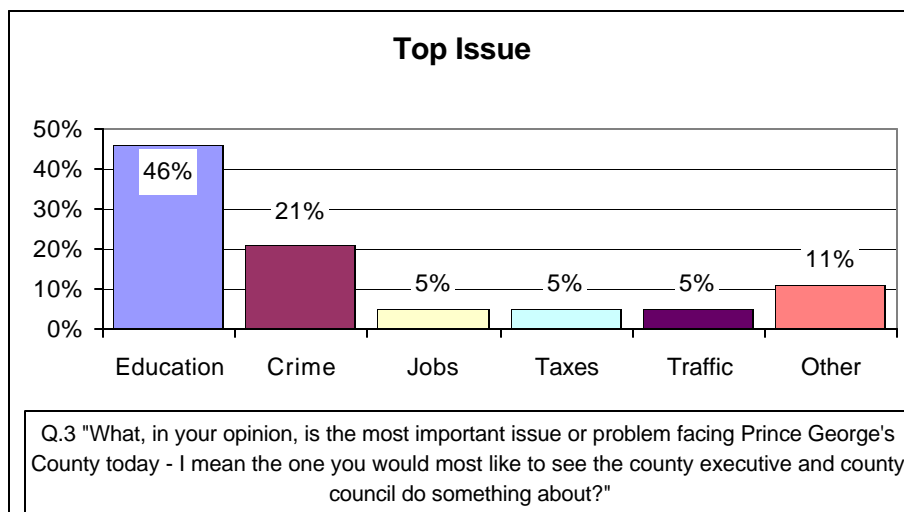


Potomac Incorporated has interviewed a total of 800 likely voters throughout Prince George's County, Maryland by telephone. Interviews were conducted June 17-24, 2003. The key findings are summarized here.

Issue Environment

Voters in Prince George's County are deeply concerned with the issue of public school education. When asked in an open-ended way to name the "most important issue or problem facing Prince George's County today," a remarkable consensus emerges. Nearly one-half of all voters (46%) name education as their top concern. Crime follows in second place with 21%, while no other issue even comes close to double-digit status.



By way of context, this overwhelming concern for education at the local level differs dramatically from the top issues for voters in the other three largest jurisdictions in Maryland. Based on Potomac's most recent Maryland Poll, conducted for *The (Baltimore) Sun* just prior to the 2003 General Assembly session, traffic tops the list in Montgomery County (mentioned by 20% of voters), crime in Baltimore City (31%), and the fiscal situation of government in Baltimore County (20%).* On that statewide survey, 34% of Prince George's voters mentioned education.

Meanwhile, the economy appears to be a mixed bag for Prince George's County voters. Looking back two years, as many voters feel their situation has gotten better (23%) as feel it has gotten worse (22%). The majority (53%) have seen no change in their economic condition.

* It should be noted that the context of the statewide question was slightly different: "what, in your opinion, is the most important problem facing Maryland today -- I mean the one you would most like to see the governor and legislature do something about?"

SUBGROUPS OF NOTE:

Education top issue facing county (Q.3)

Voters who are concerned with education are more likely to be women, aged 35-49, upper-educated and upper-income, and have kids in the public schools.

Group	Finding	Difference
All Voters	46%	–
Women	50%	+ 4%
Men	36%	- 10%
Age 35 – 49	52%	+ 6%
Age 65 +	42%	- 4%
African-American 35 – 49	56%	+ 10%
High school education or less	35%	- 11%
Post-graduate education	55%	+ 9%
African-American post-graduate	69%	+ 23%
Kids in public school	61%	+ 15%
Income < \$35,000	28%	- 18%
Income \$100,000 +	54%	+ 8%

View of Prince George's County

Very telling is the comparison by voters of Prince George's County with "other places in the area." Potomac tested five critical measures of quality of life – safety, shopping, traffic, taxes, and schools – and found that on all five, voters rated their county as worse than other places. Large majorities rated the county "not as good" for schools (63%) and shopping (62%). In the following table, the five are listed. For comparison purposes, "better" has been given a score of +1, and "not as good" a score of -1.

	Better (+1)	Same (0)	Not as good (-1)	Not sure	Mean
Schools	5%	22%	63%	10%	- 0.64
Shopping	9%	26%	62%	3%	- 0.54
Safe place	10%	46%	40%	5%	- 0.32
Taxes	12%	48%	29%	10%	- 0.19
Traffic	15%	52%	27%	5%	- 0.13

Q.5 I would like to read you a short list of things that people look for when they decide where to live. Just based on your own knowledge, for each one I mention please tell me how you think Prince George’s County compares with other places in the area. The first is: (*Rotate A-E.*) (*First statement only*): When you think about (*re-read statement*) is Prince George’s County better than other places, about the same, or not as good?

- A. A safe place to live and raise a family.
- B. Quality and variety of shopping.
- C. An efficient system of traffic and transportation.
- D. Taxes that are fair and affordable.
- E. A good system of public schools.

