through the regulation-writing process at the Department of Education. Even though citizens (in particular parents) have generally expressed support for student testing, and the ESEA reauthorization passed with wide bipartisan support, expanded testing is still not without its critics. Some parents and students in New York and Massachusetts have staged boycotts of current state-sponsored tests. It remains to be seen whether these isolated incidents will become more widespread as the details of the ESEA's testing provisions become clear.

Also relevant to this general issue regarding student testing is an important question of whether the capacity exists to carry them out properly. States are now facing budget shortfalls in the wake of the national recession. If these conditions persist, they will be pressed to come up with the financial resources to develop tests that are aligned with their state curriculum plans. It is unclear whether federal funds will be enough to support these efforts.

There is also a need to develop greater capacity to score the growing numbers of tests that students will be taking. Presently, most machine scoring of state-sponsored tests are carried out by a few major companies. Tests that require a human grader — as when students are asked to show their work or write an essay — are typically evaluated by temporary employees who receive minimal training. Many of them are teachers (or have teaching backgrounds), but large numbers are not.¹³

The proponents of testing claim:

- The testing requirements in the ESEA provide states with flexibility because they allow states to determine the kinds of tests they will use, so there is no danger of a national curriculum or test trumping state and local control.
- There is no way to know how effective education reforms are unless students are evaluated to determine what works and what does not.
- Tests will force teachers and schools to focus their efforts on essential material, such as reading and math, that are gateways for learning other subjects, and will help teachers to formulate their instructional strategies rather than inventing the curriculum as they go.
- Concerns that tests will be biased against certain student groups (i.e. minorities and disabled students) are overblown and reinforce the misguided view that not all students can perform to high standards.

The opponents of testing claim:

- The ESEA reauthorization is inflexible because it requires all states to test students in grades 3 through 8, when some states might prefer other grades and combinations of state and local tests instead.
- States will require an infusion of new federal dollars, which may not be forthcoming, to properly implement expanded testing and accommodations for needy or disabled students.
- A heightened focus on testing leads school districts to sacrifice other valuable activities such as recess for young students, and courses in the arts and humanities.
- Teachers will become test preparation specialists who drill their students in test-taking strategies, rather than focusing on teaching interesting content that they have some flexibility to choose.

#4 - Teacher Licensure and Certification

The reform path that President Bush and congressional leaders charted in 2001 depends a great deal on the efforts of teachers in the nation's classrooms. Even the best designed education reform plans will fail

without knowledgeable, well-trained, and enthusiastic teachers to carry them out.

The need to address the nation's teacher shortages and distribution problems, and to increase the number of skilled teachers in the profession has sparked new discussions about the state rules that govern who can become a teacher (teacher licensure laws), and the university courses that are designed to prepare future teachers (certification programs). The debate over whether these requirements should be loosened or tightened illustrates one of the tensions that exist between reform approaches that encourage centralization and standardization (as in testing) versus those that support greater decentralization and flexibility, like charter schools.¹⁴

The proponents of liberalizing teacher licensure and certification procedures claim:

- There are large numbers of talented people who are interested in becoming teachers, but do not because they find requirements for licensure and teacher certification to be too onerous or pointless.
- Liberalization is already beginning to occur anyway as a stopgap measure in many of the nation's urban areas that struggle to address teaching shortages.
- Current licensure requirements and certification programs fail to add enough value to future teachers relative to their costs.
- Principals and local leaders should be given more freedom to determine who is a qualified candidate to meet the particular educational needs of districts or schools.

The opponents of liberalizing teacher licensure and certification procedures claim:

- Inadequate pay, low prestige, and poor working conditions relative to other professions, rather than licensure and certification requirements, are more serious impediments that deter the vast majority of people from entering teaching.
- Fully qualified and licensed teachers have greater success raising student achievement than teachers who are not fully qualified or licensed.

- Nobody would advocate lowering standards for medicine, law, or accounting if shortages plagued those professions, so education should be no different.
- Teacher licensure laws and certification procedures are not as antiquated as some critics have charged. They have continued to become more flexible, and require prospective teachers to demonstrate in a variety of ways both content knowledge and teaching prowess.

¹ *Outcomes of Learning: Results from the 2000 Program for International Student Assessment of 15-Year-Olds in Reading, Mathematics, and Science Literacy*. <nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa>.

