

NEW JERSEY OPINIONS ON SCHOOL FUNDING

Conducted for:
Association for Children of New Jersey

Conducted by:



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SCHOOL FUNDING**

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NEW JERSEY OPINIONS ON SCHOOL FUNDING

I. Introduction

In order to assess New Jerseyans' opinion on school funding especially for poor urban districts, the Association for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) commissioned the Monmouth University Polling Institute to conduct an independent statewide survey of New Jersey residents.

The survey involved telephone interviews conducted between September 28 and October 3, 2006 with a random probability sample of 803 New Jersey residents 18 years old and older. Percentages for this survey have a sampling error of ± 3.5 percent at a 95 percent confidence level with 50/50 proportions. This report also describes findings for certain demographic groups in the population. Smaller sub-groups will have a higher margin of sampling error. A more comprehensive description of the research methodology is included in the appendix.

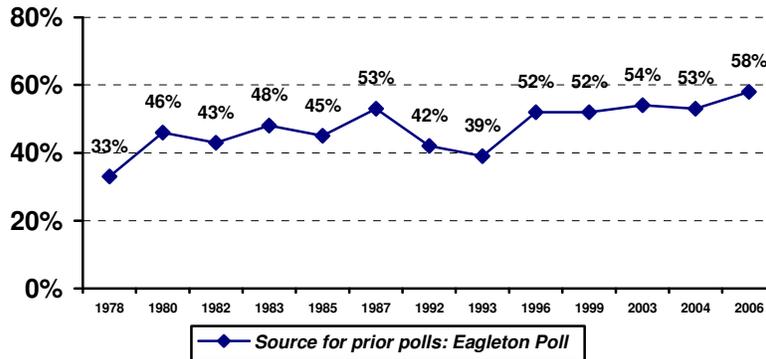
This report and the interpretation of the survey findings are the sole responsibility of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

II. Educational Quality in New Jersey

When state residents are asked to rate the job public schools are doing in New Jersey, 12 percent say excellent, 46 percent good, 25 percent fair and 9 percent poor. The combined 58 percent for "excellent/good" is a high point for this question in public polls going back to 1978.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN NEW JERSEY					
	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
All New Jersey Schools	12%	46%	25%	9%	7%
Your Local Schools	19%	47%	20%	7%	7%
Poor, Urban Schools	4%	15%	30%	36%	15%

TREND: NJ School Quality is Excellent/Good



When asked about the quality of education that their own local public schools are delivering, two-thirds give either an excellent (19%) or good (47%) rating. Another 20 percent say their local schools are only fair and 7 percent rate them as poor.

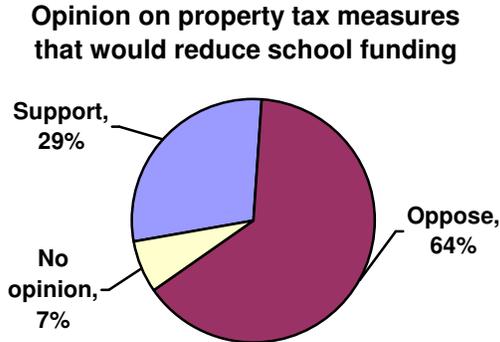
In contrast, when asked to rate the job schools in poor urban areas are doing, only 4 percent say excellent and 15 percent good, while 30 percent rate these schools as fair and 36 percent as poor. Interestingly, residents of the state’s “Abbott” districts seem to differentiate between their own schools and those in “poor, urban” areas. About half of these Abbott residents (48%) give their own schools a positive rating but only 19 percent say the same about poor, urban schools in New Jersey (Table 1).

III. State Education Funding and Property Taxes

While a small majority of New Jersey residents feel their own school district is adequately funded, the opposite is true for urban districts (Table 2). Overall, 36 percent feel their own district has enough money available to provide a quality education and an additional 12 percent feel that their district is over-funded. On the other hand, 46 percent feel that, even

with escalating property taxes, their district needs additional funding. This number is similar to public polls conducted in the prior decade.¹

However, when asked to assess the funding levels of urban schools, a majority of 56 percent of New Jerseyans feel these schools are under-funded, compared to 30 percent who say the funding levels are adequate and 8 percent who say they are over-funded. Importantly, those who feel that urban schools need additional funding include 53 percent of registered voters and 50 percent of those who live in non-Abbott districts.



