

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

**EMBARGOED — NOT FOR RELEASE UNTIL: SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 1992**

**RELEASE: SL/EP 37-5 (EP 87-5)**

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## **RELEASE INFORMATION**

A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in Sunday's *Star-Ledger*. Other newspapers may also use this information in their Sunday editions. Electronic media may release after 5:00 P.M. Saturday, February 29, 1992. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll*."

## **PUBLIC SCHOOL RATING DECLINES; NEW JERSEYANS REACT TO NEW SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

New Jerseyans are more critical of the state's public schools than they were five years ago. Four-in-ten give the public schools positive ratings — an 11 point decline, and parents of public school children are more likely to say that the quality of education in their school district has gotten worse than they were in 1987.

*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll* conducted by telephone with 800 New Jersey residents between January 20 and 27, 1992 found a range of opinions about a variety of new programs that have been proposed for the public schools.

Support for mandatory school regionalization, versus retaining local school districts, varies depending on the incentives state residents are offered. While about 68 percent favor local schools, this preference decreases to 51 percent when regionalization is linked to a reduction in local property taxes.

Among the most popular recommendations for educational changes, are mandatory pre-school education and full day kindergarten classes which are approved by about 6-in-10 state residents.

New Jerseyans are about equally divided on the suggestion to have a longer school day and the proposal to add days to the school year.

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### **ATTENTION RADIO STATIONS:**

Audio is available after 5:00 P.M. on Saturday, February 29, 1992, from (908)932-3605 (Rutgers Feature Phone).

## ***EVALUATION OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS***

Overall, 42 percent rate New Jersey's public schools as "excellent" (9%) or "good" (33%) while 52 percent say they are "only fair" (32%) or "poor" (20%). This is an 11 point decline from the positive ratings that were given in 1987 when 53 percent rated the public schools as "excellent" (11%) or "good" (42%) compared to 39 percent who rated them "only fair" (29%) or "poor" (10%). Parents with school age children (48%) are more likely than New Jerseyans without children in school (40%) to give the public schools in the state a positive evaluation.

State residents are more positive about the performance of their own local schools. Fifty-three percent say their local schools are "excellent" (15%) or "good" (38%) while 41 percent rate them "only fair" (26%) or "poor" (15%). Similar to the statewide evaluation, parents with school age children (61%) are more likely than New Jerseyans without children in school (51%) to give their local schools a positive evaluation.

When state residents evaluate the change in the quality of education in their school district in the last few years, 22 percent say it is "better," 25 percent feel it is "worse," and 45 percent report the quality has "stayed the same."

Compared to 1987, there is a 9 point increase in the percentage of parents with children in the public schools who say the quality of education in their local schools has gotten "worse" in the last few years. Currently, 22 percent of these parents say their schools have gotten "worse," 38 percent say they are "better," and 38 percent feel the quality of education has "stayed the same." In 1987, 13 percent said their schools had gotten "worse" in the last few years, 46 percent reported the quality of education was "better," and 37 percent said "stayed the same."

### ***REGIONAL VERSUS LOCAL SCHOOLS***

Overall, 68 percent of state residents say they would prefer to have their own local schools compared to 23 percent who support mandatory regionalization. Parents with school

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age children (71 percent) are more likely to support local schools than households without school age children (67%).

However, when regionalization is connected to a guaranteed reduction in property taxes, there is a 17 point decline in the percentage of state residents who support local schools. Fifty-one

percent say they would prefer local schools and 41 percent favor regionalization. Fifty-nine percent of the parents with school age children, compared to 48 percent without children, prefer local schools even if their is a property tax reduction.

Looking at specific recommendations for school district consolidation, more New Jerseyans favor combining school districts without high schools than support the proposal to require school districts with less than 2,500 students to regionalize. While 72 percent "strongly" (39%) or "mildly" (33%) approve of combining school districts without a high school, 48 percent "strongly" (26%) or "mildly" (22%) approve of requiring school districts with 2,500 students to consolidate.

