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Californians & education



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PPIC

PUBLIC POLICY
INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA

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 106th PPIC Statewide Survey in a series that has generated a database of responses of more than 226,000 Californians. This survey is part of a PPIC Statewide Survey series funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Its goal 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 sixth PPIC Statewide Survey focusing on K–12 education issues.

California has the largest K–12 public education system in the nation. During 2008–09, the state served nearly 6.3 million students in 1,043 school districts and 9,898 public schools. California also has a highly diverse student population: Half are economically disadvantaged (52%), a quarter are English learners (24%), and 11 percent have disabilities. Latinos (49%) make up the largest racial/ethnic group of students, followed by whites (28%), Asians (12%), and blacks (7%).

Improving public schools in the face of severe budget constraints shapes the context of this survey. With a deepening fiscal crisis and state budget deficit of about \$20 billion, K–12 public schools face more funding cuts this year. According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, the governor's proposed 2010–11 budget for education falls short of Proposition 98 funding requirements. Passed by voters in 1988, Proposition 98 requires minimum funding levels for K–12 public schools. California has already received more than \$5 billion in federal funds for public schools through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009. The federal government has also provided incentives—through competitive grants—for states to implement reforms to raise standards, maintain effective teachers, and improve low-achieving schools. California applied for, but did not win, a competitive grant this year.

This report presents the responses of 2,504 adult residents throughout the state on the following:

- Perceptions of educational quality in California's K–12 public schools and of the appropriate fiscal response to improve quality; approval ratings of state and federal elected officials overall and on their handling of education; opinions about federal involvement in education; rankings of California's per pupil spending and student test scores; concern about challenges caused by budget cuts; ratings of students' preparation for the future; ratings of local public schools; and expectations of public school parents about their children's educational futures.
- Fiscal attitudes and policy preferences regarding the state budget and education funding; preferences for raising revenues for local schools; concern about specific spending cuts; preferences for assisting schools in lower-income areas; attitudes about merit pay for teachers and how to award it; attitudes about using data to make education policy decisions; and the priority that Californians think the next governor should place on improving K–12 education.
- 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). For questions about the survey, please contact survey@ppic.org. View our searchable PPIC Statewide Survey database online at www.ppic.org/main/survAdvancedSearch.asp.

NEWS RELEASE

EMBARGOED: Do not publish or broadcast until 9:00 p.m. PDT on Wednesday, April 28, 2010.

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<http://www.ppic.org/main/pressreleaseindex.asp>

PPIC STATEWIDE SURVEY: CALIFORNIANS AND EDUCATION

Concern Rises Over Impact of Budget Cuts on Public Schools

**RATINGS FOR STATE LEADERS ON EDUCATION HIT NEW LOWS—
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SEEN AS DOING TOO LITTLE**

SAN FRANCISCO, April 28, 2010—As California once again confronts a multibillion dollar budget deficit, concern has grown considerably among the state’s residents about the consequences of spending cuts on kindergarten through 12th grade education, according to an annual survey released today by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) with funding from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Californians today are more likely than last year to believe that funding for their local schools is inadequate, and parents of public school students are far more likely to say that state budget cuts have had a big effect on their children’s schools.

Most Californians (62%) believe there is not enough state funding going to their public schools (26% just enough, 6% more than enough), a 12-point increase since April 2009. A similar majority (62%) say they are very concerned the state’s budget gap will cause significant spending cuts in K–12 education, up 6 points since last April. Among public school parents, 43 percent say their children’s schools have been affected a lot by recent state budget cuts, 15 points higher than a year ago. Another 38 percent say their schools have been affected somewhat, and only 17 percent say they have seen no effect.

When asked how they feel about some potential ways schools may deal with decreased funding, an overwhelming number of Californians say they are very concerned (73%) or somewhat concerned (19%) about teacher layoffs. More than half are very concerned about class sizes getting bigger (59%), having fewer days of school instruction (56%), or elimination of art and music programs (56%). About half (49%) are very concerned about elimination of after-school and summer programs.

“At a time when Californians are looking for reforms that will improve student achievement, more Californians are seeing the direct effect of the state’s budget problems on children, teachers, and resources in their local schools,” says Mark Baldassare, PPIC president and CEO. “They expect better results from their leaders in Sacramento and in Washington.”

CALIFORNIANS WANT SCHOOLS PROTECTED FROM CUTS

K–12 education is the largest spending category in the state budget and the area that a majority of Californians (63%) most want to protect from spending cuts; far fewer residents name other spending categories as those they would most like to protect (14% health and human services, 13% higher education, and 7% prisons). This view holds across parties and demographic groups, and is one that a majority of Californians have held since PPIC first asked the question in June 2003.

Californians' concerns translate to record low approval ratings for the way state leaders are handling schools. While Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's overall approval rating (24%) matches his record low reached last month, his rating for handling K–12 public education is an even lower 16 percent—down 4 points from last year, 9 points from 2008, and 20 points from 2007. The legislature's overall approval rating (16%) is similar to the record low recorded last month (14%), and its rating for handling public schools is at 15 percent—down 3 points from last year, 6 points from 2008, and 14 points from 2007.

Nearly all Californians say the gubernatorial candidates' positions on K–12 education are very important (62%) or somewhat important (30%). Most Democrats (72%) and independents (59%) consider them very important, while Republicans (46%) are less likely to say so. Three-fourths (74%) of Californians say that improving education should be a high priority for the next governor.

The Obama administration's education policy efforts have not won the president high marks in California either. While his overall approval rating (61%) remains much higher than those of Sacramento officials, Californians give him a much lower rating for his handling of K–12 education policy. Less than half (46%) approve—a 12-point decline since last year—while 28 percent disapprove and 26 percent have no opinion. A majority of Californians (59%) say the federal government is not doing enough to improve the K–12 education system (25% just enough, 7% more than enough).

DROPOUT RATE SEEN AS BIG PROBLEM

Most Californians (85%) think that the quality of K–12 education is a problem, with a slim majority (53%) viewing it as a big problem. Just over half have said that education quality is a big problem since 2007 (52% 2007, 53% 2008, 51% 2009). Blacks (68%) and whites (60%) today are far more likely than Asians (48%) and Latinos (41%) to see education quality as a big problem.

When it comes to three particular issues—the high school dropout rate, student achievement, and teacher quality—Californians are most likely to see the dropout rate as a big problem (69%). This percentage is similar to previous years (69% 2008, 70% 2009). Concerns about the other issues are higher this year: 48 percent see student achievement as a big problem, up 5 points from April 2009, and 36 percent see teacher quality as big problem, up 7 points from last April. Among public school parents concerns increased more: Half (50%) say student achievement is a big problem, up 11 points from April 2009. And 35 percent say teacher quality is a big problem, up 10 points. Views of student achievement vary among racial and ethnic groups of Californians, with blacks (63%) much more likely to see it as a big problem than Latinos (51%), whites (45%), or Asians (39%).

POOR MARKS FOR COLLEGE, WORKFORCE PREPARATION

Are public schools preparing students for college or the workforce? Californians are more likely to say schools are not so good (39%) or poor (14%) at college preparation than to say they are doing a good (37%) or excellent job (4%). Residents' assessments are worse when asked about workforce preparation. Nearly two in three rated schools as not so good (45%) or poor (19%) in this area, compared to good (28%) or excellent (3%). Public school parents are more likely to give schools positive marks in both areas (49% good or excellent for college preparation, 42% good or excellent for workforce preparation).

Despite their low rankings of the public education system, Californians continue to be more positive about the quality of their local schools. As they have since 2005, more than half of residents (54%) and public school parents (67%) give schools in their neighborhoods a grade of A or B (51% 2005, 55% 2006, 52% 2007, 54% 2008, 53% 2009).

California ranks near the bottom in math and reading scores for grades 4 and 8, according to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. How well do Californians' perceptions match the data? Half (49%) accurately view student test scores as below average compared to other states, while 31 percent say test scores are average and 11 percent say above average.

MERIT PAY FOR TEACHERS FAVORED

Most Californians favor merit pay for teachers (62% favor, 26% oppose), although they are less likely than adults nationwide to support this frequently discussed policy reform (72% favor, 21% oppose in a 2009 national Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll). Asked about possible criteria to determine merit pay, 69 percent of Californians say that academic improvement of students as measured by standardized tests should determine which teachers get extra money. Residents also support—but at a lower 57 percent—basing merit pay on the academic achievement of students as measured by standardized tests. Californians are more divided over whether length of teaching experience should be a deciding factor in determining merit pay: 48 percent say it should and 49 percent say it should not.

