

APRIL 2009

PPIC STATEWIDE SURVEY

CALIFORNIA

# Californians & education

in collaboration with  
The William and Flora Hewlett  
Foundation

Mark Baldassare  
Dean Bonner  
Jennifer Paluch  
Sonja Petek



PPIC

PUBLIC POLICY  
INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA

The Public Policy Institute of California is dedicated to informing and improving public policy in California through independent, objective, nonpartisan research on major economic, social, and political issues. The institute's goal is to raise public awareness and to give elected representatives and other decisionmakers a more informed basis for developing policies and programs.

The institute's research focuses on the underlying forces shaping California's future, cutting across a wide range of public policy concerns, including economic development, education, environment and resources, governance, population, public finance, and social and health policy.

PPIC is a private, nonprofit organization. It does not take or support positions on any ballot measures or on any local, state, or federal legislation, nor does it endorse, support, or oppose any political parties or candidates for public office. PPIC was established in 1994 with an endowment from William R. Hewlett.

Mark Baldassare is President and Chief Executive Officer of PPIC.  
Thomas C. Sutton is Chair of the Board of Directors.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>About the Survey</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Press Release</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>General Perceptions</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Fiscal Attitudes and Policy Preferences</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Regional Map</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Questionnaire and Results</b>	<b>31</b>

Copyright © 2009 Public Policy Institute of California  
All rights reserved  
San Francisco, CA

Short sections of text, not to exceed three paragraphs,  
may be quoted without written permission provided that  
full attribution is given to the source and the above  
copyright notice is included.

# ABOUT THE SURVEY

---

The PPIC Statewide Survey series provides policymakers, the media, and the public with objective, advocacy-free information on the perceptions, opinions, and public policy preferences of California residents. Inaugurated in April 1998, this is the 97th PPIC Statewide Survey in a series that has generated a database of responses of more than 206,000 Californians. This survey is part of a PPIC Statewide Survey series funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The series' intent is to inform state policymakers, encourage discussion, and raise public awareness about a variety of K–12, higher education, environment, and population issues. This is the fifth PPIC Statewide Survey focusing on K–12 education issues.

California's K–12 public education system served nearly 6.3 million students in 1,050 school districts and 9,846 public schools during 2007–08. The student population is diverse (49% Latino, 29% white, 12% Asian, 7% black) and includes nearly 1.6 million English learners.

Budgetary issues form the principal context for this survey. California's K–12 public education system is the single largest component of the state budget. The state's public schools face reductions in funding this year due to less-than-expected revenues and a multibillion-dollar gap between spending and revenues. State propositions related to education will be put to voters on the May 19 special election ballot and California public schools will be receiving federal funding from the economic stimulus plan passed by Congress. This federal funding is meant to help states offset spending cuts, avoid teacher layoffs, serve the neediest students, and invest in special education; federal officials would also like states to invest in reforms, raise standards, and develop better ways for tracking achievement.

This report presents the responses of 2,502 adult residents throughout the state on the following:

- Perceptions of California's public schools, including the quality of K–12 education; whether changes are needed to improve the state's K–12 education system; approval ratings of the governor and legislature overall and on their handling of K–12 education; approval of President Obama overall and on his handling of education policy; rankings of California's per-pupil spending and student test scores compared to other states; perceptions of teacher quality, the drop-out rate, and student achievement; ratings of local schools and perceptions of their state funding levels; and public school parents' opinions about their children's educational future.
- Fiscal attitudes and policy preferences, including spending priorities and concerns about spending cuts; perceptions of the adequacy and efficiency of school funding and of state funding requirements; preferences about decision-making in local public schools and ways to raise revenues for these schools; and perceptions of resource equity. It also examines Californians' concerns about the high school drop-out rate and the passing rates of the state high school exit exam; ratings of the schools on preparing students for college and the workforce; and perceived importance of investing in data systems.
- Time trends and variations in perceptions, attitudes, and preferences regarding California's K–12 system across the five major regions of the state (Central Valley, San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles County, Inland Empire, and Orange/San Diego Counties), among Asians, blacks, Latinos, and non-Hispanic whites, and across socioeconomic and political groups.

This report may be downloaded free of charge from our website ([www.ppic.org](http://www.ppic.org)). For questions about the survey, please contact [survey@ppic.org](mailto:survey@ppic.org). View our searchable PPIC Statewide Survey database online at <http://www.ppic.org/main/survAdvancedSearch.asp>.



# PRESS RELEASE

---

Para ver este comunicado de prensa en español, por favor visite nuestra página de internet:  
<http://www.ppic.org/main/pressreleaseindex.asp>

## PPIC STATEWIDE SURVEY: CALIFORNIANS AND EDUCATION

### Californians Want Change in Public Schools but Balk at Higher Taxes

WORRIED ABOUT STATE BUDGET CUTS, RESIDENTS SAY BETTER USE OF FUNDS IS KEY

SAN FRANCISCO, California, April 29, 2009—Californians worry that the state's budget gap will hurt public schools, but they are also increasingly likely to say that spending money more wisely—rather than just spending more—will lead to better quality K–12 education, according to a survey released today by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) with funding from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Residents believe the public schools have plenty of room for improvement: A solid majority of residents (58%) say that the system needs major changes. While most (61%) agree that more state funding would lead to higher quality public schools, there is even stronger agreement (85%) that better use of existing state funds would improve schools. When asked to choose among three options for improving public education, half (49%) say that better use of existing funds is the answer—12 points higher than two years ago (37% April 2007). Only 6 percent say increased funding is the key (11% 2007); 43 percent choose a combination of better use of funds and increased funding (48% 2007).

Although most Californians (56%) are very concerned that the state's budget gap will cause significant cuts to schools, they are divided about whether they would be willing to pay higher taxes to keep funding at current levels: 48 percent would and 49 percent would not. During the last economic downturn, Californians were much more willing to raise their own taxes for K–12 education (67% in June 2003 and January 2004).

“Californians are concerned about school quality and they're concerned about school funding. But that hasn't translated into more support for taxes and spending,” says Mark Baldassare, PPIC president and CEO. “They're looking for reform and innovation that can lead to gains in school performance and student achievement.”

### MOST WANT K–12 SCHOOLS SPARED IN STATE BUDGET

In a recession that has hit California particularly hard, and facing a fiscal crisis that threatens every part of the state budget, a majority of residents (58%) say that K–12 education is the area they most want to protect from spending cuts. Californians have held this view since June 2003, the first time PPIC asked the question and a period when the state was also struggling with a budget deficit. Today, majorities across parties, regions, and demographic groups agree.

For public school parents, the state's budget troubles are more than a future concern. Most (72%) say their children's schools have already been hurt a lot (28%) or somewhat (44%) by recent cuts.

In less than a month, Californians will decide a package of ballot measures that address the state's budget gap and would affect school funding. The results could change the way two earlier initiatives passed by voters will be carried out: Proposition 98, the 1988 measure that established minimum funding levels for public schools and community colleges, and Proposition 37 in 1984, which created the state lottery to provide more money for schools. In light of the current budget situation, how important is it to voters to guarantee minimum funding levels for schools each year? A strong majority of Californians (68%) say it's very important. They also feel that it's very important (68%) for schools to get a dedicated stream of funding from state lottery profits.

When it comes to determining how state money should be spent on public schools, residents would prefer that their local school districts (49%) or local schools (33%) rather than the state (13%) make the decisions. Most agree (77%) that local schools should have more flexibility than they do now in how they spend money. In another indication of greater confidence in their local schools than in the state's decisionmakers, more Californians say they would vote yes on a local school construction bond measure (60%) or new parcel tax to provide more money for local schools (54%), than they would be willing to pay higher taxes to maintain K–12 funding levels statewide (48%). But support for a local school construction bond falls to 54 percent among likely voters—just short of the 55 percent required for passage. The percentage of all adults and likely voters who would approve a local school construction bond is the lowest since the PPIC Statewide Survey began asking this question in 1999.

### **HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE SEEN AS BIG PROBLEM**

What needs improvement in the schools? There is little consensus. Teacher quality (13%), class size and overcrowding (11%), and teaching the basics (10%) are the top responses to this open-ended question.

When asked specifically about three education issues—the high school dropout rate, student achievement, and teacher quality—the responses are strikingly different. A strong majority (70%) say the dropout rate is a big problem, with blacks (85%) and Latinos (82%) much more likely than whites (65%) and Asians (51%) to hold this view. Forty-three percent of residents say student achievement is a big problem, with blacks (54%) more likely than others (43% whites, 41% Latinos, 38% Asians) to agree. Teacher quality is seen as a big problem by just 29 percent; blacks (42%) are more likely than others (29% Asians, 29% whites, 25% Latinos) to hold this negative view.

Californians got a reality check on the high school dropout rate last year, when the state used a new student tracking system and found that nearly one in four students in the class of 2007 had dropped out of high school. Latino and black students had even higher rates. Today, 60 percent of residents in the PPIC survey say they are very concerned that students in lower-income areas have a higher dropout rate. This is a 7-point increase since the new dropout figures were released (53% April 2008). Blacks (82%) are far more likely than others (60% Latinos, 59% whites, 52% Asians) to be very concerned.

Although nearly all Californians (96%) say it is important for K–12 schools to prepare students for college, less than half say the school system does an excellent (4%) or good (42%) job of doing so.

### **LOCAL SCHOOLS GET PASSING GRADES, STATE LEADERS FARE POORLY**

Even as many Californians see education quality as a big problem, 53 percent give their neighborhood schools a grade of A (19%) or B (34%). Public school parents have an even more positive view: 63 percent of these parents award their schools a B or higher, with 25 percent giving A grades to local schools and 38 percent giving B's.

Californians give their state leaders far worse grades. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's overall job approval rating matches his record low (32%) and marks the second time a majority of Republicans have disapproved of his performance (54% today, 53% March 2009). His approval rating on education is even lower. Just 20 percent approve, a historic low that has dropped 5 points since April 2008 and 16 points since April 2007. Majorities across parties disapprove of the way he is handling K-12 education (65% Democrats, 56% independents, 52% Republicans).

The legislature's overall approval rating remains low (23% vs. 18% last month) and drops to a record low 18 percent for their job performance on education issues. More than six in 10 (63%) disapprove of the way the legislature is handling education. Majorities across parties, regions, and racial/ethnic groups share this view.



## MORE KEY FINDINGS

- **Obama retains 70 percent approval rating**—page 11

In stark contrast to the ratings of California elected officials, President Obama approval rating has been at least 70 percent each of the three times that PPIC has surveyed California residents.

- **Parents have high aspirations for their children**—page 14

An overwhelming majority (85%) of parents want their youngest child to get a college or graduate degree, and many parents (45%) are very confident that they have the resources and information needed to make this happen. Fewer (24%) have the same level of confidence in the resources provided by their local schools. White parents and those with higher incomes are much more likely than lower-income or Latino parents to be very confident in their own resources and those of their local schools.