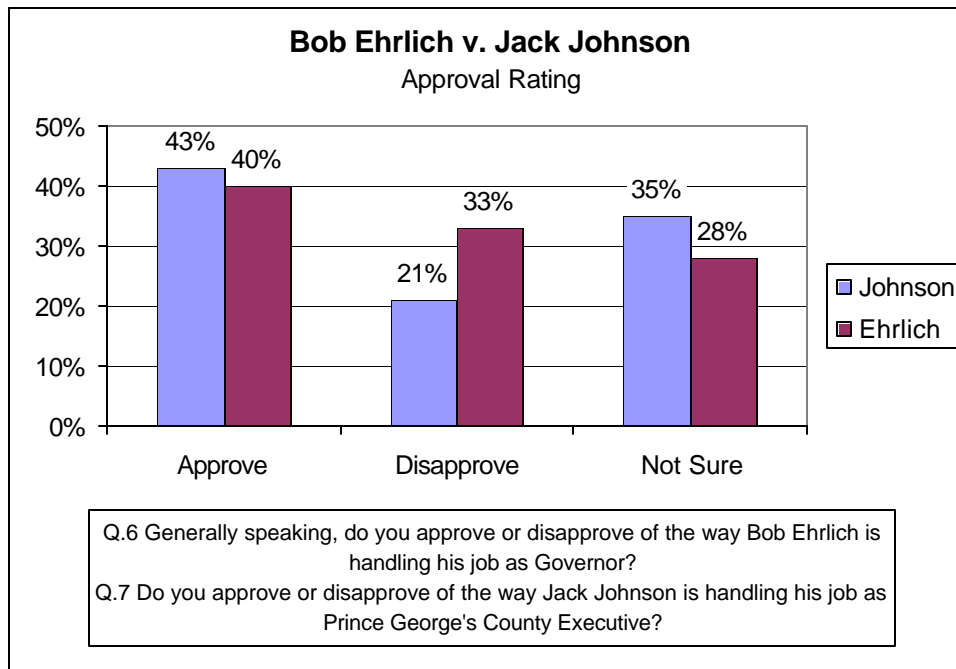
Every one of the five indicators languishes below zero. These results indicate a pessimism – or perhaps a profound lack of confidence in the county – by its citizens.

Elected Official Job Performance

Six months into his term as governor, Bob Ehrlich receives an approval rating of 40% among Prince George’s voters, while 33% disapprove. More than one in four (28%) are not sure what rating to give.

While this is by no means a strong job rating, for a partisan Republican governor in a county where four out of five active voters are Democrats, it is nonetheless fairly healthy. Harkening back once again to *The Sun* poll last January, 49% of Prince George’s voters at that time predicted that Ehrlich would do a good job as governor, while 24% thought he would do a poor job. Perhaps the latest polling numbers indicate some slippage locally in the governor’s approval rating from those early expectations.

New County Executive Jack Johnson enjoys a slightly stronger but by no means resoundingly positive approval rating. Just six months into his term, 43% approve and 21% disapprove of the job Johnson is doing. Perhaps most important for the new County executive at this early stage, one in three voters (35%) do not know enough to offer a job rating.



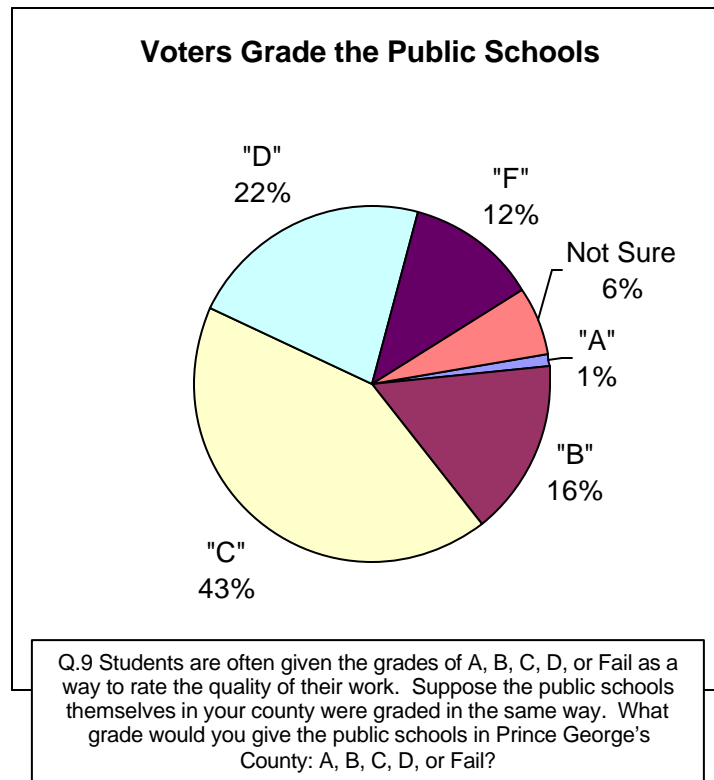
We measured the job approval of all nine County Council members in their own districts. Though the district sample sizes are relatively small, these numbers do give a sense of where the individual Council members stand. Only Dernoga, Shapiro, and Hendershot received ratings from at least half of voters in their own districts; in other words, other council members appear not as well known. Bland seems to be in the weakest position among her colleagues.