HIGHER TAXES FOR SCHOOLS? CALIFORNIANS ARE SPLIT

Despite their concerns about K–12 spending, Californians are divided in their willingness to pay higher taxes to maintain current levels of funding (49% yes, 47% no), similar to last year (48% yes, 49% no). They are also divided on the question of how best to improve the quality of schools significantly: 45 percent prefer using existing funds more wisely, and 45 percent prefer using existing funds more wisely and increasing the amount of funding. Just 8 percent prefer increased funding alone.

Reflecting their positive views of their own local schools and negative views of the state’s elected leaders, Californians overwhelmingly prefer local control of spending decisions at their local public schools. Half (51%) say local school districts should make the decisions about how to spend state funds in local schools and a third (34%) say local schools themselves should decide. More Californians (63%) would be willing to vote for a local bond measure to pay for school construction projects than would be willing to pay higher taxes to maintain current state funding (49%). A majority of Californians (57%) and about half of likely voters (52%) would vote for a local parcel tax to provide more money for local public schools, but these shares fall short of the two-thirds voter approval required to approve such a tax.

The National Education Association ranks California near the bottom—43rd of 50 states and the District of Columbia—in spending per student. Yet just 37 percent of Californians perceive the state’s per pupil spending as below average. Another 24 percent say it is average, and 26 percent say it is above average.

MORE KEY FINDINGS

- **Parents have higher expectations, less confidence that they can help**—page 15

Nearly nine in 10 parents of public school children would like their youngest child to graduate from college (43%) or earn a graduate degree (44%). The percentage hoping their child will get a graduate degree has increased 5 points since last April and 8 points since April 2005. While most public school parents express at least some confidence that they have the resources and information to help their child achieve their educational goals, the number saying they are very confident has been declining (52% 2005, 45% 2009, 41% today). White parents are far more likely than Latino parents (50% to 29%) to say they are very confident.

- **Should schools in lower-income areas pay teachers higher salaries? Half say yes**—page 20

An overwhelming majority of Californians (80%) say schools in poor neighborhoods lack the same resources—including good teachers and enough classroom materials—as their counterparts in more affluent areas. Half support the concept of paying higher salaries to teachers to work in these schools (51% yes, 44% no).

- **Most favor using school, student performance data to make policy choices**—page 22

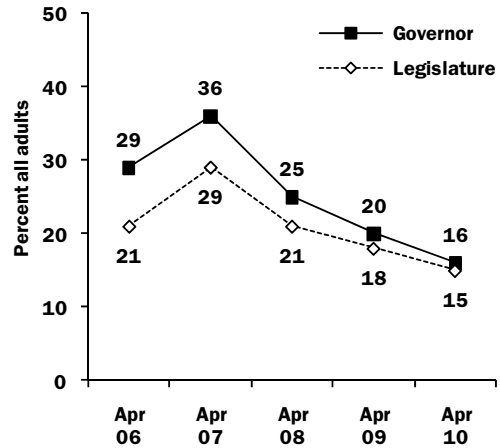
Should California collect data about schools, including resources and student performance? A record-high number of residents (60%) say this is very important, and 75 percent say this type of information should be used to make policy decisions about education programs and funding.

GENERAL PERCEPTIONS

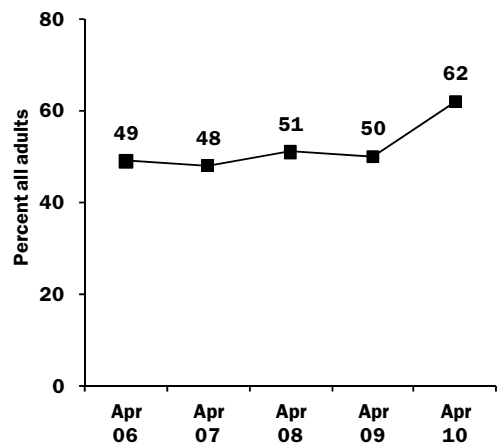
KEY FINDINGS

- Majorities of Californians consider the quality of K–12 education a big problem (53%) and believe the state’s K–12 public education system is in need of major changes (62%). Approval ratings of how state elected officials are handling K–12 public education issues have reached record lows. (pages 7, 8)
- Approval of President Obama’s handling of education policy has declined 12 points since last year, and most say the federal government’s efforts to improve education are falling short. (page 9)
- Half of Californians are aware that the state’s student test scores are lower than the national average, and 37 percent are aware that per pupil spending is below the national average. (page 10)
- Seven in 10 Californians—and over eight in 10 Latinos and blacks—consider the high school dropout rate a big problem. Far fewer believe that student achievement or teacher quality are big problems. However, about six in 10 residents are very concerned about the dropout rate, shortage of good teachers, and level of college preparation in lower-income areas. A majority of Californians give poor or not so good ratings to the state’s schools when it comes to college and workforce preparation. (pages 11–13)
- Despite concerns about quality, a majority of Californians continue to give their local public schools a grade of A or B. But a rising proportion believe state funding at their local schools is insufficient. (page 14)
- Public school parents are far more likely than last year to say that state budget cuts are greatly affecting their child’s school. (page 15)

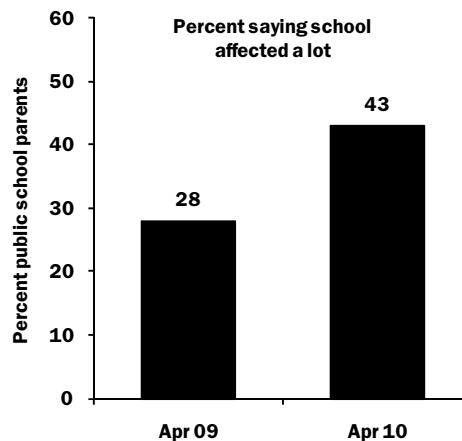
Approval Ratings of State Elected Officials' Handling of K–12 Public Education



Percent Saying State Funding for Local Schools Is Not Enough



State Budget Cuts Affecting Child's Public School



OVERALL CONDITIONS

Californians continue to name jobs and the economy (55%) as the most important issue facing the state today. Far fewer mention the state budget (13%) or education and schools (10%).

At the same time, most Californians (85%) believe that the quality of education in California’s K–12 public schools is a problem—53 percent consider it a big problem, 32 percent say it is somewhat of a problem. The percentage of Californians who believe that the quality of education is a big problem has remained about the same since 2007 (52% 2007, 53% 2008, 51% 2009, 53% today). Just under half of public school parents (47%) think the quality of education is a big problem. Overall, blacks (68%) and whites (60%) are much more likely than Asians (48%) and Latinos (41%) to consider the quality of education a big problem. San Francisco Bay Area residents (59%) are the most likely—and Central Valley residents (46%) the least likely—to view the quality of K–12 education as a big problem. Across parties, independents (61%) and Democrats (59%) are somewhat more likely than Republicans (53%) to think that the quality of education in the K–12 system is a big problem.

“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	
Big problem	53%	48%	68%	41%	60%	47%
Somewhat of a problem	32	35	26	39	28	35
Not really a problem	11	12	3	18	8	18
Don’t know	4	5	3	2	4	–

A strong majority of Californians (62%) think that the K–12 system needs major changes, while 28 percent say minor changes are needed and 7 percent say it is fine the way it is—about the same percentages as last year. Majorities of public school parents (64%) and of residents across parties and regions say major changes are needed. Blacks (68%), whites (64%), and Latinos (62%) are far more likely than Asians (45%) to say that California’s K–12 system needs major changes.

When asked how to significantly improve the quality of K–12 public education, Californians are divided: 45 percent prefer using existing funds more wisely, while 45 percent prefer using existing funds more wisely and increasing the amount of funding. Eight percent favor increased funding alone. These percentages have remained about the same since 2008. Republicans (64%) and independents (52%) are more likely to prefer using funds more wisely, while Democrats (58%) are more likely to prefer the mixed approach. Whites (51%) are the most likely to prefer using funds wisely, while blacks (64%) are by far the most likely to prefer both an increase in funding and using funds more wisely.