- **Californians recognize resource inequities**—page 21

Nearly eight in 10 Californians (77%) say schools in lower-income areas have less money for teachers and classroom materials than those in wealthier areas, a finding that holds true across all regions, demographic groups, and political parties. If new money were available, a large majority (70%) would spend more of it on lower-income schools.

- **High school exit exam is popular**—page 22

Most Californians (69%) think students should pass the exit exam to graduate, with Latinos (80%) most likely to agree. Most Californians are very (55%) or somewhat (32%) concerned that students in lower-income communities have higher failure rates on the test.

- **Career technical education gets strong backing**—page 25

Vocational education is very important to most (71%) of Californians. But just 31 percent of those who say it's very important think schools are doing a good or excellent job at preparing students for the workforce.

- **Californians value data collection**—page 26

The development of data systems to track student, school, and fiscal information is a state and national priority that residents also feel is very (56%) or somewhat (34%) important.

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

This is the fifth PPIC Statewide Survey focusing on K–12 education. It is part of a series funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation that is intended to inform state policymakers, encourage discussion, and raise public awareness about a variety of K–12, higher education, environment, and population issues. Findings are based on a telephone survey of 2,502 California adult residents, including 2,250 interviewed on landline telephones and 252 on cell phones. Interviews took place April 7-21, 2009. They were conducted in English, Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), Vietnamese, and Korean. The sampling error for the total sample is  $\pm 2$  percent and slightly larger for subgroups. For more information on methodology, see page 29. This is the 97th PPIC Statewide Survey in a series that has generated a database of responses from more than 206,000 Californians.

Mark Baldassare is president and CEO of PPIC, where he holds the Arjay and Frances Fearing Miller Chair in Public Policy. He is founder of the PPIC Statewide Survey, which he has directed since 1998.

PPIC is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to informing and improving public policy in California through independent, objective, nonpartisan research on major economic, social, and political issues. The institute was established in 1994 with an endowment from William R. Hewlett. PPIC does not take or support positions on any ballot measure or on any local, state, or federal legislation, nor does it endorse, support, or oppose any political parties or candidates for public office.

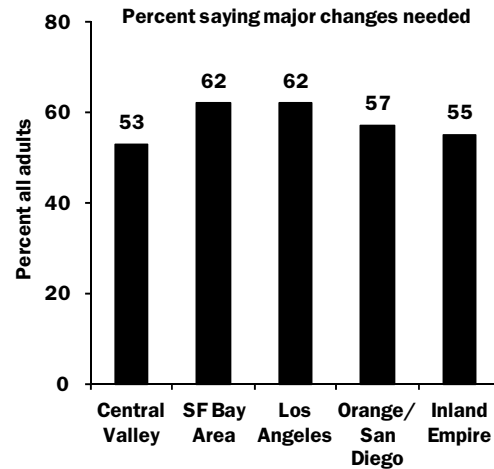


# GENERAL PERCEPTIONS

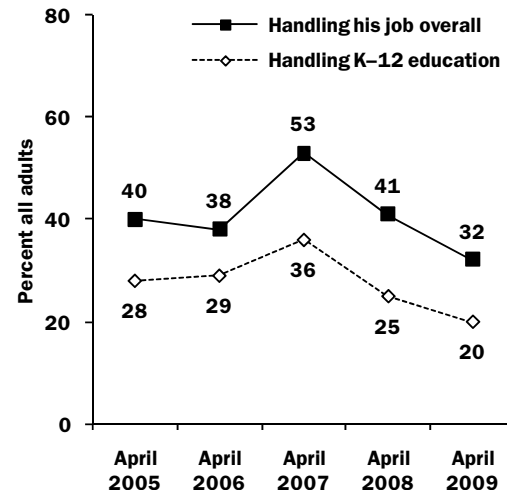
## KEY FINDINGS

- Fifty-one percent of Californians believe the quality of California's K-12 public education is a big problem, and most believe the K-12 system needs major changes. (page 8)
- The high school dropout rate is much more likely to be considered a big problem (70%) than is student achievement (43%) or teacher quality (29%). Black and Latino residents are much more likely than whites and Asians to consider the dropout rate a big problem. (page 9)
- Job approval ratings of the governor and legislature remain low, and approval ratings of their handling of the K-12 system have fallen to record lows. (page 10)
- President Obama continues to enjoy high overall job approval ratings (70%) among Californians, and 58 percent approve of his handling of education policy. Most residents think federal stimulus funds for education should be used both for offsetting cuts and for funding innovations and reforms. (page 11)
- Pluralities continue to believe that California's per-pupil spending and student test scores are lower than average when compared to other states. (page 12)
- While many Californians would award their neighborhood public schools an A or B grade when it comes to quality, nearly as many believe that their local schools do not receive enough state funding. (page 13)
- Public school parents have high hopes for the educational achievement of their children. And although nearly half are very confident they have the necessary resources to help their children, they are less confident about the resources of their local K-12 schools. (page 14)

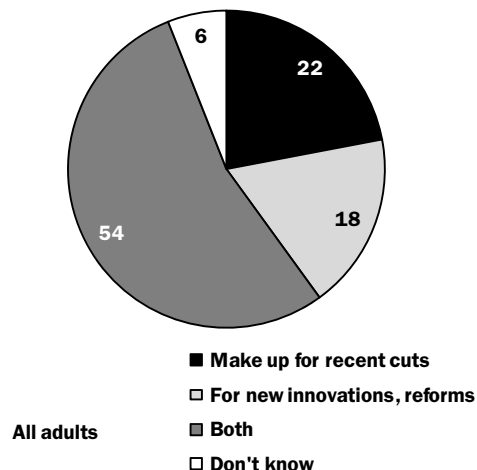
Need For Change in K-12 Public Education



Governor Schwarzenegger's Approval Ratings



How to Use Federal Stimulus Funds for Education



## QUALITY OF K–12 EDUCATION

Most Californians today (59%) continue to consider jobs and the economy and the state budget (13%) the most important issues facing the state, while seven percent consider education and schools the most important issue. Nonetheless, most Californians (83%) think the quality of California’s K–12 public education is a problem—51 percent a big problem, 32 percent somewhat of a problem. The percentage saying the quality of K–12 education is a big problem has been about the same over the past three years (53% in 2008, 52% in 2007). Forty-four percent of parents with children in public schools say the quality of K–12 schools is a big problem.

Democrats and independents (56% each) are more likely than Republicans (49%) to consider the quality of K–12 education a big problem. There are also racial/ethnic differences: Blacks (74%) are far more likely than whites (57%), Asians (41%), and Latinos (40%) to hold this view. Across regions, residents in the San Francisco Bay Area (55%) and Los Angeles (54%) are the most likely to say the quality of education is a big problem, followed by those in the Inland Empire (50%), Orange/San Diego Counties (48%), and the Central Valley (47%). Negative views increase with rising age, education, and income.

**“How much of a problem is the quality of education in California’s K–12 public schools today? Is it a big problem, somewhat of a problem, or not much of a problem?”**

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asians	Blacks	Latinos	Whites	
<b>Big problem</b>	51%	41%	74%	40%	57%	44%
<b>Somewhat of a problem</b>	32	45	22	38	29	37
<b>Not much of a problem</b>	12	7	3	19	8	16
<b>Don’t know</b>	5	7	1	3	6	3

Solid majorities of Californians (58%), likely voters (64%), and public school parents (56%) believe the K–12 public education system in California needs major changes. Another three in 10 in each group believe minor changes are needed. The percentages voicing concern in each of these groups are about the same as they were in 2007 and 2008. Today, majorities of independents (65%), Democrats (61%), and Republicans (56%) believe major changes are needed. Over half of residents in every region of the state share this view, with those in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area (62% each) the most concerned. Blacks (69%), whites (59%), and Latinos (57%) are far more likely than Asians (43%) to say that major changes are needed, an opinion that also increases with rising age, education, and income.

**“Overall, do you think the K–12 public education system in California is in need of major changes, minor changes, or that it is basically fine the way it is?”**

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>Major changes</b>	58%	61%	56%	65%	64%
<b>Minor changes</b>	31	31	34	27	29
<b>Fine the way it is</b>	7	5	7	5	4
<b>Don’t know</b>	4	3	3	3	3

There is no single dominant issue when respondents were asked to name the one thing that most needs improvement in the state’s K–12 public schools. Californians most often mention teacher quality (13%), class size and overcrowding (11%), and teaching the basics (10%). These same concerns topped the list in 2002, 2005, and 2007.

## CHALLENGES IN THE K–12 SYSTEM

Californians' opinions about three potential challenges in the state's K–12 system differ greatly. Seven in 10 believe the high school dropout rate is a big problem, 43 percent believe student achievement is a big problem, and 29 percent believe teacher quality is a big problem. The percentages expressing this level of concern about the high school dropout rate and teacher quality have remained about the same over the past four years. This is the first time we have asked about student achievement.

**“I'm going to read you a list of issues people have mentioned when talking about California's K–12 public schools today. For each one, please tell me if you think it is a big problem, somewhat of a problem, or not really a problem. How about ...”**

	The high school dropout rate	Student achievement	Teacher quality
<b>Big problem</b>	70%	43%	29%
<b>Somewhat of a problem</b>	20	42	41
<b>Not really a problem</b>	5	11	25
<b>Don't know</b>	5	4	5

While a strong majority of Californians (70%) and public school parents (71%) think the high school dropout rate is a big problem, there are considerable differences across racial/ethnic groups. Blacks (85%) and Latinos (82%) are far more likely than whites (65%) and Asians (51%) to consider the dropout rate a big problem. Across regions, at least six in 10 residents share this level of concern, but residents in Los Angeles (77%) and the Inland Empire (76%) are the most likely to view the dropout rate as a big problem. Partisan differences are also evident, with Democrats (73%) and independents (69%) much more likely than Republicans (59%) to express this level of concern. Older, less educated, and less affluent Californians are the most likely to view the high school dropout rate as a big problem.

### “How about the high school dropout rate?”

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asians	Blacks	Latinos	Whites	
<b>Big problem</b>	70%	51%	85%	82%	65%	71%
<b>Somewhat of a problem</b>	20	37	11	13	22	20
<b>Not really a problem</b>	5	6	2	3	6	6
<b>Don't know</b>	5	6	2	2	7	3

When it comes to student achievement, 43 percent of residents and 39 percent of public school parents consider this issue to be a big problem. Blacks (54%) are more likely than whites (43%), Latinos (41%), and Asians (38%) to consider student achievement a big problem. Regional differences are also evident, with those in the Inland Empire (50%) more likely to hold this view than those in Los Angeles (46%), Orange/San Diego Counties (44%), the Central Valley (40%), and the San Francisco Bay Area (39%). Fewer than half across party lines consider student achievement to be a big problem (47% of independents, 46% of Democrats, and 41% of Republicans).

Even fewer are concerned about teacher quality. Only 29 percent of Californians and 25 percent of parents of public school children consider teacher quality a big problem. Independents (35%) are more likely than Republicans (30%) and Democrats (29%) to hold this view, but concern among independents has increased by 11 points since April 2008. Across regions, fewer than one in three views teacher quality as a big problem. However, blacks (42%) are much more likely than Asians (29%), whites (29%), and Latinos (25%) to consider teacher quality a big problem.

