

January 2005

Public Education Opinion Survey Greene County, Missouri, Public Schools

Greene County School Districts & Percent of Population Residing Within Each Attendance Boundary:

- **Ash Grove R-IV**
2,355 citizens
1.8% of population
- **Fair Grove R-X**
2,139 citizens
1.6% of population
- **Republic R-III**
7,819 citizens
5.9% of population
- **Rogersville R-VIII**
3,110 citizens
2.4% of population
- **Springfield R-XII**
104,682 citizens
79.0% of population
- **Strafford R-VI**
2,745 citizens
2.1% of population
- **Walnut Grove R-V**
1,055 citizens
.8% of population
- **Willard R-II**
8,598 citizens
6.5% of population

INTRODUCTION

The Institute for School Improvement (ISI) at Southwest Missouri State University (SMSU) conducted a replication study of the 35th Annual PHI DELTA KAPPA/GALLUP Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. The ISI study, however, focused solely on Greene County, Missouri. All eight public school districts were included.

METHODS

A survey questionnaire developed by Phi Delta Kappa (an international educational association headquartered at the University of Indiana, Bloomington) was modified by ISI staff at Southwest Missouri State University and mailed to 1,000 residents living in Greene County. The survey questions focused on public perceptions of issues associated with public and private schooling. Some questions were modified appropriately to make them applicable to local residents residing in Greene County. This process allowed the ISI research team to compare local findings with those obtained from the national Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) study.

The survey was mailed to Greene County residents in January 2004. A total of 1,000 households, approximately .75% of the population, were chosen randomly from United States 2000 Census Data and constituted the sample. The following table shows the population, sample, and return rates by school district.

8 Greene County School Districts	Population	% of Population	Sample	Number of Surveys Returned	Return Rate
Ash Grove R- IV	2,355	1.78%	18	1	5.56%
Fair Grove R-X	2,139	1.61%	16	0	0.00%
Republic R-III	7,819	5.90%	59	6	10.17%
Rogersville R-VIII	3,110	2.35%	24	4	16.67%
Springfield R-VII	104,682	79.00%	790	153	19.37%
Strafford R-VI	2,745	2.07%	20	3	15.00%
Walnut Grove R-V	1,055	0.80%	8	2	25.00%
Willard R-II	8,598	6.49%	65	5	7.69%
Total	132,503	100.00%	1,000	174	17.40%

Because the stratified sample and return rates for individuals living in specific school district attendance areas in Greene County are few in number, all data were aggregated county-wide. All local analyses and comparisons to the national study are based on the overall return rate of 17.40 percent of Greene County residents. It is important to note that the national PDK survey was completed by interviewing 100 United States households via telephone. While both the national and local approaches involve relatively small numbers of individual respondents, the former has been validated by years of replication and the latter yielded a high reliability coefficient of .95. The margin of error for the ISI Greene County study is +/- 3%.

**Respondent
Characteristics:**

➤ **Gender**

Males	46.2%
Females	53.8%

➤ **Age**

19-25 yr.	4.0%
26-30 yr.	4.6%
31-40 yr.	10.4%
41-60 yr.	50.9%
61+yr.	30.1%

➤ **Income**

Up to \$10,000	3.4%
\$10,000-15,000	2.7%
\$15,000-25,000	7.5%
\$25,001-40,000	21.2%
\$40,000 -60,000	24.0%
\$60,001-80,000	13.0%
\$80,000 -100,000	8.9%
\$100,001-150,000	10.3%
\$150,000+	8.9%

➤ **Education**

Some High School	.6%
High School Grad	9.4%
Some College	29.8%
College Grad	30.4%
Master's	25.1%
Doctorate	4.7%

➤ **Home Ownership**

Own	98.3%
Rent	1.7%

➤ **Years Residing in District**

M = 24 years

➤ **Number of Years in
Current Occupation**

M = 16

MAJOR FINDINGS

School Quality

- 54% of Greene County respondents gave their local public schools an “A” or “B”; while at the national level only 21% would give public schools an “A” or “B” grade.
- Sixteen percent of Greene County respondents gave their oldest child’s school a grade of “A”; whereas at the national level, 29% awarded an “A” grade to these schools.