“To significantly improve the quality of California’s K–12 public schools, which of the following statements do you agree with the most? We need to use existing state funds more wisely, we need to increase the amount of state funding, or we need to use existing state funds more wisely and increase the amount of state funding.”

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
Use funds more wisely	45%	31%	64%	52%	47%
Increase funding	8	9	5	4	6
Use funds more wisely and increase funding	45	58	30	41	46
Don’t know	2	2	1	3	1

APPROVAL RATINGS: GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATURE

The approval rating of Governor Schwarzenegger’s overall job performance (24%) matches his record low first reached last month, while his disapproval rating (64%) matches his record high reached last month. Likely voters are just as negative as the general public; majorities across parties, regions, and most demographic groups also disapprove of the way the governor is handling his job. Latinos (73%), blacks (72%), and whites (60%) are far more likely than Asians (45%) to disapprove of the governor’s performance. Across regions, disapproval is higher in the Inland Empire (72%) and Los Angeles (70%) than in the Central Valley (62%), Orange/San Diego Counties (61%), or the San Francisco Bay Area (60%).

The governor also reaches record low approval (16%) and record high disapproval (65%) when it comes to his handling of the K–12 public education system. Opinions among likely voters are just as negative. Approval of the governor in this respect has dropped 4 points since last year, 9 points since 2008, and 20 points since 2007. Democrats (75%) and independents (66%) are far more likely than Republicans (51%) to express disapproval. Majorities across regions and across age, education, income, and racial/ethnic groups—as well as 73 percent of public school parents—disapprove of the way the governor is handling the state’s K–12 public education system.

“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>	Approve	24%	21%	33%	26%	26%
	Disapprove	64	68	57	63	65
	Don't know	12	11	10	11	9
<i>The state's K–12 public education system</i>	Approve	16	11	23	15	15
	Disapprove	65	75	51	66	66
	Don't know	19	14	26	19	19

Californians’ approval rating of the state legislature (16%) is similar to the record low reached in March (14%). The even lower rating among likely voters (11%) is also similar to the record low of March (9%). At least two in three Democrats (66%), independents (77%), and Republicans (84%) and solid majorities across regions disapprove of the legislature’s performance. Across racial/ethnic groups, whites (79%) are the most likely to disapprove, followed by blacks (67%), Latinos (59%), and Asians (53%).

When it comes to the legislature’s handling of the state’s K–12 public education system, a record low (15%) approve, while a record high (67%) disapprove. Likely voters are even more negative. Strong majorities across parties and regions, and at least half among racial/ethnic groups, disapprove.

“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>	Approve	16%	20%	9%	12%	11%
	Disapprove	69	66	84	77	79
	Don't know	15	14	7	11	10
<i>The state's K–12 public education system</i>	Approve	15	13	9	10	8
	Disapprove	67	73	70	70	76
	Don't know	18	14	21	20	16

PRESIDENT’S APPROVAL RATINGS AND FEDERAL ACTIONS

Approval ratings of President Obama are far higher than those of the state’s elected officials. Six in 10 Californians approve, while one in three disapprove of the way the president is handling his job. The president’s approval rating has declined 9 points since last April (70%), and his approval has hovered around 60 percent since December 2009. Today, Californians are more approving than adults nationwide (50% approve, 40% disapprove), according to a recent CBS News/*New York Times* poll. California’s likely voters are more negative than the state’s adult residents overall. Unlike the agreement we found in the ratings of the governor and legislature, we find a partisan divide in ratings of the president. Eight in 10 Democrats (82%) and six in 10 independents (62%) approve of the president, compared to only 25 percent of Republicans. While majorities across regions approve of the president, approval is highest in Los Angeles (69%) and lowest in Orange/San Diego Counties and the Central Valley (54% each). Blacks (89%), Asians (72%), and Latinos (71%) are far more likely than whites (50%) to approve of the president.

When it comes to his handling of K–12 education policy, fewer than half of Californians (46%) approve, a 12-point decline since last year. And once again, likely voters are more negative. We also find a significant partisan divide: 63 percent of Democrats and 44 percent of independents approve of the president’s handling of education issues, compared to only 19 percent of Republicans. Across regions, 50 percent at most approve of the president’s education policies. Blacks (68%) and Latinos (64%) are far more likely than Asians (43%) and whites (34%) to express approval.

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

		All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
			Dem	Rep	Ind	
His job as president of the United States	Approve	61%	82%	25%	62%	56%
	Disapprove	34	14	71	33	40
	Don't know	5	4	4	5	4
K–12 education policy	Approve	46	63	19	44	40
	Disapprove	28	16	49	26	33
	Don't know	26	21	32	30	27

With the Obama administration formulating education policy and providing funding incentives for K–12 reform, how satisfied are Californians with the efforts of the federal government? A majority of both residents and likely voters (59% each) think that the government is not doing enough, while about one in four say it is doing just enough. Majorities across parties, regions, and demographic groups say the federal government is not doing enough.

“Do you think that the federal government is doing more than enough, just enough, or not enough to improve the K–12 public education system?”

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
More than enough	7%	4%	13%	9%	9%
Just enough	25	26	25	22	23
Not enough	59	63	53	63	59
Don't know	9	7	9	6	9

PERCEPTIONS OF CALIFORNIA’S RELATIVE EDUCATION RANKINGS

Fewer than four in 10 Californians (37%) believe that the state’s per pupil spending is below average compared to other states, while 26 percent believe that it’s above average and 24 percent believe that it’s about average. According to the National Education Association’s *Rankings and Estimates* (December 2009), California’s ranking has declined over the past few years, with the state coming in near the bottom—43rd among 50 states and the District of Columbia—in per pupil spending in the 2008–09 school year. Perceptions among Californians about per pupil spending are similar to their perceptions last April and in April 2008. However, residents were more negative 10 years ago, with 16 percent saying above average and 51 percent below average.

Democrats and independents (43% each) are much more likely than Republicans (29%) to say the state’s per pupil spending is below average. Across regions, San Francisco Bay Area residents (43%) are the most likely to say that spending is below average, compared to about one in three residents elsewhere. Although 50 percent of blacks and 42 percent of whites believe that California’s spending is lower than most states, fewer Latinos (30%) and Asians (22%) hold this view. The perception that per pupil spending is below average increases with rising education levels.

“Where do you think California currently ranks in per pupil spending for K–12 public schools? Compared to other states, is California’s spending...?”

	All Adults	Region					Public School Parents
		Central Valley	San Francisco Bay Area	Los Angeles	Orange/San Diego	Inland Empire	
Above average	26%	26%	22%	27%	31%	28%	27%
Average	24	25	21	26	25	21	25
Below average	37	35	43	34	30	35	34
Don’t know	13	14	14	13	14	16	14

Californians are even more negative about the state’s student test scores: 49 percent say scores are below average compared to other states, 31 percent say they are average, and only 11 percent say they are above average. According to 2008 test scores compiled by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, California ranked near the bottom in math and reading scores for grades 4 and 8. Perceptions of student test scores in California have been similar since we first began asking this question in 1998. Republicans (58%) are somewhat more likely than independents (54%) or Democrats (49%) to say student test scores are lagging. At least half of residents in Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, and the Inland Empire believe California’s scores are lower than those in most other states. Whites (60%) are much more likely than blacks (47%), Latinos (38%), or Asians (31%) to believe this is so. The perception that test scores are below average rises with increasing age, income, and education. Fewer than one-quarter of those in any demographic group believe scores are above average.

“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...?”

	All Adults	Region					Public School Parents
		Central Valley	San Francisco Bay Area	Los Angeles	Orange/San Diego	Inland Empire	
Above average	11%	11%	10%	10%	16%	8%	13%
Average	31	35	27	29	35	28	34
Below average	49	46	53	52	40	53	45
Don’t know	9	8	10	9	9	11	8

CHALLENGES IN THE K–12 SYSTEM

As noted above, a majority of Californians (53%) consider the overall quality of education in the state’s K–12 public schools to be a big problem. When it comes to three particular issues, Californians are most likely to say the high school dropout rate is a big problem (69%), followed by student achievement (48%) and teacher quality (36%). The share viewing the dropout rate as a big problem was nearly identical in April 2009 (70%) and April 2008 (69%). However, since last April, the percentage who consider student achievement a big problem has increased by 5 points (from 43% to 48% today), and the percentage who consider teacher quality a big problem has increased by 7 points (from 29% to 36% today).