## APPROVAL RATINGS: GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATURE

Concern about the economy and the state budget, as well as funding cuts in K–12 education, have seemingly soured Californian’s opinions of their public officials.

Their overall job approval ratings of Governor Schwarzenegger match his record low, with 32 percent of residents approving of his performance and 55 percent disapproving. The governor’s approval rating has dropped 9 points since April 2008 and 21 points since April 2007. Today, majorities of likely voters (34%) and voters across party lines disapprove of his performance, and this marks the second time that a majority of Republicans have expressed disapproval (53% in March). Across regions, fewer than four in 10 residents approve of his performance; residents in the Central Valley (37%) are the most approving. Whites (39%) and Asians (35%) are much more likely than Latinos (24%) and blacks (17%) to express approval.

When it comes to the governor’s handling of the state’s K–12 public education system, his ratings are even lower. Only 20 percent of Californians approve of his work in this area (a historic low, 5 points lower than April 2008 and 16 points lower than April 2007). Across parties, majorities disapprove of the governor’s handling of this issue. Across regions, residents of the Central Valley (26%) are the most approving, and across racial/ethnic groups, blacks (9%) are the least approving.

### “Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way that Arnold Schwarzenegger is handling ...”

		All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
			Dem	Rep	Ind	
<i>His job as governor of California?</i>	<b>Approve</b>	32%	33%	38%	34%	34%
	<b>Disapprove</b>	55	57	54	52	55
	<b>Don't know</b>	13	10	8	14	11
<i>The state's K–12 public education system?</i>	<b>Approve</b>	20	18	24	21	19
	<b>Disapprove</b>	58	65	52	56	60
	<b>Don't know</b>	22	17	24	23	21

Overall approval ratings of the legislature remain low. In this month’s survey, 23 percent of Californians approve of the legislature, compared to 18 percent last month (among likely voters, 16% vs. 11%). Disapproval is strong across party lines, with Republicans (76%) most likely to disapprove, followed by independents (66%) and Democrats (63%). Across regions, Inland Empire residents (71%) are the most likely—and Los Angeles residents (57%) the least likely—to disapprove of the legislature’s performance.

The legislature reaches a historic low on its handling of the state’s K–12 public education system. More than six in 10 residents across party lines and more than half of the residents in every region and major racial/ethnic group of the state disapprove of the legislature’s handling of K–12 education.

### “Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way that the California Legislature is handling ...”

		All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
			Dem	Rep	Ind	
<i>Its job?</i>	<b>Approve</b>	23%	23%	18%	20%	16%
	<b>Disapprove</b>	63	63	76	66	74
	<b>Don't know</b>	14	14	6	14	10
<i>The state's K–12 public education system?</i>	<b>Approve</b>	18	14	15	16	11
	<b>Disapprove</b>	63	68	64	67	70
	<b>Don't know</b>	19	18	21	17	19

## PRESIDENT'S APPROVAL RATINGS AND STIMULUS SPENDING

In stark contrast to the job approval ratings of the state's elected officials, President Obama receives the approval of a strong majority of adults (70%) and likely voters (64%) in California. His approval rating among residents has been at least 70 percent in each of the three times we have asked this question. Californians are slightly more approving of the president than adults nationwide (66% approve, 30% disapprove), according to a recent CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll. In California, almost all Democrats (91%) and a strong majority of independents (63%) approve of his performance, while half of Republicans (50%) disapprove. Across regions, at least six in 10 residents approve. Blacks (88%) and Latinos (83%) are much more likely than Asians (70%) and whites (61%) to approve of the president's performance.

A majority of Californians (58%) and half of likely voters (51%) also approve of the president's handling of education policy. Although many residents (26%) and likely voters (30%) remain uncertain in their opinion of the president's handling of this issue, he receives a much higher approval rating than the state's elected officials when it comes to education. A majority of adults nationwide approve of the president's handling of education (65% approve, 30% disapprove, 5% don't know) according to a March CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll. In California, Democrats (74%) are far more likely than independents (55%) to approve, while Republicans are divided (31% approve, 35% disapprove, 34% don't know). Los Angeles residents (64%) are the most approving, while Inland Empire residents (51%) are the least approving. Blacks (83%) and Latinos (76%) are far more likely than Asians (53%) and whites (46%) to approve of the president's handling of education policy.

### “Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way that Barack Obama is handling...”

		All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
			Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>His job as president of the United States?</b>	<b>Approve</b>	70%	91%	38%	63%	64%
	<b>Disapprove</b>	21	4	50	24	27
	<b>Don't know</b>	9	5	12	13	9
<b>Education policy?</b>	<b>Approve</b>	58	74	31	55	51
	<b>Disapprove</b>	16	5	35	18	19
	<b>Don't know</b>	26	21	34	27	30

Through the stimulus plan passed by the president and Congress, California recently received \$4 billion—its first round of federal education funding. This funding is meant to help states avoid massive education layoffs, offset spending cuts, and invest in reforms and ways to improve student achievement. Most Californians (54%) think this money should be used to make up for spending cuts and for education innovations and reforms. Democrats (64%) and independents (54%) are more likely than Republicans (45%) to think that this stimulus money should be used for both purposes.

### “The economic stimulus plan passed by the president and Congress will be providing funding to California for K–12 public education. Do you think this federal funding should be...?”

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>Mostly used to make up for recent state spending cuts in K–12 education</b>	22%	18%	27%	24%	23%
<b>Mostly used for new education innovations and reforms</b>	18	14	18	19	16
<b>Used to make up for spending cuts and for new education innovations and reforms</b>	54	64	45	54	55
<b>Don't know</b>	6	4	10	3	6

## STATE'S RELATIVE EDUCATION RANKINGS

Many Californians believe that California falls below the national average in per-pupil spending, but does this perception match reality? According to *Rankings and Estimates* (National Education Association, 2008), California ranks 26<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states and the District of Columbia in per-pupil spending. Californians' perceptions are divided: 35 percent believe the state's spending is below average or near the bottom, 24 percent think it is about average, and 28 percent say it is higher than average.

The percentage of Californians who believe that state K–12 spending is higher than the national average has doubled since 1998 (14% to 28%). Democrats (44%) are more likely than independents (36%) and Republicans (31%) to think the state's per-pupil spending is below average or near the bottom. Residents in the San Francisco Bay Area (48%) and blacks (50%) are the most likely to hold this negative view, while residents in Orange/San Diego Counties (30%) and Asians (28%) are the least likely to think spending is lower than average.

**“Where do you think California currently ranks in ...”**

All Adults		Apr 98	Feb 00	Jan 02	Oct 02	Apr 05	Apr 06	Apr 07	Apr 08	Apr 09
<b>Per pupil spending for K–12 public schools? Compared to other states, is California's spending...</b>	<b>Near the top</b>	5%	6%	6%	9%	9%	11%	12%	12%	15%
	<b>Above average</b>	9	10	9	11	10	13	13	14	13
	<b>Average</b>	28	24	24	31	25	29	31	29	24
	<b>Below average</b>	27	29	28	23	26	20	19	20	21
	<b>Near the bottom</b>	20	22	20	14	18	11	13	16	14
	<b>Don't know</b>	11	9	13	12	12	16	12	9	13
<b>Student test scores for K–12 public schools? Compared to other states, are California's student test scores...</b>	<b>Near the top</b>	2%	–	2%	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%
	<b>Above average</b>	8	–	6	8	8	8	8	8	8
	<b>Average</b>	32	–	29	33	31	32	34	32	34
	<b>Below average</b>	39	–	39	36	35	33	34	33	32
	<b>Near the bottom</b>	14	–	16	13	14	13	15	18	17
	<b>Don't know</b>	5	–	8	7	9	11	7	7	7

Californians have a much more negative view of the state's relative ranking when it comes to student test scores and, indeed, according to the most recent findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2007), California ranks near the bottom nationally on reading and math scores for students in grades 4 and 8. Nearly half of Californians (49%) think the state's test scores fall below average or near the bottom when compared to the rest of the nation, while 34 percent believe they are about average and only 10 percent think they are above average or near the top. Californians have held similar opinions on this question for the last decade.

A majority across party lines believe the state's test scores fall below average (57% of Republicans, 55% of independents, and 52% of Democrats), and at least 47 percent of residents across the state's regions agree. Negative opinions about test scores are more likely to be held among blacks (58%) and whites (57%) than among Asians (40%) and Latinos (37%).

Public school parents are similar to all Californians in their assessment of per-pupil spending but are somewhat less negative regarding student test scores. Twenty-six percent of public school parents say spending is higher than average, 28 percent say average, and 35 percent say lower than average. As for student test scores, 13 percent of public school parents say California students rank higher than average, 39 percent say they are about average, and 43 percent say they are lower than average.



## RATING LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

While many Californians consider the quality of education in the state a big problem, 19 percent give the public schools in their neighborhood an A grade, 34 percent a B, and 28 percent a C. Thirteen percent give their schools a D or an F. At least half of Californians have given their public schools an A or B every time we have asked this question since 2005 (51% 2005, 55% 2006, 52% 2007, 54% 2008, 53% today).

Today, public school parents (63%) are more likely than all adults (53%) to give a grade of A or B to their local schools. Across regions, residents in Los Angeles (49%) are the least likely to give a grade of A or B, while residents in Orange/San Diego Counties (60%) are the most likely to award these higher grades. More than half of Latinos (59%), whites (54%), and Asians (52%) give grades of A or B to their schools, compared to only 32 percent of blacks. Across parties, Republicans (55%) are somewhat more likely than Democrats (50%) and independents (48%) to award grades of A or B.

**“Overall, how would you rate the quality of public schools in your neighborhood today?  
If you had to give your local public schools a grade, would it be A, B, C, D, or F?”**

	All Adults	Region					Public School Parents
		Central Valley	San Francisco Bay Area	Los Angeles	Orange/San Diego	Inland Empire	
<b>A</b>	19%	23%	17%	18%	25%	17%	25%
<b>B</b>	34	31	34	31	35	40	38
<b>C</b>	28	28	26	29	25	29	27
<b>D</b>	9	10	10	11	4	10	6
<b>F</b>	4	3	5	6	4	2	3
<b>Don't know</b>	6	5	8	5	7	2	1

Although about half of Californians give their local public schools an A or B, half (50%) still think that the current level of state funding for public schools is not enough; 32 percent say it is just enough and 11 percent say it is more than enough. Parents of public school children (58%) are more likely to say the current level of state funding is not enough. The belief that state funding is insufficient has hovered around 50 percent since 2005 (51% 2005, 49% 2006, 48% 2007, 51% 2008, 50% today).

Democrats (62%) are much more likely than independents (46%) and nearly twice as likely as Republicans (33%) to say that state funding for local schools today is insufficient. A majority of residents in the San Francisco Bay Area (55%) and Los Angeles (54%) think there is not enough funding, while fewer than half of the residents in other regions hold this view. Blacks (71%) and Latinos (60%) are much more likely than whites (44%) and Asians (38%) to think that local school funding is insufficient. Less educated and less affluent residents are more likely than others, and women are more likely than men, to hold this view.

