

2004 Michigan Education Poll

New Acronyms, Same Attitudes?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Methodology

In January-February of 2004, Public Sector Consultants Inc. (PSC) conducted the Michigan Education Poll. The survey has been conducted every 2–3 years since 1982. The 2004 random telephone survey of 680 Michigan adults has a margin of error ± 3.8 percent with 95 percent confidence. The poll covers a number of topics related to public education in Michigan—quality, accountability and performance, early childhood education, and funding.

How are the schools doing?

Overall, Michigan residents give their local schools good marks for quality:

- More than half (54 percent) give their local schools an A/B grade on quality (12 percent A and 42 percent B).
- Forty-seven percent say the quality of their schools has “stayed the same” in the past few years.
- As many say their schools have “gotten better” (24 percent) as say they have “gotten worse” (20 percent).
- Thirty-two percent say the education in their community is better than in neighboring districts; 42 percent say it is the same.

Early Childhood Education

The public supports early childhood education, but this view is tempered by concerns about funding for K–12 education:

- Forty-six percent of respondents think the state should create mandatory, universal pre-kindergarten education in all public schools.
- Eighty-two percent believe that public spending on early childhood education is a wise investment.
- Three out of four believe that government should take care of K–12 schools before spending money on new or expanded early childhood programs.

Attitudes Toward Education Funding

Michigan residents hold a very positive view of the value of their local schools. They seem willing to pay more in property taxes to fund improvements or maintain services and programs, but this depends on the purpose.

- When considering the quality of education delivered by their local schools, 78 percent of respondents believe public education is a good value for the tax dollars they pay.

- Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63 percent) choose to maintain education programs even if it means higher taxes; 27 percent would keep taxes as low as possible even if it means cutting education programs.

When presented with a variety of improvements that could potentially be funded through increased property taxes:

- Nine out of ten respondents would be more likely to vote “yes” for a property tax increase if its purpose were to replace unsafe buildings.
- More than three-quarters of respondents would be more willing to vote “yes” if the increased revenue went toward improving technology.
- A similar proportion would be more likely to approve a tax hike if the purpose were to fund special education
- Seventy-four percent would be more likely to approve an increase for vocational education
- Seventy-three percent would be more likely to pay more for building new schools to relieve cramped conditions.

Accountability and Student Performance

Looking at factors that impact student learning, the public places the greatest responsibility squarely on teachers and parents, with nearly equal frequency:

- Thirty percent of respondents say the quality of teachers has the greatest impact.
- Twenty-nine percent say it is the level of parental involvement.
- Twelve percent identify the level of motivation the student has for learning.
- Seven percent feel it is the leadership of the school district.

When schools fail to meet the standards of No Child Left Behind, the public is most likely to blame the leadership of the district, followed in nearly equal frequencies by parents and teachers:

- Thirty percent believe the superintendent and the school board are most responsible for a school not meeting the standards.
- Twenty-two percent believe the parents of the children are most responsible.
- Twenty-one percent believe the classroom teachers are most responsible.

Conclusions

- The public values education and has a generally positive view of the state of education in Michigan.
- Early childhood education is also valued, but is viewed as a competitor with K–12 education for funding.
- Almost half of the respondents support mandatory pre-K public education.
- Parents and teachers are viewed as having the biggest impact on students’ ability to learn.
- When things go wrong, superintendents and school boards are most likely to be held accountable, despite the fact that the public does not view them as having much impact on student learning.

- The public may not be averse to tax increases to maintain specific education programs and services.
- The public considers safety, improving technology, and special education the most persuasive reasons to increase taxes, followed closely by vocational education and new construction to relieve crowding.

2004 Michigan Education Poll

Hello, I'm calling from Public Sector Consultants in Lansing, Michigan. We are conducting a survey about Michigan education policy and your local schools. The survey is not being conducted for any candidate or political party.

Are you eighteen years of age or older and a resident of Michigan?