District	Member	Approve	Disapprove	Not sure
1	Tom Dernoga	46%	11%	43%
2	Peter Shapiro	56%	7%	37%
3	Tom Hendershot	43%	15%	42%
4	Doug Peters	36%	7%	57%
5	David Harrington	35%	7%	58%
6	Sam Dean	30%	11%	59%
7	Camille Exum	34%	9%	58%
8	Tony Knotts	32%	9%	58%
9	Marilynn Bland	31%	18%	51%

Report Card on the County's Public Schools

When assessing the public schools in a local jurisdiction, we typically ask residents to issue a report-card-style grade on the A through F scale. Prince Georgians inflict a harsh judgment on their public schools: C-Minus.

Only 1% of all voters in the county grade the public schools an "A." More than one in ten (12%) give the schools a failing grade.



This calculated G.P.A. of 1.70 is among the very lowest that we have measured in the state. Again drawing from January's poll for *The Sun*, here are the G.P.A. ratings for major nearby jurisdictions. January's rating in Prince George's County is included for comparison purposes.

Jurisdiction	G.P.A
Montgomery	2.74
Howard	2.90
Baltimore County	2.53
Anne Arundel	2.55
Prince George's	1.84
Baltimore City	1.69

We asked respondents who rated the school system a "C" or lower – which amounted to more than three-quarters of the population surveyed – to tell us why they gave that poor grade. Most of the comments were quite general in nature, things such as "poor quality," "could use improvement," etc. The leading specific comment was overcrowded classrooms (13%), with poor or inexperienced teachers following close behind (12%). A noticeable percentage (7%) mentioned the system's poor reputation as promoted by the media or word-of-mouth.

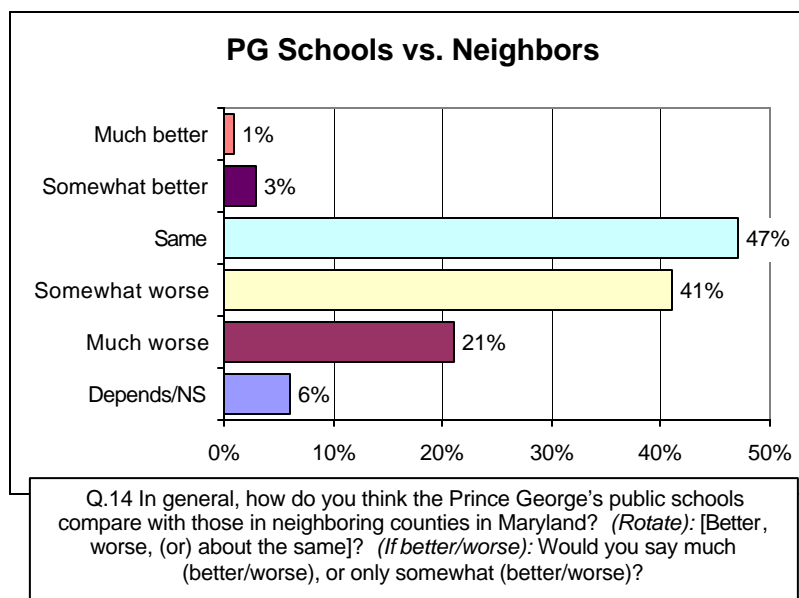
SUBGROUPS OF NOTE:

Grading the Public Schools (Q.9)

African-Americans and lower-income voters have a much more favorable view of the public school system. Private school parents have a very dim view of the public schools.