**“Do you think the current level of state funding for your local public schools is more than enough, just enough, or not enough?”**

	All Adults	Region					Public School Parents
		Central Valley	San Francisco Bay Area	Los Angeles	Orange/San Diego	Inland Empire	
<b>More than enough</b>	11%	15%	9%	11%	13%	11%	8%
<b>Just enough</b>	32	34	28	28	39	36	31
<b>Not enough</b>	50	44	55	54	40	47	58
<b>Don't know</b>	7	7	8	7	8	6	3

## PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS

California parents of public school children express high hopes for their children’s educational futures. Eighty-five percent would like their youngest child to graduate from college (46%) or to complete a postgraduate education (39%). Public school parents’ hopes are largely unchanged since we asked this question in 2005 (50% hoping for a college degree, 36% for a postgraduate degree). At least seven in 10 public school parents across political and demographic groups hope their youngest child will graduate from college; hopes for a postgraduate degree increase sharply with rising education and income. Across racial/ethnic groups, white public school parents are more than twice as likely as Latino public school parents (49% to 23%) to hope their youngest child will obtain a postgraduate degree. (Sample sizes for Asian and black public school parents are too small for analysis of parental expectations).

### “What do you hope will be the highest grade level that your youngest child will achieve: some high school, high school graduate, some college, college graduate, or a graduate degree after college?”

<i>Public school parents only</i>	All Public School Parents	Household Income			Race/Ethnicity	
		Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$79,999	\$80,000 or more	Latinos	Whites
<b>Some high school</b>	1%	3%	2%	–	3%	–
<b>High school graduate</b>	6	12	6	–	10	3%
<b>Some college</b>	5	6	5	4%	6	5
<b>College graduate</b>	46	53	47	36	52	42
<b>A graduate degree after college</b>	39	20	38	60	23	49
<b>Don’t know</b>	3	6	2	–	6	1

When it comes to helping their youngest child prepare for and graduate from college, 45 percent of public school parents are very confident they have the resources and information needed to help that child reach that goal, while just 24 percent express the same level of confidence in the resources of their local K–12 schools. Across income groups, parents’ confidence in themselves and their local schools varies widely. Among those with an income of less than \$40,000 per year, 28 percent say they are very confident in their own resources, compared to 65 percent of parents earning \$80,000 or more. Confidence in local schools also varies greatly across income levels: Parents express higher levels of confidence as income rises. Across racial/ethnic groups, white parents (56%) are far more likely than Latino parents (33%) to say they are very confident in their resources. White parents (29%) are also more likely than Latino parents (18%) to say they are very confident in their local schools’ resources.

### “How confident are you that...”

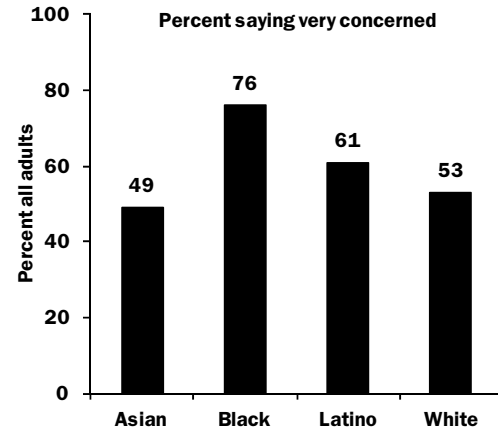
<i>Public school parents only</i>		All Public School Parents	Household Income			Race/Ethnicity	
			Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to \$79,999	\$80,000 or more	Latinos	Whites
<b>You have the resources and information needed for this child to reach that grade level?</b>	<b>Very confident</b>	45%	28%	46%	65%	33%	56%
	<b>Somewhat confident</b>	36	39	39	30	39	32
	<b>Not too confident</b>	18	33	15	5	27	11
	<b>Don’t know</b>	1	–	–	–	1	1
<b>Your local K–12 schools have the resources needed to prepare this child for that grade level?</b>	<b>Very confident</b>	24	15	26	32	18	29
	<b>Somewhat confident</b>	45	44	43	48	42	48
	<b>Not too confident</b>	30	40	31	19	39	21
	<b>Don’t know</b>	1	1	–	1	1	2

# FISCAL ATTITUDES AND POLICY PREFERENCES

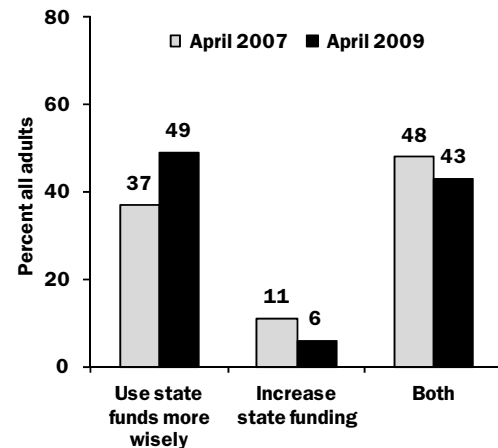
## KEY FINDINGS

- Given the current state budget situation, most Californians are very concerned about budget cuts in K–12 education. (page 16)
- Residents are increasingly likely to say that K–12 quality could be improved by using state funds wisely. Fewer say they prefer increasing state spending or a combination of increased spending and wiser spending to improve K–12 quality. (page 17)
- Most residents and likely voters believe it is very important to uphold Proposition 98’s minimum school spending requirements and Proposition 37’s state lottery funds dedicated to schools. (page 18)
- A vast majority believe local school districts or schools—not the state—should make decisions when spending state funds. To raise funds for their local schools, likely voters are divided on raising parcel taxes; support among likely voters falls just short of the 55 percent needed to pass a school construction bond. (pages 19, 20)
- Most residents perceive a disparity in resources between schools in lower- and higher-income areas and would support providing schools in lower-income areas with additional state funding, if new money were available. (page 21)
- Californians continue to support a high school exit exam but most, especially black residents, express concern about the failure rates. Blacks are also notably more concerned about the dropout rate. (pages 22, 23)
- Majorities say it is very important for schools to prepare students for college and the workforce; many say schools are not doing well in these areas. (pages 24, 25)

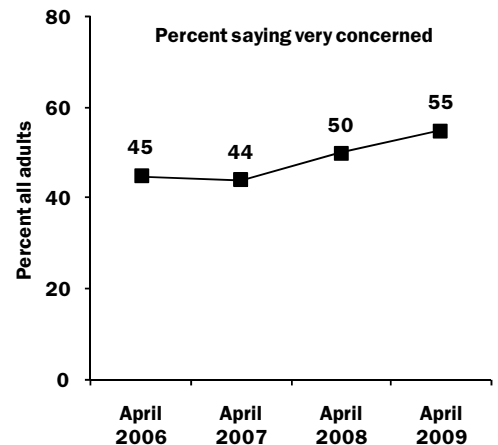
**Concern about the State Deficit Causing Spending Cuts in K–12 Education**



**How to Improve the Quality of California’s K–12 Public Schools**



**Concern about Higher Exit Exam Failure Rates Among Students in Lower-Income Areas**



## SPENDING PRIORITIES

Given fiscal reality—that nearly every spending area in the California state budget faces (or has already undergone) spending reductions due to the deficit—most Californians (58%) continue to say that K–12 public education is the area they would most like to protect from spending cuts. Eighteen percent name health and human services, 13 percent higher education, and 7 percent prisons and corrections. Since we first asked this question in June 2003 when the state also grappled with a large budget deficit, a majority of Californians have said K–12 public education is the area they would most like to protect from cuts. Today, majorities across parties, regions, and demographic groups hold this view.

**“Some of the largest areas for state spending are: K–12 public education, higher education, health and human services, and prisons and corrections. Thinking about these four areas of state spending, I’d like you to name the one you most want to protect from spending cuts.”**

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>K–12 public education</b>	58%	62%	53%	56%	59%
<b>Health and human services</b>	18	20	16	15	17
<b>Higher education</b>	13	12	12	16	13
<b>Prisons and corrections</b>	7	3	14	8	7
<b>Don’t know</b>	4	3	5	5	4

Most Californians (56%) are very concerned that the state’s budget gap will mean significant cuts in K–12 public education; another 29 percent are somewhat concerned. Similar shares expressed concern last April. Today, Democrats (67%) are more likely to be very concerned than independents (52%) or Republicans (45%). Blacks (76%) are much more likely than Latinos (61%), and far more likely than whites (53%) and Asians (49%), to be very concerned about budget reductions. At least half across other demographic groups and across regions are very concerned, with women more likely than men (62% to 50%), and public school parents more likely than other groups (67% to 51%) to hold this view.

**“How concerned are you that the state’s budget gap will cause significant spending cuts in K–12 public education?”**

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>Very concerned</b>	56%	67%	45%	52%	59%
<b>Somewhat concerned</b>	29	26	30	28	26
<b>Not too concerned</b>	7	4	12	8	8
<b>Not at all concerned</b>	6	2	11	10	6
<b>Don’t know</b>	2	1	2	2	1

Most public school parents have already noticed negative effects at their children’s schools: 72 percent say their children’s schools have been affected a lot (28%) or somewhat (44%) by recent budget cuts. Inland Empire parents (35%) are the most likely to say their children’s schools have been greatly affected.

Despite concerns about K–12 funding, Californians are divided about paying higher taxes to maintain current funding levels (48% would, 49% would not). The findings on support for tax increases for school funding were similar last year. During the last economic downturn, residents were more willing to raise their own taxes for K–12 public education (67% in June 2003 and January 2004).

## ADEQUACY AND EFFICIENCY OF STATE FUNDING

Majorities of Californians (61%) and likely voters (55%) agree with the statement that additional state funding would lead to higher quality K–12 education. Since we first asked this question in April 2006, at least six in 10 have expressed agreement that more funding would help K–12 quality (65% April 2006, 65% April 2007, 63% April 2008, 61% today). Still, registered voters are divided along party lines about this issue: 70 percent of Democrats believe additional funding would improve K–12 quality, but 55 percent of Republicans disagree. Independents are more likely to agree (59%) than disagree (38%). Majorities agree across regions (68% Los Angeles, 61% San Francisco Bay Area, 59% Central Valley, 59% Inland Empire, 55% Orange/San Diego Counties). Latinos (80%) are far more likely than others (63% Asians, 63% blacks, 51% whites) to think additional funding would improve K–12 quality. This belief declines sharply with higher age, education, and income. Public school parents (70%) are much more likely than other groups (58%) to agree.

**“In general, do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
Additional state funding would lead to higher quality K–12 education in California.”**

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>Agree</b>	61%	70%	42%	59%	55%
<b>Disagree</b>	34	25	55	38	41
<b>Don't know</b>	5	5	3	3	4

On the other hand, there is even stronger agreement that better use of existing state funds would lead to higher quality K–12 education in California. All adults (85%), likely voters (85%), Republicans (86%), independents (86%), Democrats (83%), and over 75 percent across regions and demographic groups believe greater efficiency would improve the quality of K–12 public education. At least eight in 10 have held this view in the past (81% April 2006, 84% April 2007, 85% April 2008, 85% today).

