

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NEW JERSEY

THE CLOSER YOU GET THE BETTER IT LOOKS

PARENTS GENERALLY SATISFIED: GIVE SCHOOLS A "B" ON MOST ATTRIBUTES

RELEASE: SL/EP 70-6 (EP120-6)

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the Sunday, October 11th Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll."

Public education in New Jersey is looking up. New Jerseyans give schools statewide and where they live more positive ratings than they did six years ago--an increase from about a C+ to a solid B. And those in a position to know best--parents of school-aged children--are the most positive in their assessments. Four-in-five report being satisfied with their child's education, and far more say the quality of their child's education has gotten better over the last few years than say it has gotten worse.

While far from ecstatic, parents of public school children in the state are generally positive in their assessments of a variety of quality of educational life attributes. Teachers, Principals, the curriculum and the students' physical safety, among others all receive solid B grades. Schools received lower grades for class size and the amount of attention parents felt was paid to their own children. The first *Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll Parents' Report Card on the Schools* finds parents of public school students giving the following grades:

GPA*	SUBJECT	"A"	"B"	"C"	"D"	"F"
3.1	Your child's physical safety	45%	32%	13%	5%	4%
3.1	The job the Principal is doing	37%	37%	15%	4%	3%
3.1	The quality of Teachers	33%	42%	18%	3%	1%
3.0	The emphasis of the Curriculum	37%	38%	13%	5%	4%
3.0	Extra-curricular activities/sports	40%	28%	19%	6%	3%
3.0	Teacher communication with Parents	41%	26%	18%	9%	3%
2.9	Condition of physical	34%	34%	23%	7%	2%

	facilities/classrooms					
2.7	Attention to your child's individual needs	26%	37%	20%	10%	5%
2.7	The size of classes	25%	38%	21%	10%	4%

* Don't know answers not shown and eliminated from GPA computation

The Poll computed a grade point average for parents' ratings of nine important attributes of their children's education. On a common scale of 4 points for an A, 3 points for a B, 2 points for a C, 1 point for a D and no points for an F, there were no A's or B+'s given. Six items received a basic B, with a grade point average of 3.1 or 3.0. They were:

Physical safety of the children while at school (3.1)

The job the Principal is doing running the School (3.1)

The quality of Teachers (3.1)

The emphasis of the curriculum (3.0)

The availability of extra-curricular activities and sports (3.0)

Teacher communication with parents (3.0)

Three items received less than a B average.

The condition of physical facilities such as classrooms (2.9)

The amount of attention to your child's individual needs (2.7)

The size of classes (2.7)

In looking over the grades given by parents, Cliff Zukin, director of the Rutgers-based poll commented, "The poll findings beg a couple of important questions about whether the educational glass is half full or half empty. First, are we satisfied with a basic B, or do we have higher aspirations? Second, somewhere between one-quarter and one-third of all parents in the state gave a grade of C or worse to each of the items we asked about. Some might find that pretty high for basic items like physical safety, class size and the condition of classrooms."

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll was conducted with a statewide sample of 804 adult New Jersey residents by telephone between September 14 and 20. The sample included 226 people who said they were parents with a child in the public school system. The sampling error for the total sample is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points; it is plus or minus 7 percentage points for questions asked only of parents.

Overall, 53 percent say that public schools throughout New Jersey are doing an "excellent" or "good" job, up from 42 percent in January of 1992. Another 29 percent currently say schools in New Jersey are doing an "only fair" job, with nine percent saying they are doing a "poor" job and an equal number expressing no opinion.

Local schools, which are closer to home and more visible, fare even better. Some 62 percent give their local schools positive ratings of excellent or good, 23 percent rate them as only fair and nine percent as poor. The poll results clearly show those who pay the closest attention to the schools hold them in the highest regard. Two-thirds (67 percent) of those who say they follow what is going on in their local schools at least "somewhat" closely give positive ratings to their school systems. Moreover, 72 percent of those with children in the public school system give their schools positive ratings of excellent or good. Another 20 percent say their school is doing an "only fair" job and six percent of parents say their local schools are doing a poor job.

Overall, just 40 percent of parents say they are "very" satisfied with the quality of education that their children are receiving, although another 40 percent say they are "somewhat" satisfied. About one parent in six reports being dissatisfied with their children's education--nine percent are "somewhat" dissatisfied and seven percent are "very" dissatisfied.

