Out-of-School Activities Play Crucial Role for Kids

Panelists Challenge Policy Makers to Address Access and Quality

Most kids say that out-of-school activities ranging from sports to art and music to church programs “play a crucial and positive role in their lives,” according to the report All Work and No Play? Listening to What Kids and Parents Really Want from Out-of-School Time released by Public Agenda in November 2004. But the report found stark differences in the experiences of low-income and minority parents, who are much more likely than higher-income and white parents to say they have trouble finding high-quality, convenient and affordable activities for their children.

Public Agenda and The Wallace Foundation, which commissioned the nationwide survey of parents and middle and high school students, released All Work and No Play? at a policy forum in Washington, DC, that brought together researchers, policy leaders, media and federal government officials to discuss the report’s implications. More than 70 leaders, representing organizations such as the United States Conference of Mayors, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Afterschool Alliance, America’s Promise and the National Institute on Out-of-School Time participated in the program.

Public Agenda President Ruth A. Wooden stressed how important parents and kids feel it is for youth to be involved in activities after school and on weekends. But she moved quickly to the challenges for policymakers: “For low-income parents, just making sure their child is productively occupied during the out-of-school hours is a big worry. Just 37% say they have this under control, compared with 60% of higher-income parents who say they do. On almost every measure we looked at—be it convenience, cost, quality, run by adults they trust—lower-income and minority families are substantially less satisfied than other families,” she said.

Panelist and Wallace Foundation President M. Christine DeVita said, “The voices of parents and kids captured in the Public Agenda survey, I think, suggest that our challenge is to find ways for more kids to have access more consistently to the kinds of high quality programs that meet these goals.” The panel discussion and Q&A that continued on page 5

Americans See Religion in Public Life Differently Today

Differing Media Interpretations Heighten Public Discussion

As public officials wrestle with hot-button issues ranging from abortion to gay rights to the death penalty, they may find thinner ranks of Americans supporting compromise, although slim majorities still do. That was one of the findings from a national survey by Public Agenda that compares how Americans’ views of religion in public life have changed between the years 2000 and 2004.

The survey, conducted before the November election and released in January 2005, found a smaller number of Americans who believe that deeply religious elected officials sometimes have to compromise in the political arena, with major decreases among those who attend religious services weekly.

For example, in 2000, 84% of Americans overall said “Even elected officials who are deeply religious sometimes have to make compromises and set their convictions aside to get results while in government.” In 2004, that number had dropped to 74%, with even sharper drops among weekly service attenders (82% in 2000 vs. 63% in 2004) and Evangelicals (79% in 2000 vs. 63% in 2004).

“Compromise has a long history in American politics,” said Ruth A. Wooden, President of Public Agenda. “But in 2004, there were more Americans who wanted deeply religious sometimes have to make compromises and set their convictions aside to get results while in government.”

“In 2004, there were more Americans who wanted elected officials to keep their religious principles in mind when they vote on issues like abortion and gay rights.”

continued on page 7
Coming Soon

Foreign Policy: An Index of Public Opinion

Public Agenda is developing a series of tracking surveys that will, much like the consumer confidence index, offer a status report on the public’s comfort level with U.S. foreign policy on a range of topics from fighting terrorism to reducing poverty in the developing world. With support from the FORD FOUNDATION, the surveys will be conducted biannually and will provide a crisp and persuasive picture of the public’s confidence about America’s role in the world and their sense of progress or stalemate.

Reality Check 2005

What is really happening on the front lines of education? Are parents, teachers, administrators and others seeing improvement? Public Agenda is re-launching and re-vamping its influential Reality Check tracking surveys. First conducted in 1998, Reality Check is again being supported in part by the GE FOUNDATION. The tracking surveys in 2005, 2006 and 2007 will identify progress and potential obstacles on the most important education reform initiatives now underway.