No Child Left Behind Act

- The majority of Greene County respondents believed:
 - local school boards should have the most influence regarding what is taught in the classroom.
 - public schools should be judged on whether or not students show a reasonable amount of improvement.
 - single statewide tests do not provide an adequate depiction of whether or not their school needs improvement.
 - students should be tested on other subjects in addition to math and English.
 - additional efforts should be made in their own schools rather than transferring to another.
 - that in agreement with the national respondents, students with special education needs should not be required to meet the same standards as the rest of the school.
 - utilizing a statewide standardized test will encourage teachers to “teach to the test.”
 - their school should provide tutoring to children who do not meet the level of proficiency rather than utilizing an outside agency.

The Importance of Good Teaching

- The majority of Greene County respondents did not think it was hard to *get* good teachers, but that it is difficult to *keep* good teachers.
- Greene County respondents agree that teachers’ salaries are too low, and that higher salaries would serve as an incentive to attract and retain quality teachers.

Problems and Public Expectations

- Finances were seen as the greatest problem facing public schools. Consistent with the national PDK study, violence was perceived as the least of all their concerns, even though it was listed as a concern.

Choice: Public and Private

- The majority of respondents opposed parents’ having the choice of sending students to private schools at a public expense. Furthermore, they opposed states’ making vouchers available.
- Little difference was noted in Greene County residential beliefs on academic achievement when vouchers are used. Forty-nine percent believed there would be an improvement, while 42% believed students would do worse. Nationally, very few (9%) believed students would perform worse if vouchers were in place.
- Additionally, while 42% thought they would chose to send their children to public schools, 38% thought they would select a church-related school.

Achievement Gap

- Most respondents credited the achievement gap to “other” factors, not the quality of schooling.
- All respondents believed it would be important to close the achievement gap, and that parental involvement is very important.

State Funding for Public Schools

- Greene County respondents and national respondents believed an equal amount of dollars should be spent per student.

School Quality:

➤ Grade Reports

- *At the community level, (43.8%) Greene County respondents would give their public schools a “B”; followed by a “C” (37%).*
- *At the national level, the majority (55.9%) of respondents would give the public schools a “C”; followed by a “B” (18.9%).*

➤ Grade Given to Oldest Child’s School

Greene County

A	16.7%
B	49.0%
C	26.0%
D	6.3%
F	2.1%

National

A	29.0%
B	39.0%
C	20.0%
D	8.0%
F	4.0%

Reforming vs. Alternative

- *The majority of Greene County respondents (75.8%) reported a preference in reforming the existing system, rather than finding an alternative.*

RESULTS

Quality of Public Schools

Respondents were asked to rate the quality of their public schools by responding to the following three questions pertaining to the “grade” they would assign the public schools in their community.

- Students are often given the grades of A, B, C, D, and FAIL to denote the quality of their work. Suppose that the public schools themselves, in your community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here?

“A”	“B”	“C”	“D”	“F”
9.9%	43.8%	37.0%	7.4%	1.9%

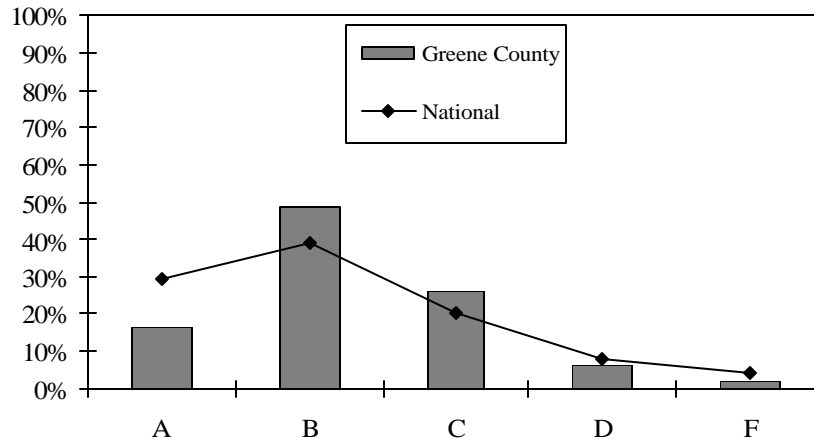
- How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally?

