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# **The Education Policy and Leadership Center Public Education Funding Survey 2007**

Prepared for  
**The Education Policy and Leadership Center**

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**Center for Opinion Research  
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**Franklin & Marshall College  
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## **Executive Summary**

The Center for Opinion Research at Franklin & Marshall College conducted a telephone survey of 800 randomly selected Pennsylvania adults about their thoughts and opinions regarding the quality, performance and funding of public education both in their local schools and across the state of Pennsylvania. Interviewing for the survey took place between September 17 and October 8, 2007. Interviews lasted an average of sixteen minutes. The sampling error for a random sample of 800 is plus or minus 3.5 percent.

Several of the survey's major findings are presented in the bullet points below. Additional results are presented in the material that follows this summary.

- Almost all Pennsylvanians believe that the state's public schools are indispensable for the continued health of the Commonwealth. More than nine in ten Pennsylvania adults believe high quality public schools are vital for the success of the state economy (94%), for the success of their local communities (94%), and for creating successful citizens (96%). There is near total agreement, too, that "everyone benefits from high quality public schools" (91%) (pg 3).
- Only two in five (44%) Pennsylvanians believe public schools do an "excellent" or "good" job of preparing students for jobs after graduation, and half (51%) believe the public schools are doing an "excellent" or "good" job of preparing students for college (pg 3).
- Most Pennsylvanians say that teachers and parents bear the greatest responsibility for the quality of public education in the state. Elected officials in the legislature and governor's office are less likely to be held responsible for school quality (pg 4).
- Nine in ten (91%) respondents believe the quality of public schools varies among school districts, and most of these people believe the quality varies a "great deal" (46%) or a "fair amount" (45%) from school to school (pg 5).

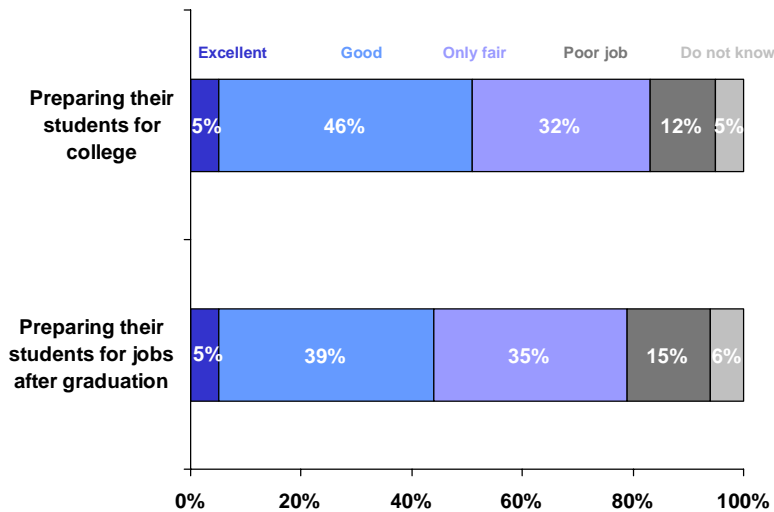
- Almost everyone (96%) agrees that public schools should be held accountable for how well they prepare their students, but far fewer agree (55%) that Pennsylvania’s public schools actually are held accountable for how well they prepare their students (pg 6).
- Pennsylvanians believe that family support (93%) and teacher quality (88%) have the most influence on student achievement. The availability of up-to-date text books (70%), school funding (64%), the design of the school curriculum (63%), the availability of computers and technology (60%), class sizes (56%), and student ability (55%) are each accorded a lesser but still substantial role in student achievement by Pennsylvanians (pg 6).
- Pennsylvania residents are critical of the state’s current system for funding public education in the Commonwealth. More than half of residents (56%) disagree that the current system of funding schools in Pennsylvania is fair. More than four in five (85%) respondents agree the state should pay a greater share of local schools’ education expenses and that the state should pay half of local schools’ total education expenses (84%). Most (85%) also believe that schools with more special needs students should receive more money from the state. Almost every adult interviewed (94%) thinks funding all Pennsylvania public schools more fairly is important (pg 7).
- Pennsylvanians are divided about the way their local schools spend money. Nearly the same proportions of citizens “strongly disagree” as “strongly agree” that their local public school uses the money it has efficiently and that their local public school spends money on the right things. Yet, very few citizens (8%) believe their local public schools spend “too much” money and two in three (65%) believe that their local district needs more money to provide students with a quality education (pg 8).
- Pennsylvanians strongly support the right of all children in the Commonwealth to have a quality public education. Most believe that all students should have access to high quality programs and services, and most believe the state government has the responsibility to guarantee access to quality public education (pg 9).