Credibility and Trust in the Independent, Voluntary Sector

This research probes the public’s level of concern about topical issues facing the non-profit sector, as well as actual knowledge of the sector’s value to the economy and community life. Public Agenda is assessing how aware the public is of recent sector issues, and examining how these issues have affected the public’s thinking about the nonprofit community, including religious and other charitable organizations and corporate, private and community foundations. The study is being conducted with support from the KETTINGER FOUNDATION. A key partner in the study is INDEPENDENT SECTOR (a coalition of nonprofits, foundations and corporations).

NBC Elections Manager Ana Maria Arumi is Public Agenda’s New Director of Research

In February, Public Agenda announced that Ana Maria Arumi, Elections Manager for NBC News, has been named the new Senior Vice President and Director of Research for Public Agenda. As Director of Research, Ms. Arumi now oversees Public Agenda’s unique program of opinion research, developing new projects and supervising all of Public Agenda’s opinion research work.

Ms. Arumi has served as Elections Manager for NBC News since 1999, coordinating all editorial and technical aspects of NBC’s News election polling. She has been a producer, editor and on-air reporter and analyst of these as well as many other public opinion results.

She has also served as Research Manager of the Office of Survey Research at the University of Texas and as Managing Partner for Visión Research in Austin and Los Angeles. Ms. Arumi is a University of Texas graduate, with a degree in linguistics and economics.

Public Agenda Chairman Daniel Yankelovich noted, “Ana Maria brings outstanding research skills and a deep commitment to truly capturing the public’s voice. Her wide ranging experience is an extraordinary asset and I am confident that it will help Public Agenda’s work grow even more respected and listened to.”

On a related note, Public Agenda President Ruth A. Wooden talked about Steve Farkas’s new role. “Steve has taken the leap into the world of consulting and we know he will apply all the talent and insights to his new endeavors that he brought to Public Agenda as Director of Research for over a decade. But we’re also very happy that he is really still part of the Public Agenda family as a Senior Consultant here.”

Steve Farkas is currently working on a major initiative to develop a Foreign Policy Index (see Coming Soon, left) and other projects. He is also serving as Research Director on the project Credibility and Trust in the Independent, Voluntary Sector.

Just the FACTS

57% of veteran teachers (teaching for more than 20 years) say teachers’ unions are “absolutely essential.” Only 30% of newcomers (teaching less than 5 years) agree. Source: Stand by Me 2003.
ISSUES IN POLLING

What We Really Said About Religion and Public Life

In January, Public Agenda released new public opinion research on religion and public life that concluded Americans—religious Americans especially—have become less likely to support political compromise over the past four years on issues such as abortion, gay rights and the death penalty (cover article).

Headlines about the study ranged from “Survey finds church-going Americans less tolerant” to “Faithful standing more firm.” The great variety of headlines from major news organizations show how differently various outlets can interpret the same research.

It also suggests a compelling interest in re-examining the role of compromise in our political system.

Public Agenda is a nonpartisan organization. We listen. We present what we hear. We actively avoid inserting our own opinions into the message. The disparity in reporting on this research, however, suggests that further discussion of the findings is necessary.

In some ways, it is not really surprising that compromise might be less acceptable or important to many Americans. There seem to be relatively few voices today arguing for compromise—or proposing middle-ground approaches on these issues. It may also reflect the fact that there are very few avenues for people to hear about and think about compromise positions, as the media tend to highlight sharp pro/con debates on these issues.

While Public Agenda’s research shows that important groups in America are becoming less supportive of compromise on issues of religious significance, we don’t necessarily know why this might be. It could be that over the past four years these groups have felt our society is threatened by the cultural developments occurring in America and therefore need to draw very deep lines in the sand. Or, just the opposite, with political trends over the past four years favoring their positions, they may feel emboldened and inclined to hold their leaders to the standards they believe are right.

Public Agenda looked at the views of religious Americans, and found that certain segments of the religious community seem less supportive of compromise on these highly charged public issues.

It should also be noted that an unwillingness to compromise is not a trait held only by the more religious segments of the population. For example, both pro-choice and pro-life advocates often present their views as “non-negotiable.”

