

# The Star-Ledger / **Eagleton-Rutgers Poll**

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## INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION SOUND GOOD TO NEW JERSEY

### *But Positive Impact on School System Uncertain*

Three different programs designed to improve the state of public education get mixed reviews from the New Jersey public:

- While most feel that No Child Left Behind is a good idea, they are unlikely to agree that standardized testing is the best way to track school improvement.
- A majority support school vouchers, but the state is split on whether instituting vouchers would improve the school system.
- While residents are slightly more likely to believe that charter schools provide a better education than traditional public schools, they don't think that this recent innovation has had any impact on overall school quality in New Jersey.

### *No Child Left Behind*

The centerpiece of President George W. Bush's education policy has been the No Child Left Behind Act. This program requires that states set standards for math and reading achievement for all students in public schools. Schools that do not make adequate yearly progress toward these standards have to implement certain changes. Parents with children in schools which need improvement can transfer their children to a different school. Overall, 63 percent of New Jersey residents say this policy sounds like a good idea compared to 26 percent who feel it is a bad one.

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

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However, few people know much about this program which was signed into law in 2002. Only 1-in-5 residents say they know a great deal. About half say they know some or a little and 3-in-10 haven't heard anything about the No Child Left Behind Act. Those who are most familiar with the policy tend to be the least supportive of it. Among those residents who report knowing a great deal about the program, just over half (52%) feel the concept is a good one compared to 40 percent who say it is a bad idea.

Still, when all is said and done, residents who have heard of the No Child Left Behind Act are more likely to believe that the program will eventually improve (41%) rather than weaken (23%) public schools in New Jersey. However, another 27 percent say the law will make no difference in the state of public education.

### ***School Vouchers***

Another potential change to public education that has been discussed over the past few years is providing vouchers to parents in low-income areas. These vouchers could be used to send a child to any public or private school in the state. Overall, 54 percent of New Jerseyans support the idea of taxpayer funded vouchers for low-income children compared to 37 percent who oppose this.

Just over half (52%) of those surveyed say they have heard about this particular voucher plan. And those who are familiar with the proposal are torn on how it will impact New Jersey's schools. Roughly one-third each say that a voucher program in low-income areas will improve (33%), weaken (34%), or make no difference (29%) on the state of public education in the Garden State.

### ***Charter Schools***

Since 1997, New Jersey has allowed groups and individuals to start charter schools. These schools are part of the public education system but operate independently of local school authorities. Even though charter schools have been operating in the state for a number of years, only 56 percent of residents are aware of them. Among those familiar with charter schools, 44 percent say these schools do a better job than traditional public schools compared to 11 percent who feel they are worse and 26 percent who say they are about the same.

Most of those who have heard of New Jersey's charter schools feel that this innovation has had no impact on traditional public schools. While 24 percent feel that

charter schools have weakened public education in New Jersey and 14 percent say they have improved the system, 52 percent feel that charter schools have made no difference to the state of public education in New Jersey.

<b>How Different Programs Will Impact Traditional Public Schools</b>			
	<u>Improve</u>	<u>Weaken</u>	<u>No Impact</u>
<b>No Child Left Behind</b>			
-- All Adults	42%	20%	29%
-- <i>Those Familiar</i>	41%	23%	27%
<b>School Vouchers</b>			
-- All Adults	32%	26%	33%
-- <i>Those Familiar</i>	33%	34%	29%
<b>Charter Schools</b>			
-- All Adults	na	na	na
-- <i>Those Familiar</i>	14%	24%	52%

***Determining Teacher Salaries***

Another issue covered in this education omnibus edition of the poll is the public’s view on setting teacher pay rates. Currently, teacher salaries in New Jersey public schools are based largely on years of experience and academic qualifications. Some advocates have called for tying teachers’ pay to how well their students do on state tests. However, New Jerseyans oppose proposal by a nearly 2-to-1 margin. Only 32 percent agree with the idea of basing teacher pay on student test scores compared to 60 percent who disagree. Even among those who are inclined to go along with tying teacher salaries to student test scores, only 1-in-4 feels that student scores should outweigh teacher experience in setting pay rates.