YesContinue
No..... Terminate

Before we begin, let me tell you that this interview is completely voluntary. If we come to a question that you don't want to answer, just let me know and we'll go on to the next question.

Let me also assure you that all your responses will be confidential.

I am going to begin by asking about the quality of education provided by the public schools in your community.

QUALITY

1. During the past few years, would you say that the quality of education provided in the public schools in your community has been getting *better*, getting *worse*, or staying *about the same*?

a) Getting better	24%
b) Getting worse	20
c) Staying same	47
d) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	9
e) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

2. Comparing the quality of K–12 schools in your community and the quality in neighboring school districts, would you say the education in your community is...?

a) Better	32%
b) About the same	42
c) Worse	18
d) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	8
e) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

3. Do you think your local schools do an *excellent*, *good*, *fair*, or *poor* job of keeping people informed about the performance of schools in the district?

a) Excellent	10%
b) Good	41
c) Fair	30
d) Poor	15
e) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	4
f) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

4. I will now read a few statements that people make about education. For each statement that I read, please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. [ROTATE]

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral/ no opinion [VOL]	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know [VOL]	Refused/ other [VOL]
a) Private schools provide a better education than public schools.	26%	24%	4%	24%	18%	4%	0
b) A good way to improve schools is to give parents more options for their children's education, such as through vouchers or schools of choice.	39	34	3	10	13	1	0
c) Giving schools more money improves the quality of education provided.	32	32	2	18	16	1	0

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

5. Students often are given the grades A, B, C, D, or F to describe the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools in your community were "graded" in the same way. What grade would you give your local public school system, an A, B, C, D, or F?

a) A	12%
b) B	42
c) C	29
d) D	10
e) F	3
f) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	4
g) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

6. Using this grading system, how would you grade your local public schools on graduating students with the following skills? Would you give them an A, B, C, D, or F for the...?

	A	B	C	D	F	Don't know [VOL]	Refused/ other [VOL]
a) Academic skills of graduating seniors, such as mathematics, reading and writing, and science skills	14%	38%	29%	8%	3%	8%	0
b) Employability skills of graduating seniors, such as good work habits and the ability to solve problems	11	34	32	10	4	9	0

7. How would you grade your local public schools on the following aspects of the education process? Would you give your local public school district an A, B, C, D, or F for...? [ROTATE]

	A	B	C	D	F	Don't know/ [VOL]	Refused/ other [VOL]
a) Providing special programs to students most at risk of failure	14%	30%	26%	11%	8%	11%	0
b) Providing a safe environment	35	34	16	7	5	2	0
c) Maintaining the involvement of parents	20	36	24	7	6	7	0
d) Managing its finances and budget effectively and responsibly	14	29	30	12	8	8	0
e) Establishing high standards for student performance	19	40	25	6	6	4	0

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

8. As you know, public education for children begins at around age five, when they enter kindergarten. Many people in the state believe that formal education should begin at age four and that the state should add pre-kindergarten classes to the local public schools. What do you think? Should the state begin public education earlier by creating mandatory, pre-kindergarten classes in every public school in Michigan?

a) Yes	46%
b) No	50
c) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	4
d) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

9. I am now going to read you some statements about early childhood programs. For each statement that I read, please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. [ROTATE]

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral/ no opinion [VOL]	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know [VOL]	Refused/ other [VOL]
a) Public spending on early childhood programs is a wise investment because kids with better early childhood learning experiences do better in school and become more productive adults.	47%	35%	1%	10%	6%	1%	0
b) The government should take care of the schools before spending money on new or expanded early childhood programs.	40	35	2	15	6	2	1

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

10. If we want to improve the learning experiences of children in Michigan, what ages do you think are most important to focus on? [READ CHOICES]

a) From birth to age four	22%
b) Elementary school	50
c) Middle school	17
d) High school	8
e) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	2
f) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	1

ACCOUNTABILITY AND NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND (NCLB)

The next questions are about student performance and the federal education bill that was passed by Congress in 2001 known as No Child Left Behind or NCLB. Let's begin with some questions about student performance.