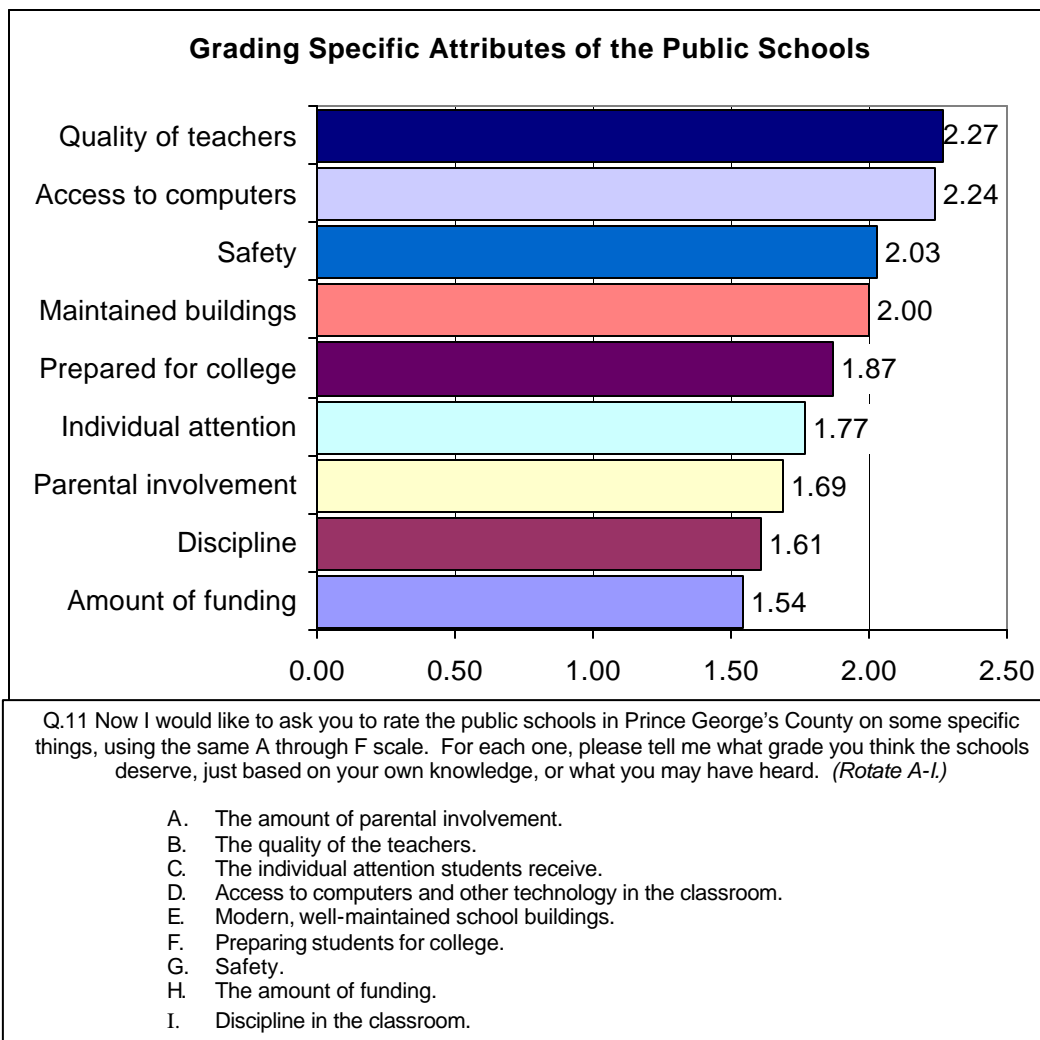
Group	Finding	Difference
All Voters	1.70	–
African-Americans	1.92	+ .22
Whites	1.51	- .19
Income < \$35,000	2.04	+ .34
\$35 – 50,000	1.82	+ .12
\$50 – 75,000	1.70	–
\$75 – 100,000	1.61	- .09
\$100,000 +	1.51	- .19
Kids in public school	1.71	+ .01
<i>Kids in private school</i>	<i>1.18</i>	<i>- .52</i>
High school education or less	1.79	+ .09
Post-graduate education	1.61	- .09

And how do the citizens of Prince George's County compare their schools to neighboring jurisdictions in Maryland? When asked if they thought their schools were better, worse, or about the same as neighboring counties, only 4% of Prince Georgians call their own schools "better." Almost two-thirds (62%) consider their schools "worse." Clearly, the public schools in Prince George's County have a local image problem.



Delving more deeply into the performance of the Prince George's County Public Schools, Potomac asked voters to grade the schools on a total of nine very specific attributes. Several attributes score much better than the 1.70 G.P.A. voters give the system overall. Quality of teachers and access to computers receive the highest grades at 2.27 and 2.24 respectively. Nonetheless, these "high" marks amount to only a C-Plus – not a testament to the internal strengths of the public school system, at least as perceived by the county's voters.

Rated lowest are the amount of funding (1.54), discipline (1.61), and parental involvement (1.69). This is a complete summary of the ideas tested:



Another yardstick of the public schools' image is the perceived trend in quality. Looking back over the last five years, one-fifth (21%) think the public schools have gotten better, while one-third (34%) see them as getting worse. The rest have seen no change in the schools' quality (35%) or are not sure (10%).

