

***CITIZENS FORUMS
ON EDUCATION
IN ILLINOIS***



SUMMARY REPORT

Sponsored By

Illinois PTA, Center on Education Policy, and Joyce Foundation

Report written by: John F. (Jack) Jennings
Center on Education Policy

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WHAT PEOPLE IN ILLINOIS SAY ABOUT THEIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

During the fall of 1998, the Illinois PTA and the Center on Education Policy sponsored ten local meetings, in several Illinois communities, to solicit citizens' views about how to make the public schools better. This report presents the voices of local people throughout Illinois on an issue they care about—public education.

What Were the Main Messages from the Illinois Citizen Forums on Education?

As gauged by these forums, local citizens have a large store of good will for the public schools and want them to succeed. They recognize that all schools, even the good ones, need to do a better job to prepare children effectively for work, citizenship, and life in the 21st century. People want their leaders to make good on their promises for better public schools, and therefore some of the recommendations emerging from the forums will require concrete action by state leaders. But, citizens also recognize that the people in a given community have a role to play in school improvement, and thus several of their other recommendations can be accomplished only through local actions and changes in attitude by parents, educators, businesses, and community groups.

Although these meetings took place in different urban, suburban, and small-town locations in Illinois, common recommendations emerged. These are the ways to improve public schools that were suggested most often by the citizens who attended these forums:

- **First, class size ought to be reduced, allowing teachers to respond to the special needs of individual students and also to be more creative and innovative in their teaching.**
- **Second, new teachers ought to receive better preparation, and current teachers ought to be given more opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge.**
- **Third, education must be a partnership between schools and parents, and schools must also be better connected to their communities.**
- **Fourth, people were concerned about the current reliance on local property taxes for the bulk of education funding and want the public schools financed differently.**
- **Fifth, school buildings need to be upgraded, and new buildings built.**

These forums offered people with different perspectives a rare opportunity to sit around the same table and talk face-to-face about education. Excluding facilitators, recorders, and other volunteer staff, the 429 people who participated in these ten meetings included parents with children in public and private schools, home-schooling parents, public and private school teachers, administrators, and school board members, senior citizens, students, clergy, business people, mayors, law enforcement officers, college and university faculty, local newspaper and television reporters, and other community people.

What Was the Purpose of the Forums?

For the past two years, the National PTA, the Center on Education Policy, and Phi Delta Kappa have sponsored 62 local community forums around the country with the purpose of encouraging a broad discussion on how to improve the public schools. During 1999, these organizations will sponsor additional forums in many states. The National PTA is the oldest and largest volunteer association in the United States working exclusively on behalf of children and youth. The Center on Education Policy is an independent organization based in Washington, DC, and funded by charitable foundations; its aims are to help citizens make sense of conflicting opinions about public education and to create the conditions that will lead to better public schools. Phi Delta Kappa is the national honor fraternity for educators.

As part of this national effort, the Illinois PTA and the Center on Education Policy in 1998 requested and received a grant from the Joyce Foundation, based in Chicago, to assist in organizing an additional ten community meetings around Illinois. Anna Weselak, President of the Illinois PTA, explained, "It is important for our legislators and state decision-makers to know how the public feels about our public schools. These ten education forums allowed a cross section of our communities to discuss issues regarding the public schools for their own benefit and for us to have the opportunity to pass this information along to governmental officials. The PTA hopes our state leaders will keep in mind the results of this report in making decisions regarding public schools and the children of Illinois."

To organize the Illinois meetings, local PTA members and state PTA board members donated hundreds of hours of time. Two of the forums were conducted downstate, in Carterville and Quincy; two were held in the city of Chicago, on the north and south sides; and the remaining six took place in suburban communities surrounding Chicago, including Joliet, Berwyn, Homewood, Arlington Heights, Lombard, and Palos Hills.

A prime purpose of these forums was to encourage a broad local dialogue on how to make the public schools better. "An important component of this effort in Illinois, as in the other forums around the country, was to have many different viewpoints represented in these meetings and to bring in people from various walks of life," explained John F. (Jack) Jennings, director of the Center on Education Policy, who served as the moderator at all ten meetings. The sponsors hope that these initial efforts will spawn additional community meetings to discuss school improvement. If the public is more involved in finding ways to improve the schools, the result will be better schools and stronger support for public education.