**“In general, do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
Better use of existing state funds would lead to higher quality K–12 education in California.”**

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>Agree</b>	85%	83%	86%	86%	85%
<b>Disagree</b>	11	13	11	11	11
<b>Don't know</b>	4	4	3	3	4

When asked what the best method would be for significantly improving the quality of California’s K–12 public education, about half of residents (49%) say better use of existing state funds is the answer. Forty-three percent say a combination of better use of funds and increased funding is needed, while just 6 percent say increased funding alone is the key. Compared to two years ago, the share saying that better use of existing funding is the best way to improve quality has grown by 12 points (from 37% to 49% today), while the other solutions have seen declines: down by 5 points for the combination approach (48% to 43% today) and down by 5 points for increased funding alone (11% to 6% today).

Across political groups there are differences, with majorities of Republicans (67%) and independents (55%) saying the best way to improve educational quality is through better use of funds, while 53 percent of Democrats say both increased funding and better management of funds are needed.

## STATE FUNDING REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOLS

Proposition 98, passed by voters in 1988, established a minimum level of state spending each year for California’s K–14 public schools. In the context of the current budget situation and the May 19 special election, schools will receive less funding this year than last year. Do residents today think the minimum funding level established by Proposition 98 is very important?

The answer is yes: Nearly seven in 10 residents (68%) and likely voters (69%) say it is very important that public schools are guaranteed a minimum level of state funding each year. Democrats (76%) are much more likely than independents (63%) and far more likely than Republicans (58%) to hold this view. Across regions, over six in 10 say the minimum spending level is very important (71% Inland Empire, 70% Los Angeles, 70% San Francisco Bay Area, 67% Central Valley, 63% Orange/San Diego Counties). Across racial/ethnic groups, blacks (74%) are the most likely to say the minimum funding guarantee is very important, followed by Latinos (70%), whites (69%), and Asians (62%). Women are more likely than men (72% to 63%), and public school parents more likely than other groups (76% to 65%), to hold this view.

**“California voters passed Proposition 98 in 1988, which established a minimum level of spending each year for K–14 public schools. How important to you is it that California’s public schools are guaranteed a minimum level of state funding each year?”**

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>Very important</b>	68%	76%	58%	63%	69%
<b>Somewhat important</b>	23	18	29	24	21
<b>Not too important</b>	3	3	6	5	4
<b>Not at all important</b>	4	2	6	7	5
<b>Don’t know</b>	2	1	1	1	1

Voters passed Proposition 37 in 1984, which created the California state lottery to provide more funding for K–12 public schools. If Proposition 1C on this May’s special election ballot passes, it would tap future lottery profits to help reduce the state’s budget deficit and place lottery revenues in the general fund; lottery payments to schools would then come from the general fund. Residents find the original purpose of Proposition 37 important: Nearly seven in 10 residents (68%) and likely voters (69%) say it is very important that public schools receive a dedicated stream of funding from state lottery profits. Over six in 10 across parties and regions hold this view. Across racial/ethnic groups, Asians (55%) are the least likely to say dedicated lottery profits for K–12 are very important (67% whites, 73% Latinos, 75% blacks).

**“California voters passed Proposition 37 in 1984, which created the California Lottery to provide supplemental funding to K–12 public schools. How important to you is it that California’s public schools receive a dedicated stream of funding from state lottery profits?”**

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>Very important</b>	68%	71%	63%	70%	69%
<b>Somewhat important</b>	21	18	22	20	18
<b>Not too important</b>	4	5	4	2	4
<b>Not at all important</b>	5	4	8	7	6
<b>Don’t know</b>	2	2	3	1	3

## DECISIONMAKING IN LOCAL SCHOOLS

When it comes to deciding how money from the state government should be spent in local public schools, about eight in 10 residents believe decisions should be made locally (49% local school districts, 33% local schools) rather than by the state (13%). Fewer than one in five across parties and regions believe the state should have control and most think the local school districts should make decisions. Among likely voters, 52 percent prefer local school districts and 35 percent prefer local schools. Across racial/ethnic groups, pluralities of Asians (55%), whites (54%), and Latinos (43%) prefer that local school districts have control, while blacks are divided (44% local schools, 45% local school districts).

### “Who do you think should have the most control in deciding how the money from state government is spent in local public schools?”

	All Adults	Region					Public School Parents
		Central Valley	San Francisco Bay Area	Los Angeles	Orange/San Diego	Inland Empire	
Local school districts	49%	46%	58%	44%	52%	54%	47%
Local schools	33	33	26	34	35	34	33
State government	13	16	12	17	9	8	16
Other	2	2	2	2	1	2	2
Don't know	3	3	2	3	3	2	2

Going along with their trust in local decisionmaking, vast majorities of residents and likely voters (77% each) agree with the statement that local schools should have more flexibility than they do now when spending state money. At least seven in 10 across parties, regions, and demographic groups agree.

At the same time, strong majorities of residents (71%) and likely voters (65%) believe local schools should be more accountable to the state for the money they spend than they are now. This view is held by at least two in three across parties and by solid majorities across regions and demographic groups. Across racial/ethnic groups, whites (62%) are the least likely to hold this view (79% blacks, 80% Asians, 85% Latinos). Agreement that local schools should be more accountable to the state declines with higher age, education, and income.

When responses are combined, 56 percent of residents agree that local schools should have more flexibility and that they should be more accountable to the state. Seventeen percent agree that schools should have more flexibility and disagree that they should be more accountable, while 13 percent disagree that schools should have more flexibility and agree that they should be more accountable.

### “In general, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”

		All Adults	Region					Likely Voters
			Central Valley	San Francisco Bay Area	Los Angeles	Orange/San Diego	Inland Empire	
<i>When spending state money, local schools should have more flexibility than they do now.</i>	Agree	77%	76%	76%	79%	77%	75%	77%
	Disagree	16	18	15	15	15	20	15
	Don't know	7	6	9	6	8	5	8
<i>When spending state money, local schools should be more accountable to the state than they are now.</i>	Agree	71	75	66	75	70	71	65
	Disagree	21	18	25	18	22	23	25
	Don't know	8	7	9	7	8	6	10

## LOCAL SCHOOL FUNDING

If their local school district had a bond measure on the ballot to pay for school construction projects, 60 percent of Californians would support it. Among likely voters, support is currently at 54 percent, just shy of the 55 percent required to pass local school construction bonds. Among all adults and likely voters, the percentages saying they would vote yes on a local school construction bond are the lowest since this question was first asked in PPIC Statewide Surveys in 1999. Today, a solid majority of Democrats (69%) would vote yes on a local school construction bond, as would 55 percent of independents, but 51 percent of Republicans would vote no. Across regions, support is lowest in Orange/San Diego Counties (53%) and highest in Los Angeles (64%). Across racial/ethnic groups, support is lowest among whites (49%) and highest among Latinos (79%).

If there were a ballot measure to increase local parcel taxes for their local public schools, 54 percent of residents would vote yes. Likely voters are divided (49% yes, 47% no), with support falling far short of the two-thirds majority vote required to pass local special taxes. Support among all adults and likely voters for increasing local parcel taxes is somewhat higher than support for increasing property taxes was in past surveys. (Property taxes vary based on a property’s assessed value, while a parcel tax is a flat tax.) Registered voters today are divided sharply along partisan lines, with 67 percent of Democrats saying they would vote yes and 63 percent of Republicans saying they would vote no. Independents are more likely to vote yes than no (51% to 44%). Moreover, homeowners, who would owe such a parcel tax, are divided (47% yes, 48% no), while renters, who would not owe any tax, support it (66%).

		All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
			Dem	Rep	Ind	
<i><b>If your local school district had a bond measure on the ballot to pay for school construction projects, would you vote yes or no?</b></i>	<b>Yes</b>	60%	69%	44%	55%	54%
	<b>No</b>	34	27	51	40	41
	<b>Don't know</b>	6	4	5	5	5
<i><b>What if there was a measure on your local ballot to increase local parcel taxes to provide more funds for the local public schools? Would you vote yes or no?</b></i>	<b>Yes</b>	54	67	33	51	49
	<b>No</b>	41	28	63	44	47
	<b>Don't know</b>	5	5	4	5	4

Californians are divided about changing the vote requirement to pass local parcel taxes for public schools. Forty-five percent think it is a good idea to lower the requirement from two-thirds to 55 percent, and 49 percent think it is a bad idea. A majority of likely voters (55%) call it a bad idea. When asked in the past about easing the vote requirement for local special taxes in general, likely voters also tended to think it was a bad idea. Today, about half of Democrats (52%) say good idea, while about half of independents (52%) and two in three Republicans (67%) say bad idea.

**“As you may know, the California state constitution requires a two-thirds vote at the ballot box to pass any local special taxes. Do you think it’s a good idea or a bad idea to replace the two-thirds vote requirement with a 55 percent majority vote for voters to pass local parcel taxes for the local public schools?”**

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>Good idea</b>	45%	52%	28%	43%	40%
<b>Bad idea</b>	49	42	67	52	55
<b>Don't know</b>	6	6	5	5	5



## RESOURCE EQUITY

Overwhelming majorities of Californians (77%) and likely voters (78%) recognize that schools in lower-income areas do not have the same amount of resources—such as good teachers and classroom materials—as schools in higher-income areas. Since this question was first asked in April 2005, at least three in four residents have said there is a discrepancy in resources (76% April 2005, 75% April 2007, 78% April 2008, 77% today).

Solid majorities across parties believe schools in lower-income areas do not have the same resources as other schools, although Democrats (85%) are the most likely to express this view (72% independents, 69% Republicans). Across regions, more than seven in 10 agree, with San Francisco Bay Area (80%) and Los Angeles (79%) residents most likely to say so. Across racial/ethnic groups, blacks (95%) are by far the most likely to say there is a disparity, followed by 80 percent of Latinos, 75 percent of whites, and 64 percent of Asians.

**“Do you think that schools in lower-income areas of the state have the same amount of resources—including good teachers and classroom materials—as schools in wealthier areas?”**

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>Yes, same</b>	17%	11%	22%	21%	15%
<b>No, not the same</b>	77	85	69	72	78
<b>Don't know</b>	6	4	9	7	7

If new state funding were to become available, Californians (70%) and likely voters (67%) believe schools in lower-income areas of the state should receive more of the new funding than other schools to help pay for teachers and classroom materials. Support for providing more new funding to schools in lower-income areas is similar to last April (72%) and April 2007 (74%).

Across parties today, an overwhelming majority of Democrats (79%) and independents (70%) support providing schools in lower-income areas greater resources if possible, compared to 53 percent of Republicans. Los Angeles (76%) and San Francisco Bay Area residents (74%) are more likely than Central Valley (67%), Inland Empire (65%), and Orange/San Diego residents (64%) to favor this idea. Eighty-seven percent of blacks and 85 percent of Latinos express support, compared to 69 percent of Asians and 61 percent of whites. Younger, less educated, and lower-income residents are more likely than others to believe these schools should get more new funding than other schools if it became available.

