

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

September 22, 2003
(Release 144-5)

CONTACT: CLIFF ZUKIN
or PATRICK MURRAY
(732) 932-9384

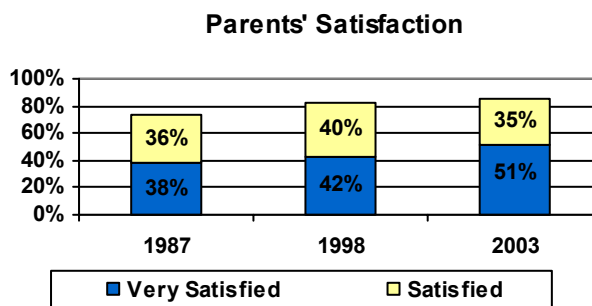
A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo appears in the Monday, September 22, 2003 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll.*"

PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NEW JERSEY: GOOD AND GETTING BETTER

There is some positive news about the quality of public education in New Jersey: It's pretty good, and getting better.

This assessment comes from those who should be in a position to know—the parents of New Jersey's public school children, as reported to the *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll*.

Statewide, 86 percent of parents say they are "satisfied" with the quality of the education their children are receiving. This includes 51 percent reporting they are "very satisfied," up from 42 percent in 1998.



Since the last report card compiled in 1998, parents:

- see significant improvement in the condition of physical facilities of their children's schools and are more assured of their children's safety;
- remain highly satisfied with the quality of classroom instruction their children receive, the job principals are doing, and the overall curriculum. (Grades of a B or better);
- remain less satisfied (below a B average) with the size of classes and the amount of individual attention given their own children, although there has been some improvement in this latter area over the last five years.

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics

185 Ryders Lane, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901

Director: Cliff Zukin x247 • Associate Director: Patrick Murray x243

Graduate Research Assistant: Robert Suls x289

Phone: 732-932-9384 - Website: <http://slerp.rutgers.edu> - Fax: 732-932-1551

But this rosy picture is painted on a dark backdrop—the squeeze of property taxes. Right now 62 percent say they believe the property taxes they pay are too high, including 44 percent who say “much too high.” And a majority of state residents (53%) say they would vote *against* raising property taxes in their community, even if their local schools said they needed more money.

These are among the main findings of the latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton Rutgers Poll*, conducted between September 2 and 8 of this year, with a random sample of 802 New Jersey adults. The poll included 227 parents who currently have children in a public school in New Jersey. The sampling error for the overall poll is ± 3.5 percentage points, and it is ± 7 percent for the segment of parents.

Statewide, the image of the public school system in New Jersey is generally positive, but not overwhelmingly so: 15 percent of all residents say schools in the state are doing an “excellent” job, 39 percent a “good” job, 25 percent “only fair,” and 10 percent “poor,” with the remainder offering no opinion. And ratings given by those who follow what is going on in their local public schools at least “somewhat closely” give those schools a similar assessment. But the closer the observer, the better the schools look: 34 percent of those with school-aged children say their local schools are doing an excellent job, while another 32 percent say they are doing a good job. In contrast, just 17 percent of those without school-aged children believe the schools in their area are doing an excellent job.

Parents with children in the state’s primary and secondary schools were asked to grade the schools—A through F—on nine different attributes. Their scores along with the computed grade point average are given in the report card below, along with the GPA recorded when this test was last administered five years ago in 1998.

The report card finds parents giving their children’s schools solid grades of B or better in seven of the nine areas. The GPAs have risen significantly, by two-tenths of a grade point, in three of the nine areas, and have declined in none. There has been measurable progress in parents’ reports of the safety of public schools, the physical condition of schools, and in the amount of individual attention their children have been

NEW JERSEY PARENTS' REPORT CARD ON THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOLS									
	Percentage giving each grade. <i>Totals add to 100 percent across.</i>						GRADE POINT AVERAGE		
Subject	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>INC</u>	2003	1998	Comment
Your child's physical safety	51	27	13	3	2	4	3.3	3.1	Significant improvement
Teacher communication with parents	46	29	14	6	3	2	3.1	3.0	Highly positive
The quality of teachers	43	32	14	6	2	3	3.1	3.1	Highly positive
The condition of physical facilities such as classrooms	42	30	22	3	2	2	3.1	2.9	Significant improvement
The job the principal is doing running the school	42	29	11	5	3	9	3.1	3.1	Highly positive
The emphasis of the curriculum	39	35	16	2	2	6	3.1	3.0	A little better, maybe
The availability of extra curricular activities & sports	41	27	12	8	5	7	3.0	3.0	Barely a B; no change
Amount of attention to your child's individual needs	34	35	17	9	3	2	2.9	2.7	Significant improvement, but still not great
The size of classes	30	35	17	6	6	5	2.8	2.7	Remains a trouble spot