“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 ...”

	High school dropout rate	Student achievement	Teacher quality
Big problem	69%	48%	36%
Somewhat of a problem	22	39	41
Not really a problem	5	10	21
Don’t know	4	3	2

Half of parents of children in public schools consider student achievement a big problem, an 11-point increase since last year. Perceptions differ across racial/ethnic groups: 63 percent of blacks say student achievement is a big problem, compared to 51 percent of Latinos, 45 percent of whites, and 39 percent of Asians. Across regions, residents in Los Angeles (57%) are the most likely to hold this view, followed by residents in the Inland Empire (53%), Central Valley (46%), Orange/San Diego Counties (41%), and San Francisco Bay Area (40%). Among those who believe that the state’s student test scores are below average compared to other states, 57 percent say student achievement is a big problem.

“How about student achievement?”

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asians	Blacks	Latinos	Whites	
Big problem	48%	39%	63%	51%	45%	50%
Somewhat of a problem	39	46	28	39	41	39
Not really a problem	10	13	9	8	10	8
Don’t know	3	2	–	2	4	3

Fewer than half of respondents across parties, regions, and demographic groups say teacher quality is a big problem, although this perception has increased since last year: 35 percent of public school parents say teacher quality is a big problem, up 10 points since April 2009. Blacks (44%) and Asians (40%) are more likely than Latinos (35%) and whites (34%) to consider teacher quality a big problem. Los Angeles residents (40%) are the most likely—and Central Valley residents (33%) the least likely—to agree.

California education officials continue to grapple with how to improve the high school graduation rate, which disproportionately affects black, Latino, and economically disadvantaged students. Similar to last year, seven in 10 Californians (69%) and public school parents (71%) say the dropout rate is a big problem. Latinos (84%) and blacks (83%) are far more likely than Asians and whites (59% each) to hold this view. Residents in Los Angeles (78%) and the Inland Empire (77%) are the most likely to hold this view, followed by residents in the Central Valley (70%), San Francisco Bay Area (64%), and Orange/San Diego Counties (55%). This negative perception of the K–12 system declines sharply with rising education and income.

CONCERN ABOUT SCHOOLS IN LOWER-INCOME AREAS

Californians express high and equivalent levels of concern about three issues affecting schools in lower-income areas. Most Californians (63%) say they are very concerned that students in lower-income areas have a higher dropout rate than students in more affluent areas. The percentage who are very concerned has been increasing in recent years (53% April 2008, 60% April 2009, 63% today). Two in three public school parents are very concerned, up 5 points since last year (60% to 65%). Democrats (76%) are much more likely than independents (65%) and Republicans (49%) to be very concerned about the high school dropout rate disproportionately affecting students in lower-income areas. Concern is highest in Los Angeles (67% very concerned) and lowest in Orange/San Diego Counties (57% very concerned). Nearly all blacks (91%) are very concerned about this issue; majorities of Latinos (68%), Asians (61%), and whites (58%) also express this level of concern.

“How concerned are you that...”

	Students in lower-income areas have a higher dropout rate from high school than other students?	Schools in lower-income areas have a shortage of good teachers compared to schools in wealthier areas?	Students in lower-income areas are less likely than other students to be ready for college when they finish high school?
Very concerned	63%	60%	61%
Somewhat concerned	26	28	28
Not too concerned	6	6	6
Not at all concerned	3	4	4
Don't know	2	2	1

Six in 10 Californians are also very concerned that schools in lower-income areas have a shortage of good teachers compared to schools in wealthier areas, up 6 points since April 2008 (from 54% to 60% today). Two in three public school parents are very concerned about this issue, up 8 points since April 2008 (from 56% to 64% today). Across parties, Democrats (72%) are again more likely than independents (59%) or Republicans (41%) to be very concerned about this issue. The vast majority of blacks (87%) and Latinos (71%) are very concerned about the shortage of good teachers in lower-income areas, compared to about half of Asians (53%) and whites (51%). Women are more likely than men (64% to 56%) to be very concerned.

Six in 10 Californians (61%) and 64 percent of public school parents are very concerned that students in lower-income areas are less likely to be ready for college upon graduation. Overwhelming majorities of blacks (91%) and Latinos (71%) are very concerned about the level of college preparation in lower-income areas, compared to about half of whites (53%) and Asians (50%). Inland Empire residents (71%) are the most likely—and Orange/San Diego residents (51%) the least likely—to be very concerned about this issue. Concern declines with rising age, education, and income.

“How concerned are you that students in lower-income areas are less likely than other students to be ready for college when they finish high school?”

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asians	Blacks	Latinos	Whites	
Very concerned	61%	50%	91%	71%	53%	64%
Somewhat concerned	28	34	7	24	33	25
Not too concerned	6	11	1	3	8	7
Not at all concerned	4	4	1	2	5	4
Don't know	1	1	–	–	1	–

COLLEGE AND WORKFORCE READINESS

When asked to rate the state’s schools on preparing students for college, Californians are more likely to rate the schools as not so good (39%) or poor (14%) rather than good (37%) or excellent (4%). Public school parents are more likely than residents overall (49% to 41%) to give excellent or good marks to schools on college preparation; however, positive ratings among this group have declined since last April (from 57% in 2009 to 49% today). Last year, 46 percent of the state’s residents said schools were doing an excellent or good job in preparing students for college, compared to 41 percent today.

Stark differences of opinion are again evident among racial/ethnic groups. While 76 percent of blacks say schools are doing a not so good or poor job in preparing students for college, far fewer whites (55%), Latinos (48%), and Asians (42%) are of this opinion. Positive ratings are highest in the Central Valley (48% saying excellent or good) and negative ratings are highest in Los Angeles (58% saying not so good or poor). Among those who are very concerned about students in lower-income areas not receiving the same level of college preparation as students in more-affluent areas, 58 percent give negative ratings to the schools on college preparation.

“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
		Asians	Blacks	Latinos	Whites	
Excellent	4%	1%	3%	7%	3%	6%
Good	37	45	20	42	37	43
Not so good	39	35	55	38	38	38
Poor	14	7	21	10	17	9
Don't know	6	12	1	3	5	4

Californians are even more negative in assessing the education system’s preparation of students for jobs and the workforce. Nearly two in three say they are doing a not so good (45%) or poor job (19%), while three in 10 say they are doing an excellent (3%) or good job (28%). Public school parents are much more likely to give positive marks than residents overall (42% to 31%). Ratings among Californians and public school parents were similar last year. Across racial/ethnic groups, 72 percent of blacks and 68 percent of whites say the schools are doing a not so good or poor job, compared to 56 percent of both Asians and Latinos. Ratings across regions are similar, with between 62 and 65 percent giving not so good or poor marks to the state’s public schools. Residents age 55 and older, those with some college education or a college degree, those with an annual household income of at least \$40,000, and men are more likely than others to give negative ratings to schools on job and workforce preparation.

“How about in preparing students for jobs and the workforce?”

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asians	Blacks	Latinos	Whites	
Excellent	3%	1%	1%	6%	2%	6%
Good	28	31	26	35	23	36
Not so good	45	44	51	44	46	41
Poor	19	12	21	12	22	12
Don't know	5	12	1	3	7	5

RATING LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Californians continue to be more positive about the quality of their local K–12 public schools than the quality of the state’s K–12 system in general. Majorities of Californians (54%) and public school parents (67%) would give the public schools in their neighborhood a grade of A or B—ratings which at least half of Californians have given their schools since 2005 (51% 2005, 55% 2006, 52% 2007, 54% 2008, 53% 2009, and 54% today). In August 2000, a much lower percentage (39%) offered such high grades.