“A”	“B”	“C”	“D”	“F”
2.1%	18.9%	55.9%	16.8%	6.3%

These data were also examined by the percent of respondents giving their school district an “A” based on whether or not they have children under the age of 18 living in their home.

- What grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?

Figure 1. Percentage of Greene County Respondents Compared to the National Survey on Grading Public Schools.



- In order to improve public education in America, some people think the focus should be on reforming the existing public school system. Others believe the focus should be on finding an alternative to the existing public school system. Which approach do you think is preferable – reforming the existing public school system or finding an alternative to the existing public school system?

Reforming Existing System	Finding Alternative System	Don’t Know	Other
75.8%	15.2%	20.0%	7.1%

No Child Left Behind Act:

➤ **Teaching**

- Over one half of Greene County respondents (62%) think that their local school board should have the most influence in deciding what should be taught in their school.

➤ **Evaluation**

- The majority of Greene County respondents (68%) think public schools should be judged by whether students show reasonable improvement from where they started.

➤ **Single Statewide Test**

- The majority of Greene County respondents (73.3%) don't believe that a single statewide test is an adequate picture of whether or not their school is in need of improvement.

➤ **Subjects Tested**

- Over half of the Greene County respondents (74%) think that students should be tested on other subjects, instead of only English and math.

No Child Left Behind Act

Respondents were asked several questions to determine the extent of their knowledge and support of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The NCLB Act is an amendment to the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

- In your opinion, who should have the greatest influence in deciding what is taught in the public schools in your community / school district?

Federal Government	State Government	Local School Board	Don't Know
7.6%	29.3%	62.0%	1.1%

- Under the NCLB Act, a school's performance is evaluated annually based on the performance of its students. In your opinion, which is the better way to judge the job a public school is doing?

Students Meet Fixed Standard	Students Show Reasonable Improvement	Don't Know
26.0%	68.0%	6.0%

- According to the NCLB Act, determining whether a public school is or is not in need of improvement will be based on the performance of its students on a single statewide test. In your opinion will a single test provide a fair picture of whether or not a school needs improvement?

Provides Fair Picture	Doesn't Provide Fair Picture	Don't Know
22.8%	73.3%	4.0%

- According to the NCLBA, statewide tests of students' performance will be devoted to English and math only. Do you think a test covering only English and math would provide a fair picture of whether a school in your community is or is not in need of improvement or should the test be based on other subjects also?

Test on English and Math	Test on Other Subjects	Don't Know
20.0%	74.0%	6.0%

No Child Left Behind Act:

➤ **Transfer**

- *The majority of respondents (81%) would prefer to have additional efforts made in their present school, as opposed to transferring to another.*

➤ **Special Education Students Should Meet Standards of Other Students:**

Greene County

Yes	10.0%
No	82.9%
DK	7.1%

National

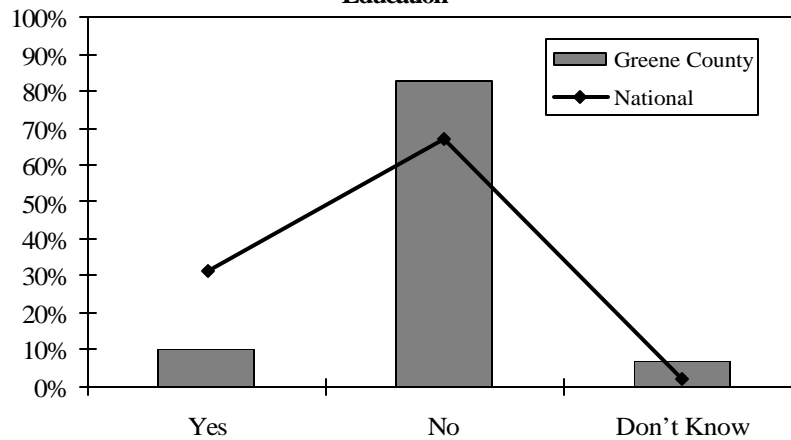
Yes	31.0%
No	67.0%
DK	2.0%

- Assume you had a child attending a school identified as in need of improvement by the No Child Left Behind Act. Which would you prefer, to transfer your child to a school identified as not in need of improvement or to have additional efforts made in your child’s present school to help him or her achieve?

