

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

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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*. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll*."

SCHOOL FUNDING: NEW JERSEYANS SUPPORT EQUAL SPENDING FOR ALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

As the state waits for a court ruling on the legal issues involved with the distribution of funding for public school education, 3-in-4 New Jerseyans agree that spending for education must be equal in all of New Jersey's school districts. In addition, while 6-in-10 residents feel that the state needs to provide additional funding for the public schools, only 1-in-4 give positive evaluations to the state's management of the money it has available to pay for the public schools.

A *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll conducted by telephone from September 10 - 15, 1993 with a random sample of 801 New Jersey adults, also found that on the political level, neither candidate for Governor ? Jim Florio nor Christine Todd Whitman ? is viewed as being better at improving the public education system.

When it comes to New Jerseyans' overall assessment of the performance of the state's public schools, a majority feel the schools are doing an only fair or a poor job; however, state residents are more positive about their local schools.

On all of these education issues, there are clear distinctions between the opinions of residents in the 30 special needs districts that were identified in the Abbot vs. Burke decision and

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those who do not live in these districts. More residents in the 30 special needs districts have negative opinions about the performance of the public schools and see a need for additional school funding. They are also more likely to be critical of the management of the educational funds that are available.

OPINIONS OF QEA

A goal of the Quality Education Act is the equality of funding for all New Jersey public school students, and this goal is supported by 76 percent of the state's residents. Fifty-eight percent strongly and 18 percent mildly agree with the decision the court made that spending for education must be equal in all of New Jersey's school districts, while 20 percent mildly (9%) or strongly (11%) disagree with this decision. Support for equal funding in all of the state's school districts is strongest among the residents of the 30 special needs districts. Eighty-seven percent of the New Jerseyans who live in these districts agree with equalized funding compared to 72 percent of the residents in other school districts.

ALLOCATION AND MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FUNDING

One way to meet the financial needs of New Jersey's school districts is to provide additional funding, and another is to improve the use of the money that is available. Fifty-nine percent of New Jersey residents say the state needs to provide additional funding for the public schools compared to 33 percent who say there is already enough money allocated for education. More residents in the 30 special needs districts (69%) feel the state should provide additional funding than residents in other school districts (55%).

However, it is clear that New Jerseyans feel the money that is currently available can be used more effectively. Only 24 percent say the state does an excellent (2%) or good (22%) job of using the money it has for public education compared to 69 percent who feel the current use of funds is only fair (45%) or poor (24%). Residents in both the 30 special needs districts and those in other districts have similar opinions on the statewide use of school funds with about 1-in-4 giving positive evaluations and close to 7-in-10 giving negative ratings.

Poll Director Janice Ballou said, "While the support for additional educational funding indicates New Jerseyans value education and are willing to pay for it, they are putting the state on notice that the use of these funds needs to be improved."

New Jerseyans have somewhat different opinions about educational funding in their local school districts. Fifty-one percent feel that their school district needs additional funding and 42 percent say they have enough money to provide a quality education. When it comes to assessing local school funding, there are wide differences of opinion between the residents of the 30 special needs districts and those in other school districts. Seventy-four percent of the residents in the special needs districts say their local schools need additional funding compared to 42 percent of those in other school districts.

Residents are more positive about the use of school funds on the local level than they are about the state's use of school revenues. Fifty percent say their local school district does an excellent (12%) or good (38%) job of using the money it has for public education compared to 41 percent who feel the job being done is only fair (28%) or poor (13%). Residents in the 30 special needs districts (57%) are more likely than those in other districts (35%) to rate their school district's use of the money it has available to pay for the public schools only fair or poor.

EVALUATION OF NEW JERSEY'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

More New Jerseyans rate the state's public schools negatively than give them positive evaluations. Overall, 55 percent of New Jersey residents feel the state's public schools are doing an only fair (33%) or a poor (22%) job. In comparison, 39 percent rate the schools as excellent (7%) or good (32%). Residents in the 30 special needs districts are more likely to give the schools negative ratings by a margin of 61 to 53 percent.

This overall rating is about the same as the results of a January 1992 survey. In 1987 opinions about the schools were more positive with 53 percent rating them excellent or good.

One notable exception to the stability of the rating since 1992 is the increase in the poor rating given by parents who have school-aged children. In 1992, 13 percent rated the state's public schools as poor and this has increased 9 percentage points to 22 percent.

New Jerseyans are more positive about the performance of their local schools with 52 percent giving positive evaluations of excellent (16%) or good (36%) compared to 43 percent saying their local schools are only fair (29%) or poor (14%). These ratings have basically not changed since the January 1992 poll. While 30 percent of the residents in the 30 special needs districts give their local schools positive ratings, twice as many — 60 percent — of the residents in other school districts rate

their schools as excellent or good.