Overall, New Jerseyans appear to be concerned that efforts to lower property taxes could impact the quality of education in the state. Nearly two-in-three (64%) would oppose any property tax relief measures that would leave less money available for public schools in the state.

This includes 65 percent of registered voters, 64 percent of homeowners, and 63 percent of non-Abbott residents.

Poll respondents were asked how willing they would be to consider six different measures to significantly reduce their property taxes. Proposals that would either cut funding of direct student services or simply shift the burden of taxation are the least popular. Those that would streamline school districts administratively tend to be viewed more favorably.

Specifically, 72 percent of New Jerseyans would not be willing to see cuts in extra-curricular programs to gain property tax relief. Similarly, 66 percent are not at all willing to

¹ Eagleton Polls conducted in 1993 and 1996 found that 51% and 45%, respectively, of state residents felt their school district needed additional funding.

accept an income tax increase and 61 percent feel the same about a sales tax increase. While 45 percent “might” consider cuts in supplemental state funding for poor school districts, a majority of 52 percent are definitely opposed to this.

WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER DIFFERENT PROPERTY TAX RELIEF MEASURES			
	<u>Very willing</u>	<u>Somewhat willing</u>	<u>Not willing</u>
Rather than having local government collect property taxes, having state government collect property taxes and then redistribute the funds to local school districts	22%	36%	37%
Merging your school district with other districts in your county	26%	30%	40%
Reducing the amount of supplemental funding the state gives to poor school districts	16%	29%	52%
Raising the sales tax	13%	24%	61%
Raising the income tax	8%	23%	66%
Cutting extra-curricular programs in your own local schools, such as after-school programs and athletics	11%	17%	72%

On the other hand, a majority of state residents are at least somewhat willing to consider a centralized, statewide property tax collection system (58%) or a county-wide merger of their school district (56%) as ways to lower property taxes significantly.

IV. Educational Equity

Regardless of what they feel about specific tax and funding proposals, New Jerseyans overwhelmingly agree that all children in the state should have equal access to educational opportunities. Furthermore, they feel that due to economic disparities, the same educational opportunities are not universally available and it is fair for the state to provide supplemental funding in areas with high concentrations of poverty.

The poll found that nearly all New Jerseyans (96%) agree with the idea that children in the state’s poorest communities should have the same educational opportunities as those who live in the wealthiest areas. Unfortunately, only 19 percent of the public believes that such educational equity is actually the case in New Jersey. Another 71 percent say that students in poor, urban schools do not get the same quality of education as children living in wealthier, suburban districts.

The state currently provides extra aid to 31 urban districts known as “Abbott” districts. These districts serve nearly one-quarter of all school children in New Jersey. While these “Abbott” designations have been in place for over a decade, few are familiar with the term – only 16 percent are very familiar and 24 percent are somewhat familiar, while 6-in-10 (59%) have not heard the term before. Even among residents of Abbott districts, fewer than half (47%) say they have heard of the “Abbott” term.

OPINIONS ON EDUCATIONAL EQUITY		
	<u>New Jersey Adults</u>	<u>Registered Voters</u>
Children in state’s poorest communities should have same educational opportunities as those in wealthy areas	96%	96%
It is fair that the state provides extra aid to Abbott districts to overcome disadvantages of poverty	72%	72%
While all poor children deserve help, areas with greater numbers of poor students should get extra aid	75%	74%
Educational quality is not the same in poor and wealthy areas	71%	70%

Regardless of how much they know of the Abbott specifics, a 72 percent majority feel it is fair that the state provides extra aid to these districts to help children overcome some of the disadvantages of poverty. Only 22 percent of residents say it is unfair to provide additional state money to these areas. Support levels are above 7-in-10 for registered voters and also for

residents in all types of communities (Abbott/non-Abbott, city/town/suburb) and of all income levels.

The survey results also indicate the public feels that certain communities should get extra help due to district-wide issues they face. Fully 3-in-4 New Jerseyans (75%) agree that while all poor children around the state deserve extra help, some areas have a greater number of poor students and these communities should get extra aid to help overcome the disadvantages that go along with living in those areas. Only 20 percent disagree with this statement.

V. Accountability

The survey also looked at issues around accountability. Accountability in how money is being spent in urban schools is an important issue for state residents, but it is also an important issue in suburban school districts as well.