Transfer Child to New School	Additional Efforts in Present School	Don’t Know
16.1%	81.0%	3.0%

- In your opinion, should students enrolled in special education be required to meet the same standards as all other students in the school?

Figure 2. Percentage of Greene County Respondents Compared to the National Survey on Standards of Students in Special Education



➤ **“Teach to the test”**

- *The majority of respondents (73.8%) believe that the emphasis on testing encourages teachers to focus on students passing the test, rather than teaching the subject.*

- In your opinion, will the current emphasis on standardized tests encourage teachers to “teach to the tests,” that is, concentrate on teaching their students to pass the tests rather than teaching the subject, or don’t you think it will have this effect?

Encourage Teaching to Tests	Will Not Have an Effect	Don’t Know
73.8%	17.4%	8.7%

➤ **Tutoring**

- *Over one half of respondents (55.7%) would prefer their child to be tutored by their own school rather than by an outside agency.*

- Now, let’s assume that your child was failing in his or her school. Which kind of tutoring would you prefer – tutoring provided by teachers in your child’s school or tutoring provided by an outside agency that you would select from a state–approved list?

Tutoring by Child’s School	Tutoring by Outside Agency	Don’t Know
55.7%	33.5%	10.8%

The Importance of Good Teaching:

Greene County Residents:

➤ **Hard to GET Good Teachers**

Yes 36.0%
 No 51.2%
 DK 12.2%

➤ **Hard to KEEP Good Teachers**

Yes 58.1%
 No 28.5%
 DK 13.4%

Greene County Residents:

➤ **Teacher Salaries:**

Respondents with Children In School
 Too Low 86.7%
 Just Right 13.3%
 Too High 0.0%

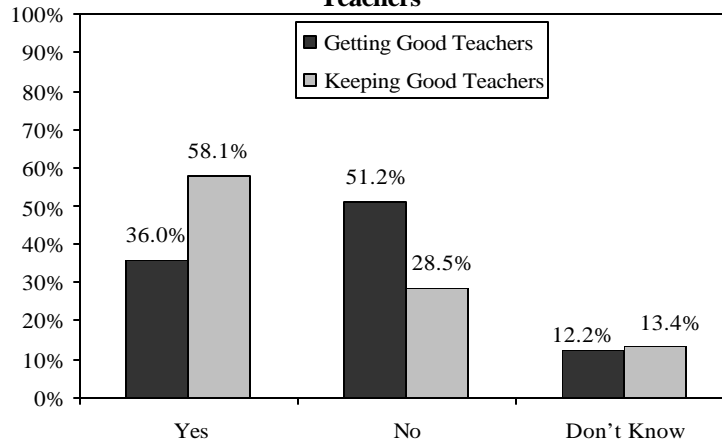
Respondents with No Children In School
 Too Low 65.7%
 Just Right 29.6%
 Too High 4.6%

The Importance of Good Teaching

This section of the questionnaire focused on respondents' viewpoints on if getting and keeping good teachers is difficult, and if teacher salaries play a factor.

