

CHECKED OUT: OHIOANS' VIEWS ON EDUCATION 2009

PREPARED FOR THE THOMAS B. FORDHAM INSTITUTE

AND CATALYST OHIO

BY THE FDR GROUP

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INTRODUCTION

In collaboration with the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and Catalyst Ohio, the FDR Group conducted a telephone survey of 1,002 randomly selected Ohio residents between April 1 and April 9, 2009 (margin of error +/- 3 percentage points). The survey – the third in a series – reports Ohioans' views on critical education issues, including school funding, charter schools, vouchers, and a host of reform proposals from all-day kindergarten to teacher quality. Where appropriate, we report trend data from previous surveys as well as the views of African-Americans, residents living in five of Ohio's largest cities, and parents. We also include an analytic comparison of Democrats and Republicans.

Some key findings:

- **Ohioans evaluate their schools:** There are some modest improvements in what parents and residents think of their public schools, but dissatisfaction is still high, especially among African-Americans and residents of the 5 big cities.
- **Awareness of the issues:** Ohioans are surprisingly unaware of hotly disputed education issues facing their state – from the unconstitutionality of how their public schools are funded, to charter schools and vouchers.
- **Spending:** Buckeye state residents doubt more spending would actually improve education, and they are most likely to trust their local schools and school districts to make spending decisions rather than the governor or the state.

- **Charter schools and vouchers:** Degree of support for charter schools and vouchers has held steady over the years – and it is stronger among African-Americans and residents of the 5 big cities.
- **Teacher quality:** There is wide support for paying higher salaries to teachers who work in tough neighborhoods and who specialize in math and science. There is also strong support for giving public schools more freedom to fire poor teachers and for paying teachers according to their effectiveness – but not for tying salaries to student scores on state tests.

DETAILED FINDINGS

I. Some evaluations of Ohio’s public schools have improved slightly, but the schools are not out of the woods yet as far as the public is concerned.

The plurality (39%) of Ohioans says that over the past two or three years the quality of their local public schools has stayed the same – 29% say quality has gotten worse and 22% say better. These results are substantially the same as those in the 2005 survey, the last time the question was asked. African-Americans are considerably more likely to think the schools have been headed in the wrong direction in the past two or three years: 49% say local school quality has gotten worse. A special focus on Ohio’s 5 big cities – Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, and Toledo – shows these residents are also more critical of their local public schools, with 35% saying they’ve gotten worse. But parents with school-age kids tend to be less negative; a smaller 28% say local school quality has declined.

1a. Is it your sense that over the past two or three years, the quality of the public schools in your local area has:	2009*	2005	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
Gotten better	22	23	18	17	27
Stayed the same	39	38	33	26	40
Gotten worse	29	32	35	49	28

* Responses in tables may not total to 100% due to rounding or the omission of some answer categories. Combining categories may also produce slight discrepancies between numbers in this report and the *Final Survey Results*. See appendix *Final Survey Results 2009* for full question wording and complete data. Samples sizes are: 2009 (n=1,002); 2007 (n=1,000); 2005 (n=1,001); 5 city (n=214); African-American (n=100); Parents (n=321).

This year’s survey shows that nearly six in 10 Ohioans (58%) say that a high school diploma from their local public schools means the typical student has learned the basics – a slight improvement over the 54% who said as much in 2007. Respondents who are African-American (52%) or live in the 5 big cities (49%) are less sanguine; parents with kids in school are more so (63%).

	2009	2007	2005	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
1. Which statement is more accurate for the students graduating from your local public schools? A high school diploma: Is no guarantee that the typical student has learned the basics	39	43	42	46	44	35
Means that the typical student has at least learned the basics	58	54	54	49	52	63

If money were not an issue, 48% of parents with K-12 students would still send their children to district public schools; 50% would choose alternatives. Although this is still not a majority, the trends reveal a bit of good news for traditional public schools. The 48% is up from 41% in 2007 and up from 37% in 2005. This growth has come at the expense of private non-religious schools – only 10% of parents would opt for them, down from 16% in 2007. Charter schools and private religious schools have basically held steady.