This is something we should all be paying attention to regardless of our own religious perspectives because, historically, progress occurs in America when consensus builds around a set of compromises or trade-offs. That seems to be an important characteristic of how democracy works. So, the double-digit decrease in support for compromise among certain groups has major implications for the nation.

Too often, compromise is portrayed in politics as either selling out your cause or a tactic employed by politicians who don’t really have any cause at all. We need to recognize the value that consensus building and compromise have played in the past, and that these processes for coming to understanding are part of our nation’s core values.

It is difficult to say if the decrease in certain groups’ willingness to embrace compromise on difficult issues is feeding the political system’s increasing contentiousness, or vice versa.

Regardless, America needs leaders who recognize this tension and seek constructive ways to create dialogue between firmly held, divergent positions—and who seek new opportunities to create solutions capable of winning broad public support.

The disparity in reporting on this research necessitates that we further clarify the findings.

This is something we should all be paying attention to regardless of our own religious perspectives because, historically, progress occurs in America when consensus builds around a set of compromises or trade-offs. That seems to be an important characteristic of how democracy works. So, the double-digit decrease in support for compromise among certain groups has major implications for the nation.

Too often, compromise is portrayed in politics as either selling out your cause or a tactic employed by politicians who don’t really have any cause at all. We need to recognize the value that consensus building and compromise have played in the past, and that these processes for coming to understanding are part of our nation’s core values.

It is difficult to say if the decrease in certain groups’ willingness to embrace compromise on difficult issues is feeding the political system’s increasing contentiousness, or vice versa.

Regardless, America needs leaders who recognize this tension and seek constructive ways to create dialogue between firmly held, divergent positions—and who seek new opportunities to create solutions capable of winning broad public support.

The disparity in reporting on this research necessitates that we further clarify the findings.

This is something we should all be paying attention to regardless of our own religious perspectives because, historically, progress occurs in America when consensus builds around a set of compromises or trade-offs. That seems to be an important characteristic of how democracy works. So, the double-digit decrease in support for compromise among certain groups has major implications for the nation.

Too often, compromise is portrayed in politics as either selling out your cause or a tactic employed by politicians who don’t really have any cause at all. We need to recognize the value that consensus building and compromise have played in the past, and that these processes for coming to understanding are part of our nation’s core values.

It is difficult to say if the decrease in certain groups’ willingness to embrace compromise on difficult issues is feeding the political system’s increasing contentiousness, or vice versa.

Regardless, America needs leaders who recognize this tension and seek constructive ways to create dialogue between firmly held, divergent positions—and who seek new opportunities to create solutions capable of winning broad public support.

This is something we should all be paying attention to regardless of our own religious perspectives because, historically, progress occurs in America when consensus builds around a set of compromises or trade-offs. That seems to be an important characteristic of how democracy works. So, the double-digit decrease in support for compromise among certain groups has major implications for the nation.

Too often, compromise is portrayed in politics as either selling out your cause or a tactic employed by politicians who don’t really have any cause at all. We need to recognize the value that consensus building and compromise have played in the past, and that these processes for coming to understanding are part of our nation’s core values.

It is difficult to say if the decrease in certain groups’ willingness to embrace compromise on difficult issues is feeding the political system’s increasing contentiousness, or vice versa.

Regardless, America needs leaders who recognize this tension and seek constructive ways to create dialogue between firmly held, divergent positions—and who seek new opportunities to create solutions capable of winning broad public support.
Adrift Without a Degree
Young People Talk About Life After High School

A new national survey of young adults age 18 to 25 from Public Agenda raises serious questions about the future of young adults with no college degree. *Life after High School: Young People Talk about Their Hopes and Prospects* found that, compared to those with either a 2- or 4-year degree, this group is less happy with their work situation and less focused on planning a future. Just 1 in 5 of these less-educated young adults said they love their job, compared with 31% of those with degrees. 7 in 10 with limited education said they are in their current job more by chance than by design, compared to 56% of young workers with post secondary degrees.

The survey, released in February 2005, also found very high support among all groups for the value of a college education. So why don’t more young people pursue higher education?