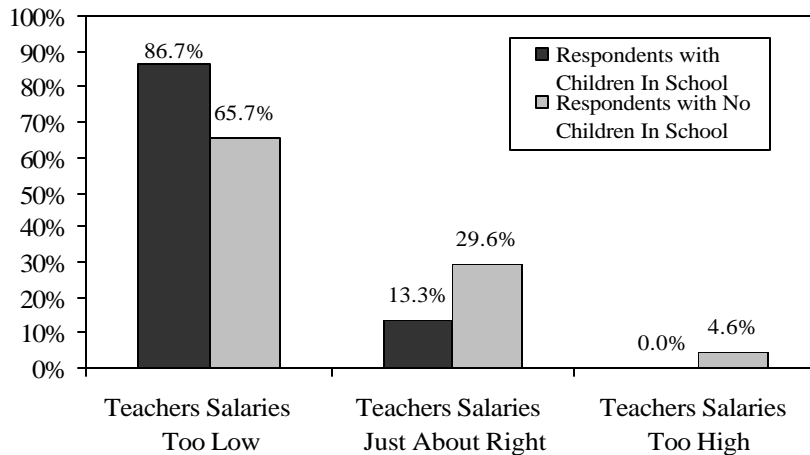
- Do you think your public school system has a hard time GETTING good teachers? Do you think your public school system has a hard time KEEPING good teachers?

Figure 3. Percentage of Greene County Respondents Who Feel It Is Difficult "GETTING" and "KEEPING" Good Teachers



- Do you think salaries for teachers in your community are too low, just about right, or too high?

Figure 4. Percentage of Greene County Respondents' Belief on Teacher Salaries



The Importance of Good Teaching:

➤ **Higher Salaries as Incentives**

Respondents with Children In School

Yes	51.0%
No	34.7%
DK	12.2%

Respondents with No Children In School

Yes	47.9%
No	44.4%
DK	7.7%

Greene County versus National:

➤ **Higher Salaries as Incentives**

Greene County

Yes	48.8%
No	41.6%
DK	9.0%

National

Yes	65.0%
No	33.0%
DK	2.0%

- In your opinion, should teachers be paid higher salaries or not as an incentive to teach in schools which have been identified as needing to improve?

Figure 5. Percentage of Greene County Respondents Disaggregated by Child Attending School Who Consider Higher Salaries as Incentives to Teachers.

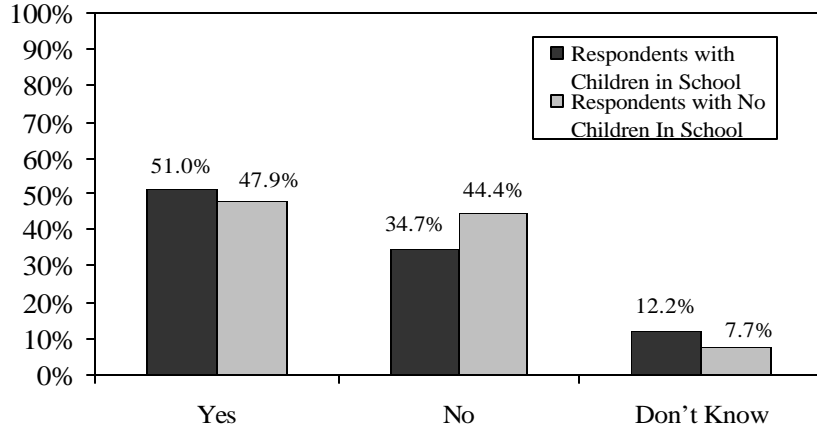
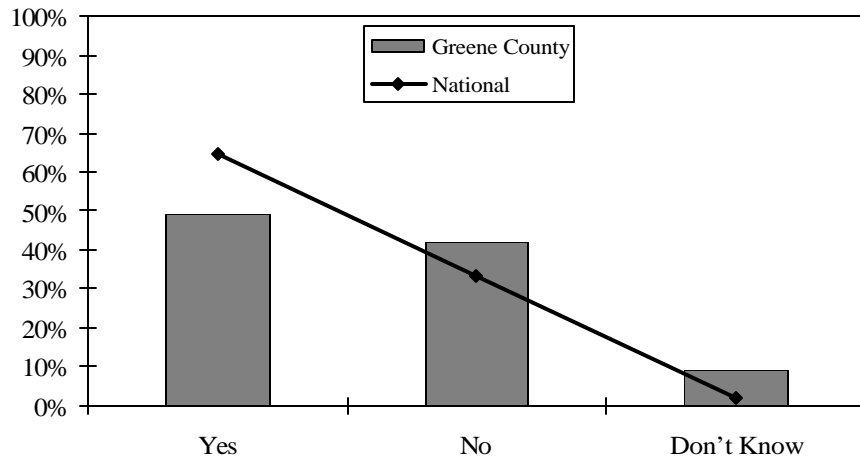