<i>Base: Parent (n=321)</i>	2009	2007	2005
40. If money were not an issue, would you prefer that your child attend:			
Private non-religious school	10	16	13
Private religious school	34	34	40
Public charter school	4	5	4
Public district school	48	41	37
[Vol.] Something else	2	2	3

II. Views toward Ohio’s public school funding system – a recipe for stalemate?

Most Buckeye state residents are not aware of the Ohio Supreme Court’s ruling about the constitutionality of the state’s public school funding system. Fully 64% do not know enough to say whether Ohio’s Supreme Court has ruled the system as constitutional or unconstitutional. About one in three (34%) correctly answer ‘unconstitutional’ (3% say ‘constitutional’). African-Americans are more likely than others to acknowledge they don’t know enough about the issue (80%).

	2009	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
17. Do you know whether Ohio’s Supreme Court has ruled the state’s system of funding its public schools as constitutional, unconstitutional, or don’t you know enough to say?				
Constitutional	3	3	3	2
Unconstitutional	34	24	17	37
Don’t know enough to say	64	73	80	61

Respondents were informed through the question wording that Ohio’s system of funding its public schools has been ruled unconstitutional “because wealthy communities have greater property values and can spend more on their schools than poor districts can.” Knowing this, fully 88% of Ohioans overall said it was personally important to them to even out education spending across school districts – 62% overall said it was *very* important, compared with 82% of African-Americans who felt this strongly.

	2009	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
18. Ohio’s system of funding its public schools has been ruled unconstitutional because wealthy communities have greater property values and can spend more on their schools than poor districts can. How important is it to you PERSONALLY to even out education spending across Ohio’s school districts?				
NET IMPORTANT	88	88	98	87
NET UNIMPORTANT	11	11	2	12
Very important	62	67	82	57
Somewhat important	26	22	16	30
Not too important	5	6	-	6
Not important at all	6	5	2	6

But when asked if they’d personally be willing to pay more in taxes to even out spending across school districts, 55% say they would not and 42% that they would. Ohioans are realistic enough to say (61%) that in order to even out spending across districts, taxes will have to be raised or services cut; only 33% say this can be accomplished without taking either of those steps. African-Americans are far more likely than other groups to say they’d personally be willing to pay more in taxes (63%).

	2009	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
19. Do you think that Ohio can even out education spending across school districts without raising taxes or cutting services, or do you think it will be necessary to do at least one of those things?				
Ohio can even out education spending without raising taxes or cutting services	33	36	27	33
It will be necessary to do at least one of those things	61	63	69	62
20. Would you personally be willing to pay more in taxes to even out education spending across Ohio’s school districts, or not?				
Yes, willing to pay more in taxes	42	51	63	46
No	55	46	33	51

III. Ohioans doubt more spending would make a difference; and they still prefer local – not state-wide – authorities to make spending decisions.

The reluctance of Ohioans to spend more tax money on the public schools reflects their persistent skepticism about whether more money for schools would improve education. Only 22% believe that if Ohio decided to spend more money on the public schools, the “money would actually get to the classroom and improve education.” The vast majority (74%) instead think the money would “get lost along the way.” This percentage has gradually grown larger over the years, from 69% in 2005 and 71% in 2007.

15. If Ohio decided to spend more money on the public schools, do you think the money: Would actually get to the classrooms and improve education Would actually get lost along the way	2009	2007	2005	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
Would actually get to the classrooms and improve education	22	21	21	25	21	19
Would actually get lost along the way	74	71	69	70	70	76

Ohioans are reluctant to spend more money on the *state’s* public schools – might they be more openhanded toward their *local* schools? Another survey item asks Ohioans about spending on the public schools in their *district* and it shows that they are consistent – 44% believe that government funding for public schools in their district should increase; 44% want it to stay about the same and 9% to decrease. These numbers remain virtually unchanged since 2007. African-Americans are more likely than the public at large to support increased spending by a convincing 67% to 44% margin.

14. Keeping in mind that the money for public education has to be paid by taxes, do you think that government funding for public schools in your district should:	2009	2007	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
Greatly increase	14	16	17	22	15
Increase	29	30	33	45	28
Stay about the same	44	41	39	28	43
Decrease	5	7	5	3	7
Greatly decrease	3	2	4	1	4

Ohioans are far more likely to trust their local school districts (47%) to decide how to spend tax money on the public schools than to trust the governor (3%), the state legislature (4%), or the State Board of Education (17%). Twenty-two percent would trust the individual schools themselves. Trust in school district control on spending has improved slightly – 47% in 2009, up from 43% in 2007. African-Americans are less trusting of local school governance – 56%

say they “trust most” either local school districts or individual schools on how to make spending decisions, compared with the vast majorities of other groups.