## The Importance and Performance of Public Schools

Almost all Pennsylvanians believe that the state’s public schools are indispensable for the continued health of the Commonwealth. More than nine in ten Pennsylvania adults believe high quality public schools are vital for the success of the state economy (94%), for the success of their local communities (94%), and for creating successful citizens (96%). There is near total agreement, too, that “everyone benefits from high quality public schools” (91%).

Pennsylvanians are divided about how well the state’s public schools prepare their students for jobs and for college. Only two in five (44%) Pennsylvanians believe public schools do an “excellent” or “good” job of preparing students for jobs after graduation, and half (51%) believe the public schools are doing an “excellent” or “good” job of preparing students for college (Figure 1). Residents of Philadelphia are more

**Figure 1 Ratings of Public School Performance**

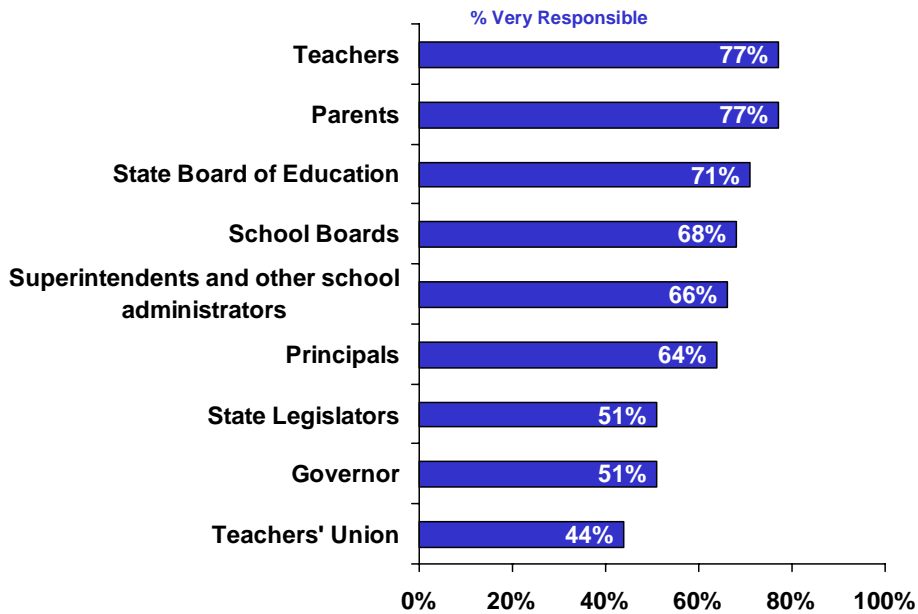


Question: Do you think Pennsylvania’s public schools are doing an excellent, good, only fair, or poor job of...?

likely than residents of any other part of the state to rate the public schools' performance as "poor." Parents with children in the public school system tend to rate the schools' performance a bit better than those residents who do not have children in public schools.

Most Pennsylvanians say that teachers and parents bear the greatest responsibility for the quality of public education in the state. Elected officials in the legislature and governor's office are less likely to be held responsible for school quality, as Figure 2 shows. The youngest respondents are more likely than those over 25 years of age to believe the state legislature and governor are "very responsible" for the quality of education in the state. Women are more likely than men to believe the governor is "very responsible" for the quality of education in the state.

**Figure 2** Responsibility for Public School Quality in Pennsylvania



Question : To what degree do you feel [fill group] are responsible for the quality of public education in Pennsylvania? Do you feel they are very responsible, somewhat responsible, not too responsible, or not at all responsible for the quality of the public education system?

Nine in ten (91%) respondents believe the quality of public schools varies among school districts, and most of these people believe the quality varies a “great deal” (46%) or a “fair amount” (45%) from school to school. Respondents offer a variety of reasons why the quality of education differs from district to district, but school funding is the most common reason. Interestingly, when respondents specified the source of the funding inequality, they mentioned local resources eight times more often than the distribution of state money (Table 1). This distinction is related to respondents’ thinking about who is responsible for school quality. Those respondents who suggest state funding is the problem are much more likely than others to believe that state legislators and the governor are responsible for quality. In fact, they believe that legislators and the governor are just as responsible for education quality as are teachers and parents.