Overall, without reference to Abbott districts or state aid for Abbotts, 32 percent of New Jerseyans feel that the state's urban schools are succeeding while 54 percent say they are not succeeding (Table 3). Those who are very familiar with Abbott districts are somewhat more likely to say urban schools are not succeeding (70%).

Respondents who felt urban schools are not succeeding were presented with a list of seven possible reasons for this. The top reasons according to these respondents are wasteful spending – 68% say this is a major reason – and lack of parental involvement (61%).

About half say lack of state accountability for performance (52%) and inadequate funding (48%) are major reasons why these schools are not succeeding. Interestingly, among urban residents, these latter two reasons are named as major reasons by 6-in-10, putting them at the same level as the top two overall reasons for this demographic group.

Only 4-in-10 (41%) of those who say urban schools are not succeeding put the blame on systematic issues, namely that it is too difficult to overcome all the disadvantages of poverty. Just 1-in-4 (27%) feel that lack of teacher dedication is a major reason for the state of urban schools, and only 14 percent write off urban children's ability to learn as a major reason why these schools may not be succeeding.

It's important to put these issues in context, particularly the spending concern. While wasteful spending is a concern for urban schools, it is an issue in suburban districts as well. Among those respondents who tab wasteful spending as a reason, 40 percent say that wasteful spending is worse in urban districts than in their own local school district, but a majority feel that the amount of wasteful spending in these urban areas is either the same (38%) or less (17%) than it is in their own home districts. This finding holds as well when the views of just non-Abbott residents are examined.

In sum, there appears to be a joint sentiment for both more spending and greater oversight of that spending as a formula for urban schools' success. The public seems to feel that most systematic disadvantages in urban districts can be overcome. The one that stands out as a continuing concern is the attitude and involvement of parents in those communities.

The survey also asked respondents to assess whether appropriate measures to account for how well schools educate their students are currently in place for both their own local schools and urban districts. In both instances, the presence of adequate accountability is a minority view (Table 4). In fact, more than half (55%) of New Jerseyans say their own district needs to institute better measures of accountability. A somewhat higher number (72%) say the same for urban districts. This finding holds regardless of whether the respondent feels urban districts get too much, too little, or adequate amounts of funding.

In a specific area of accountability, there is evidence that standardized test scores in Abbott districts have been improving over the past few years. Fully 73 percent of New Jerseyans say that such an improvement would reinforce their support of the additional funding these schools receive. Only 21 percent say they would oppose extra funding for the Abbotts even with improving test scores.

**TABLE 1
QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN NEW JERSEY**

	ALL NEW JERSEY SCHOOLS		YOUR LOCAL SCHOOLS		POOR, URBAN SCHOOLS		<i>(n)</i>
	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Excellent & Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Excellent & Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Excellent & Good</i>	
New Jersey adults	12%	58%	19%	66%	4%	19%	(803)
Registered Voters	12	59	20	66	3	18	(677)
<u>Parent</u>							
Public School Child	20	70	28	74	6	19	(219)
Other	7	57	20	66	10	28	(78)
Non-parent	9	52	15	62	2	17	(495)
<u>Community Type</u>							
Urban	8	47	11	54	6	17	(122)
Stable Town	15	63	24	71	5	21	(323)
Growing Suburb	12	60	20	68	1	16	(339)
<u>Abbott District</u>							
Yes	12	48	14	52	8	19	(125)
No	12	61	21	70	2	18	(648)

**TABLE 2
ARE CURRENT FUNDING LEVELS ADEQUATE**

	OWN SCHOOL DISTRICT			URBAN DISTRICTS			<i>(n)</i>
	<i>Has Enough Money</i>	<i>Has Too Much Money</i>	<i>Needs Additional Funding</i>	<i>Have Enough Money</i>	<i>Have Too Much Money</i>	<i>Need Additional Funding</i>	
New Jersey adults	36%	12%	46%	30%	8%	56%	(803)
Registered Voters	38	12	44	32	8	53	(677)
<u>Parent</u>							
Public School Child	31	8	56	29	6	56	(219)
Other	36	17	44	28	9	59	(78)
Non-parent	39	12	41	31	9	55	(495)
<u>Community Type</u>							
Urban	28	3	62	24	4	65	(122)
Stable Town	38	15	41	29	10	55	(323)
Growing Suburb	39	13	41	34	8	52	(339)
<u>Abbott District</u>							
Yes	23	2	71	16	4	76	(125)
No	40	14	38	34	9	50	(648)