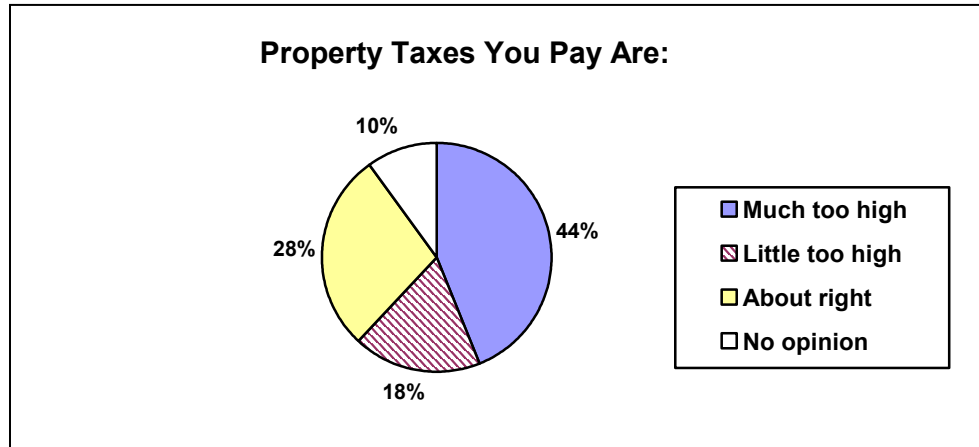
Note: Based on sample size of 227 parents currently with children in NJ public schools. Sampling error is ± 7 percent

receiving. In general, parents are well pleased with the quality of teachers and their school's principal, the emphasis of the curriculum, and teacher communication with parents, although increases in the GPA in these areas do not meet a strict test of statistical significance. Parents of public school children in New Jersey continue to give their lowest marks for "the size of classes" their children are in.

But high property taxes in New Jersey are clearly a threat to continued improvements in the schools. The poll estimates that about 30 percent of all New Jersey adults now have children attending a public school in the state, with another six percent

attending a private school, leaving more than 6-in-10 Garden State residents without a direct connection to primary or secondary education.

Local schools in New Jersey are largely funded by property taxes. And the vast majority of New Jerseyans—62 percent—feel their property taxes are already too high. It is just over one-in-four (28%) who believe what they pay in their property tax is “about right.”



Thus, public education becomes a public question: Are the majority of citizens who do not directly benefit from educating New Jersey’s children willing to pay the bill for the minority with children the state is obligated to educate? The poll’s evidence suggests that this may be a controversial question. The following question was put to the poll’s statewide representative sample: *Suppose your local public schools said they needed more money. Would you vote for or against raising local property taxes for this purpose?* Statewide, 53 percent said “no,” while 37 percent said “yes,” with the remainder offering no opinion.

Responses are broken down by various population groupings in the following table. These tabulations show: 1) Democrats are more supportive of increasing property taxes to pay for education; 2) Minorities are more supportive than are Whites; 3) Older residents—especially those over 65—are the most hostile to the idea of paying more in property taxes for schools in their community; 4) Those with school-aged children are more willing to increase property taxes than those who do not have children in this age range.

Opinion on raising property taxes if local schools said they needed more money →	Vote For	Vote Against	Depends/ Don't Know
Statewide TOTAL	37%	53%	11%
Registered Voters	37	54	9
Democrats	49	42	9
Independents	34	56	10
Republicans	27	59	13
Men	38	53	10
Women	36	53	11
Whites	33	57	11
Blacks & Hispanics	53	37	10
Age 18-29	41	50	9
Age 30-49	43	47	10
Age 50-64	35	56	9
Age 65 and older	25	63	12
Have school-aged child	43	46	10
No school-aged child	33	57	10
North Jersey	39	49	13
Central Jersey	37	55	8
South Jersey	33	59	7

Note: Figures rounded—some rows may total to 99% or 101%

While property tax funding of education may be a lurking time bomb, public perceptions on school spending are fairly well balanced at this point in time: 20 percent feel their town or city spends too much on their local public schools, and 30 percent feel they spend too little. The other half of the state is split between the 37 percent saying that the right amount is spend and the 13 percent offering no opinion on this question.

