
Majorities of Americans Continue to Believe Teacher Pay Too Low

Only one in five Americans believe public schools in their area are excellent or very good

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – June 10, 2009 – As the economic recession continues one area that could be impacted is education as states and localities look to trim costs and cut budgets. Compared to last year, however, perception of the quality of education in both the country as a whole and Americans' local areas is holding steady, but it is overall not considered excellent or very good.

These are some of the results of The Harris Poll of 2,681 U.S. adults surveyed online between May 11 and 18, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

More specifically:

- Public schools fall to the bottom of the list when it comes to the quality of education they provide. Just over one in six U.S. adults (17%) say public schools for grades K-6 provide excellent or very good education while 15% say the same about public schools for grades 7-12. This is up slightly from last year when 15% said public schools grades K-6 provided excellent or very good education and 13% said the same about public school for grades 7-12;
- When it comes to local public schools, those do a little better as one in five U.S. adults say both grades K-6 and 7-12 are providing an excellent or very good quality of education (21% and 20% respectively). This is almost unchanged from last year; and,
- Private, church related schools are considered the best, whether it is in the U.S. as a whole (36% saying excellent/very good for both grades K-6 and grades 7-12) or their local schools (32% saying excellent/very good for both K-6 and 7-12).

Money and education

While majorities of Americans say teachers get paid too little and too little money is spent on public schools, these numbers have declined from last year.

- In 2008, three in five U.S. adults (59%) believed that teachers are paid too little while one-quarter (24%) said they are paid about the right amount and 6% said teachers are paid too much. One year and an economic recession later, 53% say teachers are paid too little, three in ten (29%) say they are paid about the right amount and 8% say they are paid too much;
- In looking at public schools in their communities, there is also a slight change. Last year almost three in five (57%) said too little money is being spent on public schools in their community while one in five (20%) said it's about the right amount and 13 percent said too much. This year, half (51%) of Americans say

there is too little money being spent in their community while one-quarter (26%) say it is the right amount and 14% say it is too much; and

- Regionally, there are large differences in attitudes towards teachers' pay and school funding. Those in the East are more likely to think teachers are paid too much (17%) or about the right amount (39%) and too much money is being spent on public schools in their community (22%). Those in the South, however, are more likely to think teachers are paid too little (68%) and there is too little money being spent on public schools in their community (60%).

So What?

The debate over funding for education has changed dramatically in the past four decades. In 1965 when these questions were first asked over half of Americans thought public school teachers were paid the right amount (56%) and public schools had the right amount of funding (56%). Things have changed over time and now, the consensus is that teachers are paid too little and public schools are not receiving enough money. Over the past year, there have been some changes in how people feel about this. Some of this is definitely due to the recession and people being more and more concerned about where limited resources are going. There could also be a positive light to this as more districts have also increased their spending on teachers and schools. Maybe people are actually recognizing and acknowledging this increase.

**TABLE 1
EVALUATION OF EDUCATION QUALITY: NATIONAL AND LOCAL AREA PERSPECTIVE**

“Overall, how would you rate the quality of education provided by the following in ...Excellent, very good, good, fair, poor, not sure?”
Percent saying excellent/very good

Base: All adults

	2006		2008		2009	
	The United States	Your Local Area	The United States	Your Local Area	The United States	Your local area
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Private, church-related schools, grades K-6	35	34	38	35	36	32
Private, church-related schools, grades 7-12	34	33	37	34	36	32
Private, non-church-related schools, grades K-6	32	25	36	30	34	28
Private, non-church-related schools, grades 7-12	31	25	36	30	33	28
Homeschooling, grades K-6	25	18	20	21	22	22
Homeschooling, grades 7-12	23	17	20	20	21	21
Charter schools, grades K-6	18	16	20	21	23	23
Charter schools, grades 7-12	18	15	20	21	23	24
Public schools, grades K-6	17	26	15	20	17	21
Public schools, grades 7-12	14	23	13	19	15	20

TABLE 2
PAYING PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

“Do you feel teachers in the public schools in your community are paid too little, too much, or about the right amount?”

Base: All Adults

	1965	2008	2009
	%	%	%
Too little	42	59	53
About the right amount	56	24	29
Too much	2	6	8
Not sure	n/a	10	10

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Note: The 1965 survey was conducted by in-person interviewing, so the data should not be used as a direct trend, but rather for comparison purposes.

TABLE 3
PAYING PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS – by region

“Do you feel teachers in the public schools in your community are paid too little, too much, or about the right amount?”

Base: All Adults

	2009	Region			
		East	Midwest	South	West
	%	%	%	%	%
Too little	53	36	48	68	53
About the right amount	29	39	36	21	27
Too much	8	17	7	3	7
Not sure	10	8	9	9	13

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 4
FUNDING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

“Do you feel too much money is being spent on public schools in this community, too little money or about the right amount of money?”

Base: All Adults

	1965	2008	2009
	%	%	%
Too little	32	57	51
About the right amount	56	20	26
Too much	12	13	14
Not sure	n/a	10	9

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Note: The 1965 survey was conducted by in-person interviewing, so the data should not be used as a direct trend, but rather for comparison purposes.

**TABLE 5
FUNDING PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

“Do you feel too much money is being spent on public schools in this community, too little money or about the right amount of money?”

Base: All Adults

	2009	Region			
		East	Midwest	South	West
	%	%	%	%	%
Too little	51	36	46	60	56
About the right amount	26	36	32	20	19
Too much	14	22	13	10	14
Not sure	9	6	9	9	12

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Methodology

The Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States May 11 and 18, 2009, among 2,681 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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