16. Which of these do you trust most to make decisions about how to spend tax money allocated to Ohio’s public schools?	2009	2007	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
The individual schools themselves	22	25	28	18	28
Local school districts	47	43	43	37	44
The State Board of Education	17	18	14	21	14
The Governor	3	5	2	6	4
The State Legislature	4	5	8	10	5

IV. Charter schools – support is steady and so is lack of knowledge.

For all the controversy and political struggles that have surrounded Ohio’s charter schools in recent years, state residents have displayed persistently low levels of knowledge about them. Over the course of three surveys in four years, levels of familiarity with charter schools have not budged – in this survey, only 17% say they know a great deal or quite a bit about charter schools. In 2007 it was 19%; in 2005 it was 17%. More than half (55%) admit they know very little or nothing at all about charter schools. Among groups of Ohioans who might especially benefit from charter schools – African-Americans (21%), big-city dwellers (22%) and parents of school-age kids (21%) – just about one in five say they know a great deal or quite a bit about them.

25. How much do you know about charter schools?	2009	2007	2005	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
A great deal	4	7	7	7	8	6
Quite a bit	12	12	10	15	13	15
Only some	28	31	28	28	25	29
Very little	35	31	34	31	27	32
Nothing at all	20	18	21	18	26	18

Meanwhile, when provided a short description of charter schools, a slim majority of Ohioans do support them: 52% favor and 38% are opposed. These results are identical to those of the 2007 survey. What’s more, when asked what the policy toward closing existing charter schools should be, a 58% majority says the state should close only the worst ones. Only 12% say all charter schools should be closed while 23% would not close any. This is a slight increase from 2007 when a smaller 18% said Ohio should not close any of the state’s charter schools.

Most people (69%) still think that charter schools should get the same funding and resources as public district schools, though this is down slightly since 2007 (74%).

Perhaps surprisingly, the sub-groups of African-Americans, those who live in the 5 big cities, and parents of school-age children show virtually no differences compared with the general public on these questions about charter schools.

	2009	2007	2005	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
26. Charter schools are public schools that have a lot more control over their own budget, staff, and curriculum, and are free from many existing regulations. In general, do you favor or oppose this idea?						
NET FAVOR	52	52	51	55	57	55
NET OPPOSE	38	38	34	36	35	37
27. Some of Ohio's public charter schools are doing a good job of teaching kids and some are doing a poor job. Do you think that Ohio:						
Should close only the worst ones	58	63		63	64	56
Should close all of them	12	11		9	9	11
Should close none of them	23	18		24	27	27
28. When it comes to funding and resources, do you think that public charter schools should get higher, lower, or the same funding and resources as public district schools?						
Higher	3	3		5	7	3
Lower	22	17		19	19	30
Same	69	74		69	68	63

Ohioans overall continue to support a key principle of charter schools – “giving local public schools more flexibility to design curriculum.” The vast majority (81%) favors this idea and only 18% oppose it.

When it comes to for-profit companies running charter schools, Ohioans would not leave things as they are – 45% would put a stop to the practice altogether, while another 41% would approve only those companies that are doing a good job. Just 7% think current practice should continue as is. African-Americans are notably less likely to think the for-profit approach should be curtailed altogether (33%), preferring the more pragmatic approach of allowing it to continue for companies that are proving effective (50%).

29. Currently, some charter school boards in Ohio hire for-profit companies to run their public charter schools. These for-profit companies get paid by the state government for doing so. Do you think this practice should be:	2009	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
Stopped altogether	45	40	33	48
Continued as is	7	6	12	7
Allowed but only for companies doing a good job	41	47	50	38

V. Vouchers: Stay the course.

Just as with charters, there has been no improvement in Ohioans’ knowledge and familiarity with vouchers – only 10% know a great deal or quite a bit about Ohio’s EdChoice Scholarship program, while 68% know very little or nothing at all. These results are nearly identical to those of 2007 (8% knew a great deal or quite a bit; 69% knew very little or nothing at all.) Similar to the charter school findings, even among those who might especially benefit from the voucher program very small numbers say they know a great deal or quite a bit about them – African-Americans (15%), 5-big-city dwellers (13%), and parents of school-age kids (12%).