**TABLE 3
ARE NEW JERSEY'S URBAN SCHOOLS SUCCEEDING**

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>	<u>(n)</u>
New Jersey adults	32%	54%	13%	(803)
Registered Voters	33	54	13	(677)
<u>Parent</u>				
Public School Child	35	49	16	(219)
Other	40	55	5	(78)
Non-parent	30	57	13	(495)
<u>Community Type</u>				
Urban	31	60	10	(122)
Stable Town	31	53	16	(323)
Growing Suburb	33	54	12	(339)
<u>Abbott District</u>				
Yes	33	54	13	(125)
No	31	56	13	(648)
<u>Familiar with "Abbott"</u>				
Very Familiar	25	70	5	(147)
Somewhat Familiar	32	54	14	(208)
Not Familiar	35	51	14	(440)

**TABLE 4
BETTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY IS NEEDED**

	<u>For Your Own Local Schools</u>	<u>For Urban Districts</u>	<u>(n)</u>
New Jersey adults	55%	72%	(803)
Registered Voters	54	71	(677)
<u>Parent</u>			
Public School Child	58	72	(219)
Other	48	69	(78)
Non-parent	55	72	(495)
<u>Community Type</u>			
Urban	62	75	(122)
Stable Town	54	67	(323)
Growing Suburb	54	74	(339)
<u>Abbott District</u>			
Yes	66	77	(125)
No	52	70	(648)
<u>Familiar with "Abbott"</u>			
Very Familiar	61	74	(147)
Somewhat Familiar	53	72	(208)
Not Familiar	54	72	(440)

APPENDIX:
SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire for this survey was drafted by Monmouth University Polling Institute (MUPI) research staff in consultation with research concerns raised by the sponsor. The draft questionnaire was pretested with a random group of New Jersey residents and modifications were made to the survey instrument in order to increase the understandability and accuracy of the questions asked. MUPI retained final authority over question wording.

A random proportional probability sample was used to select the 803 New Jersey residents 18 years of age and older who were contacted to participate in this study. The sample was designed to make sure that each of six regions (defined by area code) and population gender were proportionately. The three digit exchange was used to match telephone numbers and geographic areas. The remaining four digits were randomly selected. This procedure insures that those with unlisted or new telephone numbers are included in the sample. Each working phone number was called a minimum of three times, at different times of the week, in an effort to reach people who were infrequently at home.

The study involved CATI interviews with a random probability sample of 803 New Jersey residents 18 years of age and older. The CATI interviews were conducted by telephone September 28, 2006 to October 3, 2006 by experienced professional interviewers who were monitored by the MUPI research staff.

While those interviewed in a survey ideally will have the same characteristics as the population they represent, samples frequently may under-represent groups that are more difficult to interview, such as the elderly or those with less than a high school education. To correct this imbalance, a statistical technique known as "weighting" is used. The weighting procedure

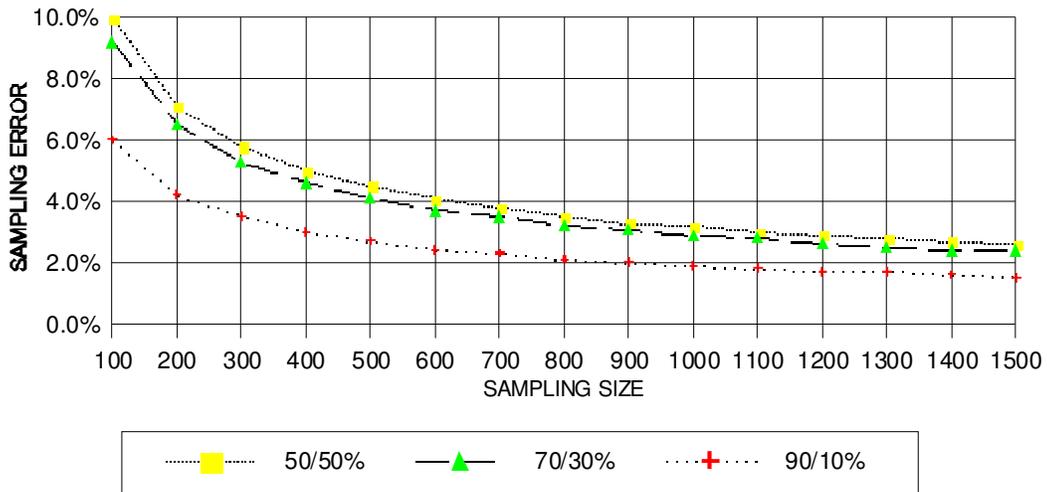
compares New Jersey population figures for age and education based on census data with those of the sample.