**Table 1            Reasons for Differences in Educational Quality by School District**

| <b>What do you think is the main reason that some schools can provide a higher quality than others?</b> |   |
|---|---|
| 53%   | Funding (Net)   |
| 44%   | Funding: money, economics, resources, politics (in general)           |
| 8%  | Funding: local wealth, local tax base, school taxes/real estate taxes |
| 1%  | Funding: state money, grants, state taxes                             |
| 17%   | Teachers, quality teachers, quality of teaching                       |
| 10%   | Location in general   |
| 5%  | Characteristics of parents or students                                |
| 5%  | School size, class size   |
| 3%  | Quality of parenting/parental involvement                             |
| 3%  | School administrators, school boards                                  |
| 2%  | Other   |
| 4%  | Do not know   |

\*Asked only of respondents who believe education quality varies among school districts (n=722).

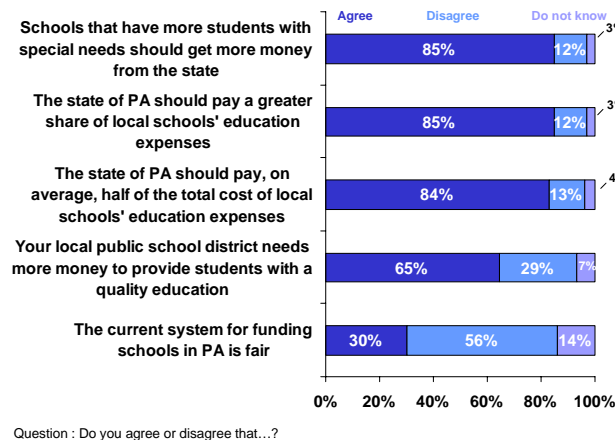
## Achievement

Almost everyone (96%) agrees that public schools should be held accountable for how well they prepare their students, but far fewer agree (55%) that Pennsylvania's public schools actually are held accountable for how well they prepare their students. Pennsylvanians believe that family support (93%) and teacher quality (88%) have the most influence on student achievement. The availability of up-to-date text books (70%), school funding (64%), the design of the school curriculum (63%), the availability of computers and technology (60%), class sizes (56%), and student ability (55%) are each accorded a lesser but still substantial role in student achievement by Pennsylvanians.

## Public School Funding and Spending

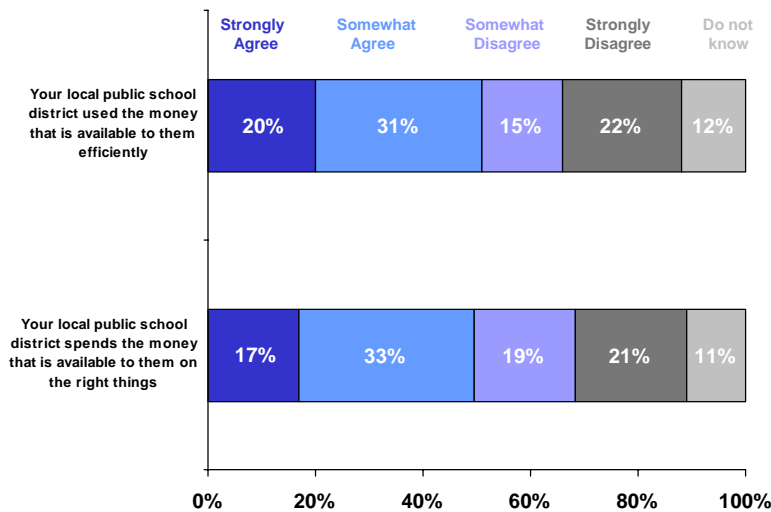
Pennsylvania residents are critical of the state’s current system for funding public education in the Commonwealth. More than half of residents (56%) disagree that the current system of funding schools in Pennsylvania is fair, although women are more likely to disagree than men. More than four in five (85%) respondents agree the state should pay a greater share of local schools’ education expenses and that the state should pay half of local schools’ total education expenses (84%). Public school parents and women are more likely than those who do not have children in public schools and men to believe the state should pay half of local education expenses. Two in three citizens believe their local school district needs more money to provide their students with a quality education. Philadelphia residents are more likely than residents of other parts of the state to say local schools need more money. Most (85%) citizens believe that schools with more special needs students should get more money from the state (Figure 3). Almost every adult interviewed (94%) thinks funding all Pennsylvania public schools more fairly is important.