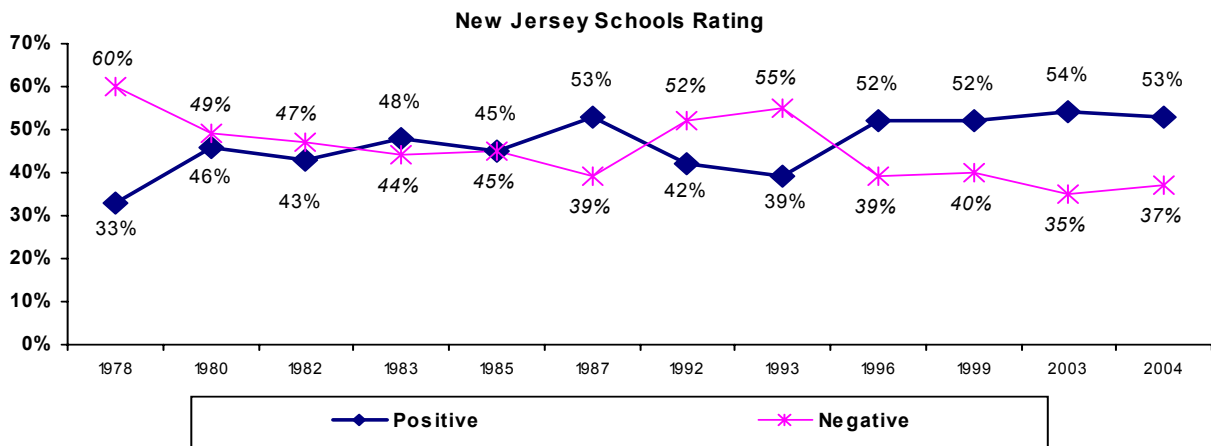
“While New Jersey residents are amenable to setting standards for our schools, they are somewhat distrustful of standardized testing as the best way to determine whether those standards are met,” observed Patrick Murray, acting director of the Rutgers University-based poll. “When it comes to teachers’ salaries, it is not just a question of whether standardized test scores are a good indicator of job performance. Also at issue is who should be primarily responsible for a student’s progress.”

When asked who should have the most responsibility for ensuring that young children do well in school – teachers or parents – the home environment is clearly deemed more important for educational success. Fifty-one percent of New Jerseyans say

that parents should be held more accountable for their children’s advancement in school. This compares to only 12 percent who hold teachers up as the primary factor in a child’s education. Another 36 percent volunteer that both parents and teachers should be equally responsible for a student’s academic progress.

**Overall School Evaluations**

This recent *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* was conducted between July 30 and August 4 with a scientifically selected sample of 800 New Jersey adults with a sampling error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. The poll also tracked resident opinion of public school performance in general.

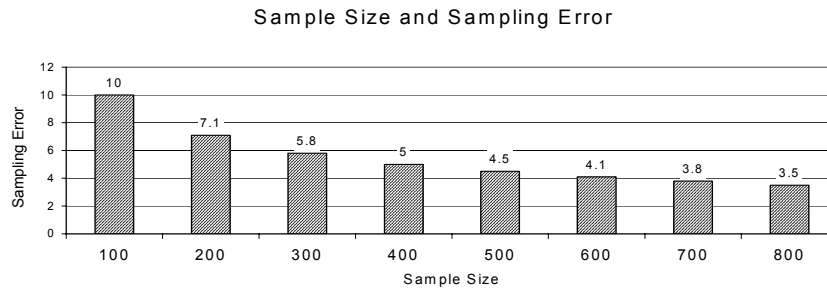


New Jersey’s opinion of the state’s public school system has been on an even keel since the mid-1990s. Currently, 53 percent give Garden State schools a positive evaluation of excellent or good compared to 37 percent who say they are only fair or poor. These findings are consistent with polls conducted since 1996, which reversed a trend in the early 1990s when more people gave negative rather positive evaluations of our public schools.

Residents are even more likely to give positive marks to the schools in their own community. Overall, 61 percent of New Jerseyans give a rating of excellent or good to the job their local schools are doing. This varies by type of community though. Two-thirds of residents in suburban areas give their schools a positive evaluation compared to fewer than half – 45 percent – in urban areas of the state who do the same.

**BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP147-5) SEPTEMBER 5, 2004**

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers* Poll was conducted from July 30 to August 4 with a scientifically selected random sample of 800 New Jersey adult residents 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 registered voters is  $\pm 3.5$  percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey residents were found to have a favorable opinion of a presidential candidate, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.5 and 53.5 percent ( $50 \pm 3.5$ ) had all New Jersey adults been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported for Republicans, Independents or Democrats, 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 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>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>August 2004</b>							
-- All Adults	13%	40%	24%	13%	10%	100%	(800)
<u>Parental Status</u>							
-- School-age children	20	41	19	18	3	101	(265)
-- No children	10	40	27	9	14	100	(529)
<u>Region</u>							
-- North	14	36	24	14	11	99	(369)
-- Central	9	45	27	10	9	100	(197)
-- South	16	42	21	12	9	100	(220)
<u>Type of Area</u>							
-- Urban	13	31	26	21	9	100	(156)
-- Stable town or suburb	12	42	24	12	11	101	(302)
-- Developing town	15	43	23	9	9	99	(331)
<b><u>PAST SURVEYS</u></b>							
September 2003	15%	39%	25%	10%	11%	100%	(802)
September 1999	11	41	31	9	9	101	(802)
February 1996	10	42	28	11	9	100	(804)
September 1993	7	32	33	22	6	100	(801)
January 1992	9	33	32	20	6	100	(800)
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)
March 1982	8	35	34	13	9	99	(603)
September 1980	8	38	39	10	5	100	(395)
April 1978	6	27	30	30	7	100	(1207)

“How would you rate the job your LOCAL schools are doing – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?” [E2]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>August 2004</b>							
-- All Adults	24%	37%	17%	12%	9%	99%	(800)
<i>Parental Status</i>							
-- School-age children	32	34	14	19	1	100	(265)
-- No children	20	39	20	8	14	101	(529)
<i>Region</i>							
-- North	26	34	16	15	9	100	(369)
-- Central	22	40	21	9	8	100	(197)
-- South	26	39	15	11	9	100	(220)
<i>Type of Area</i>							
-- Urban	14	31	19	28	8	100	(156)
-- Stable town or suburb	26	40	16	9	9	100	(302)
-- Developing town	30	37	17	7	9	100	(331)

“Have you read or heard anything about the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which was signed into law about two years ago? Have you heard a great deal, some, or only a little?” [E3]

	<u>Great Deal</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Little</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>August 2004</b>							
-- All Adults	19%	29%	19%	30%	2%	99%	(800)
<i>Parental Status</i>							
-- School-age children	24	30	22	24	1	101	(265)
-- No children	17	29	17	34	3	100	(529)
<i>Type of Area</i>							
-- Urban	19	22	14	43	1	99	(156)
-- Stable town or suburb	20	30	19	28	2	99	(302)
-- Developing town	19	31	22	26	2	100	(331)

“The No Child Left Behind Act requires that states set standards for math and reading achievement for all students in public schools. Schools that do not make adequate yearly progress toward these standards have to implement certain changes. Parents with children in schools which need improvement can transfer their children to a different school. Based on what you know or have heard of this law, do you think it is a good or bad idea?” [E4]

	<u>Good Idea</u>	<u>Bad Idea</u>	<u>(VOL) Both/Neither</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>August 2004</b>						
-- All Adults	63%	26%	5%	6%	100%	(800)
-- Those Aware	60	30	6	3	99	(569)
<i>Parental Status</i>						
-- School-age children	68	26	4	2	100	(265)
-- No children	61	25	6	7	99	(529)
<i>Type of Area</i>						
-- Urban	65	20	4	11	100	(156)
-- Stable town or suburb	66	24	5	5	100	(302)
-- Developing town	61	31	6	2	100	(331)

*E4 continued*

	<b><u>Good Idea</u></b>	<b><u>Bad Idea</u></b>	<b><u>(VOL) Both/Neither</u></b>	<b><u>Don't Know</u></b>	<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b><u>(n)</u></b>
<i><u>Awareness Level</u></i>						
-- Great Deal	52	40	7	--	99	(172)
-- Some	61	29	7	3	100	(247)
-- Little	68	23	4	5	100	(150)
-- Nothing	72	17	3	9	101	(215)

“According to the No Child Left Behind Act, a school’s progress will be measured by a statewide standardized test taken by all students. Do you feel it is fair or unfair to rely on a single standardized test to determine whether a school is in need of improvement?” [E5]

	<b><u>Fair</u></b>	<b><u>Unfair</u></b>	<b><u>(VOL) Depends</u></b>	<b><u>Don't Know</u></b>	<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b><u>(n)</u></b>
<b>August 2004</b>						
-- All Adults	37%	54%	3%	6%	100%	(800)
-- Those Aware	36	57	3	4	100	(569)
<i><u>Parental Status</u></i>						
-- School-age children	34	61	3	2	100	(265)
-- No children	39	50	3	7	99	(529)
<i><u>Type of Area</u></i>						
-- Urban	38	52	3	6	99	(156)
-- Stable town or suburb	40	54	2	3	99	(302)
-- Developing town	35	55	4	6	100	(331)
<i><u>Awareness Level</u></i>						
-- Great Deal	26	68	5	--	99	(172)
-- Some	37	55	3	5	100	(247)
-- Little	44	49	3	4	100	(150)
-- Nothing	42	50	2	7	101	(215)