But while divided in their degree of satisfaction, more parents see things getting better than see them getting worse. By a margin of 36 to 16 percent, more believe the quality of their children's education has been getting better over the past few years than feel it has been getting worse. A large number--45 percent--see no change over this time.

The Poll also found the adequacy of school spending, funded as it is principally by local property taxes, to be an extremely polarizing issue: Just four-in-ten said they think their town or city spends about the right amount on local public schools. Another three-in-ten thinks their town spends too little, while two-in-ten thinks their town spends too much. The remaining one-in-ten offer no opinion. Fissures on school spending are apparent by party, race, age and whether there are school-aged children in the household, among other factors:

- Democrats think too little is spent on education rather than too much by a margin of 37 to 14 percent; Independents by a margin of 31 to 19 percent. Republicans, on the other hand, think too much is spent rather than too little by a statistically indistinguishable margin of 26 to 24 percent. Those under 50 think that too little is spent on local schools; those over 50 think that too much is spent.
- Looking at age, those under 50 believe their communities spend too little on education; those over 50 believe that too much is spent. The percentages of each age group are as follows: 18 to 29 year olds--9 percent too much, 42 percent too little; 30-49 year olds--16 percent too much, 35 percent too little; 50 to 64 year olds--30 percent too much, 23 percent too little; 65 and older--29 percent too much, 13 percent too little.

- Whites are fairly evenly divided--22 percent too much spent and 26 percent too little spent; non-whites, who generally live in less affluent areas where less is spent on education believe that too little is spent on local schools (42 percent) rather than too much (12 percent).
- Far more parents with children in public schools feel that too little is spent on education in their community (42 percent) than believe too much is spent (13 percent). Those without children in local schools are evenly divided (26 percent too little to 22 percent too much).

Education clearly is a gut-level issue in New Jersey, as so many state residents are directly impacted in an intimate way. The Poll estimates that 17 percent of households have a child in grade school (including Kindergarten), 10 percent have a child in High School, and seven percent have a child in both. Among those with school-aged children, 78 percent say their child attends public school, 15 percent private school, and five percent have children attending both public and private schools.

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BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE SL/EP70-6 (EP120-6), SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11, 1998

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll was conducted between September 14 and 20, 1998, when a scientifically selected random sample of 804 New Jersey adult residents was interviewed by telephone. All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for the total sample size of 804 is just over ± 3.5 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jerseyans were found to have a favorable opinion of the Governor, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.5 and 53.5 percent (50 ± 3.5) had all New Jerseyans been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such separate figures reported for men and women, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. Click here for a [chart](#) that shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error. Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording, or context effects. The verbatim wording of all questions asked are reproduced in this background memo. The sample has been stratified based on county and the data have been weighted on age and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. Two versions of the questionnaire were used in this study. Not all questions were on both versions.

"How closely do you follow what is going on in your local public schools – very closely, somewhat, or not at all?" [E1]

	Very	Somewhat	Not at all	Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	30%	48%	22%	--	100%	(804)

PAST SURVEYS

October, 1987	25%	41%	33%	1%	100%	(1000)
October, 1986	27%	49%	23%	2%	101%	(793)
August, 1985	27%	43%	27%	3%	100%	(800)
October, 1983	24%	45%	31%	1%	101%	(812)

"In general, how would you rate the job the public schools are doing here in New Jersey – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" [E2]

	Excellent	Good	Only fair	Poor	Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	11%	42%	23%	9%	7%	92%	(804)

Parental Status

--Has school age children	13%	44%	27%	11%	5%	100%	(272)
--Does not have school age children	10%	41%	29%	89%	11%	100%	(532)

PAST SURVEYS

January, 1992	9%	33%	32%	20%	6%	100%	(800)
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Parental Status

--Has school age children	12%	36%	34%	13%	5%	100%	(226)
--Does not have school age children	8%	32%	31%	22%	6%	99%	(572)

October, 1987	11%	42%	29%	10%	8%	100%	(1000)
August, 1985	9%	36%	31%	14%	11%	101%	(800)
October, 1983	8%	40%	32%	12%	8%	100%	(802)

"How would you rate the job your local schools are doing – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" [E3]

	Excellent	Good	Only fair	Poor	Don't know	Total	(n)
--September, 1998							
<u>STATEWIDE*</u>	23%	44%	23%	8%	2%	100%	(622)