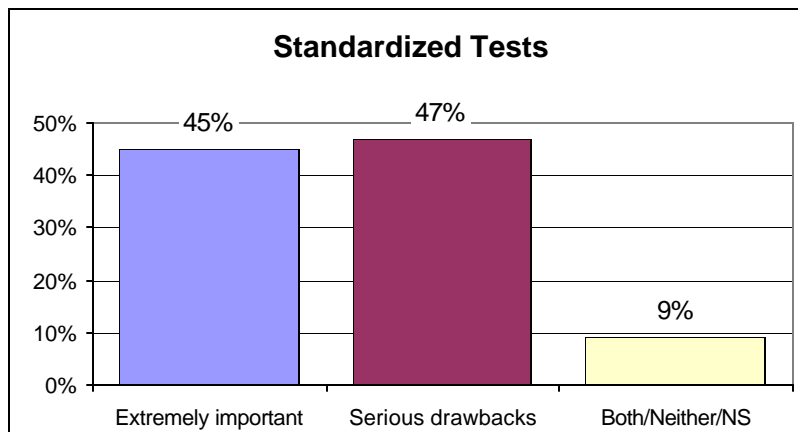
Changing from an elected to an appointed school board seems to have had absolutely no impact so far on the perceived quality of schools. When asked if the elected or appointed school board has done a better job, equal numbers choose the elected (12%) and the appointed (14%). But the real story is that the vast majority (75%) say there is no difference in the jobs the two boards have done, or they are just not sure.

Education Policy Prescriptions

What do voters think should be done to improve the schools? When offered a list of six specific policy options, a substantial one-third (34%) of voters think smaller class sizes are the highest priority. In second position (23%) is increased parental involvement. Higher teacher pay (16%) and higher standards for promotion and graduation (12%) trail.

Voters do not seem at all prone to place much value on oft-discussed physical and technological improvements such as renovated buildings (3%) or computers in the classroom (2%).

As a method of measuring school and student performance, standardized tests receive mixed reviews. Equal numbers see these tests as "extremely important" and as having "serious drawbacks." Voters are extremely polarized on the issue of standardized tests, with over 90 percent expressing an opinion one way or the other.



Q.13 Federal and state policies emphasize the use of standardized tests to measure the success of schools and to determine whether students can graduate. Which one of these two statements comes the closest to your own opinion about standardized tests? (*Read and rotate statements.*)

Standardized tests are extremely important to bring accountability to schools and set high standards.

Standardized tests have serious drawbacks, such as forcing teachers to teach to the test, and discriminating against certain students.

SUBGROUPS OF NOTE:

View of standardized tests (Q.13)

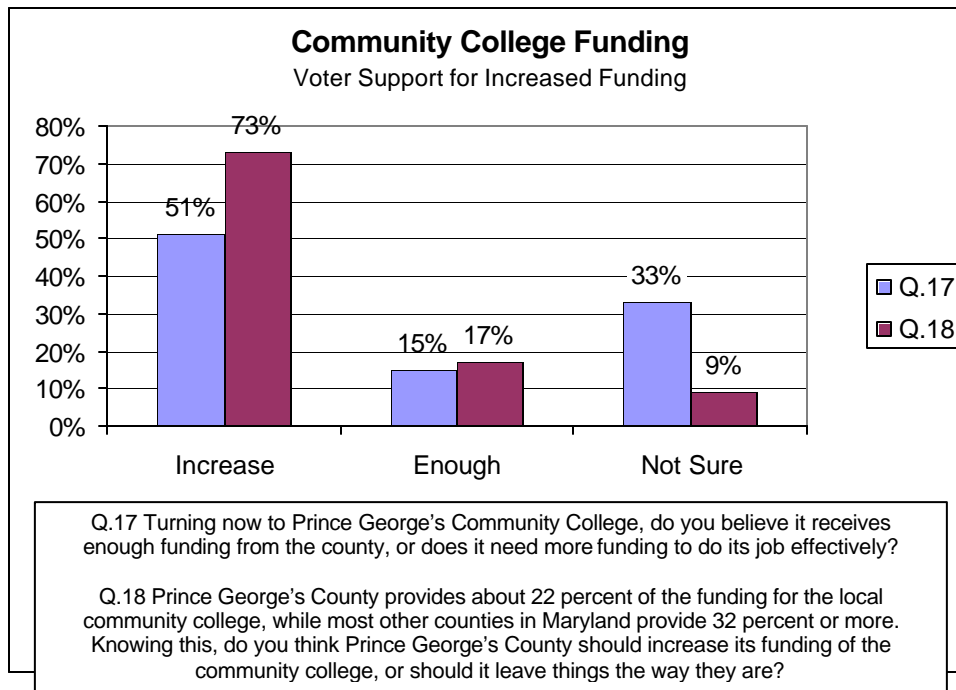
There is a strong partisan divide on this issue, with Republicans much more likely to see the value of standardized tests. Women are more suspicious of these tests than men, as are African-Americans compared with Whites. Of interest, families with children in public school have a very negative view of these tests.

