

# Differences in Public Understanding of and Reactions to GSPED Based on Awareness of the Initiative

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In the spring of 1998, the Office of Workforce Development Policy (OWDP) of the Arizona Department of Commerce commissioned a statewide opinion poll to assess public attitudes toward the state's plan for economic development as implemented through GSPED ("G-Speed") — the Governor's Strategic Partnership for Economic Development. The poll was designed to assess both the public's understanding of GSPED and their reactions to using the concept of industry clusters as a tool for organizing both economic and workforce development efforts.

More than 2,000 Arizonans participated in the poll, including 600 parents, 600 businesses, 500 teachers and 500 school administrators (i.e., principals and superintendents). These sample sizes yield results that are statistically accurate within a 95% level of confidence (with margins of error not exceeding  $\pm$  4.5 percentage points). Results of the poll, discussed in an earlier briefing paper<sup>1</sup>, were summarized in relation to:

- , overall public awareness of GSPED,
- , support for GSPED,
- , attitudes toward GSPED as a tool for economic development,
- , attitudes toward workforce development, and
- , linking workforce development with GSPED.

Polling results showed that awareness, or "brand name" recognition, of GSPED was low. However, once the concept of industry clusters was explained to respondents, support for the initiative and related workforce development efforts was higher than opposition for every question posed. Even so, results also indicated that many respondents were unsure about GSPED and its implications.

Because of the low percentage of respondents who had heard about GSPED and high percentage of responses indicating uncertainty, a question was posed by members of the Governors' Council on Workforce Development Policy as to whether polling results were based truly on informed opinions.

Specifically, the question pertained to whether the 14% (n = 308) of the respondents who had heard of GSPED answered questions differently than the 86% (n = 1,892) who had never heard of the initiative. Therefore, at the request of the Council, results of the polling were analyzed in order to answer the question:

**Does "brand name" recognition (i.e., awareness) of GSPED affect respondents' answers?**

The answer to this question is, in short, Yes.

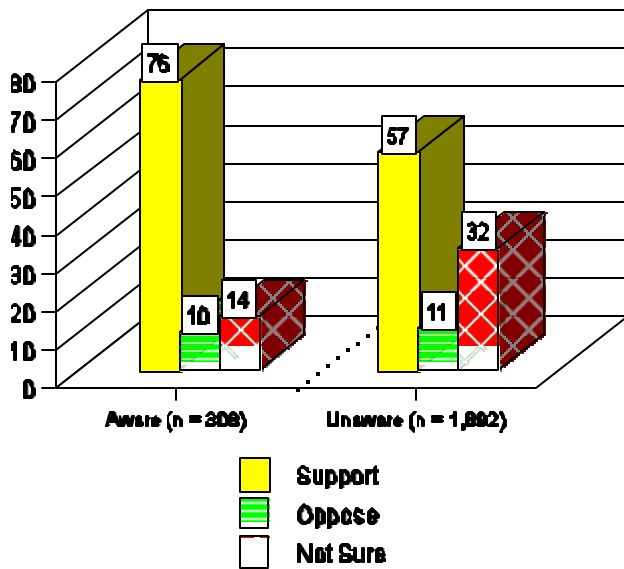
**In general, there are statistically significant differences between respondents who are aware of GSPED versus those who are not. Those who have heard about GSPED are significantly more likely to indicate support for the initiative, and efforts to link workforce development with economic development, than their peers (i.e., unaware respondents).**

This holds true for all four constituent groups: parents, businesses, teachers and school administrators. These groups are represented in the "aware" sample as follows: 23% of all school administrators surveyed had heard about GSPED, as had 14% of the businesses surveyed, 13% of the teachers, and 7% of the parents.

Whereas the "aware" sample is more likely to respond positively to questions posed, "aware" and "unaware" samples do *not* vary significantly from one another on levels of opposition (which are relatively low across all questions). However, "unaware" respondents are more than twice as likely as aware respondents to indicate that they are "not sure" about GSPED. This pattern of responses is illustrated in Figure 1 which shows levels of support for, opposition to, and uncertainty toward using GSPED as a tool for economic development.



**Figure 1**  
**Arizonans' Support for GSPED As a Tool to**  
**Develop the Economy (by Awareness)**



The pattern of responses holds true for most questions asked on the survey. One notable exception is found regarding attitudes toward using GSPED as a tool to develop Arizona's economy. In response to the statement "GSPED smacks of too much interference in private business by government," both "aware" and "unaware" businesses are more likely to agree with this statement than other constituent groups. Forty-three percent of "aware" businesses and 33% of "unaware" businesses indicated that GSPED smacks of government interference. (The difference between aware and unaware businesses is statistically significant. "Aware" businesses are more likely than their "unaware" peers to view GSPED in a potentially negative light.)

Another exception to the pattern of responses is in terms of attitudes toward using "the GSPED system" as a tool for educating and training Arizona's workforce. Typically, "aware" parents show the highest levels of support for the concepts measured than any other group. For example, they are most likely to voice the opinions that businesses are having a hard time filling jobs with competent employees, that most people coming out of high school are not prepared for the world of work, and that workforce development efforts like GSPED will result in better-prepared and more productive employees.

In terms of "what it would take" to develop a workforce development system linked with GSPED,

responses were analyzed with respect to four issues—whether people support or oppose:

- , targeting resources to specific populations (e.g., high school students, the working poor),
- , working to establish closer cooperation and communication between business/community leaders and state government in deciding how education and training programs are developed and how funds are spent,
- , obtaining greater business commitment to help develop the system, and
- , consolidating of at least *some* existing publicly funded workforce development programs.

Both "aware" and "unaware" respondents were significantly more likely to support these notions than oppose them. However, "aware" teachers voice the highest levels of opposition to all concepts measured (ranging from 16% opposed to targeting resources to 26% opposed to consolidation).

In conclusion, awareness of GSPED appears to make a great deal of difference in terms of levels of support versus uncertainty toward using the notion of industry clusters as a way to organize and link economic development with workforce development. The more aware one is, the more supportive. The exception to this pattern is among "aware" businesses, who tend to view GSPED as "government interference" with respect to economic development. This finding suggests a need for the state to recruit increased private sector involvement in continuing efforts to link economic and workforce development.

**Endnote:** Baseline data on GSPED polling results are reported in *Public Understanding of and Reactions to GSPED*, Arizona School To Work Briefing Paper #12 (August 1998). Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, Morrison Institute for Public Policy.

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