**Figure 3 Funding Local Public Schools**



Pennsylvanians are divided about the way their local schools spend money. Nearly the same proportions of citizens “strongly disagree” as “strongly agree” that their local public school uses the money it has efficiently and that their local public school spends money on the right things (see Figure 4). Residents of Philadelphia are more likely than residents of other parts of the state to disagree that local schools use their money efficiently and effectively, while public school parents are more likely than non-parents to agree. Yet, very few citizens (8%) believe their local public schools spend “too much” money to educate their students and, as noted earlier, two in three (65%) believe their local district needs more money to provide students with a quality education.

**Figure 4 Local School Spending**

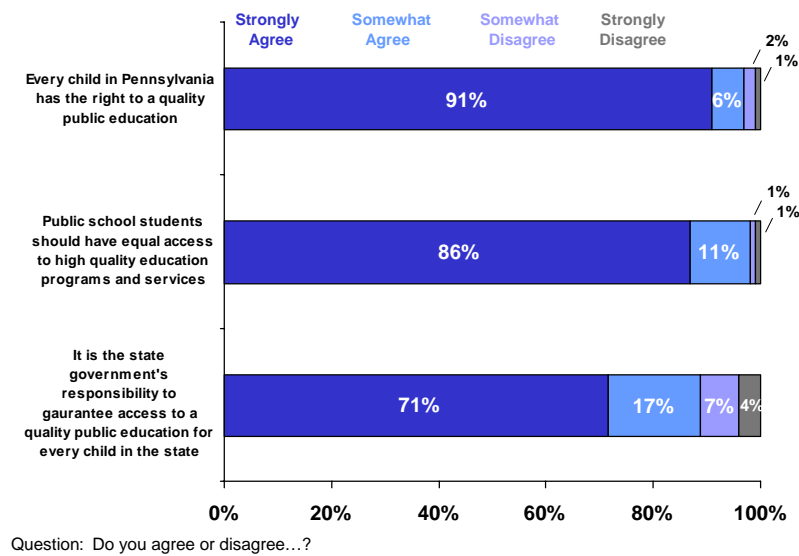


Question: Do you agree or disagree that...?

## State Responsibility, Student Rights

Pennsylvanians strongly support the right of all children in the Commonwealth to have a quality public education. Most believe that all students should have access to high quality programs and services, and most believe the state government has the responsibility to guarantee access to quality public education (Figure 5).

**Figure 5 Support for Quality Education**



## Attachment A – Marginal Frequency Report

Q1 Do you think Pennsylvania's public schools are doing an excellent, good, fair, or poor job of preparing their students for jobs after graduation?

|     |             |
|-----|-------------|
| 5%  | Excellent   |
| 39% | Good        |
| 35% | Fair        |
| 15% | Poor        |
| 6%  | Do not know |

Q2 Do you think Pennsylvania's public schools are doing an excellent, good, fair, or poor job of preparing their students for college?

|     |             |
|-----|-------------|
| 5%  | Excellent   |
| 46% | Good        |
| 32% | Fair        |
| 12% | Poor        |
| 5%  | Do not know |

Q3 Do you think the quality of public schools is pretty much the same throughout the state, or do you think that the quality varies among school districts?

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 5%  | Quality of schools is same throughout the state   |
| 91% | Quality varies among schools throughout the state |
| 5%  | Do not know                                       |

Q4 How much do you think the quality varies among school districts in the state...a great deal, a fair amount, not much, or hardly at all?

n=722

|     |               |
|-----|---------------|
| 46% | A great deal  |
| 45% | A fair amount |
| 6%  | Not much      |
| 1%  | Hardly at all |
| 2%  | Do not know   |

Q5 What do you think is the main reason that some schools can provide a higher quality than others?

n=722

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 8%  | Funding: local wealth, local tax base, school taxes/real estate taxes |
| 44% | Funding: money, economics, resources, politics (in general)           |
| 1%  | Funding: state money, grants, state taxes                             |
| 10% | Location in general   |
| 3%  | Quality of parenting/parental involvement                             |
| 3%  | School administrators, school boards                                  |
| 5%  | School size, class size   |
| 5%  | Characteristics of parents or students                                |
| 17% | Teachers, quality teachers, quality of teaching                       |
| 2%  | Other   |
| 4%  | Do not know   |

Q6 Do you agree or disagree ... Every child in Pennsylvania has the right to a quality public education?