Among those who believe schools in lower-income areas lack the resources of schools in wealthier areas, 78 percent would favor giving the schools in lower-income areas more of any new state funding.

**“If new state funding becomes available, should schools in lower-income areas get more of this funding than other schools to help pay for teachers and classroom materials, or not?”**

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>Yes</b>	70%	79%	53%	70%	67%
<b>No</b>	25	17	41	25	28
<b>Don't know</b>	5	4	6	5	5

## CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAM

To receive a high school diploma in California, students must meet their regular academic requirements and pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). This exam was first required for graduation in 2006, and includes testing in both mathematics and in English and language arts. Californians remain largely supportive of an exit exam requirement to receive a diploma (69%), and high percentages have expressed support each time this question was asked in past PPIC Statewide Surveys (74% 2002, 72% 2005, 73% 2006, 72% 2007, 72% 2008).

Across racial/ethnic groups, Latinos (80%) are the most likely to say students should have to pass an exit exam before they graduate from high school even if they have passing grades, followed by Asians (69%), whites (65%), and blacks (53%). Among public school parents (74%), support is even higher than among all adults when it comes to requiring students to pass a statewide test for a high school diploma. Across education levels, support is higher among those with just a high school diploma (75%) than among those with some college (62%) and college graduates (69%).

### “Do you think that students should or should not have to pass statewide tests before they can graduate from high school, even if they have passing grades in their classes?”

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asian	Black	Latino	White	
<b>Should have to</b>	69%	69%	53%	80%	65%	74%
<b>Should not have to</b>	28	27	42	20	31	23
<b>Don't know</b>	3	4	5	–	4	3

Although nine in 10 students overall in the class of 2008 passed the CAHSEE, passage rates across racial/ethnic groups and between economically disadvantaged students and others varied widely. In our survey, nearly nine in 10 Californians say they are concerned (55% very, 32% somewhat) that students in lower-income areas have a higher failure rate on the CAHSEE than other students. Findings are similar among public school parents. Across racial/ethnic groups, blacks (85%) are far more likely than Latinos (59%), and Asians and whites (50% each), to say they are very concerned that students in lower-income areas have higher failure rates than other students. The percentage of adults saying they are very concerned has increased over the past three years (44% 2007, 50% 2008, 55% 2009).

### “How concerned are you that students in lower-income areas have a higher failure rate on the California High School Exit Exam than other students?”

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asian	Black	Latino	White	
<b>Very concerned</b>	55%	50%	85%	59%	50%	59%
<b>Somewhat concerned</b>	32	42	13	33	32	31
<b>Not too concerned</b>	6	3	1	3	10	5
<b>Not at all concerned</b>	5	4	1	3	6	4
<b>Don't know</b>	2	1	–	2	2	1

## HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE

Last year, state educators released data about the dropout rate for the 2006–07 school year using a new student tracking system. The rate was much higher than previously estimated: Nearly one in four students (24.2%) in the class of 2007 dropped out of school, with even higher rates among Latino and black students. Educators and legislators face many challenges in trying to address the high school dropout rate, and residents remain concerned about the dropout rate among lower-income students. Eighty-nine percent of residents are concerned (60% very, 29% somewhat) that students in lower-income areas have a higher dropout rate from high school compared to other students. Concern has increased by 7 points since last year (53% 2008, 60% today), before the revised dropout figures were released.

Across racial/ethnic groups, blacks (82%) are far more likely than others (60% Latinos, 59% whites, 52% Asians) to be very concerned about the dropout rate in lower-income areas. Strong majorities across political and demographic groups are at least somewhat concerned, but Democrats (71%) are much more likely than independents (57%) and Republicans (50%) to be very concerned. Women (63%) are more likely than men (57%) to be very concerned and residents of Los Angeles (64%), the Inland Empire (63%), and the San Francisco Bay Area (62%) are more likely than others to be very concerned (58% Central Valley, 53% Orange/San Diego Counties). Among those who say the high school dropout rate is a big problem, 68 percent are very concerned.

### “How concerned are you that students in lower-income areas have a higher dropout rate from high school than other students?”

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asian	Black	Latino	White	
<b>Very concerned</b>	60%	52%	82%	60%	59%	60%
<b>Somewhat concerned</b>	29	41	14	30	28	28
<b>Not too concerned</b>	5	2	2	5	6	5
<b>Not at all concerned</b>	5	4	1	4	5	5
<b>Don't know</b>	1	1	1	1	2	2

One idea to increase graduation rates among students in lower-income areas is providing more school support staff such as mentors, counselors, and social workers; 66 percent of Californians and 61 percent of likely voters favor this idea, even if it cost more money. Support among adults and likely voters is similar to support last year, but is lower than in 2007 (72% all adults, 68% likely voters). Across parties, solid majorities of Democrats (75%) and independents (64%) would favor this proposal to help at-risk students from dropping out of high school, while Republicans are divided (47% favor, 49% oppose).

Majorities across regional and demographic groups would favor increasing school support staff, with residents in Los Angeles (70%) and the San Francisco Bay Area (69%) most likely to favor this proposal. Support for this proposal decreases as age, education, and income levels rise.

### “One idea that has been suggested for improving the graduation rate among students in lower-income areas is to increase the number of school support staff, such as counselors, mentors, and social workers. Would you favor or oppose this idea, even if it cost the state more money?”

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>Favor</b>	66%	75%	47%	64%	61%
<b>Oppose</b>	31	21	49	34	36
<b>Don't know</b>	3	4	4	2	3

## COLLEGE READINESS

Nearly all Californians say it is important for K–12 public schools to prepare students for college, with 76 percent calling it very important. Eighty-three percent of public school parents say that preparing students for college is very important to them. Californians today are somewhat less likely than they were in 2007 (81%) to say that it is very important that California’s K–12 public schools prepare students for college.

Across racial/ethnic groups, blacks (90%) and Latinos (89%) are much more likely than whites (69%) and Asians (68%) to say it is very important that K–12 public schools prepare students for college. Across regions, residents in Los Angeles (83%) are most likely to agree it is very important, followed by residents in the Inland Empire (77%), San Francisco Bay Area (75%), Central Valley (74%) and Orange/San Diego Counties (73%). Strong majorities of Democrats (83%), independents (74%), and Republicans (65%) agree that preparing California’s K–12 public school students for college is very important to them. This belief declines with rising age, income, and education.

### “How important to you is it that California’s K–12 public schools prepare students for college?”

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asian	Black	Latino	White	
<b>Very important</b>	76%	68%	90%	89%	69%	83%
<b>Somewhat important</b>	20	30	9	9	25	14
<b>Not too important</b>	3	–	–	1	5	3
<b>Don't know</b>	1	2	1	1	1	–

So how do Californians rate the performance of the state’s K–12 public schools when it comes to preparing students for college? Fewer than half of Californians (46%) say the state’s K–12 system does an excellent (4%) or good job (42%), with 48 percent saying the state’s schools are doing a not-so-good (36%) or poor job (12%). Fifty-seven percent of public school parents give an excellent or good rating; 41 percent give a not-so-good or poor job rating. Across racial/ethnic groups, Asians and Latinos (56% each) are more likely than whites (42%) and blacks (35%) to say K–12 public schools are doing an excellent or good job preparing students for college. Of those who say college preparation is very important, 47 percent give an excellent or good rating to California’s public schools and 50 percent give not-so-good or poor ratings. Residents today are somewhat more likely to give higher ratings than they were in 2006 (41% excellent/good, 53% not so good/poor).

### “Please tell me if you think California’s K–12 public schools are doing an excellent, good, not so good, or poor job in achieving the following goals. How about in preparing students for college?”

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asian	Black	Latino	White	
<b>Excellent</b>	4	2%	4%	8%	3%	7%
<b>Good</b>	42	54	31	48	39	50
<b>Not so good</b>	36	30	44	31	39	33
<b>Poor</b>	12	7	17	10	14	8
<b>Don't know</b>	6	7	4	3	5	2

## WORKFORCE READINESS

California's public schools offer students career technical or vocational education (CTE) as part of the curriculum. Almost all Californians say CTE is important, with 71 percent saying it is very important. Findings among public school parents are similar to all adults. Californians were nearly as likely in 2007 (67%) to say CTE is very important.

Across racial/ethnic groups, three in four blacks (74%), Latinos (74%), and whites (73%) say career technical education is a very important part of the California K–12 public school curriculum, while just over half of Asians (55%) say the same. Across regions, strong majorities say CTE is very important, with residents in the Central Valley (75%) the most likely to agree. Belief that CTE is very important increases as age increases. Across all income groups, about seven in 10 say CTE is very important; women (74%) are somewhat more likely than men (69%) to hold this view.

### “How important to you is it that California’s K–12 public schools include career technical or vocational education as part of the curriculum?”

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asian	Black	Latino	White	
<b>Very important</b>	71%	55%	74%	74%	73%	73%
<b>Somewhat important</b>	23	39	20	21	22	23
<b>Not too important</b>	4	4	3	5	5	4
<b>Don't know</b>	2	2	3	–	–	–

How do Californians rank the performance of the state's education system when it comes to preparing students for jobs and the workforce? Thirty-four percent of Californians say the public schools are doing an excellent (3%) or good job (31%), while 61 percent say they are doing a not-so-good (43%) or poor job (18%). Public school parents are somewhat more favorable in their assessment of the state's K–12 schools on this measure (42% excellent/good, 54% not so good/poor). Across racial/ethnic groups, Latinos (49% excellent/good) are most likely to give schools a favorable rating on preparing students for the workforce and whites (25% excellent/good) are least likely. Findings today are similar to 2006 (33% excellent/good, 60% not so good/poor). Among those who say CTE is a very important part of the curriculum, 31 percent give an excellent/good rating to schools in preparing students for jobs and the workforce, with 65 percent giving a not so good/poor rating. Favorable ratings for schools in preparing students for the workforce decline with rising age, education, and income levels.

### “Please tell me if you think California’s K–12 public schools are doing an excellent, good, not so good, or poor job in achieving the following goals. How about in preparing students for jobs and the workforce?”

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asian	Black	Latino	White	
<b>Excellent</b>	3%	2%	1%	6%	1%	5%
<b>Good</b>	31	33	25	43	24	37
<b>Not so good</b>	43	42	46	37	48	41
<b>Poor</b>	18	10	25	12	21	13
<b>Don't know</b>	5	13	3	2	6	4

## DATA AND INFORMATION GATHERING

Educational data systems are a priority at the state and national level. Such systems not only provide student data, but also information on schools and fiscal data. Recently, California received federal economic stimulus funds to help offset education spending cuts and to invest in education reforms, in raising standards, and in developing better ways to track student achievement. Nine in 10 residents and 94 percent of public school parents say it is important that the state collect and make available information about local K–12 public schools, with majorities saying it is very important (56% adults, 65% public school parents). Findings among Californians today are similar to last year’s (53% very, 35% somewhat, 10% not too important), while the perceived importance of local school data among public school parents has increased 7 points since last year (58% very important to 65% today).