² *Third International Mathematics and Science Study*. <nces.ed.gov/TIMSS/>.

³ *National Assessment of Educational Progress*. <nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.

⁴ Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips (1998), *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (Washington, DC: Brookings), p. 1.

⁵ William Hussar (1999), *Predicting the Need for Newly Hired Teachers in the United States to 2008-09* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics).

⁶ Basmat Parsad, et al (2001), *Teacher Preparation and Professional Development: 2000* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics).

⁷ A collection of articles on these and other topics are available from Education Week's "Hot Topics": <www.edweek.org/context/topics/issues.cfm>. Follow the link to "Teacher Quality."

⁸ The Gallup Organization, "Poll Topics and Trends: Most Important Problem," <www.gallup.com/poll/topics/mip.asp>. Accessed on December 31, 2001.

⁹ PDK/Gallup data are available on the web at <www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0109gal.htm>; Public Agenda is at <www.publicagenda.org/>. Other questions discussed in this section are available on the Lexis-Nexis POLL database.

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, <www.people-press.org/122001rpt.htm>. Accessed on January 11, 2002.

¹¹ The US Department of Education maintains an IDEA web site: <www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/Policy/IDEA/>. The Council for Exceptional Children, <www.cec.sped.org>, is a strong supporter of special education. A reform agenda for special education is presented in the Fordham Foundation and Progressive Policy Institute's book *Rethinking Special Education for a New Century* (2001), <www.edexcellence.net/library/special_ed/index.html>.

¹² Voucher proponents include the Center for Education Reform <www.edreform.com> and the Black Alliance for Educational Options <www.baao.org>. Opponents include the People for the American Way <www.pfaw.org> and Rethinking Schools <www.rethinkingschools.org>. For a review of the research literature on vouchers see *Rhetoric Versus Reality: What We Know and What We Need to Know About Vouchers and Charter Schools* (2001) from the RAND Corporation; on-line at <www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1118/>.

¹³ The National Center for Fair and Open Testing <www.fairtest.org> has been a critic of the ESEA reauthorization's testing provisions. The Educational Testing Service <www.ets.org> has been more positive.

¹⁴ The Progressive Policy Institute's 21st Century Schools Project published a paper in November 2001 calling for a radical overhaul of licensure and certification called *Tear Down This Wall*; read it on-line at <www.ppionline.org>. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education <www.aacte.org> has been critical of measures to loosen licensure and certification rules.

SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY

Issue in Brief

Social welfare policy specifically seeks to promote the health and well-being of Americans. It encompasses hundreds of different programs from the obscure Abandoned Infants Assistance to high profile ones like Social Security. Major social welfare programs fall into three areas: (1) Income Security, (2) Healthcare provision, and (3) Welfare.

This chapter focuses on a major example from each of the three areas: *Social Security* (OASDI), income insurance for retirees, their dependents, and the disabled; *Medicare*, healthcare provision for the elderly; and *Welfare* (TANF), aid to needy families. Each raised key political questions in 2001 about its long-term economic viability that remain to be addressed in 2002.

Social Security, Medicare, and welfare, which form the core of America's social provision, are showing signs of age. Changing demographics and increased costs are putting pressures on the system that policymakers could not foresee when they created them in the 1930s and 1960s.

On the one hand, enhanced care for the elderly is politically very popular. There is a strong desire to better meet the needs of older generations. However, the cost of eldercare (or programs directed toward the elderly), and healthcare in particular, has far outpaced inflation. The funding for both Social Security and Medicare is based on assumptions about life expectancy, health care costs, and the number of persons in the workforce that are seriously outdated. The desire to increase benefits to better assist the elderly comes at the same time that both Social Security and Medicare are facing intense financial pressures to meet the current status quo needs of recipients. Government experts predict that both systems need to be reformed if they are to continue to operate.

Despite conventional wisdom, wages paid in by workers to Social Security and Medicare are not stored in accounts like safe deposit boxes. Instead, taxes paid by current wage-earners are used to pay the benefits of current recipients. But as health care costs rise, fertility rates have declined. This means that there are increasingly more people receiving benefits and fewer people to pay for them. Without major reorganization of both systems, they will be paying out more than they are taking in within the next two decades and will be bankrupt, completely exhausting available resources, in less than forty years.