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ARIZONA: REQUIRE STUDENTS TO PASS AIMS TEST

Arizonans support requiring public school students to pass the statewide AIMS test before graduating high school, according to a recent *Grand Canyon State Poll* survey. The public believes a mandatory performance-based examination such as AIMS will encourage students to pay more attention in school and to study harder.

The Social Research Laboratory of Northern Arizona University conducted the telephone survey of 505 Arizona adults between February 23 and March 9, 2001. Survey results have a margin of error of +/- 4.5 percent.

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR AIMS

School officials throughout Arizona say the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards, also known as the AIMS test, is important for insuring that high school graduates have a minimum base of knowledge. Critics charge that AIMS standards are set too high at this time and schools have not been given adequate time to prepare students for the test.

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Most people in Arizona have read or heard something about the AIMS test. Just about half of adults in Arizona (49%) say they have heard a lot about AIMS and another 28 percent have read or heard some information about the test.

When asked if public school students should be required to pass the AIMS test before graduating high school, two of every three people surveyed (65%) say they should. Thirty percent of Arizonans disagree with the requirement, saying public school students should not be required to pass the AIMS test to graduate. Parents of children in grades K-12 are less likely to support using AIMS as a graduation requirement than people who are not parents of school-age children. Fifty-eight percent of parents with school-age children agree that AIMS should be a graduation requirement compared to 66 percent of other respondents.

Most people (73%) agree that students will pay more attention to school and will study harder if they are required to pass a test to graduate. Only one-quarter of the public disagrees that students will work harder.

People are more doubtful that AIMS requirements will help improve the quality of public schools. More than half the public (54%) says teachers teach to the AIMS test and, as a consequence, real learning is often neglected. The public is divided over whether posting AIMS scores will help improve the quality of education in Arizona. Fifty-one percent believe posting scores will improve education and 44 percent think posting scores will not improve education.

SCHOOLS ARE NOT DOING AN EQUAL JOB PREPARING STUDENTS

Arizonans tend to be critical of public school education in the state. When asked to rate the job public schools are doing, less than one-in-three people (30%) say the schools are

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doing an excellent or good job. Almost twice as many people (57%) rate school performance as fair or poor.

Despite support for the AIMS test, Arizonans do not believe all public schools are doing an equal job preparing students for the exam. Only 11 percent of people say schools are providing the same level of preparation for all students in Arizona. Fifty-nine percent of people say the public schools are not equally preparing students for the exam and another 30 percent are not sure.

Fred Solop, director of the *Grand Canyon State Poll*, said, "People think the real benefit of AIMS is that individual students will be motivated to do better in school. They will have to study more to pass the test. They will have to take classes seriously if they want a high school degree. People are not necessarily thinking AIMS will improve the quality of education offered by public schools in the state. In fact, there is a lot of concern that many schools are not well positioned to prepare their students to pass AIMS at this time."

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Social Research Laboratory, Northern Arizona University

March 14, 2001

**GRAND CANYON STATE POLL
BACKGROUND MEMO**

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The *Grand Canyon State Poll* was conducted between February 23 and March 9, 2001. A random sample of 505 Arizona residents was asked questions regarding education in Arizona and the AIMS test. Survey question results are subject to a sampling error of +/-4.5 percent at a 95 percent confidence level. Sampling error is the probable difference in results between interviewing everyone in the population versus a scientific sample taken from the population. Sampling error does not take into account additional sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion. The data referred to in this release are presented below.

First, I'd like to ask you some questions about education in Arizona.

How would you rate the job Arizona public schools are doing educating our young people? Are schools doing an excellent, good, fair, or poor job?

	<u>%</u>	
Excellent	6%	
Good	24%	N=499
Fair	32%	
Poor	25%	
Don't know/not sure	12%	

Arizona is requiring all public school students to pass a standardized test in order to graduate high school. This test is that Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards, also known as the AIMS test.

How much have you read or heard about the AIMS test recently: a lot, some, just a little, or nothing at all?

	<u>%</u>	
A lot	49%	
Some	28%	N=502
Just a little	15%	
Nothing at all	7%	
Don't know/not sure	1%	

Should public school students be required to pass a standardized test such as AIMS in order to graduate?

	Parents of K-12		
	Total	Students	Others
Yes	65%	58%	66%
No	30%	39%	28%
Depends	5%	4%	6%
	(500)	(106)	(389)

In your opinion, are Arizona's public schools equally preparing students for the AIMS test?

	%	
Yes	11%	N=501
No	59%	
Don't know/not sure	30%	

I am going to read a series of statements about the AIMS test. Please tell me if you agree or disagree with each statement. (Is that strongly (agree/disagree) or somewhat (agree/disagree). (Rotating question).

First, students pay more attention and study harder if they know they must pass a test to graduate?

	%	
Strongly agree	38%	N=500
Somewhat agree	35%	
Somewhat disagree	16%	
Strongly disagree	7%	
Don't know/not sure	3%	

Teachers focus so much on preparing for standardized test such as AIMS that real learning is neglected.

	%	
Strongly agree	25%	N=497
Somewhat agree	29%	
Somewhat disagree	25%	
Strongly disagree	10%	
Don't know/not sure	12%	

Requiring schools to publicize their AIMS scores will improve the quality of education in the state.

	<u>%</u>	
Strongly agree	20%	N=496
Somewhat agree	31%	
Somewhat disagree	26%	
Strongly disagree	18%	
Don't know/not sure	6%	