11. I am now going to read you a list of factors that can affect student achievement and school performance. For each factor, I would like you to tell me how great an impact you feel each has on student achievement, using a scale of 1 to 5, where "1" means "no impact" and "5" means the "greatest impact." [READ AND ROTATE; CODE "DON'T KNOW" AS "88" AND "REFUSED/OTHER" AS "99"]

Factor	Average rating	Percent 4 or 5	Percent 3	Percent 1 or 2
a) The quality of teachers in the district	4.2	73%	13%	10%
b) The condition of school buildings and technology available to students and teachers	3.8	64	23	13
c) The amount of money that a school district has available	3.5	51	33	16
d) The level of parental involvement and support for their child's education	4.3	79	13	8
e) The leadership of the school district, including principals, the district superintendent, and the school board.	3.9	65	24	8
f) The level of motivation for learning that the student brings into the classroom.	3.9	64	25	11

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

12. Now, of all the factors I just read to you, which do you feel has the most impact? [ROTATE; REPEAT CHOICES IF NECESSARY]

a) The quality of teachers in the district	30%
b) The condition of school buildings and technology available to students and teachers	4
c) The amount of money that a school district has available	7
d) The level of parental involvement and support for their child's education	29
e) The leadership of the school district, including principals, the district superintendent, and the school board.	7
f) The level of motivation for learning that the student brings into the classroom.	12
g) Combination [VOLUNTEERED]	8
h) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	4
i) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

13. Aside from the quality of the school buildings, the teachers, and school leadership, there are other factors that can impact a student’s ability to learn. I am now going to read a list of these factors. Using the same scale that we used a moment ago of 1 to 5 where “1” means “no impact” and “5” means the “greatest impact,” please tell me how great an impact you feel each has on a student’s ability to learn? [READ AND ROTATE EACH ITEM; REMIND RESPONDENT OF THE SCALE IF NECESSARY. CODE “DON’T KNOW” AS “88” AND “REFUSED” AS “99”]

Factor	Average rating	Percent 4 or 5	Percent 3	Percent 1 or 2
a) The race or ethnicity of the student	2.3	21%	24%	55%
b) The income level of the student’s family	2.9	30	35	35
c) The poverty level of the student’s community	3.4	47	32	21
d) The cultural background of the student	2.7	28	31	41
e) Growing up in a single parent household	3.1	38	29	33
f) Poor parenting	4.2	76	14	10

14. According to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, determining if a public school is in need of improvement will be based on the performance of students on a single, standardized test, for example the ACT or MEAP exams. In general, how accurately do you think standardized test scores reflect how well a school district is educating its students? Would you say it is a very accurate reflection, a somewhat accurate reflection, a somewhat inaccurate reflection, or a very inaccurate reflection of how well a district is performing?

a) Very accurate	9%
b) Somewhat accurate	48
c) Somewhat inaccurate	27
d) Very inaccurate	13
e) Don’t know [VOLUNTEERED]	3
f) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

15. If a school fails to meet the standards of NCLB, who should be held *most* responsible? Would you say [READ LIST]

a) The district superintendent and the school board	29%
b) The school’s principal	5
c) The classroom teachers	21
d) The parents of the children	22
e) The children themselves	8
f) Don’t know [VOLUNTEERED]	10
g) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	5

16. Currently, the earliest a student may legally drop out of school is at age 16. Do you think that the state should leave the dropout age at 16 or should the age be raised to 18?

a) Keep at 16	28%
b) Raise to 18	70
c) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	2
d) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

SCHOOL FINANCE

The next questions are about the way schools are funded.