When there is significant difference between these two figures, the sample is weighted so it more accurately reflects the population of the state. For example, if census figures show 39 percent of New Jerseyans, 18 years and older, to have a high school education, and the sample consists of 32 percent with a high school education, each respondent in this category would be counted as 1.21 persons to adjust for this difference.

The percentages obtained in a sample survey are estimates of what the distribution of responses would be if the entire population had been surveyed. "Sampling error" is a statistical term which describes the probable difference between interviewing everyone in a given population and a sample drawn from that population. For example, the sampling error associated with a sample of this size is ± 3.5 percent at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus, if 47 percent in this sample are found to agree with a particular statement, the percentage of agreement within the population from which the sample was drawn would be between 43.5 and 50.5 percent ($47 \pm 3.5\%$) 95 times out of 100.

Sampling error increases as the sample size is reduced. For, example, if statements are made based on a sub-group of 600, the sampling error is ± 4 percent. This fact must be kept in mind when comparing the responses of different groups within a sample (e.g. men compared with women). Readers should note that sampling error does not take into account other possible sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error.

SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING ERROR



Demographic Characteristics (n=803)

<u>Registered Voter</u>		<u>Age</u>	
80%	Yes	21%	18 to 29
20	No	42	30 to 49
		24	50 to 69
		13	70 and older
<u>Party Identification</u>		<u>Child in the home</u>	
36%	Democrat	39%	Yes
44	Independent/Other	61	No
20	Republican		
<u>Gender</u>		<u>Years in New Jersey</u>	
48%	Male	29%	20 or less
52	Female	37	21 to 40
		34	More than 40/entire life
<u>Education</u>		<u>Region of the State</u>	
47%	High School or Less	48%	North
23	Some College	24	Central
30	College Grad	28	South
<u>Race</u>		<u>Type of Municipality</u>	
66%	White, non-Hispanic	8%	Major Urban Center
34	Hispanic, Black, Asian, other	15	Other Urban Area
<u>Family Income</u>		37	Older Town & Suburb
39%	Under \$50,000	34	Growing Suburb & Town
37	\$50-99,999	6	Rural Area
24	\$100,000 or more		

STATEMENT FOR PUBLIC RELEASE OF DATA

Any public release of these data must include the following information in addition to the actual text of the questions in the survey instrument:

This survey was conducted by telephone from September 28 to October 3, 2006 with a scientifically selected random sample of 803 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 think the state was in good economic condition, 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. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported by race or age, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. 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 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. This study was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT



ACNJ School Funding Survey

Interview dates: Sept. 28-Oct. 3, 2006

Sample = 803 New Jersey adults

LOCAL SCHOOL QUALITY

A1. In general, how would you rate the job the public schools are doing here in New Jersey – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

12% excellent
46 good
25 only fair
9 poor
7 (VOL) don't know/refused

A2. How closely do you follow what is going on in your local public schools – very, somewhat, or not closely?

37% very closely
36 somewhat closely
27 not closely
1 (VOL) don't know/refused

A3. Overall, would you say the children in your local public schools are receiving an excellent, good, fair, or poor education?

19% excellent
47 good
20 fair
7 poor
7 (VOL) don't know/refused

A4. Based on what you have read or heard, do you feel your school district has enough money to provide a quality education for its students, too much money, or do you think it needs additional funding?

36% Has enough money
12 Too much money
46 Needs additional funding
7 (VOL) don't know/refused

PROPERTY TAX RELIEF IMPACT

B1. Right now the state is trying to draw up plans to reduce property taxes. I'm going to read you a number of proposals that have been mentioned as ways to lower property taxes. In order to achieve what you would consider to be a SIGNIFICANT reduction in property taxes, how willing would you be to accept [READ ITEM] – very, somewhat, or not willing?
ROTATE

	Very willing	Somewhat willing	Not willing	Don't know/Ref
A. Raising the sales tax	13%	24%	61%	1%
B. Raising the income tax	8	23	66	2
C. Rather than having local government collect property taxes, having state government collect property taxes and then redistribute the funds to local school districts	22	36	37	6
D. Merging your school district with other districts in your county	26	30	40	4
E. Reducing the amount of supplemental funding the state gives to poor school districts	16	29	52	3
F. Cutting extra-curricular programs in your own local schools, such as after-school programs and athletics	11	17	72	1

B2. Would you support or oppose measures aimed at reducing property taxes, if it means less money will be available for public schools?