Today, Democrats (59%) and independents (57%) are more likely than Republicans (50%) to say this kind of data gathering is very important to them. Across racial/ethnic groups, blacks (70%) are more likely than Latinos (64%) and far more likely than whites (51%) and Asians (44%) to say data collection and dissemination is very important. Across regions, residents in the Inland Empire (64%) are the most likely to say it is very important; residents in Orange/San Diego Counties (52%) are the least likely to agree. Majorities of men and women (56% each) say this data gathering effort is very important.

**“How important to you is it that the state collect and make available information about local K–12 public schools, including resources and student performance?”**

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asian	Black	Latino	White	
<b>Very important</b>	56%	44%	70%	64%	51%	65%
<b>Somewhat important</b>	34	43	23	32	35	29
<b>Not too important</b>	8	8	6	4	11	6
<b>Don't know</b>	2	5	1	–	3	–

Moreover, a majority of Californians believe the state should support this effort. Fifty-eight percent of residents and 51 percent of likely voters say they would favor increased state funding for the development of this data system. Although support among residents and likely voters was similar last year (59% all adults, 50% likely voters), it has declined since 2007 (66% all adults, 57% likely voters). Across political groups, Democrats (64%) are more likely than independents (56%) to favor this idea, while Republicans (53%) oppose it.

Across racial/ethnic groups, Latinos (77%) are much more likely than blacks (62%), Asians (58%), and whites (47%) to favor this idea, and support declines sharply with higher age, education, and income. Among those who say collecting and disseminating data is very important, 69 percent say they favor increased state funding for a data system.

**“Would you favor or oppose increased state funding for the development of a data system that maintains this type of information about the K–12 education system?”**

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
<b>Favor</b>	58%	64%	43%	56%	51%
<b>Oppose</b>	37	31	53	38	44
<b>Don't know</b>	5	5	4	6	5



# REGIONAL MAP

---





# METHODOLOGY

---

The PPIC Statewide Survey is directed by Mark Baldassare, president and CEO and survey director at the Public Policy Institute of California, with research support from Sonja Petek, project manager for this survey, and survey research associates Dean Bonner and Jennifer Paluch. This survey was conducted with funding from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation as part of a three-year grant on K–12 and higher education, environment, and population issues. We benefited from discussions with PPIC staff, foundation staff, and other policy experts; however, the methods, questions, and content of this report were solely determined by Mark Baldassare and the survey staff.

The findings in this report are based on a telephone survey of 2,502 California adult residents, including 2,250 interviewed on landline telephones and 252 interviewed on cell phones. Interviewing took place on weekday nights and weekend days from April 7–21, 2009. Interviews took an average of 19 minutes to complete.

Landline interviews were conducted using a computer-generated random sample of telephone numbers that ensured that both listed and unlisted numbers were called. All landline telephone exchanges in California were eligible for selection and the sample telephone numbers were called as many as six times to increase the likelihood of reaching eligible households. Once a household was reached, an adult respondent (age 18 or older) was randomly chosen for interviewing using the “last birthday method” to avoid biases in age and gender.

Cell phone interviews were included in this survey to account for the growing number of Californians who use them. These interviews were conducted using a computer-generated random sample of cell phone numbers. All cell phone numbers with California area codes were eligible for selection and the sample telephone numbers were called as many as eight times to increase the likelihood of reaching an eligible respondent. Once a cell phone user was reached, it was verified that this person was age 18 or older, a resident of California, and in a safe place to continue the survey (e.g., not driving). Cell phone respondents were offered a small reimbursement for their time to help defray the potential cost of the call. Cell phone interviews were conducted with adults who have cell phone service only and with those who have both cell phone and landline service in the household.

Landline and cell phone interviewing was conducted in English, Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), Vietnamese, and Korean, according to respondents’ preferences. We chose these languages because Spanish is the dominant language among non-English speaking adults in California, followed in prevalence by the three Asian languages. Accent on Languages, Inc. translated the survey into Spanish, with assistance from Renatta DeFever. Abt SRBI Inc. translated the survey into Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean, and conducted all interviewing.

With assistance from Abt SRBI, we used recent U.S. Census and state figures to compare the demographic characteristics of the survey sample with characteristics of California’s adult population. The survey sample was closely comparable to the census and state figures. Abt SRBI used data from the 2007 National Health Interview Survey and data from the 2006–2007 American Community Survey for California, both to estimate landline and cell phone service in California and to compare it against landline and cell phone service reported in the survey. The survey data in this report were statistically weighted to account for any differences in demographics and telephone service.

The sampling error for the total of 2,502 adults is  $\pm 2$  percent at the 95 percent confidence level. This means that 95 times out of 100, the results will be within 2 percentage points of what they would be if all adults in California were interviewed. The sampling error for subgroups is larger: For the 2,012 registered

voters, it is  $\pm 2.2$  percent; for the 1,518 likely voters, it is  $\pm 2.5$  percent, for the 762 public school parents it is  $\pm 3.5$  percent. Sampling error is only one type of error to which surveys are subject. Results may also be affected by factors such as question wording, question order, and survey timing.

Throughout the report, we refer to five geographic regions that account for approximately 90 percent of the state population. “Central Valley” includes Butte, Colusa, El Dorado, Fresno, Glenn, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Shasta, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Tulare, Yolo, and Yuba Counties. “San Francisco Bay Area” includes Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma Counties. “Los Angeles” refers to Los Angeles County, “Inland Empire” refers to Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, and “Orange/San Diego” refers to Orange and San Diego Counties. Residents from other geographic areas are included in the results reported for all adults, registered voters, and likely voters, but sample sizes for these less populated areas are not large enough to report separately in tables and text.

We present specific results for respondents in four self-identified racial/ethnic groups: Asian, black, Latino, and non-Hispanic white. We also compare the opinions of registered Democrats, Republicans, and independents (i.e., those registered as “decline to state”). We also analyze the responses of likely voters—those who are the most likely to participate in the state’s elections. We compare current PPIC Statewide Survey results to those in earlier PPIC Statewide Surveys and to results from surveys conducted by CNN/Opinion Research Corporation.

# QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESULTS

---

## CALIFORNIANS AND EDUCATION

**April 7–21, 2009**

**2,502 California Adult Residents:**

**English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese**

MARGIN OF ERROR  $\pm 2\%$  AT 95% CONFIDENCE LEVEL FOR TOTAL SAMPLE

1. First, thinking about the state as a whole, what do you think is the most important issue facing people in California today?  
*[code, don't read]*
  - 59% jobs, economy
  - 13 state budget, deficit, taxes
  - 7 education, schools
  - 3 immigration, illegal immigration
  - 2 crime, gangs, drugs
  - 2 health care, health costs
  - 2 housing costs, housing crisis
  - 2 water, drought
  - 7 other
  - 3 don't know
2. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way that Arnold Schwarzenegger is handling his job as governor of California?
  - 32% approve
  - 55 disapprove
  - 13 don't know
3. Do you approve or disapprove of the way that Governor Schwarzenegger is handling the state's kindergarten through 12th grade public education system?
  - 20% approve
  - 58 disapprove
  - 22 don't know
4. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way that the California Legislature is handling its job?
  - 23% approve
  - 63 disapprove
  - 14 don't know
5. Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the California Legislature is handling the state's kindergarten through 12th grade public education system?
  - 18% approve
  - 63 disapprove
  - 19 don't know
6. As you may know, the state government has an annual budget of around \$100 billion and currently faces a multibillion-dollar gap between spending and revenues. Some of the largest areas for state spending are: *[rotate]* [1] K–12 public education, [2] higher education, [3] health and human services, *[and]* [4] prisons and corrections. Thinking about these four areas of state spending, I'd like you to name the one you most want to protect from spending cuts.
  - 58% K–12 public education
  - 18 health and human services
  - 13 higher education
  - 7 prisons and corrections
  - 4 don't know
7. How concerned are you that the state's budget gap will cause significant spending cuts in K–12 public education?
  - 56% very concerned
  - 29 somewhat concerned
  - 7 not too concerned
  - 6 not at all concerned
  - 2 don't know

8. What if the state said it needed more money just to maintain current funding for K–12 public education. Would you be willing to pay higher taxes for this purpose, or not?

- 48% yes
- 49 no
- 3 don't know

9. Next, how much of a problem is the quality of education in California's K–12 public schools today? Is it a big problem, somewhat of a problem, or not much of a problem?

- 51% big problem
- 32 somewhat of a problem
- 12 not much of a problem
- 5 don't know

10. People have different ideas about California's public schools. Of all the possible things you can think of, what one thing about California's K–12 public schools do you think most needs improvement?

**[code, don't read]**

- 13% teacher quality
- 11 class size, overcrowding
- 10 teaching the basics
- 6 bureaucracy, inefficiency
- 5 not enough funding
- 5 teacher shortage, layoffs
- 3 student testing, accountability
- 3 discipline, values
- 3 safety, crime, gangs, violence, drugs
- 3 teachers' salaries
- 2 health, food, P.E.
- 2 parents, parental involvement
- 2 not enough resources, books, materials, technology
- 2 teaching art, music
- 2 too many immigrants/English learners, should only teach in English
- 18 other
- 10 don't know

11. Overall, do you think the K–12 public education system in California is in need of major changes, minor changes, or that it is basically fine the way it is?

- 58% major changes
- 31 minor changes
- 7 fine the way it is
- 4 don't know

In general, do you agree or disagree with the following statements? First,

**[rotate questions 12 and 13]**

12. Additional state funding would lead to higher quality K–12 education in California.

- 61% agree
- 34 disagree
- 5 don't know

Next,

13. Better use of existing state funds would lead to higher quality K–12 education in California.

- 85% agree
- 11 disagree
- 4 don't know

14. To significantly improve the quality of California's K–12 public schools, which of the following statements do you agree with the most? **[rotate responses 1 and 2]** [1] We need to use existing state funds more wisely, **[or]** [2] We need to increase the amount of state funding, **[or]** [3] We need to use existing state funds more wisely and increase the amount of state funding.

- 49% use funds more wisely
- 6 increase state funding
- 43 both
- 3 don't know

Next, I'm going to read you a list of issues people have mentioned when talking about California's K–12 public schools today. For each one, please tell me if you think it is a big problem, somewhat of a problem, or not really a problem.

**[rotate questions 15 to 17]**

15. How about teacher quality?

- 29% big problem
- 41 somewhat of a problem
- 25 not really a problem
- 5 don't know

16. How about the high school dropout rate?

- 70% big problem
- 20 somewhat of a problem
- 5 not really a problem
- 5 don't know

17. How about student achievement?

- 43% big problem
- 42 somewhat of a problem
- 11 not really a problem
- 4 don't know

On another topic,

**[rotate questions 18 and 19]**

18. Where do you think California currently ranks in per pupil spending for K–12 public schools? Compared to other states, is California's spending near the top, above average, average, below average, or near the bottom?

- 15% near the top
- 13 above average
- 24 average
- 21 below average
- 14 near the bottom
- 13 don't know

19. Where do you think California currently ranks in student test scores for K–12 public schools? Compared to other states, are California's student test scores near the top, above average, average, below average, or near the bottom?