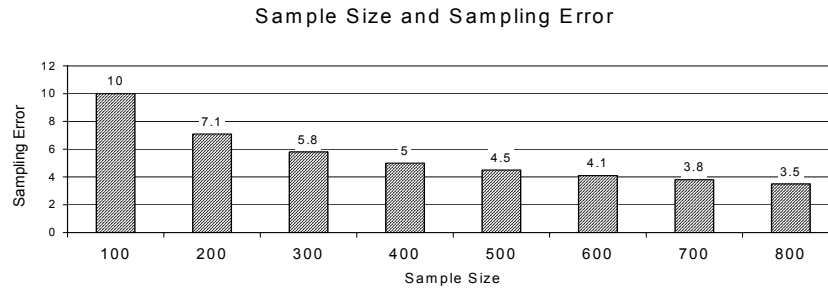


AUDIO COMMENTARY ON THIS POLL IS AVAILABLE BY DIALING 732-932-9384 ext. 302



BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP144-5) September 22, 2003

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll was conducted by telephone from September 2 to 8 with a scientifically selected random sample of 802 New Jersey adults. The figures in this release are based on this sample size. 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 is ± 3.5 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey residents were found to be less likely to agree with a statement, 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 Jersey residents been interviewed, rather than just a sample. This release also includes information based on a sub-sample of 227 public school parents with a ± 7 percent margin of error. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported for residents of North, Central and South Jersey, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The following chart 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 is 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. The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

“In general, how would you rate the job the public schools are doing here in New Jersey – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?” [E1]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	15%	39%	25%	10%	11%	100%	(802)
<u>Parental Status</u>							
-- School-age children	22	40	20	14	4	100	(269)
-- No children	10	39	28	7	15	99	(533)
<u>Region</u>							
-- North	13	36	27	11	12	99	(367)
-- Central	15	45	22	6	12	100	(205)
-- South	16	41	24	9	9	99	(215)
<u>Type of Area</u>							
-- Urban	13	30	26	17	15	101	(188)
-- Stable town or suburb	15	45	24	6	11	101	(281)
-- Developing town	16	41	26	8	10	101	(331)

“How closely do you follow what is going on in your local schools--very closely, somewhat, or not at all?” [E2]

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Somewhat closely</u>	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	35%	38%	25%	2%	100%	(802)
<u>Parental Status</u>						
-- School-age children	59	32	9	1	101	(269)
-- No children	22	41	34	3	100	(533)

[ASKED OF THOSE WHO FOLLOW THEIR LOCAL SCHOOLS:]

“How would you rate the job your local schools are doing -- excellent, good, only fair, or poor?”

[E3]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	25%	41%	25%	7%	3%	101%	(607)
<i>Parental Status</i>							
-- School-age children	34	32	23	9	2	100	(249)
-- No children	17	49	26	5	3	100	(358)
<u>PUBLIC SCHOOL PARENTS ONLY</u>							
-- September 2003	38%	32%	21%	7%	3%	101%	(227)
-- September 1999	25	49	13	11	1	99	(257)
-- September 1998	29	43	20	6	1	99	(226)
-- October 1987	29	43	22	6	--	100	(242)
-- August 1985	23	47	21	7	1	99	(205)

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

	<u>Too much</u>	<u>Too little</u>	<u>Right Amount</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	20%	30%	37%	13%	100%	(802)
<i>Parental Status</i>						
-- School-age children	15	41	38	6	100	(269)
-- No children	23	24	36	16	99	(533)
<i>Region</i>						
-- North	18	36	33	13	100	(367)
-- Central	25	23	42	10	100	(205)
-- South	20	29	39	12	100	(215)
<i>Type of Area</i>						
-- Urban	14	48	22	17	101	(188)
-- Stable town or suburb	15	26	47	12	100	(281)
-- Developing town	29	23	39	10	101	(331)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>						
-- September 1998	19	30	40	10	99	(804)

“Suppose your local public schools said they needed more money. Would you vote for or against raising local property taxes for this purpose?” [E5]

	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>Depends (VOL)</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	37%	53%	6%	5%	101%	(802)
<u>Registration Status</u>						
-- Registered to vote	37	54	5	4	100	(658)
-- Not registered to vote	37	49	7	6	99	(144)
<u>Party Affiliation</u>						
-- Democrat	49	42	4	5	100	(285)
-- Independent	34	56	8	2	100	(212)
-- Republican	27	59	9	4	99	(195)
<u>Ideology</u>						
-- Liberal	49	42	5	4	100	(162)
-- Moderate	37	53	5	5	100	(441)
-- Conservative	27	62	9	2	100	(173)
<u>Gender</u>						
-- Male	38	53	6	4	101	(386)
-- Female	36	53	5	6	100	(416)
<u>Race</u>						
--White	33	57	7	4	100	(597)
--Black & Hispanic	53	37	3	7	100	(143)
<u>Age</u>						
-- 18 to 29	41	50	5	4	100	(105)
-- 30 to 49	43	47	6	4	100	(326)
-- 50 to 64	35	56	6	3	100	(187)
-- 65 and older	25	63	5	7	100	(157)
<u>Parental Status</u>						
-- School-age children	43	46	7	3	99	(269)
-- No children	33	57	5	5	100	(533)
<u>Region</u>						
-- North	39	49	6	7	101	(367)
-- Central	37	55	6	2	100	(205)
-- South	33	59	5	2	100	(215)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>						
-- February 1996	37	54	5	4	100	(804)