A second purpose of the forums was to ask people which actions should be taken to improve education by the new Governor, the General Assembly, the state board of education, and local school boards. Before every meeting each participant was sent a brochure on the state education laws enacted in 1997-98, and during every meeting, participants were briefed on these new state initiatives and had an opportunity to discuss them in small groups.

Who Were the Participants and How Did They Express Their Views?

The Illinois forums incorporated two unique features that had been used with success in the national series of forums sponsored by the Center, the National PTA, and Phi Delta Kappa.

First, the participants came from a broader range of backgrounds, roles, and viewpoints than those at a typical education conference, and the number of public school teachers and administrators at each forum was limited. Parents who home-school their children, parochial school teachers and administrators, clergy, and business people were invited. A goal was to assure that the skeptics, as well as the supporters of public education, were heard.

The number of participants for each Illinois forum ranged from 13 to 75, with an average attendance of about 50. (Many more people were invited than actually attended; the invitation list ranged from 100 to 340.) In addition to the invited participants, local PTA members served as table facilitators, reporters, and tabulators at each forum.

Second, participants spent most of their time at these meetings, which lasted about three hours, in face-to-face discussions at tables of eight to ten people. Each table included a mixture of people from varied backgrounds. There were no speeches. The only full-group or large discussions among the participants were devoted to reporting on the agreements from the tables and determining whether there was a broad consensus on the issues raised.

The Illinois sessions departed from the model used in the national forums in one important regard—they emphasized new state education legislation enacted in 1997-98. As noted above, participants were informed about the content of this legislation and urged to consider it when they discussed ways to improve education. As will be seen, this legislation engendered very little response and limited discussion at the sessions. The participants were also encouraged to suggest other improvements they felt were appropriate and to consider ideas that did not cost money. Many ideas were offered.

Along with their invitation, everyone invited to the forums was sent a ten-question portion of the Gallup Poll of opinions about public education, sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, and was asked to fill it out and return it at the start of the forum. The responses from each forum were tabulated and compared with the national Gallup Poll results. (At the end of this report is a compilation of all the Illinois responses with a comparison to the national responses on that poll.)

After each of the local forums, volunteers prepared reports summarizing the discussions and recommendations from that forum and made the reports available to participants. The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, under the direction of Jeri Nowakowski and Sabrina Laine, produced the reports on eight of the forums, and Amy Broemmel from Southern Illinois University wrote the reports on the two downstate forums. The North Central Laboratory also analyzed all the data generated by the forums and did comparisons of the Illinois and national responses to the Gallup Poll. This report and the reports on the local forums are posted on the websites of the sponsoring organizations. The website addresses are www.prairienet.org/ipta/ for the Illinois PTA, and www.ctredpol.org for the Center on Education Policy.

The recommendations of the participants in all the local forums were brought to the attention of the Governor, the General Assembly, and the state board of education in February 1999.

What Were the Conclusions of the Forums?

At each Illinois forum, the roundtable discussions were organized around three questions:

- (1) What are the purposes of public schools?
- (2) How effective are the local public schools?
- (3) What should be done to improve the public schools?

These same questions formed the basis of discussion at the other sixty-two local forums sponsored by the Center, the National PTA, and Phi Delta Kappa. The new Illinois education legislation was highlighted in the discussion of the third question. In the ten different meeting sites in Illinois, participants arrived at some common responses to all three questions.

Purposes of Public Schools

Across the ten forums, participants identified four basic purposes of public schools. First, a central purpose of public schooling is to prepare children to be good citizens. Although not always ranked first, this citizenship purpose appeared in some form at every meeting. In Quincy participants spoke of “helping children become well-rounded, contributing citizens.” In Berwyn they cited the need “to prepare all students to be responsible members of a democratic society.” In Chicago participants said it was important to “develop socialization and citizenship skills in children.” As a teacher in Chicago noted, “Citizenship is an integral part of public education. Unless it’s reinforced, kids don’t know the Pledge of Allegiance, the Star Spangled Banner.”

