

MEMORANDUM

TO: Joseph Garcia, North Carolina New Schools Project
FROM: Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc.
DATE: May 23, 2007
RE: Recommendations On Message

In March and April, 2007, Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., conducted two surveys for the North Carolina New Schools Project. The first survey was conducted from March 30 to April 1, 2007, among a representative statewide sample of 602 voters. This survey has a margin of error of ± 4.1 percentage points. Hart Research conducted a second survey from April 2 to 5, 2007, among 403 recent North Carolina high school graduates age 18 to 24 who have not graduated from college. This survey has a margin of error of ± 4.9 percentage points.

Key Messages

Several key messages emerged from the voter and student survey results:

- The world is changing and schools must keep up with changing times.
- A relevant high school education is necessary for kids to be successful in the new global economy.
- Students are telling the story: they could have been better prepared and would have worked harder.

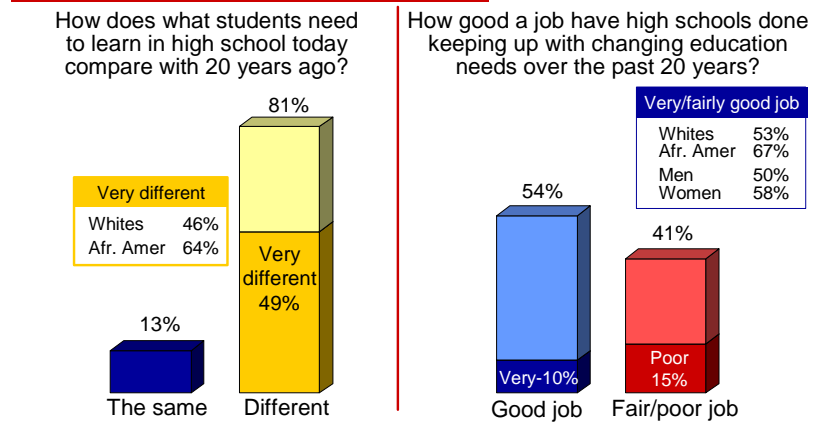
Keeping Up With Changing Times

North Carolina voters say that improving the quality of public education is a top issue for state government to address. While voters are divided on how well the state's high schools are working, widespread agreement exists that a student must learn different things in high school today than they did 20 years ago. An overwhelming majority (81%) of voters believe that the things a student must learn today are very (49%) or somewhat (32%) different. Only one in 10 (13%) say that high school students have the same learning needs now as they did 20 years ago. African-American voters (64%) are much more likely than are white voters (46%) to think that what a student must learn in high school today is very different from the past.

North Carolina high schools could be doing a better job of keeping up with students' changing educational needs. Very few voters think that schools have been doing a very good job (10%) and most believe that schools are doing a fairly good job (44%) or worse (26% only fair, 15% poor). African-American voters

(67%) and women (58%) are more likely to give schools credit for doing a very or fairly good job of keeping up than are white voters (53%) and men (50%).

High Schools Need To Change With Changing Times



Relevant Education Critical To Success In Global Economy

High schools must change with the times and teach students how to evolve as the world changes as well. Students today must be armed with critical thinking and technology-based skills along with the basics that have traditionally been included in the high school curriculum. Voters believe that skills such as reasoning and problem solving, writing and communicating effectively, math skills, and technology and computer skills are top areas for increased emphasis in North Carolina's high schools.

North Carolina voters appreciate the importance of a relevant high school education vis-à-vis the global economy. They are concerned about high schools' failure to adequately prepare students for their future because of global competition and because education is seen as a key component in the American Dream. In the United States, the land of opportunity, all children should have a quality education that will give them a chance to fulfill their potential and succeed in their own communities as well as the global community.