Group	Important	Drawbacks	Difference
All Voters	45%	47%	- 2%
Republicans	56%	36%	+ 20%
Democrats	42%	49%	- 7%
Men	48%	42%	+ 6%
Women	41%	51%	- 10%
Non-union households	45%	46%	- 1%
Union households	37%	56%	- 19%
Whites	48%	44%	+ 4%
African-Americans	39%	51%	- 12%
No kids in public school	46%	45%	+ 1%
<i>Kids in public school</i>	<i>34%</i>	<i>55%</i>	<i>- 21%</i>

Prince George's County Community College

The survey touched briefly on Prince George's County Community College. When asked whether the community college receives enough funding from the county or needs "more funding to do its job effectively," a majority (51%) would like it to receive more funding. Only one voter in the seven (15%) believes the community college receives enough money from the county. The remainder (33%) are not sure.

Potomac tested one specific fact about public support for the community college and found it to be persuasive among voters undecided about increased funding. When presented with the idea that Prince George's County provides only 22 percent of the community college's funding, "while most other counties in Maryland provide 32 percent or more," the number supporting increased funding rises from 51% to 73%. Seventeen percent still think that funding should remain at current levels.



Trust in Organizations

Various groups waded into the political waters of Prince George's County when there is an important issue or election. Potomac measured the relative influence among voters of several major groups. We asked if a group's endorsement would make voters more likely (or less likely) to support a particular issue or candidate.

Prince George's County teachers emerged as the most influential group tested, with virtually no downside. By an eleven-to-one ratio (55% more likely to 5% less likely), voters said the teachers' endorsement would have a positive impact on their decision. Public employee unions such as police and firefighters score well, with a better than four-to-one positive ratio. "Religious leaders" – even in that abstract formulation – have a relatively positive influence; individual ministers who are known to voters would likely have much more impact. Even business executives seem to have a positive influence on voters' decisions by a two-to-one margin.

Group	More likely	Less likely	No difference	Not sure
Teachers	55%	5%	36%	4%
Public unions	40%	9%	46%	4%
Religious leaders	32%	13%	51%	4%
Executives	26%	13%	56%	5%

Q.19 I would like to read you the names of some groups that might become involved in the political process and endorse issues or candidates for office. For each one, please tell me if their endorsement would make you more likely to support the issue or candidate, less likely, or if it would make no difference either way. The first is... (Rotate A – D.)

- A. Prince George's County Teachers
- B. Local business executives
- C. Religious leaders
- D. Unions like the police and firefighters

TRIM and Public Spending

TRIM is obviously a critically important backdrop to the entire education funding question. This survey measured both awareness and support for the existing TRIM measure among voters, while exploring willingness to modify or repeal TRIM under certain circumstances.

Considering its impact on Prince George's County public policy, TRIM does not have the sweeping recognition among voters that it probably deserves. Although a majority (57%) have heard of TRIM when specifically prompted ("Have you ever heard of a local tax cap measure called Tax Reform Initiative by Marylanders, or TRIM?"), that number is by no means overwhelming. As one would expect, recognition of TRIM rises substantially the longer one has lived in the county, as these numbers attest:

Length of Residency	Heard of TRIM	Not Heard	Not sure
Less than 2 Years	13%	88%	*%
2 – 5 Years	27%	73%	*%
6 – 10 Years	38%	63%	*%
11 – 25 Years	51%	47%	2%
26+ Years (1978 and prior)	72%	27%	1%

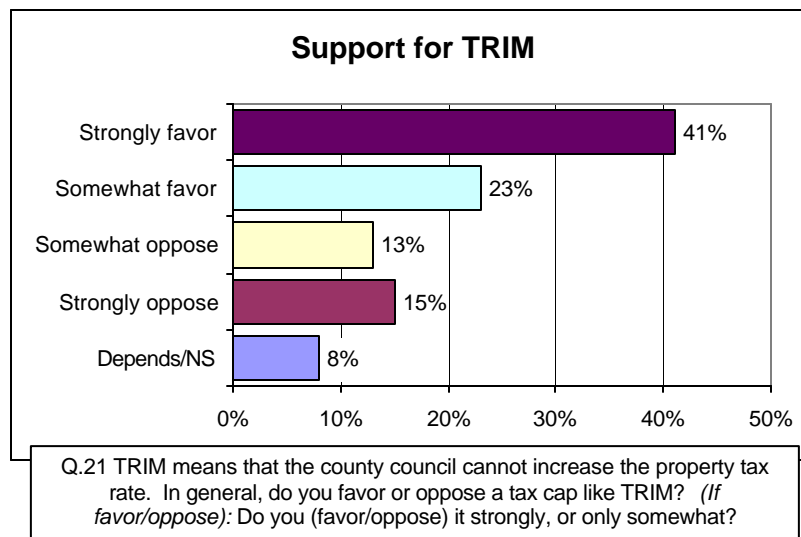
Q.20 Have you ever heard of a local tax cap measure called Tax Reform Initiative by Marylanders, or TRIM ("trim")?