30. How much do you know about Ohio’s school voucher program, the EdChoice Scholarship Program?	2009	2007	2005	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
A great deal	3	3	7	6	6	3
Quite a bit	7	5	9	8	9	9
Only some	22	22	30	24	19	22
Very little	32	31	32	30	35	30
Nothing at all	36	38	22	33	31	36
<i>Question wording in 2005 survey: “How much do you know about school vouchers?”</i>						

Still, 41% would continue the program and 24% would expand it, after hearing that the program “gives parents a voucher of several thousand dollars to help pay tuition if they choose to send their child to a private or church-related school. It is available only to students whose public school has been failing for two years.” Twenty-eight percent think it should be eliminated. African-Americans are less likely to think Ohio’s voucher program should be eliminated (16%) – in fact, the vast majority (80%) would like to see it either expanded or continued as is.

	2009	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
31. The EdChoice Scholarship Program gives parents a voucher of several thousand dollars to help pay tuition if they choose to send their child to a private or church-related school. It is available only to students whose public school has been failing for two years. Do you think this program should be?				
Eliminated	28	24	16	30
Expanded	24	29	36	26
Continued as is	41	44	44	41

Fifty-two percent of Ohioans overall believe a more apt description of vouchers is that they “are a lifeline for kids who can finally escape failing public schools” compared with 37% who think vouchers “will help only a few kids and make things worse for most students who are left behind.” The latter has grown from 31% in 2007, returning to its previous 2005 mark of 37%. Majorities of African-Americans (54%), 5 big city residents (54%), and parents of school-age kids (55%) perceive of school vouchers as a lifeline.

By a 52% to 39% margin, Ohioans are more likely to think “charters and vouchers give parents more choices and push district schools to improve,” rather than to say they “drain resources from district schools and undermine them.” On this question, supportive sentiment toward school choice is considerably powerful among African-Americans (67%), and to a lesser extent among the 5 big city residents (59%).

	2009	2007	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
33. Some see both public charter schools and school vouchers as ways to give parents more choices about where to send their children and to push public district schools to improve. Others see charters and vouchers as draining resources from public district schools and undermining them. Which comes closer to your view?					
Charters and vouchers give parents more choices and push district schools to improve	52	54	59	67	55
Charters and vouchers drain resources from district schools and undermine them	39	35	33	26	38

VI. Current proposals to change Ohio’s system of education

Here are the findings regarding several current proposals to change various aspects of education in Ohio, from expansion of pre-school to consideration of same-gender classrooms.

- **Pre-school gains support but it’s conditional.** A proposal to expand state-funded pre-school for Ohio’s poorest children gets some support: 42% say it’s a good idea all

around, another 39% agree but only if it helps under-privileged children get academically-ready for school. This last number is a change since 2007 – then, 33% put “the only if helps” condition on state-funded pre-school.

	2009	2007	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
34. As you may know, there’s a proposal to expand state-funded pre-school for Ohio’s poorest children. In your view, is this:					
A good idea all around	42	50	45	48	43
A good idea ONLY if it helps under-privileged kids get academically-ready for school	39	33	41	47	38
A bad idea all around	15	13	10	4	18

- **Moving to all-day kindergarten from half-day gets majority support.** Sixty-two percent favor this proposal (46% *strongly* favor), while 34% oppose it. African-Americans (84%) are far more likely to support all-day kindergarten compared with other groups.

	2009	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
35. There’s also a proposal to require ALL-day kindergarten for all children in Ohio instead of the current HALF-day. Do you favor or oppose this proposal?				
NET FAVOR	62	67	84	69
NET OPPOSE	34	30	13	28

- **Only a meager majority supports extending the school year or school day.** Fifty-three percent favor “increasing the amount of time students spend in the public schools by extending the school year or the school day” while 45% oppose doing so. There has been no substantive change since 2007. Support is especially strong among African-Americans (69%) and residents of Ohio’s 5 big cities (63%). Parents of school-age children, however, are more likely to oppose than favor this proposal (53% vs. 44%).

	2009	2007	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
7. Next, I’m going to read you ideas some people have suggested for improving Ohio’s public schools.... Increasing the amount of time students spend in the public schools by extending the school year or the school day?					
NET FAVOR	53	53	63	69	44
NET OPPOSE	45	42	36	29	53

- **Virtual schools are unpopular.** Three in four (75%) believe virtual schools are a poor or fair idea when described as “schools that get state funding and allow students to do their work at home over the Internet, under adult supervision.” Only 21% say they are an excellent or good idea. Opposition has grown slightly since 2005, when it was at 71%, despite the increased comfort-level with the Internet over the years.