“Do you have school-aged children in your household--Kindergarten through High School? Is that public school, private school, or both?” [E6/E7]

	<u>Public</u>	<u>Private</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>None/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	30%	5%	1%	63%	99%	(802)
<u>Region</u>						
-- North	31	5	2	63	101	(367)
-- Central	32	6	2	60	100	(205)
-- South	27	6	1	66	100	(215)
<u>Type of Area</u>						
-- Urban	25	6	1	67	99	(188)
-- Stable town or suburb	31	6	1	62	100	(281)
-- Developing town	32	4	2	62	100	(331)

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS (E8 through E11) WERE ASKED OF PUBLIC SCHOOL PARENTS ONLY:

“Overall, would you say you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of education your children are receiving? Is that very or somewhat (SATISFIED/ DISSATISFIED)?” [E8]

	<u>Very Satisfied</u>	<u>Somewhat Satisfied</u>	<u>Somewhat Dissatisfied</u>	<u>Very Dissatisfied</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003							
--Public school parents	51%	35%	6%	4%	4%	100%	(227)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
-- September 1999	44	39	9	6	2	100	(257)
-- September 1998	42	40	9	7	2	100	(226)
-- October 1987	38	36	16	5	3	98	(322)

“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?” [E9]

<i>Public school parents</i>	<u>“A”</u>	<u>“B”</u>	<u>“C”</u>	<u>“D”</u>	<u>“F”</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Average Grade (out of 4.0)*</u>	<u>(n)</u>
A) The quality of teachers									
September 2003	43%	32%	14%	6%	2%	3%	100%	3.1	(227)
September 1998	33%	42%	18%	3%	1%	3%	100%	3.1	(226)
B) The availability of extra curricular activities and sports									
September 2003	41%	27%	12%	8%	5%	7%	100%	3.0	(227)
September 1998	40%	28%	19%	6%	3%	3%	99%	3.0	(226)
C) The condition of physical facilities such as classrooms									
September 2003	42%	30%	22%	3%	2%	2%	101%	3.1	(227)
September 1998	34%	34%	23%	7%	2%	--	100%	2.9	(226)
D) Your child’s physical safety									
September 2003	51%	27%	13%	3%	2%	4%	100%	3.3	(227)
September 1998	46%	31%	13%	6%	4%	--	100%	3.1	(226)
E) The job the principal is doing running the school									
September 2003	42%	29%	11%	5%	3%	9%	99%	3.1	(227)
September 1998	37%	37%	15%	4%	3%	4%	100%	3.1	(226)
F) The size of classes									
September 2003	30%	35%	17%	6%	6%	5%	99%	2.8	(227)
September 1998	25%	38%	21%	10%	4%	2%	100%	2.7	(226)
G) The emphasis of the curriculum									
September 2003	39%	35%	16%	2%	2%	6%	100%	3.1	(227)
September 1998	37%	38%	13%	5%	4%	3%	100%	3.0	(226)

[E9] Continued...

<i>Public school parents</i>	<u>"A"</u>	<u>"B"</u>	<u>"C"</u>	<u>"D"</u>	<u>"F"</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Average Grade (out of 4.0)*</u>	<u>(n)</u>
H) Teacher communication with parents									
September 2003	46%	29%	14%	6%	3%	2%	100%	3.1	(227)
September 1998	41%	26%	18%	9%	3%	3%	100%	3.0	(226)
I) The amount of attention to your child's individual needs									
September 2003	34%	35%	17%	9%	3%	2%	100%	2.9	(227)
September 1998	26%	37%	20%	10%	5%	2%	100%	2.7	(226)
Overall Grade Point Average of New Jersey Public Schools									
							September 2003	3.1	
							September 1998	3.0	
									* "Don't know" answers eliminated from GPA computation.

"What kind of job do you think the standardized tests used in your children's schools do at accurately measuring their ability----excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" [E10]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003							
--Public school parents	15%	40%	29%	13%	4%	101%	(227)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
-- September 1999	5	48	36	8	3	100	(257)

"What kind of job do you think the standardized tests used in your children's schools do at accurately measuring the job teachers are doing----excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" [E11]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003							
--Public school parents	14%	42%	30%	10%	5%	101%	(227)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
-- September 1999	8	46	30	10	7	101	(257)

[ASKED OF EVERYONE:]

"Do you think the LOCAL PROPERTY taxes you pay are too high or are they about right. [IF TOO HIGH, PROBE: Are they much too high or just a little high]?"

	<u>Much too High</u>	<u>A little too High</u>	<u>About Right</u>	<u>DK/ Do not pay</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	44%	18%	28%	10%	100%	(802)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>						
--February 2003	50	18	25	7	100	(401)
--April 2001	39	23	26	12	100	(802)
--February 1994	44	25	22	9	100	(801)