Figure 6. Percentage of Greene County Respondents Compared to the National Survey on Higher Salaries as Incentives to Teachers



Problems and Public Expectations:

- **“Biggest” Problem Facing Schools**
 - The majority of respondents (48%) report that the “biggest” problem facing the public schools in their community is finances.
 - Violence was ranked as having the “least” amount of concern (n = 3%).

Choice, Public and Private:

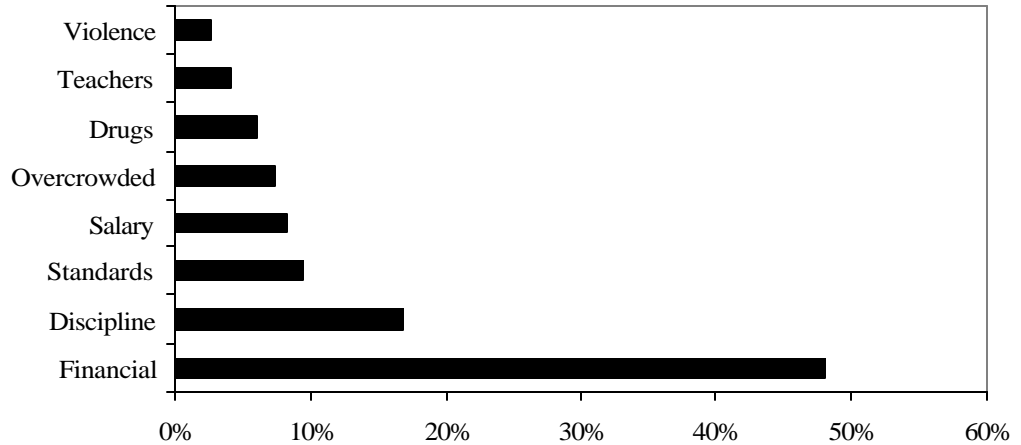
- **The Choice**
 - The majority of respondents (69.4%) oppose allowing parents the choice of sending their children to a private school at public expense.
- **Vouchers**
 - The majority of respondents (68%) oppose states’ making vouchers available.

Problems Facing the Public Schools and Public Expectations

Respondents were asked questions concerning problems schools face along with their expectations with both school and student performance.

- Please rank from “biggest” = 1 to “least” = 8, what you think are the major problems public schools in your community must face?

Figure 7. Frequency of Greene County Responses Regarding the "Biggest" Problems Public Schools Face



Choice, Public and Private

The following questions focused on the public’s view of using public funds to finance attendance at private schools and the effect of vouchers on achievement.

- Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?

Favor	Oppose	Don't Know
28.8%	69.4%	1.8%

- Last year’s Supreme Court decision says that the U.S. Constitution does not prevent a state from offering vouchers that parents can use to send their students to private schools at public expense. Do you favor or oppose your state making such vouchers available?

Favor	Oppose	Don't Know
30.8%	68.0%	1.2%

Choice, Public and Private:

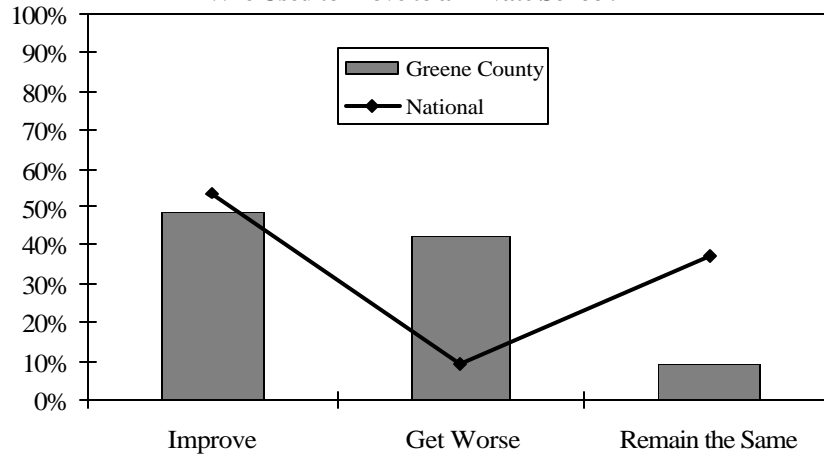
➤ **Influence on Academic Achievement When Vouchers are Used:**

