

Poll shows Americans more receptive to condom distribution

By Tara Duncan
Staff Writer

The traditional three R's of education: reading, writing and arithmetic, might be changing - to relationships, reality and responsibility.

A Gallup Organization poll released Thursday shows that a majority of Americans favor condom distribution in public schools.

Response to the poll, commissioned annually by Phi Delta Kappa, a fraternity of educators, showed that 68 percent of respondents favored having condoms available for students in public schools.

"The response really didn't surprise me," said Bruce Smith, managing editor of Phi Delta Kappa, based in

Bloomington, Ind. "The question was carefully worded to include that the condom distribution could be with parental consent."

Forty three percent of those surveyed favored condom distribution with no parental consent involved, Smith said. The other 25 percent favoring distribution said schools should require parental permission. Only 25 percent of survey participants said schools should not distribute condoms at all, Smith said.

"The results of this poll reflect the fact that AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is permanent," Smith said. "Everyone I know is acquainted with someone infected with the AIDS virus. Once it hits home, everyone is willing to try anything."

American views on the distribution

of condoms have changed in the past 10 years, said Phyllis Bennett, a Raleigh member of Phi Delta Kappa.

"I think there is an adult population with different values and views on life and relationships," Bennett said.

In the past, condom distribution was primarily associated with teenage preg-

nancy, Smith said.

"Teenage pregnancy is a serious problem, but the girls are still alive," he said. "AIDS kills, and it is the only major change that has been happening over the past 10 years."

Growing numbers of schools — including those in Los Angeles, New York

City, Chicago and Portland, Ore. — are starting condom-distribution programs, Smith said.

In North Carolina, no public middle or high schools participate in condom distribution, said Larry McDonald of Healthful Living, a division of the N.C. Department of Public Instruction.

"I'm sure this poll will have quite a reaction both ways," he said, "but it is primarily a decision that will have to be dealt with on the local school board level."

Gallup interviewed about 1,300 adults last spring. The margin of error is about three percentage points.

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