SUBGROUPS OF NOTE:
Heard of TRIM (Q.20)

Not only are longer-term residents more likely to have heard of TRIM, so are more active voters, older voters, and men. *Families with children in public school are much less likely to have heard of TRIM.*

Group	Finding	Difference
All Voters	57%	–
Primary voters	77%	+ 20%
Frequent voters	63%	+ 6%
Infrequent/New voters	34%	- 17%
Men	64%	+ 7%
Women	53%	- 4%
Age 18 – 34	22%	- 35%
35 – 49	54%	- 3%
50 – 64	60%	+ 3%
65 +	72%	+ 15%
<i>Kids in public school</i>	44%	- 13%
Kids in private school	68%	+ 11%

Support for the concept of "a tax cap like TRIM" is strong in Prince George's County. Two-thirds of voters (64%) seem to favor this idea, while one-quarter (28%) oppose it at first blush. Making the job of TRIM opponents more difficult, the intensity of feeling is definitely on the side of TRIM proponents. While only 15% of voters strongly oppose a TRIM-style tax cap, four voters in ten (41%) strongly favor it.



***SUBGROUPS OF NOTE:
Strongly favor TRIM (Q.21)***

TRIM support is strongest among longest-term residents, families with no children in the public schools, and Republicans. Voters who are likely to trust religious leaders for political cues may be a more unlikely TRIM support group.

Group	Finding	Difference
All Voters	41%	-
Residency >25 years	48%	+ 7%
Residency < 25 years	34%	- 7%
No kids in school	43%	+ 2%
Kids in public school	34%	- 7%
Republicans	51%	+ 10%
Independents	44%	+ 3%
Democrats	38%	- 3%
Trust business execs	48%	+ 7%
<i>Trust religious leaders</i>	<i>47%</i>	<i>+ 6%</i>
<i>Trust unions</i>	<i>43%</i>	<i>+ 2%</i>
Trust teachers	36%	- 5%

It is helpful to gain a sense of voters' most critical funding priorities in these tight fiscal times. Survey respondents were painted a picture of county government "collecting less tax revenue" and government being faced with "difficult choices about spending." Voters were asked to choose their top and second funding priority from a list of five core tasks of the county government: public safety, public health, transportation, education, and economic development. As if to place an exclamation mark on their concern for education in Prince George's County, two-thirds (66%) chose education from the list as either their first or second choice. Remarkably, even public safety trails more than 20 points behind at 44%.

Priority	1st Mention	2nd Mention	Combined
Education	44%	22%	66%
Public safety	19%	26%	44%
Public health	12%	23%	35%
Economic development	13%	12%	24%
Transportation	8%	13%	20%

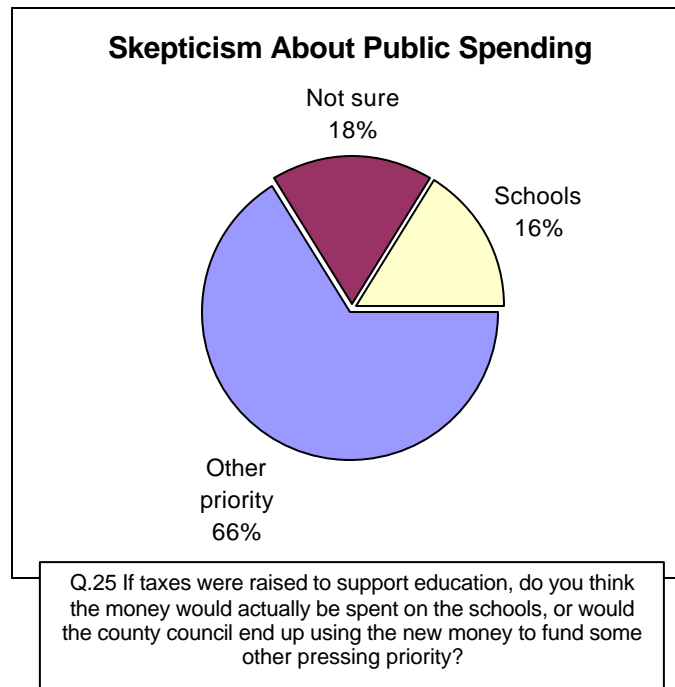
Q.22 Because of the weak economy, counties are collecting less tax revenue and are having a hard time balancing their budgets. As a result, county leaders are having to make difficult choices about spending. If it were up to you, which of these funding priorities would you most want to protect, even if it meant cutting back in other areas? (*Read and rotate list*): Public safety, Transportation, Education, Public health, Economic development

Q.23 And what would be your second priority? (*Re-read list, dropping first item mentioned.*)

This survey has both made and amply reinforced the idea that voters in Prince George's County have a strong preoccupation with improving the public schools. A large share of voters feel the schools are underfunded, or seem to endorse policy prescriptions that would require significant resources. We have also learned that TRIM remains a popular concept and enjoys a fairly committed following. So what happens when the competing priorities of funding education and holding the line on taxes go head-to-head?

Initially, a majority of the county's voters (53%) favor a tax increase "so that more money could be spent on public schools in Prince George's County." Forty-one percent oppose such a tax hike.