Greene County
Improves 48.6%
Worse 42.3%
Same 9.2%

National
Improves 53.5%
Worse 9.3%
Same 37.2%

- How about the students who use vouchers to move to private schools? Do you think their academic achievement would improve, get worse, or remain the same?

Figure 8. Percentage of Greene County Respondents Compared to the National Survey on Academic Achievement When Vouchers Were Used to Move to a Private School.



➤ **What type of school would you choose?**

- If given a voucher covering full tuition, the majority of respondents would choose either a public school (42.3%) or a church – related school (37.5%).

- Suppose you had a school-age child and were given a voucher covering full tuition that would permit you to send that child to any public, private, or church – related school of your choice. Which kind of school do you think you would choose?

Public School	Private School	Church – Related School	Don't Know
42.3%	12.5%	37.5%	7.7%

Achievement Gap:

➤ **The gap between ethnic groups (white, Black, & Hispanic students)**

- The majority of respondents (86.2%) believe the gap is due to “other factors” not the quality of schooling.

Achievement Gap

Respondents were asked questions to determine their understanding of the gap between the achievement of students with differing ethnic backgrounds.

- In your opinion, is the achievement gap between White students and Black and Hispanic students mostly related to the quality of schooling received or mostly related to other factors?

Related to Quality of Schooling	Related to Other Factors	Don't Know
10.8%	86.2%	3.0%

➤ **Possible to narrow the gap without spending more money?**

- 39.1% believe spending more money would help, while 51.5% believe it would not help.

- Do you think it is possible or not possible to narrow the achievement gap between White students and Black and Hispanic students without spending more money than is currently being spent to help low-achieving students?

Yes	No	Don't Know
51.5%	39.1%	9.5%

Achievement Gap:

➤ **Importance of Closing the Academic Achievement Gap**

Respondents with Children In School

Very Important	10.9%
Important	43.5%
Somewhat Important	26.1%
Not Too Important	10.9%
Not At All Important	8.7%

Respondents with No Children In School

Very Important	10.3%
Important	48.7%
Somewhat Important	30.8%
Not Too Important	6.8%
Not At All Important	3.4%

➤ **Parent Involvement**

Respondents with Children In School

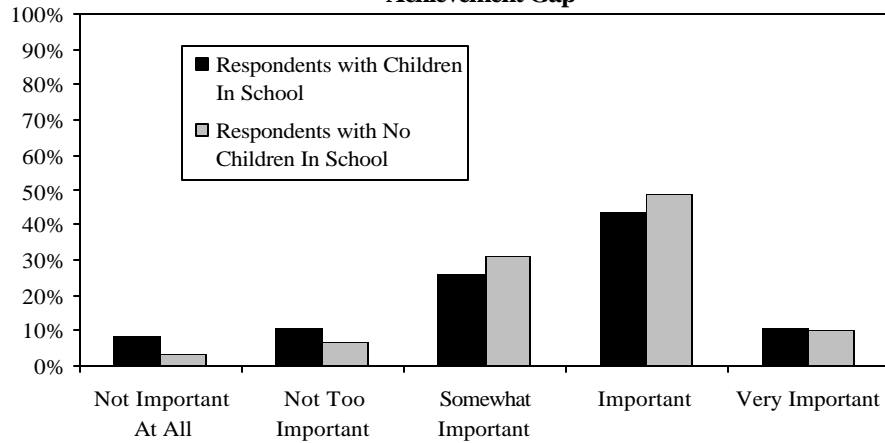
Very Important	73.5%
Important	24.5%
Somewhat Important	2.0%
Not Too Important	0.0%
Not At All Important	0.0%