17. Generally speaking, when it comes to election proposals that would increase your property taxes to generate more money for your local school district, how do you usually vote? Do you...? [ROTATE RESPONSES A, B, C]

a) ...always vote "no" to such proposals [SKIP TO QUESTION 19]	10%
b) ...always vote "yes" to such proposals	21
c) ...vote depending on how much is being asked for and/or how the money would be used.	66
d) Don't know/don't vote [VOLUNTEERED]	3
e) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

18. I am now going to read some of the reasons a school district might seek voter approval of a property tax increase. For each one, please tell me, if you knew that the additional funds would be used for that purpose, would it make you more likely to vote "yes," more likely to vote "no" or would it make no difference to how you would vote on such a proposal?

Note: Question 18 asked only of those who respond that they always vote "yes" or vote depending on the amount and purpose of the proposal.

	More likely to vote "Yes"	No difference	More likely to vote "No"	Don't know [VOL]	Refused/other [VOL]
a) To fund early childhood education programs	65%	10%	22%	3%	0
b) To fund special education programs	77	11	10	2	0
c) To improve technology	78	11	9	2	0
d) To fund vocational and technical education	74	13	9	2	1
e) To replace buildings that are unsafe	90	5	4	1	1
f) To replace buildings that are old and could use modernization	65	12	17	5	1
g) To build new schools because of population increases and cramped conditions	73	13	12	2	1
h) To decrease class size	60	13	23	3	1
i) To renovate existing buildings or build new ones to improve school programs	67	12	16	4	1
j) To expand or enhance programs for the larger community	52	17	23	8	1

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

TECHNOLOGY

The next two questions are about technology.

19. In the past 7 days, have you used the Internet for any reasons?

a) Yes	59%
b) No	41
c) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	0
d) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

20. Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the following statement: In 20 years, most students will learn at home, via the Internet or other electronic means, instead of in a school building. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with this statement?

a) Strongly agree	17%
b) Somewhat agree	33
c) Neutral/no opinion [VOLUNTEERED]	1
d) Somewhat disagree	22
e) Strongly disagree	26
f) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	1
g) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	1

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

CUSTOMER AND OWNER SATISFACTION

The next set of questions is about how you perceive your relationship with the local public schools.

21. As a taxpayer, do you view yourself as an “owner” of the public schools?

a) Yes	48%
b) No	51
c) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	1
d) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

22. Do you believe that your local school district treats you as a “customer”?

a) Yes	45%
b) No	50
c) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	5
d) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	1

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

23. The public can receive information about local public schools from a variety of sources. I am now going to read a list of the most common sources of information about schools. For each, please tell me how much you would trust that source for information about your local public schools—would you always trust it, sometimes trust it, or never trust that source?

How about [READ ITEM]? Would you say you always trust this source, sometimes trust this source, or never trust this source for information about your local public schools? [ROTATE]

	Always trust	Sometimes trust	Never trust	Don't know [VOL]	Refused [VOL]
a) Superintendent	23%	61%	12%	3%	0
b) School board	19	66	12	2	0
c) Teachers	31	62	4	2	1
d) Principals	28	62	7	2	0
e) Parent/teacher organization	35	57	4	3	0
f) Neighbors or friends	19	70	9	2	0
g) Local media (newspapers, television, or radio)	13	70	16	1	0

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

GENERAL ATTITUDE TOWARD FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Now I am going to ask you your opinion of the financial environment for schools.

24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “My tax dollars that support my local schools are a good buy when you consider the quality of education and the importance of education to this community.” Would you say you...?

a) Strongly agree	33%
b) Somewhat agree	45
c) Somewhat disagree	12
d) Strongly disagree	8
e) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	2
f) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

25. Which of the following two statements comes closest to your opinion?

a) In light of the current budget situation facing the State of Michigan, there's a need to maintain educational services and programs in my local school district, even if it means higher taxes.	63%
b) In light of the current budget situation facing the State of Michigan, there is a need to keep taxes as low as possible, even if it means reducing the educational services and programs of my local school district.	27
c) Don't know	6
d) Refused	3

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

26. Considering everything, do you feel that your family's finances will be better, worse, or the same one year from now?

a) Better	42%
b) Worse	14
c) The same	41
d) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	3
e) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	1

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

TRUST IN GOVERNMENT AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

Next, I would like to ask you about your attitudes toward **state government** in general.