Majorities of residents across regions gave their local school an A or B (52% in the Inland Empire, 53% in the San Francisco Bay Area, 54% in Los Angeles, 57% in the Central Valley, and 57% in Orange/San Diego Counties). Ratings across racial/ethnic groups, however, are not as uniform. Blacks (36%) are far less likely than whites (55%), Latinos (57%), or Asians (58%) to give a grade of A or B to their local schools. A plurality of blacks (40%) give their local schools a grade of C. Upper-income residents (62%) are more likely than middle-income (52%) and lower-income residents (50%) to give 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	
A	19%	18%	18%	20%	26%	14%	30%
B	35	39	35	34	31	38	37
C	26	28	25	25	27	24	21
D	10	9	10	12	7	13	6
F	4	4	3	5	3	4	5
Don't know	6	2	9	4	6	7	1

Strong majorities of Californians (62%) and public school parents (72%) believe the current level of state funding for their local public schools is not enough—a 12-point increase among all adults since last year (from 50% to 62% today) and a similarly large increase of 14 points among public school parents (from 58% to 72% today). Majorities across regions believe that the state funding of their local schools is inadequate. Across racial/ethnic groups, 76 percent of blacks and 71 percent of Latinos say their local schools lack adequate funding; far fewer whites (56%) and Asians (53%) hold this view. Women are more likely than men (66% to 58%) to say local schools don’t have enough state funding. The percentage saying that state funding is not enough declines with rising education and income levels. Residents age 55 and older are much less likely than younger residents to hold this view (66% age 18–34, 65% age 35–54, 55% age 55 and older). Among those giving their local schools a grade of A or B, 57 percent believe funding falls short; among those giving local schools a grade of C, 71 percent say funding falls short.

“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	
More than enough	6%	7%	5%	6%	7%	7%	4%
Just enough	26	27	25	23	31	29	23
Not enough	62	60	64	64	58	59	72
Don't know	6	6	6	7	4	5	1

PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS AMONG PUBLIC SCHOOL PARENTS

Consistent with increasing shares saying local funding is inadequate, parents of public school children are far more likely this year to say their child's public school has been affected a lot by recent state budget cuts (rising from 28% in April 2009 to 43% today). Another 38 percent say their school has been somewhat affected, while only 17 percent say their child's public school has not been affected by state budget cuts. White parents are much more likely than Latino parents (50% to 35%)—and women more than men (49% to 36%)—to say their child's school has been greatly affected. Sample sizes for Asian and black public school parents are not large enough for separate analysis.

When it comes to the educational aspirations they have for their children, nearly nine in 10 public school parents hope their youngest child graduates from college (43%) or obtains a postgraduate degree (44%). Hopes for an advanced degree have increased 5 points since last April and 8 points since April 2005. White parents are twice as likely as Latino parents (54% to 27%) to say postgraduate degree.

“What do you hope will be the highest grade level that your youngest child will achieve?”

<i>Public school parents only</i>	All Public School Parents	Household Income			Race/Ethnicity	
		Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to under \$80,000	\$80,000 or more	Latinos	Whites
Some high school/ High school graduate	6%	10%	6%	–	11%	3%
Some college	4	6	4	2%	5	4
College graduate	43	46	41	41	51	39
Graduate degree after college	44	32	48	56	27	54
Don't know	3	6	1	1	6	–

Most public school parents express at least some confidence that they have the resources and information needed to help their child achieve their educational goals, but the percentage saying they are very confident has declined over time (52% in 2005, 45% in 2009, 41% today). Public school parents with annual household incomes of at least \$80,000 are more than twice as likely as those with household incomes under \$40,000 to say they are very confident they can sufficiently help their child (59% to 27%), and white parents are far more likely than Latino parents (50% to 29%) to express this confidence.

Public school parents are far less confident that their local school has the resources and information needed to prepare their child for their educational goals. Only 24 percent are very confident, the same percentage as last April. Upper-income parents have much more confidence in the schools than lower-income parents. Fewer than three in 10 white or Latino parents are very confident.

“How confident are you that...”

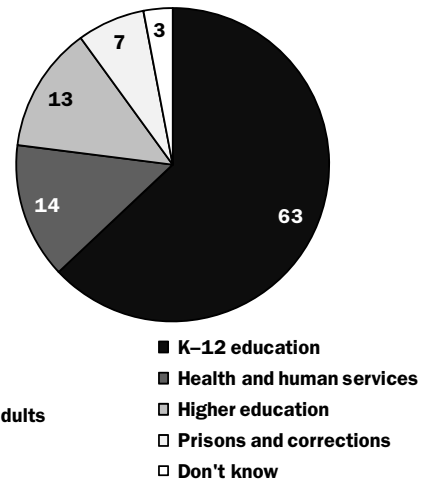
<i>Public school parents only</i>		All Public School Parents	Household Income			Race/Ethnicity	
			Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to under \$80,000	\$80,000 or more	Latinos	Whites
You have the resources and information needed for this child to reach that grade level?	Very confident	41%	27%	43%	59%	29%	50%
	Somewhat confident	37	38	42	31	39	37
	Not too confident	21	33	14	10	30	12
	Don't know	1	2	1	–	2	1
Your local K–12 schools have the resources and information needed to prepare this child for that grade level?	Very confident	24	19	21	32	22	29
	Somewhat confident	46	44	43	49	44	45
	Not too confident	30	35	35	18	32	26
	Don't know	–	2	1	1	2	–

FISCAL ATTITUDES AND POLICY PREFERENCES

KEY FINDINGS

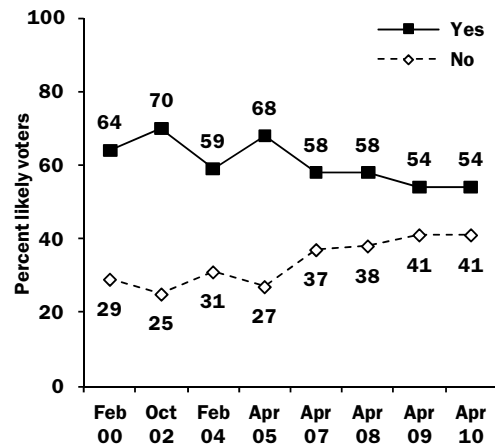
- More than six in 10 Californians say they most want to protect K–12 education from spending cuts; voters remain sharply divided along party lines about paying higher taxes to maintain current K–12 funding levels. *(page 17)*
- Just over half of likely voters would consider voting for a bond measure or parcel tax for schools. Support for a hypothetical bond measure has declined over time. *(page 18)*
- When asked about specific spending cuts, Californians express the highest level of concern about teacher layoffs. Many are also concerned about larger class sizes, cuts in the number of school days, and the elimination of art, music, after-school, and summer programs. *(page 19)*
- If new state funding becomes available, about two in three Californians say schools in lower-income areas should receive more of the funding than other schools. *(page 20)*
- About six in 10 Californians support merit pay for teachers, but they are more likely to say it should be based on students' academic improvement than on students' academic achievement or on length of teaching experience. *(page 21)*
- About six in 10 likely voters say gubernatorial candidates' positions on K–12 education are very important. Democrats are most likely to hold this view. Strong majorities across parties say that improving the K–12 system should be a high priority for the next governor. *(page 23)*

Budget Area to Protect from Spending Cuts

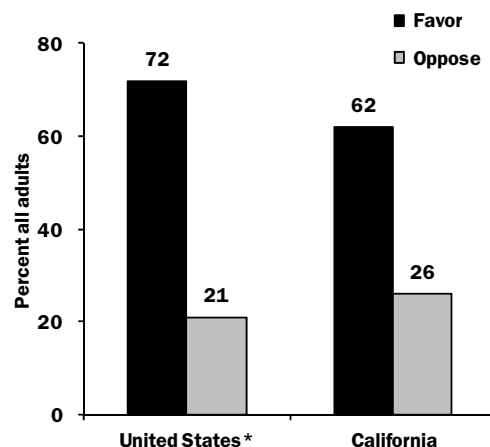


All adults

Voting Preference on Hypothetical School Construction Bond



Merit Pay for Teachers



*Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll, 2009

STATE BUDGET SITUATION

K–12 public education is the largest spending category in the California budget. The governor has proposed cuts to K–12 education to help close the \$20 billion state budget deficit. At the same time, more than six in 10 Californians (63%) continue to say that among budget categories, they most want to protect K–12 education from spending cuts; far fewer name health and human services (14%), higher education (13%), or prisons (7%). Majorities of Californians across parties and demographic groups say K–12 education is the spending category they most want to protect.

Concern about spending cuts is high: 62 percent of Californians say they are very concerned the state’s budget gap will cause significant spending cuts in K–12 education, up 6 points since last April. Among those who most want to protect K–12 education from cuts, nearly all (95%) are at least somewhat concerned, with 73 percent saying they are very concerned. At least eight in 10 residents across party and demographic groups are at least somewhat concerned about cuts; however, intensity varies across these groups. Seven in 10 Democrats are very concerned, compared to six in 10 independents and half of Republicans. San Francisco Bay Area residents (67%) are the most likely to be very concerned, while Orange/San Diego County residents (56%) are the least likely. Seventy-three percent of public school parents report they are very concerned about funding.