Most forum attendees, however, had a broader view of what preparation for citizenship entails, one that went beyond patriotism and participation in the political process. In Palos Hills people talked about “the public schools’ capacity to produce productive citizens, students who could learn individually, work cooperatively, and think globally.” Participants in several forums felt that children had to learn to get along with others and to be kind. Citizens attending the Palos Hills meeting discussed the need for schools to teach responsibility, namely, good morals and values. In Carterville the discussion focused on “teaching positive social skills and values,” although the whole-group discussion revealed disagreement about which specific values should be taught.

A second purpose of schooling identified at every meeting was to prepare children for life. In Carterville the consensus was that “schools should prepare students for self-sufficiency and develop their full potential for future careers and jobs.” In Palos Hills people generally agreed that schools should teach students problem-solving skills, to prepare them for the future and to foster a lifelong love of learning. In Arlington Heights one participant expressed the group consensus that education ought to “prepare individuals for the work of work, the 21st century and to be lifelong learners.” In Lombard citizens agreed that public education should graduate lifelong learners with a love of learning—or, as one senior citizen put it, “preparing students to go out in the world of work with the ability to reason and think.” In Berwyn some people argued that a purpose was “to encourage lifelong learning, and educate students to access and evaluate knowledge through creative problem-solving and critical thinking in preparation for work in the global economy.”

The third most frequently identified purpose of public schools was to educate all children. In Quincy a consensus emerged that “schools should serve as an equalizer, by providing quality education to all students.” In Arlington Heights participants agreed that all children should receive a quality education. In Lombard most people agreed that “schools should educate all children to maximize their full potential.” In Chicago participants felt a purpose for public schools was “to provide a free education for every child regardless of income or social status.” In Joliet attendees concurred about the need “to give all citizens the opportunity to become educated.” In Berwyn people agreed that public education should be accessible by all people regardless of money or background, and should help all students realize their full potential.

The final most commonly mentioned purpose was to teach children basic skills. In Carterville participants agreed that “schools should teach children the basic education skills like reading, math and writing.” In Palos Hills people cited the need “to teach basic skills such as reading and mathematics.” In Arlington Heights participants expressed a broader view of the “basics” when they said that a purpose was “to teach students fundamentals/basic skills, including social, moral, ethical, and survival skills.”

Effectiveness of Local Public Schools

Forum participants were asked their opinions about whether their local public schools were effective. In many sites, people were reluctant to give a simple “yes” or “no” answer and instead sought to identify the conditions that made schools effective. The local responses to the Gallup Poll suggest, though, that the participants in the Illinois forums were generally more satisfied with public education than the national average. In the national poll, only 10% of the respondents would grade the quality of public schools an “A”, and 36% would grade it a “B”. In the Illinois sites, however, the aggregate percentage giving the public schools an “A” was 16%, and the percentage giving the schools a “B” was 48%. Another sign of satisfaction with the public schools is that the percentage of people at the Illinois sites who approved of the government paying for all or part of the tuition at any public, private, or church-related school chosen by parents for their children was lower than was the national percentage as shown on the Gallup Poll; in Illinois 38% favored such aid and 60% opposed, while nationally 51% favored and 45% opposed.

Even when the meetings did not produce clear “yes” or “no” answers to questions about effectiveness, participants made several important points that bear reporting.

First, people believe that public schools must become better because children will face an increasingly complex world. Even participants who thought their own community’s schools were already good recognized that they had to improve. At the Quincy meeting, for instance, there was general satisfaction with the public schools, but “there was still room for improvement.” At the Arlington Heights forum, the discussants agreed that their schools were doing a good job with teaching the basic skills of math, reading and writing—which they called the traditional mission of the schools. But they felt that the schools were not doing as well as they should in teaching the “new basic skills” of team building, critical thinking, problem solving, and analysis—skills that students will increasingly need to succeed in the workplace.

Second, the forum participants observed that regardless of the amount of money available in a school district or school, public schools vary in their effectiveness due to such factors as the quality of the principals, teachers, and other administrators. As one Berwyn participant said, "It's not the wealth, it's the know-how." Even so, there was a common understanding that more money generally resulted in better schools, or at least increased the chances that a school would be effective. For instance, in both Palos Hills and Homewood, the discussion of school effectiveness emphasized the amount of money available to the schools. As evidence of this point, those who attended forums in the affluent northwest and western suburbs of Chicago were more pleased with their schools than citizens attending forums in the less affluent southern suburbs.