“We need to address disconcerting evidence that the cost of higher education is a deterrent, and in some cases a deal-breaker, for many students,” College Board President Gaston Caperton was quoted saying in an Associated Press story on the study. The research was supported by the College Board, GE Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and KnowledgeWorks Foundation.

Lack of parental encouragement also seems to play a big role. By a 30 point margin, young workers with less education are less likely than the more educated to say their parents strongly expected them to go to college (32% vs. 67%). By a 19 point margin they are less likely to point to a parent as their number one source of guidance (47% vs. 69%).

Those without college degrees are more likely to say they could have worked harder in school (78% of the less educated said this compared to 62% with degrees). While conventional wisdom may hold that those without college degrees didn’t have mentors in high school, majorities said they did, in fact, have a high school teacher or coach who took an interest and inspired them.

**Money and Lack Thereof**

*Lifen after High School* found that the vast majority of today’s young adults — be they African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian American or white — strongly believe in the value of higher education. But the research discovered that financial pressures force many college-bound African Americans and Hispanics to compromise on college choice. The study also indicated that young adults worry that high school counselor services are stretched too thin. 53% said there were not enough counselors in their high school and almost half (47%) said they felt like they were “just another face in the crowd” with their counselor.

CNN anchor Lou Dobbs, reporting on the study, said, “The decision not to attend college carries more significance in a shifting economy with fewer well-paying jobs available for less-skilled-workers. Manufacturing jobs have been steadily declining, and in fact, the economy has lost more than 2.5 million manufacturing jobs over the past four years.” In CNN’s

---

**5 Things Parents Should Know about Young Adults and College Choices**

1. **Young Adults say a parent is their #1 influence on their decisions about going to college or going directly into the workforce.**
2. **Parental encouragement plays a big role in whether or not kids go to college:** By a 30 point margin, young workers who do not get a degree after high school are less likely than the more educated to say their parents strongly expected them to go to college (32% vs. 67%).
3. **The vast majority of young adults “get” that higher education is the key to success in life, but many times, they may not be getting the nuts-and-bolts help and guidance they need to reach the goal of getting a college degree.**
4. Don’t assume that kids are getting the help they need from high school counselors. Young adults across all racial and ethnic demographic groups said counseling resources in their high schools were stretched thin, with the majority saying that there were not enough counselors and almost as many saying they didn’t feel they got individualized attention from counselors.
5. Don’t assume that high school is doing enough to prepare your kids for the future. The vast majority of young adults admit that they could have worked harder in high school (78% of those who do not get a college degree and 62% of those who do). 42% of those who do go to college say that their high school education should have done more to prepare them for college level work. Of those who did not go to college, 38% said high school did not adequately prepare them for the world of work.
All Work and No Play continued from page 1

A Push in the Right Direction

Even though I might complain about it, sometimes I need to be pushed by my parents to do things that are good for me—do you agree or disagree?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree Strongly</th>
<th>Agree Somewhat</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>62%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

followed focused on ways the assembled group could work to get the research’s message about program quality and underserved communities out to the widest possible audience.


Following the Washington, DC roundtable, a second panel discussion was held in New York City for the region’s youth service policy leaders and the media. In February 2005, Public Agenda’s Ann Duffett and the Wallace Foundation’s Shao-Chee Sim presented the research at the National Afterschool Association Conference in Austin, TX.

As told by panelist Frank Donaghue, President and CEO of the Arnold Schwarzenegger Youth Foundation After-School All-Stars:

“…There was art class after school and this little boy was very frustrated, he couldn’t do the assignment and he put his pencil down, and he was very shy in his own way, and he went up to the instructor and told him that he’d just really had it with art, because there was never enough time to finish the assignment and he never had the colors that he needed. I watched the instructor teach him how to manage his time and give him some more time to finish what he wanted to do, and to show him, as shy as he was, if he asked others, there were plenty of colors that he could use. My life is full of times that I think that I don’t have enough time, and I don’t have the colors I need either. And if we can teach Jorge in that class, through a caring individual, that there is plenty of time if we find it and there are all the colors we need, I think after-school is well worth it.”
Public Engagement Works
“Essential Education” Plan Gains Public Support

In the state where the tourism tag line is “Possibilities... Endless,” the Nebraska Board of Education has, for the second time, used Public Agenda public engagement services to advance its educational system. In 1996, Public Agenda helped the State Board engage hundreds of Nebraskans on the question of state-wide standards—at the time, a highly contentious issue. As a result, the Board was able to adopt new statewide guidelines that reflected what had been learned, confident that the reforms would meet a generally supportive public.