	2009	2005	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
36. More and more “virtual schools” – sometimes called “cyber-schools” or “e-schools” – are opening in Ohio. These schools get state funding and allow students to do their work at home over the Internet, under adult supervision. Generally, do you think virtual schools are an excellent, good, fair or poor idea?					
NET POSITIVE	21	21	21	18	25
NET NEGATIVE	75	71	73	76	71

- Substantial opposition to single-sex schools.** Fully 63% of Ohioans oppose – and 34% favor – “single-sex schools as an option for some parents and students” in their community (an unusually high 45% *strongly* oppose them). Support is stronger among African-Americans but does not reach a majority – 47% are in favor. Big city residents are also stronger supporters – 46% are in favor of single-sex schools for some parents and students in their community.

	2009	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
37. People have different views on whether it’s a good idea to have separate schools for boys and girls. Generally speaking, would you favor or oppose single-sex schools as an option for some parents and students in your community?				
NET FAVOR	34	46	47	34
NET OPPOSE	63	51	48	63

VII. Standards, accountability and testing – somewhat in flux

More than six in ten Ohioans (62%) say yes to a single national standard and a single national test for all students in the United States; 33% support different tests and standards throughout the states. There has been an uptick for the single national standard option, up 5 percentage points from 57% in 2007.

	2009	2007	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
2. In your view, should there be: A single national standard and a single national test for all students in the U.S.	62	57	61	69	63
Different standards and tests in different states <i>In 2007, question wording began with “Under No Child Left Behind, should there be...”</i>	33	38	34	29	30

Almost seven in 10 (69%) favor Ohio’s high school exit exam policy – but this is a substantial decline from 2007 and 2005, when 82% and 83%, respectively, favored the policy. A majority of African-Americans (56%) support the policy as well, but by a smaller majority compared with the population overall.

21. All of Ohio's 10th graders are required to pass tests in each of the major subjects before they can graduate from high school. Students who fail will get help and get more chances to pass, but they MUST pass in order to get a diploma. Do you favor or oppose this policy?	2009	2007	2005	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
NET FAVOR	69	82	83	65	56	66
NET OPPOSE	28	17	15	32	43	33
<i>Question wording in 2005 survey began: "Starting this year...."</i>						

A bare 51% majority supports – and 43% opposes – a proposal to replace the current exit exam with a combination of factors such as student scores on a national college entrance exam and end-of-year course exams and projects.

22. There is a proposal to change the current high school graduation requirement in Ohio. Instead of passing the Ohio Graduation Tests, students would graduate based on their score on a national college entrance exam PLUS the results of end-of-year course exams and projects. Do you favor or oppose this proposal?	2009	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
NET FAVOR	51	50	56	56
NET OPPOSE	43	45	38	40

A large majority of Ohio's general public (62%) believes evaluating Ohio's schools and districts through report cards that rely on student standardized test scores is mostly good because it "calls attention to problems that need to be addressed"; 32% say it's harmful. But this is a shift up from 2007 when 27% said it was harmful. Regarding a proposal to change the report card by adding an evaluation of whether districts spend their money effectively or have enough of it to do the job garners support, 58% say it's an excellent or good idea, 39% fair or poor.

23. In Ohio, schools and districts are evaluated by how well students do on standardized tests, and the results are publicized. Schools that do very badly are identified, watched carefully, and must put an improvement plan into action. Do you think that using test scores this way:	2009	2007	2005	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
Is mostly HARMFUL because it puts students and educators under unfair pressure	32	27	28	33	29	35
Is mostly GOOD because it calls attention to problems that need to be addressed	62	63	62	61	66	59
[Vol.] Both	3	6	4	4	2	3

24. There's a proposal to evaluate and publicize how effectively Ohio's schools and districts use the money they get AND whether they have enough money to do their job. Generally, do you think that evaluating and publicizing Ohio's schools and districts in this way is an excellent, good, fair or poor idea?	2009	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
NET POSITIVE	58	60	61	59
NET NEGATIVE	39	37	34	38
Excellent	19	18	16	21
Good	39	42	45	39
Fair	29	30	23	28
Poor	10	7	11	10

VIII. Improving the teaching profession

From bonus pay for teachers working in the toughest areas to giving schools more freedom to fire ineffective teachers, Buckeye state residents rally to a host of measures to improve the teaching profession. Some proposals addressing teacher quality are especially salient to residents of the 5 big cities.