Asked about reasons people might be concerned about high schools' failure to adequately prepare students for their future, about one-third (32%) of all voters say that America's ability to compete successfully in the global economy is a top concern. College graduates especially recognize the importance of the link between education and the economy; 40% of North Carolinians with a college degree say that maintaining America's competitive edge is most important to them. Those with a high school education or less (24%) or who have some college or vocational training (31%) are less concerned about falling behind our competitors.

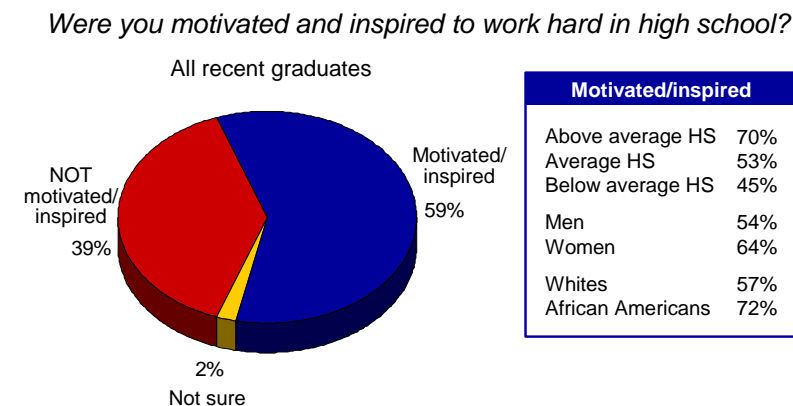
Our Students' Voices

Perhaps the best messengers for the need for high school reform are the customers that North Carolina schools have failed. Recent high school graduates recognize the importance of graduating high school to succeed in life and wish that their high schools had done more to prepare them for college and work. Two in five (39%) graduates say that with the benefit of hindsight, they wish now that their high school had done a better job preparing them for the expectations they face today. Half (49%) of recent graduates say that there were at least some gaps in their college preparation and even more (58%) feel unprepared to get a good job. One-quarter of students who attend or have attended college have been required to take remedial classes in English, writing, or math.

Students are not being challenged in high school. Students say that the bar is being set too low in high school and that requirements for graduating are not difficult. Fewer than one in four (22%) students say that academic expectations set for them in high school were high and that they were significantly challenged. More graduates classified expectations as moderate (51%) or low (26%). More than three in four students say that requirements for graduating from high school are somewhat (45%) or very easy (32%). Similar proportions of white (26%) and African-American students (29%) found it easy to slide by in high school.

Many students are not being motivated or inspired in high school. Nearly two in five (39%) recent graduates say that they were not motivated and inspired to work hard in high school. Levels of motivation vary significantly by subgroup. Women (64%) are more likely to say they were motivated than are men (54%). Seven in 10 (72%) African-American students report being motivated and inspired compared with 57% of white students. Graduates who attended above-average high schools where most students go to college are more likely to say they were motivated (70%) than are graduates who went to average (53%) or below-average (45%) high schools.

Many Students Not Motivated



Graduates who were motivated and inspired are more likely to feel prepared for college and the work world than those who were not motivated. Those who felt motivated in high school are much more likely to feel prepared for college-level academic work (15% extremely, 44% very) than are graduates who were not motivated (7% extremely, 24% very). Major differences exist in preparedness for getting a good job between those who felt motivated (19% extremely, 46% very) and those who did not (2% extremely, 26% very).

High school students are ready to work harder; they just need to be motivated to do so. Knowing what they know today about life after high school, a majority (68%) of recent graduates report that they would have worked harder and applied themselves more even if it meant they had less time for other activities. An even higher proportion (80%) say that they would have worked harder if their high school had demanded more of students, set higher academic standards, and raised the expectations of how much course work and studying would be necessary to earn a diploma. Three in four (75%) women and nearly three in five (58%) men feel strongly that they would have worked harder if expectations had been higher. More African-American students (77%) than white students (65%) feel that they would have worked harder if they had been pushed to meet higher expectations.

Majority Could Work Harder

If your high school your high school had demanded more, would you have worked harder to meet the higher expectations?