Respondents with No Children In School

Very Important	52.1%
Important	38.8%
Somewhat Important	8.3%
Not Too Important	0.0%
Not At All Important	0.8%

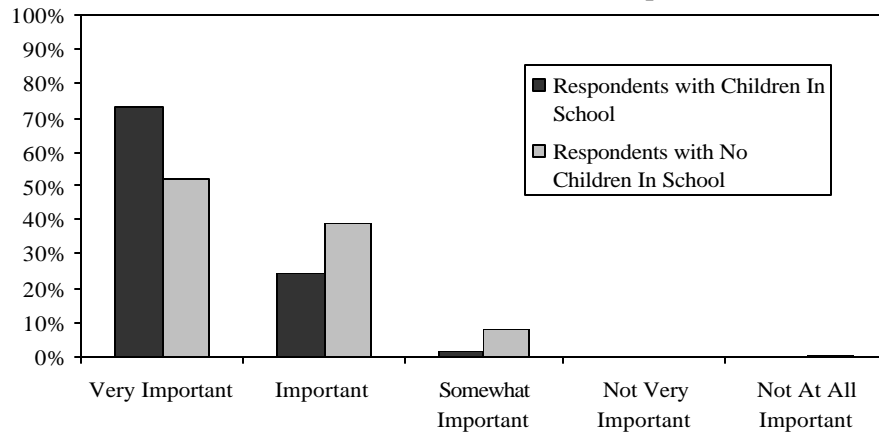
- There is a recognized academic achievement gap between White students and Black and Hispanic students, with White students consistently outperforming Black and Hispanic students. How important do you think it is to close this gap?

Figure 9. Greene County Respondents With and Without Children Attending School Regarding the Importance of Closing the Academic Achievement Gap



- In your opinion, how important do you think parent involvement is in contributing to the achievement gap between White children and Black and Hispanic children?

Figure 10. Percentage of Greene County Respondents Disaggregated by Child Attending School on Importance of Parent Involvement with the Achievement Gap



State Funding to Public Schools:

➤ **State funding for public schools**

Greene County

Equal 69.2%
Vary 19.5%
Don't Know 10.1%

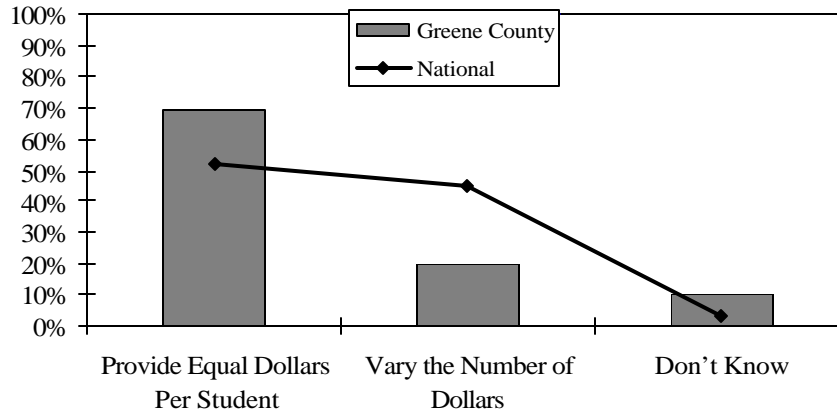
National

Equal 52.0%
Vary 45.0%
Don't Know 3.0%

Funding Public Schools

- In your opinion, which is the better way for your state to fund the public schools – provide equal dollars per student or vary the number of dollars to meet each student’s educational needs?

Figure 11. Percentage of Greene County Respondents Compared to the National Survey on State Funding to Public Schools



- As a means of saving money, some states are considering a four-day week consisting of longer school days. Would you favor or oppose such a plan in the public schools in your community?

➤ **Four-day week?**

- The majority of respondents (70.2%) oppose four-day school weeks as a plan to save money.

Favor	Oppose	Don't Know
21.6%	70.2%	7.6%

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