“Do you think the No Child Left Behind Act will eventually improve or weaken public schools in New Jersey, or will it make no difference?” [E6]

	<b><u>Improve public schools</u></b>	<b><u>Weaken public schools</u></b>	<b><u>Make no difference</u></b>	<b><u>(VOL) Will do both</u></b>	<b><u>Don't Know</u></b>	<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b><u>(n)</u></b>
<b>August 2004</b>							
-- All Adults	42%	20%	29%	2%	7%	100%	(800)
-- Those Aware	41	23	27	2	6	99	(569)
<i><u>Parental Status</u></i>							
-- School-age children	44	23	26	3	3	99	(265)
-- No children	41	18	31	1	8	99	(529)
<i><u>Type of Area</u></i>							
-- Urban	48	16	26	1	9	100	(156)
-- Stable town or suburb	41	18	32	2	7	100	(302)
-- Developing town	40	24	28	3	5	100	(331)
<i><u>Awareness Level</u></i>							
-- Great Deal	39	30	26	1	4	100	(172)
-- Some	40	27	25	2	6	100	(247)
-- Little	47	12	32	2	7	100	(150)
-- Nothing	44	13	34	2	6	99	(215)

“A few years ago, New Jersey allowed groups and individuals to start charter schools. These are schools which serve a town or district but operate independently of the local school district. Have you read or heard anything about these charter schools, or not? Have you heard a great deal, some, or only a little?” [E7]

	<u>Great Deal</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Little</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>August 2004</b>							
-- All Adults	16%	24%	16%	42%	2%	100%	(800)
<i>Parental Status</i>							
-- School-age children	22	24	19	36	--	101	(265)
-- No children	13	24	15	46	2	100	(529)
<i>Type of Area</i>							
-- Urban	20	17	15	45	3	100	(156)
-- Stable town or suburb	13	25	17	43	1	99	(302)
-- Developing town	17	27	16	39	1	100	(331)

“[ASKED OF THOSE AWARE OF CHARTER SCHOOLS:] Do you think charter schools do a better, worse or about the same job as traditional public schools in educating students?” [E8]

	<u>Better than traditional</u>	<u>Worse than traditional</u>	<u>About the same</u>	<u>(VOL) Depends</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>August 2004</b>							
-- Those Aware	44%	11%	26%	6%	14%	101%	(483)
<i>Parental Status</i>							
-- School-age children	41	13	28	3	15	100	(179)
-- No children	46	9	24	7	13	99	(303)
<i>Type of Area</i>							
-- Urban	44	13	24	4	15	100	(86)
-- Stable town or suburb	45	11	25	6	13	100	(182)
-- Developing town	44	9	27	6	14	100	(210)
<i>Awareness Level</i>							
-- Great Deal	48	19	25	7	2	101	(150)
-- Some	46	9	28	5	13	101	(207)
-- Little	37	5	24	6	27	99	(126)

“[ASKED OF THOSE AWARE OF CHARTER SCHOOLS:] Do you think the growth of charter schools has improved or weakened traditional public schools in New Jersey, or has it made no difference?” [E9]

	<u>Improved public schools</u>	<u>Weakened public schools</u>	<u>Made no difference</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>August 2004</b>						
-- Those Aware	14%	24%	52%	10%	100%	(483)
<i>Parental Status</i>						
-- School-age children	14	29	48	9	100	(179)
-- No children	14	20	55	11	100	(303)
<i>Type of Area</i>						
-- Urban	16	28	50	6	100	(86)
-- Stable town or suburb	14	22	51	13	100	(182)
-- Developing town	13	23	54	10	100	(210)
<i>Awareness Level</i>						
-- Great Deal	21	29	46	4	100	(150)
-- Some	12	22	55	10	99	(207)
-- Little	10	20	54	16	100	(126)



“Another suggested change for education in New Jersey is to give vouchers to parents in low-income areas. These vouchers could be used to send a child to any public or private school. Have you read or heard anything about school vouchers, or not? Have you heard a great deal, some, or only a little?” [E10]