- **Want to tie pay to effective teaching, not years of service.** By a vast 69% to 15% margin, Ohioans prefer paying teachers according to their “performance and how effectively they teach” over “years of service and the degrees they’ve earned.” In 2007 a smaller 61% said pay according to performance.

12. Do you think that teachers' pay should be based on:	2009	2007	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
Their performance and how effectively they teach	69	61	67	63	72
Their years of service and the degrees they've earned	15	16	17	18	12
[Vol.] Both	13	21	12	15	13

- **But reluctant to tie pay to state tests.** 52% oppose “basing a teacher’s salary, in part, on students’ academic progress on state tests,” 44% favor it. Support has declined slightly since 2007 when 49% were in favor.
- **Give schools more freedom to fire poor teachers.** An overwhelming 87% majority favors “giving local public schools more freedom to fire teachers that aren’t performing”; only 11% oppose this. Virtually no shift since 2007.
- **Combat pay – wide support.** More than seven in 10 (72%) favor “paying higher salaries to teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with hard-to-reach students.” This is slightly less than 2005 when 77% supported the measure. Residents of Ohio’s 5 big cities are more likely to support this proposal (78%).

- **Support for higher pay for math and science teachers.** Two in three (66%) favor “paying higher salaries to teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or mathematics.” Again, residents of Ohio’s 5 big cities are more likely to support this proposal (72%).

	2009	2007	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
Next, I’m going to read you ideas some people have suggested for improving Ohio’s public schools. Please tell me for each of the following proposals whether you would strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose.					
6. Basing a teacher’s salary, in part, on students’ academic progress on state tests?					
NET FAVOR	44	49	49	45	44
NET OPPOSE	52	47	50	52	54
5. Giving local public schools more freedom to fire teachers that aren’t performing?					
NET FAVOR	87	85	86	82	91
NET OPPOSE	11	12	11	15	8
8. Paying higher salaries to teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with hard-to-reach students?					
NET FAVOR	72		78	79	72
NET OPPOSE	26		22	21	25
9. Paying higher salaries to teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or mathematics?					
NET FAVOR	66		72	73	71
NET OPPOSE	32		25	25	28

- **Teacher certification is less important than it used to be.** By a narrow 52% to 41% margin, Ohioans say the public schools “should be free to hire college graduates who have demonstrated their knowledge and skills” rather than “only hire teachers who have finished a university-based professional training program in education.” Support has also grown since 2007, when 44% of Ohio’s general public thought the public schools should be free to hire college grads with demonstrated knowledge and skills. Big city residents support broadening the hiring pool beyond certification in stronger numbers (59%, compared with 35% who say only teachers with university-based education credentials should be hired).
- **Ohioans split over whether good teachers can succeed with kids who have social problems.** Almost half (46%) believe good teachers can lead even students who are

poor and have uninvolved parents to learn, but 48% also say it's too hard to overcome these barriers.

3. Which comes closer to your view:	2009	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
Good teachers lead even students who are poor and have uninvolved parents to learn what they are supposed to	46	48	51	47
It is too hard even for good teachers to overcome these barriers	48	45	40	48

IX. Principals: more autonomy, more accountability

Two out of three Ohioans (65%) favor giving school principals far more freedom to run the schools but terminating their contracts if specific goals are not reached; 32% oppose. There has been no substantial change since 2007.

Half (51%) think the public schools would improve if principals could choose their teachers and had more say over work rules, 30% say they would stay the same, and 12% think they would get worse. There has been virtually no change since 2007. Parents of school-age children do stand out as being more likely to think giving principals more authority would improve the public schools (59%).

11. If principals in public district schools could choose which teachers work in their buildings and had more say over work rules, do you think the public schools would:	2009	2007	2005	5 city	Af-Am	Parents
Improve	51	50	54	52	49	59
Get worse	12	11	8	10	16	11
Stay the same	30	31	26	32	31	25

X. Democrats versus Republicans

As one might expect, Democrats and Republicans sometimes hold opposing views on the issues covered in this survey. Many of the strongest differences involve spending and tax questions. For example, 53% of Democrats – but only 36% of Republicans – think government funding of the public schools in their districts should increase. Democrats are much more likely than Republicans to say that it is *very* important to them to even out education spending across Ohio's school districts (75% to 45%). And by a 55% to 32% margin, Democrats are more likely to say they'd "personally be willing to pay more in taxes to even out education spending across Ohio's school districts." Yet, it's interesting that large majorities of both are skeptical about where all the money goes: 66% of Democrats and 79%

of Republicans agree that if Ohio were to spend more money on the public schools the money “would actually get lost along the way” rather than get to the classrooms and improve education.