“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	
Very concerned	62%	72%	52%	61%	65%
Somewhat concerned	26	22	33	23	23
Not too concerned	6	4	6	9	6
Not at all concerned	5	2	7	6	5
Don't know	1	–	2	1	1

Although Californians are highly concerned about K–12 spending cuts, they are divided in their willingness to pay higher taxes to maintain current levels of funding (49% yes, 47% no). The percentage willing to pay higher taxes today is similar to last April (48%) and April 2008 (49%). Likely voters are less in favor (44%) of paying higher taxes. Partisans hold sharply different views on the issue. Six in 10 Democrats are willing to pay higher taxes, while nearly seven in 10 Republicans are not. Independents are more divided in their willingness to pay higher taxes (46% yes, 52% no). Significant differences are also present across racial/ethnic groups. Majorities of blacks (60%) and Latinos (56%) are willing to pay higher taxes, compared to fewer Asians (49%) and whites (45%). Half of public school parents would pay higher taxes to benefit K–12 education. Willingness to pay higher taxes declines with older age; willingness is higher among those with annual household incomes of less than \$40,000.

“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?”

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
Yes	49%	60%	30%	46%	44%
No	47	36	68	52	53
Don't know	4	4	2	2	3

LOCAL SCHOOL FUNDING

Californians overwhelmingly prefer local control of spending decisions at their local public schools. Consistent with April 2008 and 2009 surveys, half of residents (51%) say local school districts should make the decisions about how to spend state funds in local schools and a third (34%) say the local schools themselves should decide. Just one in 10 Californians (10%) say the state should control decisions over use of money in local public schools. Across parties, more than 80 percent of Democrats, Republicans, and independents say either school districts or local schools should have control of spending decisions. Favor for local control is consistent across regions, but Los Angeles residents (46%) are somewhat less likely than San Francisco Bay Area (51%), Orange/San Diego (52%), Inland Empire (53%), and Central Valley (54%) residents to say local school districts specifically should hold control.

This preference for local control may be reflected in Californians’ greater willingness to vote for a hypothetical local bond measure for school construction projects (63%), than to pay higher taxes to maintain current state funding (49%). Fewer likely voters (54%) would vote for school construction bonds, and support among likely voters has declined over time. (A 55-percent vote is required to pass local school bonds.) Democrats (71%) and independents (57%) are much more likely than Republicans (44%) to say they would support a local bond measure. Across regions, majorities express support for a local bond measure, with support highest among Los Angeles and Inland Empire residents (66% each) and lowest among Orange/San Diego residents (55%). Strong majorities of Latinos (83%) and blacks (72%) would vote for a hypothetical school bond, compared to fewer Asians (57%) and whites (51%).

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

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
Yes	63%	71%	44%	57%	54%
No	33	25	51	37	41
Don't know	4	4	5	6	5

Fifty-seven percent of Californians and 52 percent of likely voters say they would vote for a local parcel tax to provide more funds for the local public schools, similar to views last year. (Parcel taxes require a two-thirds vote to pass.) There are significant differences across parties—seven in 10 Democrats would vote for a local parcel tax while six in 10 Republicans would vote no. Across regions, residents of the San Francisco Bay Area (62%) are the most likely to say they would support a parcel tax, with Inland Empire residents (47%) the least likely. Again, strong majorities of blacks (72%) and Latinos (70%) support a parcel tax, while far fewer Asians (50%) and whites (49%) do. Six in 10 public school parents (61%) would vote for a parcel tax. Not surprisingly, support for parcel taxes, which are paid only by property owners, is far higher among renters (69%) than homeowners (48%). The likelihood of voting yes on a local parcel tax for schools decreases as income and age rise.

“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?”

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
Yes	57%	70%	36%	51%	52%
No	38	26	61	44	44
Don't know	5	4	3	5	4

SPENDING CUTS

Concern about the consequences of decreased K–12 funding is evident among Californians today. In particular, they are overwhelmingly concerned about teacher layoffs (73% very concerned, 19% somewhat) as a result of decreased state and local funding. Although they are less likely to say they are very concerned about other issues, at least eight in 10 Californians are at least somewhat concerned about larger class sizes, fewer days of school instruction, and the elimination of art, music, and after-school and summer programs.

“There are a number of ways for the state’s K–12 public schools to cut spending to deal with decreased state and local funding. For each of the following, please tell me if you are very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned.”

	Laying Off Teachers	Class Sizes Getting Bigger as a Result	Having Fewer Days of School Instruction	Eliminating Art and Music Programs	Eliminating After-School and Summer Programs
Very concerned	73%	59%	56%	56%	49%
Somewhat concerned	19	28	26	30	32
Not too concerned	3	7	11	8	11
Not at all concerned	4	5	6	5	7
Don't know	1	1	1	1	1

However, levels of concern about the ways K–12 spending might be cut vary across demographic groups. Strong majorities of blacks are very concerned about all methods of dealing with decreased funding, and express the most concern about laying off teachers (84%). Asians are the least concerned about each issue, and there is a considerable difference between blacks and Asians in concern about larger class sizes (38% Asians, 57% whites, 65% Latinos, 77% blacks) and on program elimination. Across regions, residents are most likely to say they are very concerned about laying off teachers, and least likely to be very concerned about eliminating after-school and summer programs. Although a majority of public school parents are very concerned about each way of dealing with decreased funding, they are most likely to express a high level of concern about teacher layoffs (81%). Democrats are more likely than independents and Republicans to say they are very concerned about all the potential spending cut ideas.

<i>Percent saying very concerned</i>	Laying Off Teachers	Class Sizes Getting Bigger as a Result	Having Fewer Days of School Instruction	Eliminating Art and Music Programs	Eliminating After-School and Summer Programs	
All Adults	73%	59%	56%	56%	49%	
Likely Voters	71	60	55	60	47	
Public School Parents	81	71	61	54	54	
Race/ethnicity	Asians	54	38	47	39	34
	Blacks	84	77	67	68	74
	Latinos	82	65	63	49	61
	Whites	70	57	52	61	41
Region	Central Valley	73	55	55	55	51
	San Francisco Bay Area	70	52	59	56	47
	Los Angeles	75	65	58	56	55
	Orange/San Diego	73	59	52	49	41
	Inland Empire	78	68	55	59	50

RESOURCE EQUITY

An overwhelming majority of Californians (80%) and public school parents (79%) say that schools in lower-income areas do not have the same level of resources, such as good teachers and adequate classroom materials, as schools in wealthier areas. Californians have expressed similar views since 2005. Today more than six in 10 across parties (65% Republicans, 81% independents, 87% Democrats) and at least seven in 10 across regions and demographic groups perceive this resource disparity. Across racial/ethnic groups, blacks (92%) are the most likely and Asians the least likely (70%) to hold this view.

Three in four Californians (77%) and public school parents (75%) also say that students in lower-income areas do not receive the same level of college preparation as students in wealthier areas. Over two in three across parties (67% Republicans, 79% independents, 85% Democrats) and at least seven in 10 across regions and demographic groups say the level of college preparation is not equal. Again, blacks (93%) are the most likely and Asians (70%) the least likely to perceive a disparity in college preparation.

Strong majorities of adults (68%) and likely voters (61%) believe that if new state funding became available, schools in lower-income areas should get more of this funding to help pay for teachers and classroom materials. Support has declined slightly since 2007 (74% 2007, 72% 2008, 70% 2009, 68% today). Of those who perceive resource inequity among schools, most (75%) support allocating more funds to schools in lower-income areas. More than two in three Democrats and independents support assignment of new funding to these schools, with Republicans divided (47% yes, 46% no). Latinos (86%) and blacks (80%) are far more likely than Asians (64%) and whites (56%) to say new funding should go to these schools. Majorities across age, income, and education groups support this idea, with support highest among those age 18–34 and among those with less education and lower incomes.