	<u>Great Deal</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Little</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>August 2004</b>							
-- All Adults	16%	22%	14%	46%	2%	100%	(800)
<i>Parental Status</i>							
-- School-age children	21	19	12	47	--	99	(265)
-- No children	14	24	15	45	2	100	(529)
<i>Type of Area</i>							
-- Urban	15	16	13	54	2	100	(156)
-- Stable town or suburb	17	24	15	42	2	100	(302)
-- Developing town	17	24	14	43	2	100	(331)

“Would you support or oppose using tax funds to pay for a voucher program so children living in low-income areas can go to a different school?” [E11]

	<u>Support</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>(VOL) Depends</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>August 2004</b>						
-- All Adults	54%	37%	4%	6%	101%	(800)
-- Those Aware	53	40	4	4	101	(462)
<i>Parental Status</i>						
-- School-age children	56	38	2	4	100	(265)
-- No children	52	37	5	6	100	(529)
<i>Type of Area</i>						
-- Urban	57	35	2	6	100	(156)
-- Stable town or suburb	54	35	4	6	99	(302)
-- Developing town	52	39	4	5	100	(331)
<i>Awareness Level</i>						
-- Great Deal	56	41	3	--	100	(152)
-- Some	53	37	5	4	99	(194)
-- Little	48	42	4	6	100	(116)
-- Nothing	57	34	3	6	100	(323)

“Do you think a voucher program would improve or weaken public schools in New Jersey, or would it make no difference?” [E12]

	<b><u>Improve public schools</u></b>	<b><u>Weaken public schools</u></b>	<b><u>Make no difference</u></b>	<b><u>Don't Know</u></b>	<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b><u>(n)</u></b>
<b>August 2004</b>						
-- All Adults	32%	26%	33%	8%	99%	(800)
-- Those Aware	33	34	29	3	99	(462)
<i>Parental Status</i>						
-- School-age children	34	29	32	6	101	(265)
-- No children	31	25	34	9	99	(529)
<i>Type of Area</i>						
-- Urban	37	22	30	11	100	(156)
-- Stable town or suburb	33	26	32	9	100	(302)
-- Developing town	29	29	36	6	100	(331)
<i>Awareness Level</i>						
-- Great Deal	35	40	24	2	101	(152)
-- Some	34	35	28	3	100	(194)
-- Little	29	27	39	5	100	(116)
-- Nothing	32	17	39	12	100	(323)

“In general, who do you think should have the most responsibility for making sure that young children do well in school – teachers or parents?” [E13]

	<b><u>Teachers</u></b>	<b><u>Parents</u></b>	<b><u>(VOL) Both equally</u></b>	<b><u>Don't Know</u></b>	<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b><u>(n)</u></b>
<b>August 2004</b>						
-- All Adults	12%	51%	36%	1%	100%	(800)
<i>Parental Status</i>						
-- School-age children	11	51	37	1	100	(265)
-- No children	12	52	36	--	100	(529)
<i>Type of Area</i>						
-- Urban	12	46	39	2	99	(156)
-- Stable town or suburb	12	56	31	1	100	(302)
-- Developing town	11	52	38	--	101	(331)

“Now a quick question about teacher salaries. Currently, teacher salaries in New Jersey public schools are based largely on years of experience and academic qualifications. Do you agree or disagree with a proposal that school teachers’ pay should be tied to how well their students do on state tests?” [E14]

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>August 2004</b>					
-- All Adults	32%	60%	8%	100%	(800)
<i>Parental Status</i>					
-- School-age children	31	63	6	100	(265)
-- No children	33	59	8	100	(529)
<i>Type of Area</i>					
-- Urban	34	55	12	101	(156)
-- Stable town or suburb	30	64	6	100	(302)
-- Developing town	34	60	6	100	(331)

“[ASKED OF THOSE WHO AGREE WITH TYING TEACHER SALARIES TO STUDENT SCORES:] Should student test scores be more important than a teacher’s experience, less important, or equally as important in determining teacher pay?” [E14A]

	<u>Scores more important</u>	<u>Scores less important</u>	<u>Scores equally as important</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>August 2004</b>						
-- Those who think salaries should be tied	25%	7%	63%	4%	99%	(244)

“Do you have school-aged children in your household – that is Kindergarten through high school? [IF “YES”:] Is that public school, private school, or both?” [E15]

	<u>Public</u>	<u>Private</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>No School Age Children</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>August 2004</b>						
-- All Adults	29%	5%	2%	64%	100%	(800)
<i>Type of Area</i>						
-- Urban	27	8	4	60	99	(156)
-- Stable town or suburb	29	5	2	64	100	(302)
-- Developing town	31	3	2	64	100	(331)