In both of the Chicago forums, people noted that quality varied among the city's schools, regardless of the level of funding. "Schools within the city are uneven," said one business person. "The products of some schools are good, but others nearby are poor. There is incredible unevenness." But in general, the Chicago participants expressed greater concern about inadequate funding and more general dissatisfaction with the public schools than participants in any of the other Illinois forums. Citizens in Chicago harshly criticized some principals and teachers, and voiced grave concern that all students were not being adequately prepared for life.

Third, forum participants often felt that elementary schools were more effective than high schools. In Chicago many participants wanted to assign separate grades of effectiveness to elementary and secondary schools because they viewed the elementary schools as overwhelmingly more effective. In the Joliet and Homewood forums, people also agreed that the elementary schools were better than the secondary schools. In Joliet a business person noted that there is a missing link between school and workforce preparation: "Somewhere along the line, something's been lost. Maybe it's morals or work ethic but they're not taught what's required in every day work life."

Lastly, in determining the effectiveness of their local public schools, people frequently considered such factors as graduation rates, school dropout rates, or college attendance. Often they used personal judgements, based on what they heard from students or teachers in the community. Occasionally, but not often, they mentioned student test scores as a measure of effectiveness. Most thought that test scores were not a good criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of the schools.

Changes Needed for Improvement

Forum participants made several recommendations for improving the public schools. All of them are included in the individual reports written about each local forum, which are available on the websites of the Illinois PTA and the Center on Education Policy. The following recommendations appeared most frequently across the ten forums.

Class size reduction. At all ten of the forums, a major recommendation was to reduce class size. Some forums also suggested a reduction in the size of schools. The primary rationale for this change seemed to be that many children are lost in large classes and schools, and that often it is the average children, rather than the gifted or low-achieving children, who are the most overlooked.

As one business person said at the Lombard forum, "Nobody's reaching out to the average Joe." Participants often observed that too many students were not engaged in the learning process and were just logging time until they graduated. In Chicago one participant said, "The smaller the class size the better the learning." Another added, "If you are going to have classrooms with critical thinking, we need to lower class size, and we need to spend more time." In Arlington Heights parents sought smaller classes in order to allow for innovation and creativity in teaching and learning.

Teaching skills. Another common major recommendation was to provide teachers with opportunities to upgrade their skills and to better prepare college students who planned to enter teaching. Some forums recommended developing a better system to certify teachers and suggested eliminating tenure.

In Arlington Heights participants recommended stronger accountability for teachers, including performance-based contracts. In Homewood people felt that schools needed to encourage teachers to take risks and try new teaching techniques, and to institute more rigorous teacher training requirements. In Carterville citizens recommended eliminating teacher tenure. At both forums held in Chicago, people sharply criticized some teachers. Their recommendations included restructuring and staff development programs to assure that teachers have up-to-date teaching methods to meet the needs of the diverse population of students and to provide to the students critical thinking and decision-making skills.

Open schools. At every forum, people recommended that education be recognized as a partnership between the schools and parents. In Homewood participants advocated increased parental involvement, including the use of volunteers in the classroom, and more parenting education programs. In Lombard many parents said that the schools were not “parent-friendly” and that they wanted to be in the classroom both to help and to evaluate how well the schools were doing. In Berwyn citizens recommended greater parental involvement in the classroom and advocated parenting education programs. A Joliet participant said, “Parents should be made to feel more welcome. A simple ‘Hello, glad to see you’re here, and thank you,’ would go a long way.”

People attending the forums also wanted schools to become more open to the community. In Berwyn participants felt that the community should become more involved in the schools. They suggested greater use of schools as “community centers,” which would be open year round and before and after school hours. They also felt that the schools should be reaching out to business and seniors for tutoring and mentoring. In Arlington Heights people advised schools “to reach out to senior citizen groups,” “to develop partnerships with local business,” and “to include community, schools, students, teachers, districts, and individuals to a greater degree in all partnerships.” In Lombard participants felt that there were more resources in the community that could be used to improve the schools, but that the community needed to become more aware that the schools needed their help. In Chicago people recommended that schools open their buildings more widely to the community and parents.

