

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, 2000
SURVEY RESEARCH REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
JUNE 5, 2000**

The following executive summary provides some valuable information concerning Oregonians' perceptions and opinions toward the Oregon public school system and its kindergarten through 12th grade programs and activities. This survey should provide information to assist the educational planners in implementing future educational priorities in Oregon.

Below, The Nelson Report has highlighted the key results of the final survey research report. The actual report is over 150 pages in length with multiple tables designed to assist the Quality Education Commission in understanding and analyzing respondents' views.

In this analysis, The Nelson Report identifies "key" demographics for many of the questions. Key demographics are those subgroups that respond at a higher percentage rate than the total sample for any given response. The key demographic groups for any given opinion are not necessarily the only subgroups in the survey who share that opinion. They are, however, the ones that hold that opinion most strongly.

A total of 601 registered voters were interviewed between May 23 and May 30, 2000. The margin of error for this survey was 4.0%, at a 95% level of confidence.

MOST SERIOUS PROBLEMS FACING OREGON SCHOOLS TODAY

“Insufficient funding” led the list of most serious problems facing Oregon schools today, followed by “overcrowding/class size” and “school funding/financing”. Below, the top answers to this question are displayed in more detail. The full responses can be found in the final report. Since this question and other open-ended questions call for multiple responses, the results are displayed in terms of the percentage of respondents who mentioned a particular issue (totals over 100%) and the percentage of total responses (totals 100%).

Issue	Percent of Respondents	Percent of Responses
INSUFFICIENT FUNDING	25	14
OVERCROWDING/CLASS SIZE	18	10
SCHOOL FUNDING/FINANCING	16	8
DISCIPLINE	12	6
IMPROVE TEACHER QUALITY	9	5
TEACHER SHORTAGE	8	4
NOT USING FUNDS WISELY	8	4
QUALITY OF EDUCATION	7	4
ADMINISTRATION	6	3
VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS/GUNS	6	3
MORE PARENT INVOLVEMENT NEEDED	6	3

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RATING: OREGON PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Overall, a majority of respondents, 54%, rated the Oregon public school system positively (excellent-3%, pretty good-51%) as opposed to 37% who rated the school system negatively (only fair-29%, poor-8%). Another nine percent were not sure.

Key demographics who gave the public school system a positive rating were females (56%), 18-29 years old (63%), 45-59 years old (56%), respondents with children in other types of schools (58%), respondents with no school children (56%), respondents who have home schooled children in the past (100%), respondents with children who attended public schools in the past (58%), no school children in the past (57%), Democrats (62%), non-voters and voters in 1 out of 4 elections (59%), Eastern (59%), Mid-Willamette (57%) and Tri-County (56%).

Key groups who gave the public school system a negative rating were males (40%), 30-44 years old (47%), 45-59 years old (41%), respondents who are home schooling their children (75%), respondents with children in private schools (60%), respondents with children in pre-school (39%), children attending private schools in the past (89%), respondents with children in other types of schools in the past (51%), Independents (44%), Republicans (41%), voters in 3 out of 4 elections (40%), voters in 4 out of 4 elections (39%), Coast (51%) and Southern (44%).

In a special crosstab, 70% of those respondents who later believed there has been a **positive change** in Oregon's public school in the last ten years (38% of all respondents) also gave the public school system a positive rating.

In a similar crosstab, 47% of those respondents who later believed there has been a **negative change** in Oregon's public school in the last ten years (25% of all respondents) gave the public school system a positive rating.

POSITIVE/NEGATIVE CHANGE IN OREGON'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Slightly over half of respondents, 52% believed there has been a negative change in Oregon's public schools in the last ten years as opposed to 23% who felt a positive change has occurred. Twenty-five percent were not sure.

Key groups who believed there has been a negative change were 45-59 years old (65%), respondents who are home schooling their children (75%), respondents with children in private schools (70%), respondents who have home schooled their children in the past (100%), respondents with children attending private schools in the past (78%), respondents who attended other types of school in the past (75%), Republicans (61%), voters in 4 out of 4 elections (59%) and Tri-County (57%).

Key demographics who felt a positive change has occurred were 18-29 years old (40%), 30-44 years old (28%), respondents with children in pre-school (28%), respondents who are home schooling their children and with no school children (25%), respondents with no school children in the past (26%), respondents with school children in public school in the past (25%), Independents (27%), Democrats (26%), voters in 1 out of 4 elections (28%), voters in 3 out of 4

elections (25%), Eastern (29%), Coast (27%) and Mid-Willamette (26%).

INCREASE MONEY SPENT, ACHIEVE HIGHER ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Respondents were split with 44% who felt it would make no difference in achieving higher academic standards if additional money was spent on education while 42% felt higher academic standards were more likely to happen if additional money was spent. Three percent felt it was less likely to happen and eleven percent were not sure.