In Spring 2004, the Board of Education was eager to move ahead with its ideas on bringing more consistency to the academic offerings from one school to the next. But they knew from previous experience how valuable the public engagement process could be.

What is “Essential Education”? The Nebraska Board asked Public Agenda to help design and implement a new public engagement process to address the issue of an “essential education” for all students. Public Agenda conducted focus groups and helped select districts to facilitate discussion forums. Over 370 parents, students, educators and members of the general public living in 25 different school districts contributed to the dialogue. In addition, Public Agenda trained local organizers, moderators, and recorders in each of the districts where forums took place so they can keep the discussions going.

Led by Public Agenda Public Engagement Director Will Friedman, the process uncovered Nebraskans’ expansive vision of the educational opportunities that should be available to all students. In fact, ordinary Nebraskans’ views were generally consistent with the State Board’s thinking.

As reported by the Associated Press, “Most agreed with the plan’s general concepts but had concerns over how much it would cost to implement them and whether small schools could manage... Given that the state already has academic standards in place, saying what students should know and when, state education policy makers said it only made sense to revisit the proposal, saying it will come up with educational requirements that will allow schools and students to meet those goals.”

The State Board of Education approved the Essential Education document on December 10, 2004 immediately following Dr. Friedman’s presentation on the statewide engagement initiative. Omaha Public Schools administrator Mel Clancy said, “It’s going to require that we look at what things in our day we need to restructure and add time to.”

With the new plan, all Nebraska schools will offer their students educational opportunities in areas such as math, science, social studies and art. Nebraska Education Commissioner Doug Christensen told the Omaha World-Herald that he wants more public discussion about costs and implementation.

A report on the work, which took place in the latter half of 2004 throughout the state of Nebraska, is available online.
Religion in Public Life
continued from page 1

elected officials to keep their religious principles in mind when they vote on issues like abortion and gay rights. We found double-digit decreases in support for compromise on these issues among those who attend services weekly and among Catholics. The changes are really quite dramatic.”

The research was widely discussed in the media from many perspectives (see Issues in Polling on page 3). In his nationally syndicated column, The Washington Post’s William Raspberry said, “We may all agree that ‘working things out’ is the right thing to do when it comes to secular disagreements. But as many deeply religious Americans see it, compromise between righteousness and sin is: sin.”

The Raspberry column quoted Public Agenda President Ruth A. Wooden saying, “Some say compromise is essential in a diverse society. But others see compromise as a retreat from core values and beliefs.” The issue of compromise was discussed widely in the context of our religion research in reporting by Reuters, The Rush Limbaugh Show, The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Christian Science Monitor, Gannett Newspapers, the National Review, and ABC Radio.

Even elected officials who are deeply religious sometimes have to make compromises and set their convictions aside to get results while in government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% agreeing</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GENERAL PUBLIC</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTEND SERVICES ONCE A WEEK</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEVER GO TO SERVICES</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATHOLICS</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NON-EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTS</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVANGELICALS</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moyers Receives Faith and Freedom Award
Judith Davidson Moyers, along with her husband Bill Moyers, was awarded The Interfaith Alliance’s 2004 Walter Cronkite Faith and Freedom Award. The Moyers were recognized for “their lifetime work in courageously promoting democratic values, defending religious liberty, and reinvigorating informed civic participation,” Interfaith Alliance President Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy said.

Rivlin Joins NYSE Board
Alice Rivlin, Senior Fellow in economic studies at The Brookings Institution and former Vice Chair of the Federal Reserve Board from 1996 to 1999 and Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget from 1994 to 1996, joined the board of the New York Stock Exchange in February 2005.