When New Jerseyans think about which of the candidates for governor would do a better job of improving public school education in New Jersey, 52 percent feel that there is not any difference between the incumbent Jim Florio and the challenger Christine Todd Whitman. About equal percentages select one of the candidates as a governor who would do a better job at improving public school education ? 18 percent say Florio and 20 percent choose Whitman.

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BACKGROUND MEMO ? RELEASE SL/EP44-3 (EP94-3), SUNDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1993

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll was conducted between September 10 and 15, 1993, when a random sample of 801 New Jerseyans, 18 years and older, was interviewed by telephone. Figures based on this sample size are subject to a sampling error of about "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.32]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Only Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Don't Poor</u>	<u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1993	7%	32%	33%	22%	6%	100%	(801)
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school-aged children	12	37	28	22	1	100	(218)
--Does not have school-aged children		5	31	36	22	7	101 (583)
<i>Type of Location</i>							
--Center city	1	19	32	41	7	100	(83)
--City and old suburb	9	29	39	17	7	101	(169)
--New suburb	7	35	33	20	5	100	(484)
--Rural	13	45	24	15	4	101	(65)
<i>Type of District</i>							
--30 Special needs districts	6	26	30	31	8	101	(219)
--Not a 30 special needs district		7	35	35	18	5	100 (588)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
January, 1992	9	33	32	20	6	100	(800)
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school-aged children	12	36	34	13	5	100	(226)
--Does not have school-aged children		8	32	31	22	6	99 (572)
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)

"Which of the candidates for governor do you think would do a better job of improving the public education system in New Jersey ? Florio or Whitman or don't you think it will make a difference?" [Q.33]

	<u>Florio</u>	No <u>Whitman</u>	Don't <u>Difference</u>	<u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1993	18%	20%	52%	10%	100%	(801)
<i>Parental Status</i>						
--Has school-aged children	15	25	50	10	100	(218)
--Does not have school-aged children	19	18	52	11	100	(583)
<i>Vote Status</i>						
--Likely Voters	18	20	54	9	101	(551)

"How would you rate the job that your local schools are doing--excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" [Q.34]

	<u>Excellent</u>	Only <u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	Don't <u>Poor</u>	<u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1993	16%	36%	29%	14%	5%	100%	(801)
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school-aged children	25	35	24	15	--	99	(218)
--Does not have school-aged children		13	37	30	13	7	100 (583)
<i>Type of Location</i>							
--Center city	1	13	43	35	8	100	(83)
--City and old suburb	19	29	31	18	3	100	(169)
--New suburb	17	44	26	8	4	99	(484)
--Rural	26	44	14	7	10	101	(65)
<i>Type of District</i>							
--30 Special needs district	7	23	39	26	5	100	(219)
--Not a 30 special needs district		19	41	25	10	5	100 (588)

PAST SURVEYS

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

"Recently a New Jersey superior court ruled that the state's school aid formula known as the Quality Education Act, or QEA, does not insure the same amount of funding to the state's 30 poorest school districts as it does to the wealthier districts. The court is requiring that funding for the state's 30 poorest districts must equal that of the wealthiest districts. How much have you read or heard about this QEA ruling ? a great deal, some, not much or nothing at all?" [Q.35]

	A Great Deal	Not Some	Nothing Much	Don't At All	Know	Total	(n)
September, 1993	8%	29%	27%	36%	--	100%	(801)
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school-aged children	10	28	28	34	1%	101	(218)
--Does not have school-aged children		7	29	27	36	--	99 (583)
<i>Type of District</i>							
--30 Special needs district	4	22	30	44	--	100	(219)
--Not a 30 special needs district		9	31	26	33	--	99 (588)

"In general, do you agree or disagree with the decision made by the court that spending for education must be equal in all of New Jersey's school districts? Do you (agree/disagree) mildly or strongly?" [Q.36]

	Strongly Agree	Mildly Agree	Mildly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	Total	(n)
September, 1993	58%	18%	9%	11%	3%	99%	(801)
<i>Parental Status</i>							
--Has school-aged children	59	16	10	13	1	99	(218)
--Does not have school-aged children		58	19	8	11	4	100 (583)
<i>Awareness of QEA</i>							
--Has read or heard about QEA	54	21	9	15	2	101	(515)
--Has not read or heard about QEA		67	15	8	6	6	102 (288)
<i>Type of Location</i>							
--Center city	76	13	3	5	2	99	(83)
--City and old suburb	64	18	8	10	--	100	(169)
--New suburb	51	20	10	14	5	100	(484)
--Rural	60	15	13	7	5	100	(65)
<i>Type of District</i>							
--30 Special needs district	73	14	5	5	3	100	(219)
--Not a 30 special needs district		52	20	10	14	3	99 (588)

PAST SURVEYS

July, 1990 ? "In June the New Jersey Supreme Court decided in the Abbott vs. Burke case that the state's present system of financing public education is unconstitutional because of the wide differences in funding between the rich and the poor school districts. The court decision also said that a new system of financing public education was needed to give students in poorer school districts an opportunity for an education that was equal to that of students in richer school districts."

