

# Poll: Black, Hispanic students see school as tougher, more dangerous

By Ben Fuller  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Black and Hispanic students see school as a more rowdy, disrespectful and dangerous place than their white classmates do, a poll says.

The findings suggest that many minority kids are struggling in the equivalent of a hostile work environment, according to Public Agenda, a nonpartisan opinion research group that tracks education trends.

Minority children in public middle and high schools are more likely than white children to describe profanity, truancy, fighting, weapons and drug abuse as "very serious" problems.

The black and Hispanic children — under pressure to close their test-score gaps with whites — also see more pervasive academic woes, such as lower standards, higher dropout rates and kids who advance even if they don't learn.

"There is so much discussion about the achievement gap, and we talk about teachers and curriculum and testing and money," said Jean Johnson, Public Agenda's

executive vice president and an author of the report.

"We need to add something to that list — school climate. For these kids, it has become such a distracting atmosphere."

Thirty percent of black students — three in every 10 — said teachers spend more time trying to keep order in class than teaching, 14 percent of white students said the same.

More than half of black students said kids who lack respect for teachers and use bad language is a very serious problem, compared to less than one-third of white students.

Hispanic students also reported worse social and academic conditions in school than white children, although the gaps were not as large as they were between blacks and whites.

On the plus side, the poll found positive results that cut across race and ethnicity. Majorities of children said they are learning a lot in reading, writing and math classes. Most students said at least one teacher who has gotten them interested in a

subject they usually hate.

The students agreed on matters of work ethic, too.

About eight in 10 said it is good for school districts to require higher standards, even if that means kids must go to summer school. Almost 60 percent of black students acknowledged they could try a little harder, compared to 53 percent of Hispanics and 46 percent of whites.

In perspective, most students said schools were meeting expectations on most measures. Yet the minority children were more likely to see students struggling to get by in class, to see unfair enforcement of discipline rules, to say schools aren't getting enough money.

"Students of color are correct in their understanding that their schools get less in the way of resources and offer less in the way of high standards," said Ross Wiener, policy director of The Education Trust, an advocacy group for poor and minority children. "It is a shame that a country dedicated to equal opportunity tolerates these inequities."

Among students in public schools, 59 percent are white,

19 percent are Hispanic and 17 percent are black, according to Education Department numbers from the 2003-04 school year.

In the poll, students in wealthier schools reported fewer serious problems than students in poor schools, but results were not available for racial groups of different income levels.

Minority parents were more likely to see problems in schools, just as their kids did.

Black and Hispanic parents were more than twice as likely as white parents to call weapons and fighting a very serious problem. They reported bigger concerns about crowded classes and low standards.

Most teachers, meanwhile, said academic expectations for students were high regardless of the racial makeup of the school. Teachers in mostly minority schools reported less parental involvement, lower support from their superintendent and poorer grammar among their students.

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## NAACP fund honors advocacy

Some of North Carolina's most prominent advocates of equality and community will be honored by the state NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Joe Martin, Carlenia Ivory, Jim Johnson and Angeles Ortega-Moore will be honored by the LDF Saturday at its fundraising banquet at the Marriott, 5700 West Park Drive. Tickets are \$75. Call Franklin McCain at (704) 598-7737 or Anna Hood at (704) 333-4685.

A retired Bank of America executive, Martin is an advocate of improving race relations. Martin has worked with the Urban League of Central Carolinas and promoted the idea of "Race Day" to encourage cross-cultural understanding.

Ivory, supervisor of the Double Oaks Community Resource Center, is an advocate for low-income families and acquiring resources to improve their lives.

Johnson, director of the Urban Investment Strategies Center at UNC-Chapel Hill, launched the Durham Scholars program, an after-school college preparatory academy where low-income students can improve their academic and social skills.

Ortega-Moore, executive director of the Latin American Coalition, is one of the leading advocates of equal access for Latinos in Charlotte.

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