Key demographics who felt it would make no difference if more money was spent were males (48%), 60+ years old (50%), respondents with children in other types of schools (51%), respondents with children attending private schools in the past (78%), respondents who had children in other types of schools in the past (50%), Republicans (53%), Independents (47%), voters in 1 out of 4 elections (54%), voters in 3 out of 4 elections (47%), Southern (62%) and Eastern (47%).

Key groups who believed spending additional money would more likely achieve higher academic standards were females (45%), 18-29 years old (70%), 45-59 years old (47%), 30-44 years old (46%), respondents with children in home school and pre-school (50%), children in public schools (44%), respondents who home schooled their children in the past (100%), respondents with no school children in the past (52%), Democrats (50%), non-voters (50%), voters in 2 out of 4 elections (46%), Tri-County (48%) and Coast (46%).

PRIORITY RANKINGS: PROGRAMS/ACTIVITIES THAT COULD CONTRIBUTE TO A QUALITY EDUCATION

Next, respondents were read a list of educational programs and activities that could possibly make a difference in the quality of education received by K-12 students at their local school district. They were then asked, on a scale of one to four, with “1” representing low priority and “4” representing high priority, to rate each program or activity in terms of the difference they would make in the quality of education. The ones and twos have been collapsed into a low priority category while the threes and fours were grouped into a high priority category. Below, all responses are listed in descending order of priority.

Program/Activity	High Priority	Low Priority	Not Sure
Well trained teachers	97	3	0
Parents and community involvement and partnerships in schools	94	4	2
School upkeep, maintenance and repair of existing structures	89	9	2
Up-to-date and sufficient number of text books	87	9	4
Additional instruction in reading, writing and math	87	10	3
Music and art instruction in middle and high school	84	15	1
Additional instructional time for students not meeting academic standards	80	16	4
Special programs for the disabled and other students with special needs	80	19	1

Program/Activity	High Priority	Low Priority	Not Sure
Programs that help students explore potential career opportunities	79	16	5
Smaller class size	78	20	2
Updated computer technology	77	18	5
Middle and high school foreign languages	77	22	1
School librarians	76	22	2
School counselors	76	21	3
Campus security and school safety	75	22	3
Music and art instruction in elementary school	75	24	1
Special programs for talented and gifted students	74	24	2
Major building improvements to school facilities	70	25	5
Middle and high school competitive sports	67	32	1
Pre-Kindergarten or Head Start	51	43	6
Foreign language teachers at the elementary level	41	58	1
All-day kindergarten	28	65	7

A very large majority of respondents rated most programs and activities as high priorities. An extremely high number of Oregonians felt “well trained teachers” and “parents and community involvement and partnerships in schools” were a high priority in determining a quality education, followed by “school upkeep, maintenance and repair of existing structures”, “up-to-date and sufficient number of text books”, “additional instruction in reading, writing and math” and “music and art instruction in middle and high school”. On the other hand, a large majority of respondents rated “all-day kindergarten” and “foreign language teachers at the elementary level” as lower priorities.

Furthermore, respondents felt that “the basics – reading, writing and arithmetic” was the most important program a school district can offer its students, followed by “math/arithmetic”, “reading” and “writing”, as indicated in the table below.

The basics – reading, writing and arithmetic	11%
Math/arithmetic	8%
Reading	7%
Writing	6%
Arts	5%
Quality teachers	5%
Computer science/technology	5%
Quality education/academic programs	4%
Balanced overall education/well-rounded curriculum	4%
Music	3%
Vocational/trade preparation/work experience	3%
Sports/physical fitness	3%
Science	3%
Individualized attention/smaller class size	3%

NO SUPPORT/MAJOR SUPPORT: PROGRAMS/ACTIVITIES THAT SHOULD RECEIVE STATE FUNDING

Respondents were then given the following information:

“Currently the State of Oregon is examining a model to determine the components of a quality education and determine the costs of each component on a per student basis. Using the Quality Education Funding Model developed for the legislature, I am going to read you a list of educational programs and activities and their associated costs on a per student basis. The state now spends on schools about \$4,856 per student.”

Again respondents were asked, on a scale of one to four, with “1” representing no support and “4” representing major support, how much support each local school district’s educational program or activity should receive from state funding. Below, the ones and twos were collapsed into a low support category and the threes and fours into a high support category.

In addition, presented along side and in parenthesis are the before mentioned priority rankings concerning programs and activities that could make a difference in the quality of education. The number in parenthesis and bold represents the category’s ranking in the first priority list. The net loss category reflects the difference between the rankings from programs/activities that should receive state funding and programs/activities that could make a difference in the quality of education.