### ***EARLY EDUCATION***

Full day kindergarten classes and mandatory pre-school education are approved by 6-in-10 of the state's residents. Sixty-two percent say they "strongly" (43%) or "mildly" (19%) approve of having full day kindergarten classes. A similar 61 percent, report they "strongly" (43%) or "mildly" (18%) approve of mandatory pre-school education.

However, there is a 25 point decline in approval for mandatory pre-school education when the projected costs of the program are considered. Thirty-six percent say they "strongly" (18%) or "mildly" (18%) approve of mandatory pre-school education at the estimated statewide yearly cost of \$250 million dollars.

### ***TIME IN SCHOOL***

There are two proposals for extending the time students spend in school, an increase in the school year from 180 to 220 days and a longer school day. While 54 percent

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say they "strongly" (34%) or "mildly" (20%) approve of an increase in the length of the school year, 48 percent "strongly" (33%) or "mildly" (15%) approve of a longer school day.

The percentage of New Jerseyans who approve of the longer school year declines 21 points when the estimated cost of \$2 billion is included in the assessment of the program. Thirty-three percent "strongly" (17%) or "mildly" (16%) approve of the longer school year when the program costs are considered.

### ***SCHOOL CHOICE***

The possibility of giving parents the choice to send their children to any public school they want, even if it isn't in their own town is approved by a majority of state residents. Fifty-four percent "strongly" (38%) or "mildly" (16%) approve of this recommendation compared to 43 percent who "strongly" (32%) or "mildly" (11%) disapprove.

### ***TEACHER BENEFITS***

Teacher salaries and tenure are two aspects of the state's educational program that New Jerseyans were asked to assess. The majority of state residents (48%) feel that public school teachers are paid "about the right amount," compared to 36 percent who say they are paid "too little," and 15 percent who say "too much."

New Jerseyans are equally divided in their support for eliminating tenure for public school teachers. While 43 percent "strongly" (28%) or "mildly" (15%) approve of eliminating tenure, 46 percent "strongly" (27%) or "mildly" (19%) disapprove.

## BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE SL/EP37-5 (EP87-5), SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 1992

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll was conducted between January 20 and 27, 1992, when a random sample of 800 New Jerseyans, 18 years and older, was interviewed by telephone. Figures based on this sample size are subject to a sampling error of about  $\pm 3.5$  percent at a 95 percent confidence interval. Sampling error is the probable difference in results between interviewing everyone in the population versus a scientific sample taken from that population. Sampling error does not take into account other possible sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion. The questions and figures referred to in this release are presented below. The location of each question on the actual questionnaire is in brackets.

"In general, how would you rate the job public schools are doing here in New Jersey--excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" [Q.30]

	<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>January, 1992</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<u>Parental Status</u>							
--Has school age children	12	36	34	13	5	100	(226)
--Does not have school age children	8	32	31	22	6	99	(572)
<b><u>PAST SURVEYS</u></b>							
October, 1987	11	42	29	10	8	100	(1,000)
August, 1985	9	36	31	14	11	101	(800)
October, 1983	8	40	32	12	8	100	(802)

"How would you rate the job that your local schools are doing--excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" [Q.31]

	<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>January, 1992</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<u>Parental Status</u>							
--Has school age children	21	40	27	10	2	100	(226)
--Does not have school age children	13	38	26	16	7	100	(572)

"In your opinion, do you think public school teachers are paid too much, too little, or about the right amount?" [Q.32]

	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Too Little</u>	<u>About The Right Amount</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(743)</b>

"Thinking back over the last few years, would you say the quality of education in your school district has been getting better, worse, or has it stayed the same?" [Q.33]

	<u>Better</u>	<u>Worse</u>	<u>Stayed The Same</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<i>Parental Status</i>						
--Has school age children	33	24	40	3	100	(226)
--Does not have school age children	19	25	47	9	100	(572)
--Public School Parents	38	22	38	2	100	(163)

