

# RESEARCH BRIEFS

*Brief #1*  
Fall 2011

## What We Want From our Schools

There are some in this country who would reduce education of young people to only a few basic subjects. In their world, there would be no art, music, or physical education—only reading, writing, and arithmetic. However, this narrow definition of education lacks public support.

In 2006, Rothstein and Jacobsen summarized what Americans' have expected from their schools over the past two hundred years. As part of their study, they surveyed adults (including superintendents, school board members, the general public and state legislators) to identify the goals of education that the American public expects from both public and private schools. Respondents were asked to take a total of 100 percent and divide it among each of eight goal categories. The percent values shown represent the average amount assigned to the category.<sup>1</sup>

- **(22%) Basic Academic Skills in Core Subjects** (Reading, writing, math, knowledge of science and history).
- **(18%) Critical Thinking and Problem Solving** (Ability to analyze and interpret information, use computers to develop knowledge, apply ideas to new situations).
- **(12%) Social Skills and Work Ethic** (Good communication skills, personal responsibility, ability to get along well with others and to work with others from different backgrounds).
- **(11%) Citizenship and Community Responsibility** (Knowledge of how government works and of how to participate in civic activities like voting, volunteering, and becoming active in communities).

# RESEARCH BRIEFS

- **(10%) Preparation for Skilled Work** (Vocational, career, and technical education that will qualify youths for skilled employment that does not require a college degree).
- **(9%) Physical Health** (A foundation for lifelong physical health, including good habits of exercise and nutrition).
- **(9%) Emotional Health** (Tools to develop self-confidence, respect for others, and the ability to resist peer pressure to engage in irresponsible personal behavior).
- **(9%) The Arts and Literature** (Capacity to participate in and appreciate the musical, visual and performing arts. Development of a love of literature).

## Conclusion

In their summary of what Americans have expected of their schools over the past two centuries, Rothstein and Jacobsen conclude that the current emphasis on test scores in two academic areas (mathematics and reading) runs counter to our traditional expectations.

Written by: Russ Allen PhD and Jeffrey Leverich PhD

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper, The Goals of Public Education, first appeared in Phi Delta Kappan in December, 2006. It is available online: [http://www.epi.org/publications/entry/webfeatures\\_viewpoints\\_education\\_goals](http://www.epi.org/publications/entry/webfeatures_viewpoints_education_goals)