91% Strongly Agree  
 6% Somewhat Agree  
 2% Somewhat Disagree  
 1% Strongly Disagree

Q7 Do you agree or disagree ... It is the state government's responsibility to guarantee access to a quality public education for every child in the state?

71% Strongly Agree  
 17% Somewhat Agree  
 7% Somewhat Disagree  
 4% Strongly Disagree

Q8 Do you agree or disagree ... Public school students should have equal access to high quality education programs and services?

86% Strongly Agree  
 11% Somewhat Agree  
 1% Somewhat Disagree  
 1% Strongly Disagree

Q10 To what degree do you feel [fill phrase]...are responsible for the quality of public education in Pennsylvania? Do you feel they are very responsible, somewhat responsible, not too responsible, or not at all responsible for the quality of the public education system?

|   | Very Responsible | Somewhat Responsible | Not Too Responsible | Not Responsible At All | Do Not Know |
|---|------------------|----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Teachers  | 77%              | 21%                  | 1%                  | 1%                     | 0%          |
| Parents   | 77%              | 18%                  | 4%                  | 1%                     | 0%          |
| State Board of Education                        | 71%              | 22%                  | 4%                  | 2%                     | 2%          |
| School Boards                                   | 68%              | 27%                  | 3%                  | 2%                     | 1%          |
| Superintendents and Other School Administrators | 66%              | 28%                  | 3%                  | 1%                     | 2%          |
| Principals                                      | 64%              | 30%                  | 4%                  | 1%                     | 1%          |
| State Legislators                               | 51%              | 36%                  | 8%                  | 4%                     | 1%          |
| Governor  | 51%              | 35%                  | 8%                  | 4%                     | 1%          |
| Teachers' Union                                 | 44%              | 32%                  | 12%                 | 8%                     | 4%          |

Q11 Do you agree or disagree that ALL public schools in Pennsylvania should be held accountable for how well they prepare their students?.

79% Strongly Agree  
17% Somewhat Agree  
2% Somewhat Disagree  
1% Strongly Disagree  
1% Do not know

Q12 Do you agree or disagree that the public schools in Pennsylvania are held accountable for how well they prepare their students?

26% Strongly Agree  
29% Somewhat Agree  
20% Somewhat Disagree  
17% Strongly Disagree  
8% Do not know

Q13 Do you agree or disagree that high quality public schools are vital for the success of Pennsylvania's economy?

74% Strongly Agree  
20% Somewhat Agree  
4% Somewhat Disagree  
1% Strongly Disagree  
2% Do not know

Q14 Do you agree or disagree that high quality public schools are vital for the success of my local community?

76% Strongly Agree  
19% Somewhat Agree  
4% Somewhat Disagree  
1% Strongly Disagree  
1% Do not know

Q15 Do you agree or disagree that high quality public schools are vital for creating successful citizens?

82% Strongly Agree  
14% Somewhat Agree  
2% Somewhat Disagree  
1% Strongly Disagree

Q16 Do you agree or disagree that everyone benefits from high quality public schools?

79% Strongly Agree  
12% Somewhat Agree  
6% Somewhat Disagree  
3% Strongly Disagree

Q17 What are the benefits that good schools provide for Pennsylvania?

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| 24% | Economic benefit for the community/state             |
| 4%  | Fewer social problems                                |
| 10% | General improved community/state                     |
| 26% | Citizenship: better citizens, community participants |
| 13% | College preparation                                  |
| 17% | Instill common sense, life skills, life preparedness |
| 23% | Educated people in general                           |
| 17% | Job preparation                                      |
| 15% | Produce good character/well-rounded people           |
| 6%  | Other  |
| 10% | Do not know  |

\*Responses may total more than 100% because multiple responses were accepted.

Q18 Recent test scores show that there are many students who did not meet academic proficiency standards this year, while there are many other students who did meet these standards.