“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	
Yes	68%	75%	47%	68%	61%
No	28	21	46	29	34
Don't know	4	4	7	3	5

Californians express considerably less support (51% yes, 44% no) when asked if local schools in lower-income areas should pay higher salaries to attract and retain teachers, even if it costs the state more money. Support for this idea has dropped sharply since 2007 (67%) and 2006 (66%). Half of independents (52%) and 57 percent of Democrats support the idea, while 57 percent of Republicans oppose it. Latinos (57%) are more likely than Asians (49%), whites (49%), and blacks (48%) to favor higher salaries for teachers in these areas. Of those who say schools in lower-income areas have unequal resources, 55 percent favor higher salaries.

“Should local schools in lower-income areas pay higher salaries to attract and retain teachers, even if it costs the state more money?”

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
Yes	51%	57%	39%	52%	50%
No	44	37	57	44	45
Don't know	5	6	4	4	5

MERIT PAY FOR TEACHERS

A frequently discussed education policy reform centers on merit pay for teachers. How do Californians feel about the general concept of merit pay? In general, they are more likely to favor (62%) than oppose (26%) this idea. Majorities across parties, regions, racial/ethnic groups, and of both men and women favor merit pay. Among those most likely to favor the idea are Republicans (68%), residents of the San Francisco Bay Area (66%) and Orange/San Diego Counties (66%), Asians (68%), and men (66%). According to a 2009 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll, adults nationwide are even more likely to favor the idea of merit pay (72% favor, 21% oppose).

While Californians favor the general idea of merit pay, the question of how to award it draws varied levels of support. Residents (69%) and public school parents (70%) are most likely to say that the academic improvement of students as measured by standardized tests should be used as the basis for merit pay. This criterion has the support of seven in 10 across income groups, and of strong majorities across parties, regions, and demographic groups. Eight in 10 Californians who favor merit pay in general say this criterion should be used, as do 71 percent who say teacher quality is a big problem.

There is lower support among Californians (57%) and public school parents (53%) for basing merit pay on the academic achievement—rather than academic improvement—of students, as measured by standardized tests. Men are more likely than women (62% to 51%) to say this criterion should be used. Two in three Californians in favor of merit pay in general say this criterion should be used, as do 63 percent who say teacher quality is a big problem.

Californians are more divided about using teaching experience as a criterion for giving additional pay to teachers for special merit (48% should, 49% should not). Over half of public school parents (55%) think length of teaching experience should be used as a criterion. Half of Democrats (51%) think it should, but over half of Republicans (59%) and independents (55%) say it should not. Los Angeles County residents (53%) are the most likely to say that teacher experience should be a criterion, while residents in the San Francisco Bay Area (58%) are most likely to say it should not. According to the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll, adults nationwide are far more likely than Californians to think teacher experience should be a criterion for merit pay (67% nationwide to 48% in California).

“I am going to read some possible criteria for giving additional pay to teachers for special merit. For each one, please tell me if you think it should or should not be used to determine which teachers receive merit pay. How about...”

	All Adults	Household Income			Public School Parents	
		Under \$40,000	\$40,000 to under \$80,000	\$80,000 or more		
The academic improvement of students as measured by standardized tests?	Should	69%	70%	70%	69%	70%
	Should not	27	25	26	29	26
	Don't know	4	5	4	2	4
The academic achievement of students as measured by standardized tests?	Should	57	57	56	58	53
	Should not	32	24	35	38	28
	Don't know	11	19	9	4	19
Length of teaching experience?	Should	48	59	47	36	55
	Should not	49	38	50	63	42
	Don't know	3	3	3	1	3

DATA AND INFORMATION

Establishing education data systems continues to be a policy priority at the state and national level. These systems include data on students, schools, and finance and budgets. Californians continue to view the collection of data about resources and student performance as very important: Six in 10 Californians (60%) and two in three public school parents (66%) say doing so is very important. This marks a record high for both groups since we began asking this question in 2007, although majorities have held this view each time we asked. Blacks (80%) and Latinos (70%) are far more likely than whites (53%) and Asians (51%) to view data collection as very important. Across parties, independents (64%) and Democrats (62%) are much more likely than Republicans (51%) to view this issue as very important.

Majorities across California’s regions say that data collection is very important, with residents in the Inland Empire (66%) the most likely to hold this view, followed by residents in the Central Valley (64%), Los Angeles (62%), Orange/San Diego Counties (58%), and the San Francisco Bay Area (52%). Older, more educated, and more affluent adults are less likely than others to say data collection is very important.

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

	All Adults	Race/Ethnicity				Public School Parents
		Asians	Blacks	Latinos	Whites	
Very important	60%	51%	80%	70%	53%	66%
Somewhat important	32	40	17	26	35	28
Not too important	7	6	3	3	10	5
Don’t know	1	3	–	1	2	1

Three in four Californians (75%), likely voters (74%), and public school parents (74%) favor using data and information collected about local K–12 public schools in making policy decisions about education programs and funding. This idea is favored by at least seven in 10 across parties, regions, and racial/ethnic groups, as well as across gender, income, education, and age groups. Among those who view data collection as very important, 85 percent are in favor using the data for this purpose.

“Some people say that the state should be using this type of data and information in making policy decisions about education programs and funding. Do you favor or oppose this idea?”

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
Favor	75%	76%	73%	79%	74%
Oppose	18	17	21	18	20
Don’t know	7	7	6	3	6

2010 GOVERNOR'S ELECTION

With the general election seven months away, nearly all Californians say gubernatorial candidates' positions on K–12 public education are very (62%) or somewhat (30%) important. Likely voters hold similar views. Opinions were similar in April 2006 when 60 percent of likely voters viewed gubernatorial candidates' positions on public education as very important. Most Democrats (72%) and independents (59%) say candidates' positions are very important, with Republicans (46%) much less likely to say they are very important. Three in four public school parents (74%) hold this view. Majorities of adults across regions say candidates' positions are very important, with Los Angeles residents (67%) the most likely to hold this view and Orange/San Diego residents (56%) least likely. Differences emerge across racial/ethnic groups: Latinos (76%) and blacks (72%) are far more likely than whites (55%) and Asians (49%) to say this is very important. The view that the candidates' positions on education are very important declines as education and income rise.

“In thinking about the upcoming California governor’s election in November, how important to you are the candidates’ positions on K–12 public education?”

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
Very important	62%	72%	46%	59%	60%
Somewhat important	30	24	44	30	32
Not too important	6	4	9	10	7
Don't know	2	–	1	1	1

With most Californians describing the gubernatorial candidates' positions on K–12 public education as important, what priority do Californians say think the next governor should place on improving the state's K–12 education system? Three in four Californians (74%) and likely voters (73%) and eight in 10 public school parents (81%) say that improving education should be a high priority. Strong majorities across parties, regions, and demographic groups place a high priority on improving the state's K–12 education system. There are differences, however—Democrats (84%) are more likely than independents (72%) and far more likely than Republicans (63%) to say education should be a high priority for the next governor.

Across regions, Los Angeles (78%) residents are the most likely to hold this view, with Orange/San Diego County (70%) residents the least likely. Blacks (85%) and Latinos (83%) are more likely than whites (70%) and Asians (69%) to think that improving the state's K–12 public education system should be a high priority for the next governor. Among those who say the quality of K–12 public education is a big problem, 81 percent place a high priority on improving public education. Among those who say the gubernatorial candidates' positions on education are very important, 89 percent say the next governor should place a high priority on K–12 education improvement.

“In thinking about priorities for the next governor, do you think that improving the state’s K–12 public education system should be a...?”

	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
High priority	74%	84%	63%	72%	73%
Medium priority	18	12	28	20	20
Low priority	6	4	8	7	7
Don't know	2	–	1	1	–

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 assistance from Sonja Petek, project manager for this survey, and survey research associates Dean Bonner and Nicole Willcoxon. 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 Hewlett program staff and others; however, the survey methods, questions, and the content of the report were determined solely by Mark Baldassare and the survey staff.

Findings in this report are based on a telephone survey of 2,504 California adult residents, including 2,254 interviewed on landline telephones and 250 interviewed on cell phones. Interviewing took place on weekday nights and weekend days from April 6–20, 2010. 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 2008 National Health Interview Survey and data from the 2005–2007 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 2,504 adults is ± 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

2,046 registered voters, it is ± 2.5 percent; for the 1,439 likely voters, it is ± 3 percent; for the 1,056 parents of children 18 or younger it is ± 3 percent; for the 808 public school parents it is ± 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, likely voters, and parents, 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 CBS News/*New York Times* and by Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup.

QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESULTS

CALIFORNIANS AND EDUCATION

April 6–20, 2010

2,504 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]
 - 55% jobs, economy
 - 13 state budget, deficit, taxes
 - 10 education, schools
 - 5 immigration, illegal immigration
 - 4 health care, health costs
 - 2 crime, gangs, drugs
 - 9 other
 - 2 don't know
2. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way that Arnold Schwarzenegger is handling his job as governor of California?
 - 24% approve
 - 64 disapprove
 - 12 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?
 - 16% approve
 - 65 disapprove
 - 19 don't know
4. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way that the California Legislature is handling its job?
 - 16% approve
 - 69 disapprove
 - 15 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?
 - 15% approve
 - 67 disapprove
 - 18 don't know
6. As you may know, the state government has an annual budget of around \$85 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.
 - 63% K–12 public education
 - 14 health and human services
 - 13 higher education
 - 7 prisons and corrections
 - 3 don't know
7. How concerned are you that the state's budget gap will cause significant spending cuts in K–12 public education?
 - 62% very concerned
 - 26 somewhat concerned
 - 6 not too concerned
 - 5 not at all concerned
 - 1 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?

- 49% yes
- 47 no
- 4 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?

- 53% big problem
- 32 somewhat of a problem
- 11 not much of a problem
- 4 don't know

10. 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?

- 62% major changes
- 28 minor changes
- 7 fine the way it is
- 3 don't know

11. To significantly improve the quality of California's K–12 public schools, which of the following statements do you agree with the most? **[rotate 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.

- 45% use funds more wisely
- 8 increase state funding
- 45 use funds more wisely and increase funding
- 2 don't know

There are a number of ways for the state's K–12 public schools to cut spending to deal with decreased state and local funding. For each of the following, please tell me if you are very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned.

[rotate questions 12 to 14]

12. How about laying off teachers as a way to deal with decreased funding?

- 73% very concerned
- 19 somewhat concerned
- 3 not too concerned
- 4 not at all concerned
- 1 don't know

13. How about eliminating art and music programs as a way to deal with decreased funding?

- 56% very concerned
- 30 somewhat concerned
- 8 not too concerned
- 5 not at all concerned
- 1 don't know

13a. How about eliminating after-school and summer programs as a way to deal with decreased funding?

- 49% very concerned
- 32 somewhat concerned
- 11 not too concerned
- 7 not at all concerned
- 1 don't know

14. How about having fewer days of school instruction as a way to deal with decreased funding?

- 56% very concerned
- 26 somewhat concerned
- 11 not too concerned
- 6 not at all concerned
- 1 don't know

15. How concerned are you that class sizes are getting bigger as a result of decreased funding?

- 59% very concerned
- 28 somewhat concerned
- 7 not too concerned
- 5 not at all concerned
- 1 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 16 to 18]

16. How about teacher quality?

- 36% big problem
- 41 somewhat of a problem
- 21 not really a problem
- 2 don't know

17. How about the high school dropout rate?

- 69% big problem
- 22 somewhat of a problem
- 5 not really a problem
- 4 don't know

18. How about student achievement?

- 48% big problem
- 39 somewhat of a problem
- 10 not really a problem
- 3 don't know

On another topic,

[rotate questions 19 and 20]

19. 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?

- 12% near the top
- 14 above average
- 24 average
- 22 below average
- 15 near the bottom
- 13 don't know

20. 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?

- 3% near the top
- 8 above average
- 31 average
- 33 below average
- 16 near the bottom
- 9 don't know

Next,

[rotate questions 21 to 23]

21. How concerned are you that students in lower-income areas have a higher dropout rate from high school than other students—are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned about this issue?

- 63% very concerned
- 26 somewhat concerned
- 6 not too concerned
- 3 not at all concerned
- 2 don't know

22. How concerned are you that students in lower-income areas are less likely than other students to be ready for college when they finish high school—are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned about this issue?

- 61% very concerned
- 28 somewhat concerned
- 6 not too concerned
- 4 not at all concerned
- 1 don't know

23. How concerned are you that schools in lower-income areas have a shortage of good teachers compared to schools in wealthier areas—are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned about this issue?

- 60% very concerned
- 28 somewhat concerned
- 6 not too concerned
- 4 not at all concerned
- 2 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 24 and 25]

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

- 3% excellent
- 28 good
- 45 not so good
- 19 poor
- 5 don't know

25. How about in preparing students for college?

- 4% excellent
- 37 good
- 39 not so good
- 14 poor
- 6 don't know

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

- 60% very important
- 32 somewhat important
- 7 not too important
- 1 don't know

27. Some people say that the state should be using this type of data and information in making policy decisions about education programs and funding. Do you favor or oppose this idea?

- 75% favor
- 18 oppose
- 7 don't know

28. 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
- 35 B
- 26 C
- 10 D
- 4 F
- 6 don't know

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

- 6% more than enough
- 26 just enough
- 62 not enough
- 6 don't know

[rotate questions 30 and 31]

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

- 63% yes
- 33 no
- 4 don't know

31. 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?

- 57% yes
- 38 no
- 5 don't know

32. 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.

- 51% the local school districts
- 34 the local schools
- 10 the state government
- 2 other (specify)
- 3 don't know

Changing topics,

[rotate questions 33 and 34]

33. 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?

- 14% yes, same
- 80 no, not the same
- 6 don't know

34. Do you think that students in lower-income areas of the state receive the same level of college preparation as students in wealthier areas?

- 16% yes, same
- 77 no, not the same
- 7 don't know

35. 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?

- 68% yes
- 28 no
- 4 don't know

36. Should local schools in lower-income areas pay higher salaries to attract and retain teachers, even if it costs the state more money?

- 51% yes
- 44 no
- 5 don't know

37. Next, how do you, yourself, feel about the idea of merit pay for teachers. In general, do you favor or oppose it?

- 62% favor
- 26 oppose
- 12 don't know

I am going to read some possible criteria for giving additional pay to teachers for special merit. For each one, please tell me if you think it should or should not be used to determine which teachers receive merit pay.

[rotate questions 37a to 39]

37a. How about the academic achievement of students as measured by standardized tests?

- 57% should
- 32 should not
- 11 don't know

38. How about the academic improvement of students as measured by standardized tests?

- 69% should
- 27 should not
- 4 don't know

39. How about length of teaching experience?

- 48% should
- 49 should not
- 3 don't know

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

- 61% approve
- 34 disapprove
- 5 don't know

41. Do you approve or disapprove of the way that President Obama is handling K–12 education policy?

- 46% approve
- 28 disapprove
- 26 don't know

42. Do you think that the federal government is doing more than enough, just enough, or not enough to improve the K–12 public education system?

- 7% more than enough
- 25 just enough
- 59 not enough
- 9 don't know

43. In thinking about the upcoming California governor's election in November, how important to you are the candidates' positions on K–12 public education?

- 62% very important
- 30 somewhat important
- 6 not too important
- 2 don't know

44. In thinking about priorities for the next governor, do you think that improving the state's K–12 public education system should be a: **[rotate order]** very high priority, high priority, medium priority, low priority, **[or]** very low priority?

- 29% very high priority
- 45 high priority
- 18 medium priority
- 3 low priority
- 3 very low priority
- 2 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?

- 83% yes *[ask q45a]*
- 17 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]*
- 2 another party *(specify) [skip to q47]*
- 22 independent *[skip to q46b]*

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

- 52% strong
- 46 not very strong
- 2 don't know

[skip to q47]

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

- 52% strong
- 45 not very strong
- 3 don't know

[skip to q47]

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

- 20% Republican Party
- 46 Democratic Party
- 25 neither *(volunteered)*
- 9 don't know

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

- 10% very liberal
- 22 somewhat liberal
- 30 middle-of-the-road
- 23 somewhat conservative
- 13 very conservative
- 2 don't know

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

- 26% great deal
- 43 fair amount
- 25 only a little
- 5 none
- 1 don't know

[d1-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?)***

- 43% affected a lot
- 38 affected somewhat
- 17 not affected
- 2 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
- 5 high school graduate
- 4 some college
- 43 college graduate
- 44 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?

- 41% very confident
- 37 somewhat confident
- 21 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 and information needed to prepare this child for that grade level?

- 24% very confident
- 46 somewhat confident
- 30 not too confident

[d5-d18: demographic questions]

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Mark Baldassare is President and Chief Executive Officer of PPIC.

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