29% support
64 oppose
7 (VOL) don't know/refused

ABBOTT DISTRICTS

C1. Now I'd like to ask you some questions about the state's poorest school districts, including inner cities and urban areas. Would you say the children attending public schools in the poorest areas of New Jersey are receiving an excellent, good, fair, or poor education?

4% excellent
15 good
30 fair
36 poor
15 (VOL) don't know/refused

C2. Based on what you have read or heard, do you feel New Jersey’s urban school districts have enough money to provide a quality education for their students, too much money, or do you think they need additional funding?

30% Has enough money
 8 Too much money
 56 Needs additional funding
 6 (VOL) don’t know/refused

C3. In general, do you agree or disagree that children in the state’s poorest communities should have the same educational opportunities as those who live in the wealthiest areas?

96% Agree
 3 Disagree
 1 (VOL) don’t know/refused

C4. In New Jersey, do you feel students in poor, urban schools currently do or do not get the same quality of education as children living in wealthier, suburban districts?

19% Do get same quality
 71 Do not get same quality
 10 (VOL) don’t know/refused

C5. Based on what you know or have heard, are New Jersey’s urban schools succeeding or not?

32% Succeeding
 54 Not succeeding
 13 (VOL) don’t know/refused

[IF “NOT SUCCEEDING IN C5, ASK C6. ALL OTHERS SKIP TO C8]

C6. I’m going to read you a list of reasons some people have given for why urban schools are NOT succeeding. For each, please tell me how much of a reason YOU think it is. **[READ ITEM]** – is this a major, minor, or not a reason why urban schools are not succeeding? **ROTATE**

(n=453)	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Don’t know/Ref
A. There is too much wasteful spending	68%	16%	13%	3%
B. The state does not hold these schools accountable for their performance	52	24	19	5
C. The teachers are not as dedicated as teachers in suburban schools	27	34	36	3
D. The parents don’t take an interest in their child’s education	61	27	10	2
E. It is too difficult to overcome all the disadvantages of poverty in those communities	41	30	27	2
F. They don’t receive enough funding	48	27	22	4
G. Many children who live in urban areas will never be able to learn	14	22	62	2

[IF “A. WASTEFUL SPENDING” IS MAJOR/MINOR REASON, ASK:]

C7. Do you think that the amount of wasteful spending in these urban districts is more, less or the same as in your own school district? Is that a lot or a little [more/less]?
(n=377)

30%	Lot more
10	Little more
38	Same
8	Little less
9	Lot less
5	(VOL) don't know/refused

C8. How familiar are you with the term “Abbott schools” or “Abbott districts” – very familiar, somewhat familiar, or you really haven't heard the term before?

16%	very familiar
24	somewhat familiar
59	haven't heard the term before
1	(VOL) don't know/refused

C9. The Abbott districts serve about one-quarter of all the school children in New Jersey. They are mostly urban areas that receive extra state aid to help children overcome some of the disadvantages of poverty. In general, do you feel it is fair or unfair that the state provides additional money to these particular school districts?

72%	fair
22	unfair
5	(VOL) don't know/refused

C10. And would you support or oppose the additional funding for Abbott schools if you learned that children in Abbott districts are now performing better on standardized tests since they started receiving extra state aid?

73%	support
21	oppose
6	(VOL) don't know/refused

C11. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: While all poor children around the state deserve extra help, some areas have a greater number of poor students and these communities should get extra aid to help overcome the disadvantages that go along with living in those areas.

75%	agree
20	disagree
4	(VOL) don't know/refused

ACCOUNTABILITY

D1. Now looking at assessing schools as a whole. Do you think appropriate measures are in place to hold YOUR OWN LOCAL SCHOOLS accountable for how well they educate students or are better measures needed?

39% appropriate measures in place
55 better measures needed
7 (VOL) don't know/refused

D2. And do you think appropriate measures are in place to hold URBAN DISTRICTS accountable for how well they educate students or are better measures needed?

18% appropriate measures in place
72 better measures needed
10 (VOL) don't know/refused