How much influence do you think [fill phrase] has on student achievement?

|   | Major Influence | Moderate Influence | Minor Influence | No Influence at All | Do Not Know |
|---|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Family support for the child                        | 93%             | 6%                 | 1%              | 0%                  | 1%          |
| Quality of teaching                                 | 88%             | 10%                | 1%              | 0%                  | 1%          |
| Availability of up-to-date textbooks                | 70%             | 22%                | 6%              | 1%                  | 1%          |
| School funding                                      | 64%             | 27%                | 6%              | 1%                  | 2%          |
| School curriculum                                   | 63%             | 30%                | 4%              | 1%                  | 2%          |
| Availability of up-to-date computers and technology | 60%             | 27%                | 10%             | 2%                  | 1%          |
| Class size  | 56%             | 35%                | 8%              | 1%                  | 1%          |
| Student ability                                     | 55%             | 35%                | 7%              | 1%                  | 2%          |
| Standardized testing                                | 22%             | 41%                | 26%             | 8%                  | 3%          |

Q19 Students are now required to take PSSAs, which are Pennsylvania’s standardized tests to measure performance in reading and math, every year.

In your opinion, how accurately do the results of these standardized tests provide information about ...

|   | Very Accurately | Somewhat Accurately | Not Too Accurately | Not Accurately At All | Do Not Know |
|---|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| The quality of teaching in your local schools                   | 18%             | 54%                 | 16%                | 7%                    | 5%          |
| The amount of academic growth that students have made in a year | 14%             | 61%                 | 15%                | 5%                    | 6%          |
| The performance of students at your local schools               | 13%             | 62%                 | 14%                | 5%                    | 7%          |

Q24 Now, thinking about funding and school budget issues do you agree or disagree that the current system for funding schools in Pennsylvania is fair?

|     |                   |
|-----|-------------------|
| 6%  | Strongly Agree    |
| 24% | Somewhat Agree    |
| 22% | Somewhat Disagree |
| 34% | Strongly Disagree |
| 14% | Do not know       |

Q25 How much of Pennsylvania public schools' educational expenses on average, do you think, are funded by the state of Pennsylvania?

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 20% | Less than one-third   |
| 34% | Between one-third and one-half  |
| 21% | Between one-half and two-thirds   |
| 6%  | More than two-thirds of Pennsylvania public school's education expenses are funded by the state |
| 19% | Do not know   |

Q26 Twenty-five years ago more than half the money it took to run local school districts was provided by the state of Pennsylvania. This past year, however, the state provided only about 40 percent of the money for local schools' education expenses.

Do you agree or disagree that the state of Pennsylvania should pay a greater share of local schools' education expenses?

|     |                   |
|-----|-------------------|
| 62% | Strongly Agree    |
| 23% | Somewhat Agree    |
| 7%  | Somewhat Disagree |
| 5%  | Strongly Disagree |
| 3%  | Do not know       |

Q27 Do you agree or disagree that the state of Pennsylvania should pay, on average, half of the total cost of local schools' education expenses?

|     |                   |
|-----|-------------------|
| 58% | Strongly Agree    |
| 26% | Somewhat Agree    |
| 8%  | Somewhat Disagree |
| 5%  | Strongly Disagree |
| 4%  | Do not know       |

Q28 Pennsylvania had one of the nation’s worst rates of education equity, which is the difference in funding available in wealthy districts compared to poor districts. Under the current funding system of state and local taxes, some districts spend as much as \$17,000 per student while other districts spend about \$6,000 per student.

How important is it for the state to make it possible for all public schools in Pennsylvania to be funded more fairly? Is it...

- 79% Very important
- 15% Somewhat important
- 3% Not too important
- 2% Not at all important
- 1% Do not know

Q30 Do you agree or disagree that...

|  | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Do Not Know |
|--|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Schools that have more students with special needs should get more money from the state          | 53%            | 32%            | 8%                | 4%                | 3%          |
| Your local public school district needs more money to provide students with a quality education  | 39%            | 26%            | 16%               | 13%               | 7%          |
| Your local public school district uses the money that is available to them efficiently           | 20%            | 31%            | 15%               | 22%               | 12%         |
| Your local public school district spends the money that is available to them on the right things | 17%            | 33%            | 19%               | 21%               | 11%         |

Q23 Do you think that your local public school spends too much, too little, or about the right amount to educate its students?

