

Poll shows majority want trial for national standards

Tom Hunt

FEWER than one in five adults believe national standards should be introduced to schools before being trialled, a new poll shows.

The poll, commissioned by the Educational Institute and conducted by UMR Research, is being made public today.

While it is being used by the union to argue that the Government is pushing the standards through without a crucial and robust trial, it has been criticised by a marketing academic as asking a "charged" question.

Introduced in primary and intermediate schools this year, the national standards aim to increase literacy and numeracy standards by setting signposts for what pupils should achieve and when.

Critics, including unions and leading education academics, have argued that the standards need to be tested, risk labelling pupils as failures, and could lead to league tables unfairly ranking schools.

UMR Research director Gavin White said the poll was worded to eliminate bias and, although it was commissioned by the union, was carried out independently.

It asked 750 New Zealanders how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "The national standards should be tested before being implemented in schools so that their impact on children's learning is known."

Fifty-two per cent strongly agreed and 14 per cent agreed, while 11 per cent strongly disagreed and 7 per cent disagreed. The remainder were undecided or ambivalent. The poll had a margin of error of 3.6 per cent.

Of those polled with children in school, 71 per cent believed the standards should be tested, against 15 per cent who did not.

Union president Frances Nelson said the poll showed the Government did not have parental or public support to introduce the standards in schools without a trial. "They also reflect what we are seeing in communities around the country during

our national standards bus tour - that people understand that children's learning is too important to experiment with."

Otago University marketing lecturer Mathew Parackel said it was hard to say whether the poll was representative. The question asked was "positively charged" and could have led to an inflated number of people responding positively in favour of a trial.

But it was "one piece of evidence" that could be added to expert opinion opposing the standards' full introduction this year, he said.

Education Minister Anne Tolley said NZEI was involved in developing the standards, and more than 11,000 parents and representatives from the education sector were involved in consultation last year.

An independent technical advisory group had been appointed to give advice. "In addition to this, the ministry has put a three-year monitoring and evaluation programme in place. So any changes that need to be made will be made."

THE POLITICIAN