Funding. At every forum, the sponsors asked participants to make two types of recommendations for improvement: those that would involve additional funding and those that would not cost money. When reporting on their agreements, each table of participants had to indicate which required additional funding (such as smaller class sizes or greater opportunities for teacher retraining) and which that did not (such as greater parental or community involvement). The reason for this charge was to encourage people to recognize that many popular ideas had financial implications, and at the same time understand that many things could be accomplished without waiting for additional resources.

In the category of items that cost money, a common recommendation was to provide adequate funding of education or a more equitable system of financing the schools. In Chicago participants recommended that citizens work for school finance equity. In Quincy participants wanted more funding for the schools. In Carterville citizens suggested better pay for teachers.

The most intense discussion about school financing occurred in the suburbs of Chicago. In Berwyn many participants criticized the disparities in funding among school districts around the state, but they had great difficulty coming up with ways to alter the current structure. In Homewood people recommended equitable funding for all school districts. They expressed concern about “over-reliance on local property taxes;” they further suggested that schools be funded through state income taxes and that the local real estate tax be eliminated. In Lombard many participants were unhappy with the reliance on local property taxes for the schools, but the discussion about taxes led to many expressions of frustration about not being able to “come up with a better mousetrap.”

In Arlington Heights the group suggested “changes related to school funding and equity issues.” As one participant said, “Not all schools are financially advantaged. The state needs to provide fifty percent funding for all schools.” Another said, “The state needs to improve equity of funding for public education across the state by leveling up” so that all schools across Illinois receive a higher minimum level of funding. In Palos Hills recommendations included providing equitable funding for all teacher salaries in the state, and funding all mandates (including special education). “Funding is the most important change that needs to be made,” said one participant. In the general discussion, participants at this forum also made clear that they wanted the state to address the appropriateness of using local property taxes as the base for school financing.

Renovation and construction. Forum participants also highlighted the need to upgrade existing buildings and construct new buildings. In Palos Hills people recommended continuing “the infrastructure upgrades” occurring in their communities. In Joliet they emphasized the need to “renovate school buildings.” In Lombard they wanted “physical improvements for the schools, with labs for all.” In Arlington Heights participants sought “to enhance and improve technology for both teachers and students,” a goal also shared by the participants in Homewood and Quincy. In Chicago the citizens wanted to renovate buildings.

Other Recommendations. Many other recommendations were made by the participants in the ten Illinois forums, and the individual reports on each forum should be read to gain an appreciation for the variety of good and thoughtful ideas put forth by people across the state. Some suggestions that merit mention include lengthening the school day and year, ensuring better management of the financial resources currently available for education, restoring extracurricular activities, and mounting public relations campaigns to gain the support of the public about the importance of education and of a good public school system.

What Else Did We Learn?

Although these forums involved exhausting work from volunteer PTA members, including the state leaders who attended all of the forums throughout the state, the sponsors came away very pleased with the results. We are grateful to the Joyce Foundation, whose grant helped to pay for many of the expenses related to the forums, and we also appreciate the work done by the local coordinators.

We learned several important lessons from these forums. First, people want to talk face-to-face with fellow citizens about important issues, such as the future of public schools. At every forum, participants filled out evaluations. They expressed overwhelming satisfaction at being given an opportunity to engage in conversations with others from different backgrounds and to reach consensus about ways to make the schools better. Apparently there are few occasions in society that enable people from different walks of life and with different points of view to have serious conversations on important issues. In their evaluations the participants also overwhelmingly agreed that holding these forums in communities across the nation would be a good thing and would result in better public schools. The spirit of the meetings was captured in a comment made by one participant in Carterville (and reported in the newspaper), “This was the first time I’ve been at a meeting like this and nobody’s yelled at me.”

Some people came away from the forums with a better view of the public schools, but that was not the major outcome of the meetings. More often, people felt afterwards that these meetings helped them to become better informed about the schools. That, in itself, is a major accomplishment, and it is bound to lead to better schools and greater support for public education.