- 8% Too much
- 37% Too little
- 42% About the right amount
- 12% Do not know

Q22 Do you think that public schools in Pennsylvania spend too much, too little, or about the right amount to educate their students?

- 8% Too much
- 54% Too little
- 24% About the right amount
- 14% Do not know

Q31 What do you think would be the fairest way to provide additional state funding for our public schools?

- 31% Through an increase in the sales tax
- 14% Through an increase in the income tax
- 43% By raising some other state tax
- 13% Do not know

CNTY What is the name of county you live in?

|     |              |
|-----|--------------|
| 8%  | Philadelphia |
| 13% | Northeast    |
| 7%  | Allegheny    |
| 9%  | Southwest    |
| 11% | Northwest    |
| 36% | Central      |
| 16% | Southeast    |

AGE What was your age on your last birthday?

|     |            |
|-----|------------|
| 8%  | 18-24      |
| 20% | 25-34      |
| 19% | 35-44      |
| 20% | 45-54      |
| 14% | 55-64      |
| 20% | 65 or more |

EDUC What was the highest grade level of school you have completed?

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 4%  | Non high school graduate                              |
| 34% | High school graduate (or Graduate Equivalency Degree) |
| 10% | Some college  |
| 13% | Two-year or tech degree                               |
| 23% | Four year college degree                              |
| 16% | Postgraduate degree                                   |

WORK Are you currently working FULL-time, PART-time, going to school, keeping house or something else?

|     |                 |
|-----|-----------------|
| 55% | Full time       |
| 11% | Part time       |
| 3%  | Going to school |
| 8%  | Keeping house   |
| 1%  | Unemployed      |
| 3%  | Disabled        |
| 19% | Retired         |

MAR What is your CURRENT marital status, are you married, separated, divorced, or a widow or widower?

|     |                       |
|-----|-----------------------|
| 22% | Single, never married |
| 59% | Married               |
| 2%  | Separated             |
| 9%  | Divorced              |
| 9%  | Widow, widower        |

Hisp Are you Hispanic or Latino, or NOT?

|     |     |
|-----|-----|
| 2%  | Yes |
| 98% | No  |

RACE Which one or more of the following best describes your racial background?

|     |                                |
|-----|--------------------------------|
| 88% | White                          |
| 8%  | Black or African American      |
| 2%  | Asian                          |
| 1%  | American Indian, Alaska Native |
| 1%  | Other                          |

NumA Including yourself, how many adults 18 years of age or OLDER CURRENTLY live in this household?

|     |           |
|-----|-----------|
| 26% | 1         |
| 57% | 2         |
| 11% | 3         |
| 6%  | 4 or more |

NumC How MANY children UNDER 18 currently live in this household?

|     |           |
|-----|-----------|
| 60% | None      |
| 16% | 1         |
| 15% | 2         |
| 7%  | 3         |
| 3%  | 4 or more |

SchAge How many of these children are in kindergarten through twelfth grade?

n=323

|     |           |
|-----|-----------|
| 15% | None      |
| 48% | 1         |
| 26% | 2         |
| 9%  | 3         |
| 3%  | 4 or more |

PubSch How many of these children attend PUBLIC school?

n=276

|     |           |
|-----|-----------|
| 16% | 0         |
| 48% | 1         |
| 26% | 2         |
| 8%  | 3         |
| 2%  | 4 or more |

PRTY1 In politics, as of today, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?

|     |             |
|-----|-------------|
| 36% | Republican  |
| 34% | Democrat    |
| 26% | Independent |
| 3%  | Other       |
| 1%  | Do not know |

REL Do you consider yourself to be Catholic, Protestant, Jewish or something else?

|     |                |
|-----|----------------|
| 30% | Catholic       |
| 34% | Protestant     |
| 2%  | Jewish         |
| 34% | Something else |

INCOME And, just for statistical purposes, what is your total family income?

|     |                |
|-----|----------------|
| 14% | Under \$25,000 |
| 12% | \$25-\$35,000  |
| 14% | \$35-50,000    |
| 24% | \$50-75,000    |
| 14% | \$75-100,000   |
| 18% | Over \$100,000 |
| 4%  | Do not know    |

DONE. Are you male or female?

|     |        |
|-----|--------|
| 48% | Male   |
| 52% | Female |