#### **PAST SURVEYS**

October, 1987						
--Public School Parents	46	13	37	4	100	(266)

"There have been some recommendations made for educational reforms in New Jersey. Please tell me if you approve or disapprove of each of the following as a way to improve public school education. Do you approve or disapprove of (NAME ITEM) to improve public school education? (IF "APPROVE" OR "DISAPPROVE", PROBE: Do you mildly or strongly (approve/disapprove)?" [Q.34]

	<u>Strongly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Disapprove</u>	<u>Strongly Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Requiring school districts without a high school to combine with other school districts.</b>							
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school age children	32	38	9	17	3	99	(226)
--Does not have school age children	42	31	6	13	7	99	(572)

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(Q.34 cont'd.)

	<u>Strongly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Disapprove</u>	<u>Strongly Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b><u>Full day kindergarten classes.</u></b>							
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school age children	55	16	14	14	2	101	(226)
--Does not have school age children	39	20	15	22	3	99	(572)
<b><u>Mandatory pre-school education.</u></b>							
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>(799)</b>
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school age children	48	14	20	16	1	99	(226)
--Does not have school age children	42	19	15	20	4	100	(571)
<b><u>Having the school year increased from 180 days to 220 days.</u></b>							
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school age children	31	20	13	34	3	101	(226)
--Does not have school age children	35	20	15	27	2	99	(572)
<b><u>Giving parents the choice to send their children to any public school they want, even if it isn't in their own town.</u></b>							
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school age children	43	12	10	32	3	100	(226)
--Does not have school age children	37	17	11	32	3	100	(572)
<b><u>Having a longer school day.</u></b>							
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school age children	33	15	12	35	4	99	(226)
--Does not have school age children	33	15	18	29	5	100	(572)

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(Q.34 cont'd.)

	<u>Strongly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Disapprove</u>	<u>Strongly Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Requiring school districts with less than 2,500 students to combine with other school districts.</b>							
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school age children	22	25	14	35	4	100	(226)
--Does not have school age children	28	21	17	22	12	100	(572)
<b>Eliminating tenure for public school teachers.</b>							
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(798)</b>
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school age children	33	12	16	30	9	100	(225)
--Does not have school age children	27	16	19	26	12	100	(571)

"Cost estimates have been made for two of the programs. Do you approve or disapprove of (READ ITEM)...(IF APPROVE/DISAPPROVE, PROBE: Do you mildly or strongly (approve/disapprove)?" [Q.35]

	<u>Strongly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Disapprove</u>	<u>Strongly Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Increasing the school day from 180 to 220 days at an estimated statewide yearly cost of \$2 billion.</b>							
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school age children	19	17	11	50	3	100	(226)
--Does not have school age children	16	15	14	50	5	100	(572)
<b>Having mandatory preschool education at an estimated statewide yearly cost of \$250 million.</b>							
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school age children	23	18	18	39	3	101	(226)

--Does not have school age children	17	18	17	41	7	100	(572)
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"Regionalization means some local school districts would be combined with others.

Overall, if you had a choice, in your town would you prefer to have your own local schools or would you prefer mandatory regionalization?" [Q.36]

	<u>Prefers Local Schools</u>	<u>Prefers Mandatory Regionalization</u>	<u>Has Regionalization</u>	<u>Depends</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<u>Parental Status</u>							
--Has school age children	71	22	2	2	2	99	(226)
--Does not have school age children	67	23	1	3	6	100	(572)

"And, if regionalization would guarantee that you would have a reduction in your local property taxes, would you prefer to have your own local schools or would you prefer regionalization?" [Q.37]

	<u>Prefers Local Schools</u>	<u>Prefers Mandatory Regionalization</u>	<u>Has Regionalization</u>	<u>Depends</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<u>Parental Status</u>							
--Has school age children	59	37	1	1	1	99	(226)
--Does not have school age children	48	43	1	4	5	101	(572)