Also as one might expect, Republicans are stronger supporters of charter schools than Democrats – by a 62% to 46% margin. But both groups take surprisingly close stands on Ohio’s EdChoice voucher program: the plurality of Democrats (46%) agrees with the plurality of Republicans (41%) and would continue the program as is; another 22% of Democrats would expand vouchers, only a slightly smaller proportion compared with the 28% of Republicans who would expand.

Democrats are much more likely to support expanding state-funded pre-school for Ohio’s poorest children (52% versus 32% call it “a good idea all around”). They are also more likely to favor all-day kindergarten for all children by a 72% to 54% margin.

Although it’s natural to focus on differences across party lines, it’s important to keep in mind that Democrats and Republicans agree on a myriad of issues. For example, as seen above, although they differ on willingness to personally pay more taxes to even out education spending, both groups harbor serious doubts about the system’s capacity to use the money effectively. Another example of agreement: large majorities of both Democrats (78%) and Republicans (73%) think virtual- or cyber-schools are a fair or poor idea.

METHODOLOGY

Checked Out: Ohioans’ Views on Education 2009 is based on 1,002 interviews conducted by telephone with a statewide representative sample of adults 18 and older residing in Ohio. The fielding took place between April 1 and April 9, 2009. The interviews were approximately 16 minutes in length.

The margin of error for a survey of this size is plus or minus 3 percentage points; the margin of error increases for sub-groups within the sample. For example, the survey includes a sub-group of 100 African-American Ohioans. When the study reports the views of African-Americans, the margin of error to take into account is plus or minus 10 percentage points. For the sub-group of 321 parents, it is 6 percentage points.

The study includes a “5 city” sub-group of 214 residents of Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, and Toledo; the margin of error is plus or minus 7 percentage points. Thirty-six of the 214 interviews conducted with residents of these cities were a result of an over-sampling effort.

This 2009 report is a follow-up to two previous surveys conducted in 2005 and 2007 by the FDR Group on behalf of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.* Most of the questions in the current survey have been repeated, allowing for an analysis of trends over the years since 2005.

To ensure a random sample of households, a standard random-digit-dialing technology was used. Every household in the state had an equal chance of being contacted, including those with unlisted numbers. To minimize non-response bias, interviews were conducted on different days of the week, including weekends, and at different times of the day. If a potential respondent indicated a better time for an interview, call-backs were made accordingly. Typically, at least six attempts were made for each piece of sample.

Non-sampling sources of error could also have an impact on survey results. The survey instrument used in this study was extensively pre-tested with Ohio residents to ensure that the language was accessible and appropriate to members of the general public, both those who may be familiar with Ohio’s public schools and those not. Questions were randomized and answer categories rotated in an effort to minimize non-sampling sources of error.

* These are *Ohioans’ Views on Education 2007* and *Halfway Out the Door: Ohioans Sound Off on Public Schooling, with a Special Analysis of the Views of African Americans and Dayton Residents* in 2005.

Sample was provided by Survey Sampling International of Shelton, CT. The telephone interviews and data collection were provided by Robinson and Muenster Associates of Sioux Falls, SD.

The following table shows the characteristics of the Ohio sample compared with U.S. Census data.

Characteristics of the Sample

	Sample (n=1,002)	State of Ohio*
Gender		
Male	47	49
Female	53	51
Household Income		
Less than \$25,000	13	23
\$25,000 to <\$50,000	26	27
\$50,000 to <\$100,000	43	33
\$100,000 or more	15	17
Race		
African-American	10	12
White	87	85
Other	3	4
Education		
Less than high school	4	11
High school graduate	29	24
Some college	29	17
Bach. or Grad. degree	38	14
Urbanicity		
Rural	21	21
Suburban	54	58
Urban	25	20
Parent of K-12		
Yes	32	
No	68	

* Based on U.S. Census data. For "Education," the sample includes adults 18 and older; the Census breakdown by education is based on Ohio adults 25 and older. Thus, these two groups are not strictly comparable.

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