Huang Joins Rockefeller Foundation Board
Dr. Alice S. Huang, a senior councilor for external relations and faculty associate in biology at the California Institute of Technology, joined the board of The Rockefeller Foundation in December 2004.
On its face, democracy appears strong and healthy. We have inarguably made great strides from our founding, yet many democratic ideals remain only partially realized and there are signs that democracy’s long-term health may be compromised by the poor lifestyle choices we’re making today. The health of democracy is just like physical health in this way: We cannot rely on doctors—the experts—to maintain our own health. We must be educated and active in our own decision-making to maintain our democratic health as well.

A strong democracy is one in which an informed citizenry is able to grapple with issues, weigh its options, voice its priorities, and have its choices advanced by a responsive system. Depending on your chosen reading list and core beliefs, you could easily come to the conclusion that democracy is facing a nearly unavoidable decline in well-being. But we need not fade quietly into sedentary old age. In order to avoid diminished democratic health, we need to first recognize the signs of potential long-term problems and try hard to commit to wiser lifestyle choices.

Public Agenda co-founder and chairman Daniel Yankelovich got it exactly right when he said in the introduction to his 1991 book Coming to Public Judgment that the real threat to democracy’s health lies in the eroding ability of the American public to participate in the political discussions that affect their lives because of the ascendancy of experts. Almost a decade and a half of discouraging developments add credence to his thesis that deferring to “expertism” is replacing public dialogue and engagement as the default authority on public decision-making.

It only makes sense that experts who deal with the issues and facts every day are better equipped to make good decisions—as long as they don’t take us off track from what we believe in our gut. But we may have become much too comfortable in our passive role as mere spectators and not actors in our nation’s democratic system.

Public Agenda’s prescription for American democracy at middle-age is as straightforward as you might get from a medical doctor: a consistent and healthy diet of information and exercise that comes from public engagement. And just like caring about human health, the right solution is not trendy or easy—but it need not be boring either. It is about making choices about priorities and resource allocations that fundamentally change the way we conduct our daily lives.

Public dialogue on a large scale, we believe, is the very best method to engage “regular, non expert” Americans in learning, discussing and demanding an active response from our political system. Half-measures and democracy-lite won’t cut it. We need to try to wisely alter our democratic lifestyle with a healthy regimen of energizing public engagement and dialogue. Otherwise America may find the aches and pains we are experiencing in our democracy’s middle age become more than just a nagging annoyance.

**Board of Directors**

- **Daniel Yankelovich**  
  Chairman, Co-founder
- **Sidney Harman**  
  Chairman, Executive Committee 
  Executive Chairman, Harman International Industries
- **Richard Danzig**  
  Former Secretary of the Navy
- **Alice S. Huang**  
  Senior Counselor for External Relations, California Institute of Technology
- **Bobby R. Inman**  
  Admiral, U.S. Navy (retired)
- **David Mathews**  
  President, Charles F. Kettering Foundation
- **Lloyd Morrisett**  
  Former President, The Markle Foundation

- **Judith Davidson Moyers**  
  President, Public Affairs Television, Inc.
- **Peter G. Peterson**  
  Chairman, The Blackstone Group
- **Lois Dickson Rice**  
  Guest Scholar, The Brookings Institution
- **Alice M. Rivlin**  
  Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution
- **Max Stier**  
  President, Partnership for Public Service
- **Deborah Wadsworth**  
  Senior Advisor, Public Agenda
- **Judith Davidson Moyers**  
  President, Public Affairs Television, Inc.
- **Peter G. Peterson**  
  Chairman, The Blackstone Group
- **Lois Dickson Rice**  
  Guest Scholar, The Brookings Institution
- **Alice M. Rivlin**  
  Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution
- **Max Stier**  
  President, Partnership for Public Service
- **Deborah Wadsworth**  
  Senior Advisor, Public Agenda
- **Cyrus R. Vance**  
  Former U.S. Secretary of State