Program/Activity	High Support	Low Support	Not Sure	Net Loss
Additional instruction in reading, writing and math at a cost of \$133 per student	82 (87) {5}	13 (10)	5 (3)	-5

Program/Activity	High Support	Low Support	Not Sure	Net Loss
Up-to-date and sufficient number of text books at a cost of \$64 per student	79 (87) {4}	16 (9)	5 (4)	-8
Additional instructional time for students not meeting academic standards at a cost of \$54 per student	73 (80) {7}	22 (16)	5 (4)	-7
Programs that help students explore potential career opportunities at a cost of \$19 per student	72 (79) {9}	24 (16)	4 (5)	-7
Music and art instruction in middle and high school at a cost of \$85 per student	66 (84) {6}	30 (15)	4 (1)	-18
Improving school upkeep, maintenance and repair of existing structures at a cost of \$186 per student	64 (89) {3}	30 (9)	6 (2)	-25
Additional teacher training at a cost of \$79 per student	63 (97) {1}	29 (3)	8 (0)	-34
Reduce class size to 20 at a cost of \$570 per student	59 (78) {10}	35 (20)	6 (2)	-19
Additional music and art instruction in elementary schools at a cost of \$74 per student	54 (75) {16}	42 (24)	4 (1)	-21
Provide a part time community involvement coordinator for partnership development at a cost of \$15 per student	48 (94) {2}	45 (4)	7 (2)	-46

Program/Activity	High Support	Low Support	Not Sure	Net Loss
Additional school counselors, one for every 200 students, at a cost of \$237 per student	44 (76) {14}	51 (21)	5 (3)	-32
Increased overall instructional time, such as, longer school day, longer school year, at a cost of \$281 per student	38 (NA) {NA}	55 (NA)	7 (NA)	(NA)
Additional training for principals at a cost of \$7 per student	38 (NA) {NA}	57 (NA)	5 (NA)	(NA)
All-day kindergarten at a cost of \$85 per student	27 (28) {22}	67 (65)	6 (7)	-1

When comparing the difference between the rankings concerning support for state funding and rankings that determine a quality education, support for state funding was lower for each program/activity. A very large majority of respondents continued to give high support for “additional instruction in reading, writing and math”, “up-to-date and sufficient number of text books”, “additional instructional time for students not meeting academic standards” and “programs that help students explore career opportunities”. On the other hand, “provide a part time community involvement coordinator for partnership development” (-46%), “additional teacher training” (-34%), “additional school counselors” (-32%), “improving school upkeep, maintenance and repair of existing structures” (-25%) and “additional music and art instruction in elementary school” (-21%) received greater net losses in terms of support for state funding.

AGREE/DISAGREE

In this series, respondents were presented with a number of intentionally prejudicial statements regarding Oregon's public school system. This format was designed to serve as a cross-check on various close-ended questions as well as to pick up variations on prejudices not readily apparent in those types of questions. This also serves as a preliminary check on various themes. The following table simply displays all of the agree/disagree statements in descending order of agreement.

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
Schools should make reading their top priority with a goal of all students reading up to standards by the end of third grade.	96	3	1
Local school buildings need to be repaired to protect the community's investment.	90	8	2
Our local school district is accountable and responsive to the needs of students and the community and deserves our support.	85	10	5
Schools should make improved teaching and administration a priority for staff training.	84	12	4
Schools should do more to communicate with the community and to develop business partnerships.	83	14	3
If the new Quality Education Model would tie school spending to improved student achievement and make schools accountable, I support it. That makes sense.	78	15	7

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
Today's students need a more comprehensive school program than just the traditional learning of reading, writing and arithmetic.	76	23	1
I don't believe additional funding is the answer to improved student achievement in Oregon. Schools should be able to reform education and make improvements with the money they already have.	53	45	2

CONCLUSIONS

1. Respondents list “insufficient funding” as the most serious problem facing Oregon schools today, followed by “overcrowding/class size” and “school funding/financing”.
2. Although, a majority of respondents give Oregon’s public school system a positive performance rating, they believe there has been a negative change in Oregon’s public schools in the last ten years.
3. Respondents are split with less than half who feel it would make no difference in achieving higher academic standards if additional money is spent on education while slightly fewer numbers feel high academic standards is more likely to happen if additional money is spent.
4. A very large majority of respondents rate most programs and activities as high priorities. An extremely high number of Oregonians, however, rate “well trained teachers” and “parents and community involvement and partnerships in schools” as a high priority in determining a quality education, followed by “school upkeep, maintenance and repair of existing structures”, “up-to-date and sufficient number of text books”, “additional instruction in reading, writing and math” and “music and art instruction in middle and high school”. On the other hand, a large majority of respondents rate “all-day kindergarten” and “foreign language teachers at the elementary level” as lower priorities.
5. Furthermore, respondents feel that “the basics – reading, writing and arithmetic” is the most important program a school district can offer its students, followed by “math/arithmetic”, “reading” and “writing”.
6. When comparing the difference between the rankings concerning support for state funding and rankings that determine a quality education, support for state funding is lower for each program/activity. A very large majority of respondents continue to give high support for “additional instruction in reading, writing and math”, “up-to-date and sufficient number of text books”, “additional instructional time for students not meeting academic standards” and “programs that help students explore career opportunities”. On the other hand, “provide a part time community involvement coordinator for partnership development”, “additional teacher training”, “additional school counselors”, “improving school upkeep, maintenance and repair of existing structures” and “additional music and art instruction in elementary school” receives greater net losses in terms of support for state funding.