Despite our efforts to acquaint participants with the new Illinois state education legislation ahead of time, very few participants were aware of those laws. This is understandable, because the new laws went into effect only within the last year. Nevertheless, state legislators and other state officials might pause to ask whether they are addressing issues of major concern to the people. In most of the roundtable conversations at our forums, people engaged in some discussion about the legislation, but their attention soon shifted to issues they felt were more important, such as reducing class size. The state laws seem to be a useful first step, but now other issues should be addressed.

We were also impressed with people's understanding of the important role schools play in teaching children about citizenship in the broad sense. The schools are responsible not only for preparing students for further education and for employment, but also for assuring that children grow up to be responsible adults who can get along with others. That purpose is understood by the ordinary citizen, but we wonder if the news media and politicians understand its importance.

At these forums, we also came to appreciate that people do not fit easy stereotypes. A participating mother was home-schooling one child but had another in the public schools. A parent had one child in a parochial school and another in a public school, while a different parent had children in religious elementary schools but expected to send them to a public high school. Some clergymen who were critical of the public schools had attended public school themselves and were children of public school teachers; they also said they wanted the public schools to succeed.

We came away impressed by the good will that exists for the public schools. We found very little "slamming" or "bashing" of the public schools. People want the public schools to succeed. They know that the future of our society will be largely determined by how well the public schools educate children.

After these meetings we feel better about our fellow citizens. We are also more hopeful about the future of public education. Now is the time for state and local leaders to respond to the citizens who want better schools.

APPENDIX A

PDK/GALLUP POLL QUESTIONS

1. Students are often given the grades A, B,C, D and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves, in your community were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools in your community?

	<u>NATIONAL</u>	<u>ILLINOIS*</u>
A	10%	16%
B	36%	48%
C	31%	27%
D	9%	6%
FAIL	5%	1%
DON'T KNOW	9%	1%

*These results do not always total 100% due to rounding and due to respondents who did not answer.

2. In your opinion, is there too much emphasis on achievement testing in the public schools in this community, not enough emphasis on testing, or about the right amount?

	<u>NATIONAL</u>	<u>ILLINOIS</u>
TOO MUCH EMPHASIS	20%	35%
NOT ENOUGH EMPHASIS	28%	15%
ABOUT THE RIGHT AMOUNT	48%	48%
DON'T KNOW	4%	2%

3. 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 non-public schools, the government would pay all or part of the tuition. Would you favor or oppose this proposal in your state?

	<u>NATIONAL</u>	<u>ILLINOIS</u>
FAVOR	51%	38%
OPPOSE	45%	60%
DON'T KNOW	4%	1%

4. Do you think the school curriculum in your community needs to be changed to meet today's needs, or do you think it already meets today's needs?

	<u>NATIONAL</u>	<u>ILLINOIS</u>
NEEDS TO BE CHANGED	54%	54%
ALREADY MEETS NEEDS	39%	42%
DON'T KNOW	7%	4%

5. I'd like your opinion about extracurricular activities, such as school band, sports, dramatics, and the school newspaper. How important are these to a young person's education?

	<u>NATIONAL</u>	<u>ILLINOIS</u>
VERY IMPORTANT	63%	69%
FAIRLY IMPORTANT	27%	25%
NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	8%	4%
NO DIFFERENCE OR DON'T KNOW	2%	1%

6. As you look on your own elementary and high school education, is it your impression that children today get a better, or worse education than you did?

	<u>NATIONAL</u>	<u>ILLINOIS</u>
BETTER	41%	59%
WORSE	48%	35%
NO DIFFERENCE OR DON'T KNOW	11%	6%

7. In your opinion, are the public schools in your community taking the necessary steps to promote understanding and tolerance among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds or not?

	<u>NATIONAL</u>	<u>ILLINOIS</u>
YES	62%	65%
NO	27%	29%
DON'T KNOW	11%	6%

8. How serious a problem would you say each of the following is in public schools in your community? Would you say a VERY serious problem, FAIRLY serious, NOT VERY serious, or NOT AT ALL serious?

