



<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-teachers7may07,1,4185210.story>

THE STATE

Teachers Surveyed Back Riordan Plan

Eighty-two percent agree that local budget control would be a plus, and 63% support a weighted student funding formula.

By Erika Hayasaki
Times Staff Writer

May 7, 2004

Frustrated by rundown facilities and scarce resources, California teachers overwhelmingly support plans being pushed by State Education Secretary Richard Riordan to give schools more control over their budgets and provide additional funds for campuses with large numbers of poor and minority students, according to a poll released Thursday.

The survey of 1,056 public school teachers in California, conducted by Louis Harris, found that most teachers think many African American and Latino students in California are getting short-changed 50 years after the Supreme Court handed down the Brown vs. Board of Education decision that outlawed forced segregation.

Teachers reported that schools with the most minority students were more likely to have rat and cockroach infestations, unqualified teachers, rundown campuses, and not enough textbooks.

In addition, the report, which was commissioned by the Hewlett Foundation, found that 82% of teachers approved of Riordan's proposal that schools control their budgets and 63% supported a weighted student funding formula in which more money would go to campuses with high numbers of English-language learners and students, disabled students and children from low-income families.

"Teachers themselves really are concerned about children," Riordan said in a phone interview Thursday. "They and other people at the school level really have their hands tied."

The best way to ensure a fair and equal education is to "put authority and accountability down at the school level and work on developing fair and more efficient ways to fund schools," Riordan said.

He added that the teacher opinion poll was a "huge step in the right direction," and said he hoped it would help his education plans gain passage in the Legislature.

But California Teachers Assn. President Barbara Kerr said that although she believed teachers wanted more control over their curriculum, school budget and textbook choices, she worried that Riordan's proposals would give principals too much power and that teachers would be left out of the decision-making.

"I have not talked to anyone who is interested in the concept in a principal as a czar," she said. "Even the principals I have spoken to hardly have the time to be a leader in curriculum and deal with students, let alone dealing with [buying] toilet paper and paper towels too."

Some California principals have criticized a return of power to the schools, saying that they already face strong pressure to raise test scores and run their staff and that controlling their budgets would be an added burden in an already stressful and busy workload.

UCLA management professor William G. Ouchi, an advisor to Riordan, said the teacher survey was significant because it showed that some teachers in more affluent districts were willing to allow more money to flow to needy districts.

"There is overwhelming agreement that this current system is broken, and they're willing to adopt a really big change in the way things are done," he said.

Researchers interviewed the teachers over the phone between Feb. 12 and March 7, asking about conditions on their campuses and their thoughts about Riordan's plans.

They found that teachers in schools with overwhelmingly African American and Latino enrollments were 11 times more likely to have more than 20% uncredentialed teachers among their staff; 3.3 times more likely to report a serious teacher turnover problem; 70% more likely to see cockroaches, rats or mice; and 40% more likely to lack books or other materials.

"Most disadvantaged children attend schools that do not have the basic facilities and conditions conducive to providing them with a quality education," the report concluded. "Without such facilities and conditions, both the teachers and the students will be hard-put to achieve any semblance of quality education."

Fifty-four percent of all science teachers surveyed said they did not have enough lab equipment, tools or lab stations; 50% of all social sciences teachers interviewed reported a lack of maps, atlases and reference materials; and 32% of all teachers who responded reported there were not enough copies of textbooks for students to take home.

Rick Miller, a spokesman for the California Department of Education, said, "There's no question there is clear room for improvement in school finance."

He said the department and governor's office were putting together a commission that would soon begin to study school finance and come up with "a comprehensive way for how we can better fund schools."

Harris, the pollster, said he hoped legislators and Schwarzenegger's team would review the poll results while making decisions because "the entire school system is in jeopardy."

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at latimes.com/archives.

TMSReprints

Article licensing and reprint options