27. How much of the time do you think you can trust people who run our state government to do what is right?

a) Just about always	7%
b) Some of the time	56
c) Not very often	31
d) Never	6
e) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	0
f) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

28. When state government leaders make statements to Michigan citizens on television or in newspapers, how often do you think they are telling the truth?

a) Just about always	7%
b) Some of the time	60
c) Not very often	24
d) Never	6
e) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	2
f) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

29. Do you think the people we elect to state offices usually try to keep the promises they have made during the election or do they forget those promises once the election is over?

a) Yes, they try to keep their promises	36%
b) No, they forget their promises after the election	53
c) Sometimes [VOLUNTEERED]	9
d) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	2
e) Refused [VOLUNTEERED]	0

DEMOGRAPHICS

The final set of questions is for statistical purposes only. Your answers will be kept confidential, and you will not be personally identified with your answers.

30. Do you currently have children of school age (K–12) or younger?

a) Yes [CONTINUE]	40%
b) No [GO TO QUESTION 33]	59
c) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	0
d) Refused/other [VOLUNTEERED]	0

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

31. From what kind of school do your children receive most of their education: a traditional public school, a charter school, a private or parochial school, or some combination of these?

a) Traditional public school	80%
b) Charter	5
c) Private/parochial	7
d) Combination	4
e) Other [VOLUNTEERED]	4
f) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	0
g) Refused [VOLUNTEERED]	0

32. In what year were you born? [RECORD 4-DIGIT YEAR; RECORD REFUSED AS 9999]

Age	Percent
<25	11%
25–34	14
35–44	21
45–54	24
55–64	13
65+	17

33. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

a) Less than high school	14%
b) High school graduate or GED	32
c) Some college or vocational/technical school	30
d) 4-year college degree	15
e) Graduate degree	8
f) Refused [VOLUNTEERED]	1

34. Which of the following income groups includes your total family income last year? [READ GROUPS]

a) Less than \$25,000	20%
b) \$25,000 to \$49,999	27
c) \$50,000 to \$74,999	18
d) \$75,000 and over	18
e) Refused [VOLUNTEERED]	18

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

35. Would you mind telling me if you are white, black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian American or Pacific Islander, Native American or Alaskan Native, or some other ethnic group?

a) White	77%
b) Black or African American	15
c) Hispanic or Latino/a	2
d) Asian American or Pacific Islander	<1
e) Native American or Alaskan Native	<1
f) Other	1
g) Multi- or bi-racial [VOLUNTEERED]	2
h) Refused [VOLUNTEERED]	4

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

36. In what county do you live? _____

Region of the State	Percent
Metro Detroit, including Detroit City	31%
Southern	6
Western	23
Central	9
Thumb	11
Northern Lower and Upper Peninsula	18

NOTE: Frequencies may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

37a. [IF RESPONDENT ANSWERS, “WAYNE COUNTY”] Do you live within the City of Detroit?

N = 85 live in Wayne County (13% of the sample)

a) Yes	70% (9% of total sample)
b) No	30
c) Refused	0

37. What is your ZIP code? _____

38. What is your political affiliation? Are you Republican, Democrat, Independent, or some other political affiliation? [IF “INDEPENDENT,” GO TO 41. ALL OTHERS GO TO 42]

a) Republican	23%
b) Democrat	32
c) Independent	28
d) Other	5
e) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	4
f) Refused [VOLUNTEERED]	8

39. As an independent, do you more closely identify with the Republicans or the Democrats?

a) Republicans	34%
b) Democrats	30
c) Neither [VOLUNTEERED]	29
d) Don't know [VOLUNTEERED]	6
e) Refused [VOLUNTEERED]	1

40. Gender [CODE BY OBSERVATION]

a) Female	50%
b) Male	50