	<u>NATIONAL</u>				<u>ILLINOIS</u>			
	<u>VERY</u>	<u>FAIRLY</u>	<u>NOT VERY</u>	<u>NOT AT ALL</u>	<u>VERY</u>	<u>FAIRLY</u>	<u>NOT VERY</u>	<u>NOT AT ALL</u>
A. DRUGS	52%	28%	13%	3%	26%	48%	23%	1%
B. DISCIPLINE	50%	26%	17%	3%	26%	39%	30%	2%
C. SMOKING	50%	26%	15%	3%	26%	45%	24%	3%
D. ALCOHOL	44%	28%	18%	4%	30%	46%	19%	2%
E. TEENAGE PREGNANCY	43%	28%	19%	4%	19%	35%	39%	5%
F. FIGHTING	37%	27%	26%	5%	20%	34%	42%	2%
G. GANGS	37%	20%	28%	11%	19%	35%	39%	4%

(Responses to not total 100% because of those responding "Don't Know.")

9. In your opinion, are public schools in your community too big, too small, or about the right size in terms of the number of students?

	<u>NATIONAL</u>	<u>ILLINOIS</u>
TOO BIG	30%	29%
TOO SMALL	15%	8%
ABOUT THE RIGHT SIZE	49%	62%
DON'T KNOW	6%	

10. Do you feel that parents of public school children should have more say, or do they have about the right amount of say about the following areas in the public schools?

	<u>NATIONAL</u>			<u>ILLINOIS</u>		
	<u>MORE</u>	<u>LESS</u>	<u>ABOUT RIGHT</u>	<u>MORE</u>	<u>LESS</u>	<u>ABOUT RIGHT</u>
A. ALLOCATION OF SCHOOL FUNDS	57%	8%	29%	41%	9%	46%
B. SELECTION & HIRING ADMINISTRATORS AND PRINCIPALS	55%	9%	30%	32%	15%	50%
C. CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS OFFERED	53%	10%	32%	41%	10%	47%
D. TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATOR SALARIES	48%	14%	32%	25%	17%	55%
E. SELECTION OF BOOKS AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS	46%	13%	37%	31%	15%	51%

(Responses do not total 100% because of those answering "Don't Know.")

APPENDIX B

ILLINOIS COMMUNITY FORUMS

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Sites</u>	<u>PTA District Directors</u>
October 20, 1998	Carterville	Deborah A. David
November 12, 1998	Quincy	Jayne A. Brown
November 13, 1998	Joliet	Sonja Kapusniak
November 14, 1998	Berwyn	Mary Ann Daugherty
November 16, 1998	Homewood	Paula Kay Purkhiser
November 17, 1998	Chicago (South side)	Mary Sherrod & Isabella Waller
November 17, 1998	Arlington Heights	Donna Anderson
December 1, 1998	Lombard	Millie Reinschmidt
December 2, 1998	Palos Hills	Gerry Krakowsky
December 3, 1998	Chicago (North side)	Alice Barr & Sue Anzaldua

This report and the reports on the local forums are posted on the websites of the sponsoring organizations. The website addresses are www.prairienet.org/ipta/ for the Illinois PTA, and www.ctredpol.org for the Center on Education Policy.

Note of Appreciation

The Joyce Foundation has provided support for this project, which is jointly operated by the Center on Education Policy and the Illinois PTA. The Center on Education Policy is the national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center receives most of its funding from charitable foundations, such as The Pew Charitable Trusts, The George Gund Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, and the Phi Delta Kappa Foundation.

The Illinois Congress of Parents and Teachers, known as the Illinois PTA, has more than 211,000 members and is a constituent of The National Congress of Parents and Teachers. The Illinois PTA is the largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the state. It is organized to:

support and speak on behalf of children and youth in the schools, in the community, and before governmental bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children, assist parents in developing skills they need to raise and protect their children, and encourage parent and public involvement in the public schools of this nation.

These forums would not have occurred without the dedication of Sharon Voliva, the Illinois PTA's legislative chair, and Anna Weselak, the Illinois PTA President. The local coordinators and the volunteers who assisted them were also indispensable to this effort. The state officers of the PTA, who worked at every session as facilitators and recorders, showed great commitment. John F. (Jack) Jennings, director of the Center on Education Policy, was the moderator for all ten sessions and wrote this report.