- 2% near the top
- 8 above average
- 34 average
- 32 below average
- 17 near the bottom
- 7 don't know

Next,

**[rotate question blocks: 20-21 and 22-23]**

20. Do you think that students should or should not have to pass statewide tests before they can graduate from high school, even if they have passing grades in their classes?

- 69% should have to
- 28 should not have to
- 3 don't know

21. How concerned are you that students in lower-income areas have a higher failure rate on the California High School Exit Exam than other students?

- 55% very concerned
- 32 somewhat concerned
- 6 not too concerned
- 5 not at all concerned
- 2 don't know

22. How concerned are you that students in lower-income areas have a higher drop-out rate from high school than other students?

- 60% very concerned
- 29 somewhat concerned
- 5 not too concerned
- 5 not at all concerned
- 1 don't know

23. One idea that has been suggested for improving the graduation rate among students in lower-income areas is to increase the number of school support staff, such as counselors, mentors, and social workers. Would you favor or oppose this idea, even if it cost the state more money?

- 66% favor
- 31 oppose
- 3 don't know

**[rotate questions 24 and 25]**

24. How important to you is it that California's K-12 public schools include career technical or vocational education as part of the curriculum?

- 71% very important
- 23 somewhat important
- 4 not too important
- 2 don't know

25. How important to you is it that California's K-12 public schools prepare students for college?

- 76% very important
- 20 somewhat important
- 3 not too important
- 1 don't know

Next, please tell me if you think California's K-12 public schools are doing an excellent, good, not so good, or poor job in achieving the following goals.

**[rotate questions 26 and 27]**

26. How about in preparing students for jobs and the workforce?

- 3% excellent
- 31 good
- 43 not so good
- 18 poor
- 5 don't know

27. How about in preparing students for college?

- 4% excellent
- 42 good
- 36 not so good
- 12 poor
- 6 don't know

28. Changing topics, how important to you is it that the state collect and make available information about local K-12 public schools, including resources and student performance?

- 56% very important
- 34 somewhat important
- 8 not too important
- 2 don't know

29. Would you favor or oppose increased state funding for the development of a data system that maintains this type of information about the K-12 education system?

- 58% favor
- 37 oppose
- 5 don't know

30. Next, overall, how would you rate the quality of public schools in your neighborhood today? If you had to give your local public schools a grade, would it be A, B, C, D, or F?

- 19% A
- 34 B
- 28 C
- 9 D
- 4 F
- 6 don't know

31. Do you think the current level of state funding for your local public schools is more than enough, just enough, or not enough?

- 11% more than enough
- 32 just enough
- 50 not enough
- 7 don't know

**[rotate questions 32 and 33]**

32. If your local school district had a bond measure on the ballot to pay for school construction projects, would you vote yes or no?

- 60% yes
- 34 no
- 6 don't know

33. What if there was a measure on your local ballot to increase local parcel taxes to provide more funds for the local public schools? Would you vote yes or no?

- 54% yes
- 41 no
- 5 don't know

34. Next, as you may know, the California state constitution requires a two-thirds vote at the ballot box to pass any local special taxes. Do you think it's a good idea or a bad idea to replace the two-thirds vote requirement with a 55 percent majority vote for voters to pass local parcel taxes for the local public schools?

- 45% good idea
- 49 bad idea
- 6 don't know

35. Next, who do you think should have the most control in deciding how the money from state government is spent in local public schools—**[rotate order]** [1] the local schools, [2] the local school districts, **[or]** [3] the state government?

- 49% the local school districts
- 33 the local schools
- 13 the state government
- 2 other (*specify*)
- 3 don't know

In general, do you agree or disagree with the following statements? First,

**[rotate questions 36 and 37]**

36. When spending state money, local schools should have more flexibility than they do now.

- 77% agree
- 16 disagree
- 7 don't know

37. When spending state money, local schools should be more accountable to the state than they are now.

- 71% agree
- 21 disagree
- 8 don't know

38. Changing topics, do you think that schools in lower-income areas of the state have the same amount of resources—including good teachers and classroom materials—as schools in wealthier areas?

- 17% yes
- 77 no
- 6 don't know

39. If new state funding becomes available, should schools in lower-income areas get more of this funding than other schools to help pay for teachers and classroom materials, or not?

- 70% yes
- 25 no
- 5 don't know

Next,

**[rotate questions 40 and 41]**

40. California voters passed Proposition 98 in 1988, which established a minimum level of spending each year for K–14 public schools. How important to you is it that California's public schools are guaranteed a minimum level of state funding each year?

- 68% very important
- 23 somewhat important
- 3 not too important
- 4 not at all important
- 2 don't know

41. California voters passed Proposition 37 in 1984, which created the California Lottery to provide supplemental funding to K–12 public schools. How important to you is it that California’s public schools receive a dedicated stream of funding from state lottery profits?

- 68% very important
- 21 somewhat important
- 4 not too important
- 5 not at all important
- 2 don’t know

42. Changing topics, overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way that Barack Obama is handling his job as president of the United States?

- 70% approve
- 21 disapprove
- 9 don’t know

43. Do you approve or disapprove of the way that President Obama is handling education policy?

- 58% approve
- 16 disapprove
- 26 don’t know

44. The economic stimulus plan passed by the president and Congress will be providing funding to California for K–12 public education. Do you think this federal funding should be: **[rotate responses 1 and 2]** [1] mostly used to make up for recent state spending cuts in K–12 education, [2] mostly used for new education innovations and reforms, **[or]** [3] used to make up for spending cuts and for new education innovations and reforms?

- 22% make up for recent cuts
- 18 new innovations and reforms
- 54 both
- 6 don’t know

45. Next, some people are registered to vote and others are not. Are you absolutely certain that you are registered to vote in California?

- 81% yes *[ask q45a]*
- 19 no *[skip to q46b]*

45a. Are you registered as a Democrat, a Republican, another party, or as an independent?

- 45% Democrat *[ask q46]*
- 31 Republican *[skip to q46a]*
- 4 another party *(specify) [skip to q47]*
- 20 independent *[skip to q46b]*

46. Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or not a very strong Democrat?

- 58% strong
- 39 not very strong
- 3 don’t know

**[skip to q47]**

46a. Would you call yourself a strong Republican or not a very strong Republican?

- 48% strong
- 50 not very strong
- 2 don’t know

**[skip to q47]**

46b. Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or Democratic Party?

- 18% Republican Party
- 50 Democratic Party
- 26 neither *(volunteered)*
- 6 don’t know

47. Next, would you consider yourself to be politically: **[read list, rotate order top to bottom]**

- 11% very liberal
- 20 somewhat liberal
- 31 middle-of-the-road
- 22 somewhat conservative
- 13 very conservative
- 3 don’t know



48. Generally speaking, how much interest would you say you have in politics?

- 30% great deal
- 41 fair amount
- 23 only a little
- 5 none
- 1 don't know

49. How closely are you following news about the May 19th statewide special election?

- 15% very closely
- 32 fairly closely
- 30 not too closely
- 18 not at all closely
- 4 have not heard about it (*volunteered*)
- 1 don't know

**[d1 to d4a: demographic questions]**

D4b. **[public school parents only]** Would you say your child's public school has or has not been affected by recent state budget cuts? (*if it has: Has it been affected a lot or somewhat?*)

- 28% affected a lot
- 44 affected somewhat
- 23 not affected
- 5 don't know

D4c. **[public school parents only]** What do you hope will be the highest grade level that your youngest child will achieve: some high school; high school graduate; some college; college graduate; or a graduate degree after college?

- 1% some high school
- 6 high school graduate
- 5 some college
- 46 college graduate
- 39 a graduate degree after college
- 3 don't know

D4d. **[public school parents only]** How confident are you that you have the resources and information needed for this child to reach that grade level?

- 45% very confident
- 36 somewhat confident
- 18 not too confident
- 1 don't know

D4e. **[public school parents only]** How confident are you that your local K-12 schools have the resources needed to prepare this child for that grade level?

- 24% very confident
- 45 somewhat confident
- 30 not too confident
- 1 don't know

**[d5 to d18: demographic questions]**



# PPIC STATEWIDE SURVEY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

---

**Ruben Barrales**

President and Chief Executive Officer  
San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce

**Angela Blackwell**

Founder and Chief Executive Officer  
PolicyLink

**Paul Brest**

President  
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

**Mollyann Brodie**

Vice President  
Kaiser Family Foundation

**Bruce E. Cain**

Executive Director  
University of California Washington Center

**James E. Canales**

President  
The James Irvine Foundation

**Jon Cohen**

Director of Polling  
*The Washington Post*

**Matthew K. Fong**

Special Counsel  
Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton, LLP

**Russell Hancock**

President and Chief Executive Officer  
Joint Venture Silicon Valley Network

**William Hauck**

President  
California Business Roundtable

**Sherry Bebitch Jeffe**

Senior Scholar  
School of Policy, Planning, and Development  
University of Southern California

**Carol S. Larson**

President and Chief Executive Officer  
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

**Monica Lozano**

Publisher and Chief Executive Officer  
*La Opinión*

**Donna Lucas**

Chief Executive Officer  
Lucas Public Affairs

**Dan Rosenheim**

News Director  
KPIX-TV

**Robert K. Ross, M.D.**

President and Chief Executive Officer  
The California Endowment

**Most Reverend Jaime Soto**

Bishop of Sacramento  
Roman Catholic Diocese of Sacramento

**Cathy Taylor**

Vice President and  
Editorial Commentary Director  
*Orange County Register*

**Raymond L. Watson**

Vice Chairman of the Board Emeritus  
The Irvine Company

**Carol Whiteside**

President Emeritus  
Great Valley Center

# PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA

---

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Walter B. Hewlett, Chair**

Director  
Center for Computer Assisted  
Research in the Humanities

**Mark Baldassare**

President and Chief Executive Officer  
Public Policy Institute of California

**Ruben Barrales**

President and Chief Executive Officer  
San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce

**John E. Bryson**

Retired Chairman and CEO  
Edison International

**Gary K. Hart**

Former State Senator and  
Secretary of Education  
State of California

**Donna Lucas**

Chief Executive Officer  
Lucas Public Affairs

**Ki Suh Park**

Design and Managing Partner  
Gruen Associates

**Constance L. Rice**

Co-Director  
The Advancement Project

**Thomas C. Sutton**

Retired Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
Pacific Life Insurance Company

**Raymond L. Watson**

Vice Chairman of the Board Emeritus  
The Irvine Company

**Carol Whiteside**

President Emeritus  
Great Valley Center



**PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA**

500 Washington Street, Suite 600

San Francisco, California 94111

phone: 415.291.4400

fax: 415.291.4401

**PPIC SACRAMENTO CENTER**

Senator Office Building

1121 L Street, Suite 801

Sacramento, California 95814

phone: 916.440.1120

fax: 916.440.1121

[www.ppic.org](http://www.ppic.org)

[survey@ppic.org](mailto:survey@ppic.org)