"In general, do you agree or disagree with the decision made by the court? Do you (agree/disagree) strongly or mildly?" [Asked only of those who have heard of the Abbott vs. Burke case.]

	Strongly Agree	Mildly Agree	Mildly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	Total	(n)
TOTAL, July, 1990	32%	22%	15%	23%	9%	101%	(615)

"Based on what you have read or heard, do you feel your school district has enough money to provide a quality education for students or do you think your school district needs additional funding?" [Q.37]

	<u>Has Enough Money</u>	<u>Needs Additional Funding</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1993	42%	51%	7%	100%	(801)
<i><u>Parental Status</u></i>					
--Has school-aged children	39	59	3	101	(218)
--Does not have school-aged children	44	48	8	100	(583)
<i><u>Type of Location</u></i>					
--Center city	8	84	8	100	(83)
--City and old suburb	42	51	7	100	(169)
--New suburb	50	44	6	100	(484)
--Rural	46	46	8	100	(65)
<i><u>Type of District</u></i>					
--30 Special needs district	18	74	8	100	(219)
--Not a 30 special needs district	52	42	6	100	(588)

"And, in your opinion, do you feel that your school district does an excellent, good, only fair, or poor job of using the money it has available to pay for public schools?" [Q.38]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Only Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Don't Poor</u>	<u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1993	12%	38%	28%	13%	9%	100%	(801)
<i><u>Parental Status</u></i>							
--Has school-aged children	21	37	27	11	3	99	(218)
--Does not have school-aged children		9	38	28	14	12	101 (583)
<i><u>Type of Location</u></i>							
--Center city	2	16	47	22	12	99	(83)
--City and old suburb	13	35	24	16	12	100	(169)
--New suburb	13	44	25	11	7	100	(484)
--Rural	20	41	22	4	13	100	(65)
<i><u>Type of District</u></i>							
--30 Special needs district	8	26	35	22	9	100	(219)
--Not a 30 special needs district		14	42	25	10	9	100 (588)

"Based on what you have read or heard, do you feel the state of New Jersey has enough money dedicated to public schools to provide a quality education for students or do you think the state needs to provide additional funding for public schools?" [Q.39]

	<u>Has Enough Money</u>	<u>Needs Additional Funding</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1993	33%	59%	8%	100%	(801)
<i><u>Parental Status</u></i>					
--Has school-aged children	32	63	5	100	(218)
--Does not have school-aged children	33	57	10	100	(583)
<i><u>Type of Location</u></i>					
--Center city	19	69	12	100	(83)
--City and old suburb	33	61	6	100	(169)
--New suburb	36	55	8	99	(484)
--Rural	34	57	9	100	(65)
<i><u>Type of District</u></i>					
--30 Special needs district	24	69	8	101	(219)
--Not a 30 special needs district	37	55	9	101	(588)

"And, in your opinion, do you feel that the state does an excellent, good, only fair, or poor job of using the money it has available to pay for public schools?" [Q.40]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Only Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Don't Poor</u>	<u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1993	2%	22%	45%	24%	8%	101%	(801)
<i><u>Parental Status</u></i>							
--Has school-aged children	3	25	43	25	4	100	(218)
--Does not have school-aged children		2	20	45	23	10	100 (583)
<i><u>Type of Location</u></i>							
--Center city	--	9	35	39	18	101	(83)
--City and old suburb	4	20	47	23	5	99	(169)
--New suburb	1	25	46	22	6	100	(484)
--Rural	2	25	47	12	14	100	(65)
<i><u>Type of District</u></i>							
--30 Special needs district	3	20	35	31	11	100	(219)
--Not a 30 special needs district		2	22	48	21	7	100 (588)

*Type of Place Respondent Lives In: All municipalities in the state have been classified into one of four groups, based on location, settlement patterns, population density and growth.

Central Cities: New Jersey's largest cities: Newark, Jersey City, Paterson, Elizabeth, Trenton and Camden.

Older Cities and Suburban Areas: This category is generally based on the cities of the state over 25,000 in 1980 with the following exceptions: balance of Hudson and Union counties, included because of their high density. Long Branch and Vineland were excluded because of the rapid growth and their small proportion of their counties population. Woodbridge, South Amboy and Carteret were included because of their similarity to nearby high density areas of Union County.

New Suburbs: These are primarily "outside central city" proportions of the Census Bureau's Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, with the addition of Somerset and parts of Middlesex, Ocean and Monmouth because of their settlement patterns.

Rural Areas: Includes communities not in any of the three categories above. Salem, Warren and sections of Gloucester, Burlington, Middlesex and Monmouth are not classified as rural by the Census Bureau, but they are included here either because of the minor central cities toward which they are directed or because of their development patterns. Atlantic County outside of Atlantic City is included here because of its development pattern and similarity to surrounding rural areas.