PUBLIC SCHOOL PARENTS

Yes	29%	43%	20%	6%	1%	99%	(226)
No	17%	41%	23%	10%	9%	100%	(578)

<u>FULL SAMPLE</u>	20%	42%	23%	9%	7%	101%	(804)
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PAST SURVEYS

<u>STATEWIDE*</u>							
--October, 1987	17%	53%	21%	5%	4%	100%	(339)

--October, 1986	18%	41%	26%	11%	3%	99%	(621)
--August, 1985	17%	44%	27%	10%	2%	100%	(576)
--October, 1983	20%	45%	23%	9%	3%	100%	(568)
--March, 1982	20%	38%	29%	10%	3%	100%	(454)
--September, 1980	15%	43%	30%	10%	2%	100%	(381)

PUBLIC SCHOOL PARENTS

--October, 1987	29%	43%	22%	6%	--	100%	(242)
--August, 1985	23%	47%	21%	7%	1%	99%	(205)

FULL SAMPLE

--October, 1987	14%	46%	23%	6%	11%	100%	(500)
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*STATEWIDE figures based on those respondents who said they followed what was going on in their local schools "very" or "somewhat" closely.

"Do you think your town or city spends too much, too little, or about the right amount on your local public schools?" [E4]

	Too much	Too little	About right	Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	19%	30%	40%	10%	99%	(804)

By Party

Democrat	14%	37%	41%	9%	101%	(229)
Independent	19%	31%	38%	12%	100%	(338)
Republican	26%	24%	44%	5%	99%	(195)

By Age

18-29	9%	42%	36%	13%	100%	(117)
30-49	16%	35%	42%	8%	101%	(357)
50-64	30%	23%	39%	8%	100%	(181)
65+	29%	13%	42%	16%	100%	(141)

By Race

White	22%	26%	43%	9%	100%	(600)
Non-White	12%	42%	31%	14%	99%	(185)

Public School Parent

Yes	13%	42%	41%	4%	100%	(226)
No	22%	26%	39%	13%	100%	(578)

"Do you have school-aged children in your household – Kindergarten through High School? IF YES, PROBE: Is that grade school, High School or both?" [E6]

	Grade (includes	High	Both	No	Don't	Total	(n)
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	Kindergarten)	School			know		
September, 1998	17%	10%	7%	66%	--	100%	(804)

Note: People without school-aged children in their household (those who answered "No" or "Don't know" to question E6) were not asked any of the following questions (E7 through E10).

"Is that public school, private school, or both?" [E7]

	Public	Private	Both	Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	78%	15%	5%	2%	100%	(272)

"Overall, would you say you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of education your children are receiving? IF CHOICE MADE, PROBE: Is that very or somewhat (SATISFIED/ DISSATISFIED)?" [E8]

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	42%	40%	9%	7%	2%	100%	(226)

"Thinking back over the last few years, would you say the quality of education your children are receiving has been getting better, worse, or has it stayed the same?" [E9]

	Better	Worse	Same	Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	36%	16%	46%	2%	99%	(226)

"Thinking about your child's school, I would like you to grade how well it is doing in different areas. For each one I read please give it the letter grade A, B, C, D or F for failing. (IF DIFFERENT SCHOOLS/DIFFERENT KIDS, ASK ABOUT (ROTATED) (youngest/oldest) child. First, how about . . . (READ FIRST ITEM) Would you give it an A, B, C, D or F?" [E10]

	"A"	"B"	"C"	"D"	"F"	Don't Know	Total	(n)	
September, 1998									
A) The quality of teachers		33%	42%	18%	3%	1%	3%	100%	(226)
B) The availability of extra curricular activities and sports		40%	28%	19%	6%	3%	4%	100%	(226)
C) The condition of physical facilities such as classrooms		34%	34%	23%	7%	2%	--	100%	(226)

D) Your child's physical safety	45%	32%	13%	5%	4%	--	100%	(226)
E) The job the principal is doing running the school	37%	37%	15%	4%	3%	4%	100%	(226)
F) The size of classes	25%	38%	21%	10%	4%	2%	100%	(226)
G) The emphasis of the curriculum	37%	38%	13%	5%	4%	3%	100%	(226)
H) Teacher communication with parents	41%	26%	18%	9%	3%	3%	100%	(226)
I) The amount of attention to your child's individual needs	26%	37%	20%	10%	5%	2%	100%	(226)