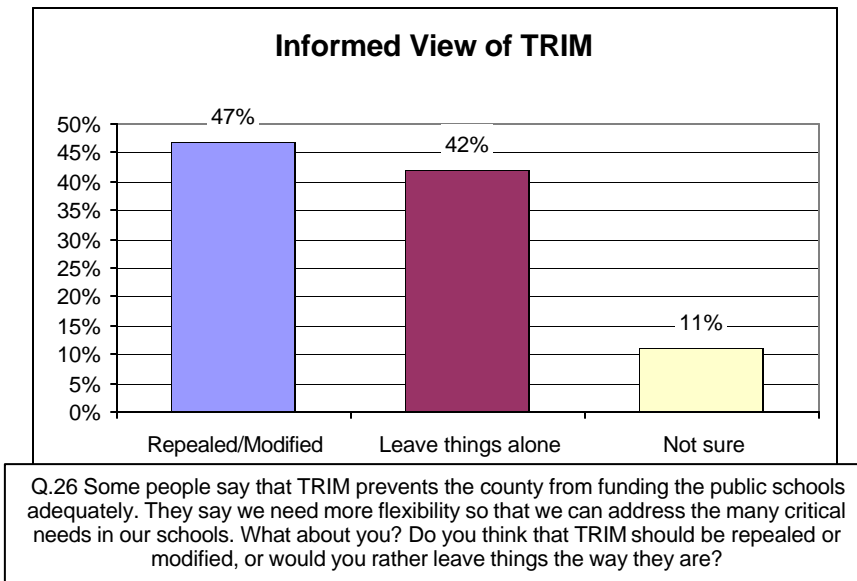
Such a simple question cannot be taken at face value, however. Underlying this seeming majority in favor of raising taxes for education is a skepticism by voters that dedicated funds will never reach their intended purpose. A stunning two-thirds (66%) of the electorate thinks the County Council would end up spending the money on other projects, not schools. **Only one voter in six in Prince George's County (16%) actually believes a dedicated school tax would end up benefiting the public schools.**



Such sentiment is not confined to Prince George's County, but is found across the state and in fact the region. This lack of belief that elected officials will actually spend public money for its intended purpose has long been brewing. Allocation of Tobacco Settlement dollars for non-health purposes in many states, which received wide media attention in recent years, has largely contributed to this problem. Use of Lottery funds for unintended purposes in a number of states has helped create this perception, as well. In Prince George's County and elsewhere, there is a deep mistrust of elected officials, and therefore a reluctance to trust

them with any additional public funds – even for the noblest of purposes. As these numbers make clear, the problem is a significant one in Prince George's County. The challenge is great for policymakers trying to find new resources in these tight fiscal times.

All of that having been said, there is indeed a sliver of hope for those who would like to modify or repeal TRIM if education is to be the beneficiary. When voters are presented with the choice of modifying TRIM to provide "flexibility so that we can address the many critical needs in our schools," or leaving TRIM in place, a bare five-point plurality opts to modify TRIM.



SUBGROUPS OF NOTE:

Willingness to repeal/modify TRIM (Q.26)

Repealing or modifying TRIM for the sake of public school funding is persuasive for majorities of African-Americans, better-educated and upper-income voters, those with kids in the public schools or who are in the child-raising years themselves, union households, and political Independents.

Group	Finding	Difference
All Voters	47%	–
African-Americans	54%	+ 7%
Whites	39%	- 8%
Post-graduate education	58%	+ 11%
High school or less	32%	- 15%
Income over \$75,000	57%	+ 10%
Income under \$50,000	39%	- 8%
Kids in public school	56%	+ 9%
No kids in school	41%	- 6%
Age 35 to 49	56%	+ 9%
Age 65 +	33%	- 14%
Residency < 25 years	52%	+ 5%
Residency > 25 years	38%	- 9%
Labor union households	51%	+ 4%
Non-union households	44%	- 3%
Independents	50%	+ 3%
Democrats	47%	–
Republicans	34%	- 13%

This so-called “informed view” of TRIM represents a remarkable 41-point shift from the initial strong support for a tax cap measured in this survey (Question 21: 64% favor vs. 28% oppose; Question 26: 47% repeal/modify vs. 42% leave things alone).

Another interesting way to view this shift is to compare the "strongly favor" group from Question 21 with the "leave things the way they are" group from Question 26. Among voters at large, the shift is non-existent at only + 1%; i.e., 46% initially strongly favor TRIM, while 47% would not respond to the plea to repeal or modify TRIM even to help the public schools.

In this context, these subgroups had significant shifts away from the "leave things the way they are" camp, and therefore might be considered key persuadables:

All voters	+ 1%
African-Americans	- 5%
African-Americans, four-year degree	- 17%
African-Americans, kids in public school	- 12%
Overall, kids in public school	- 3%
Residency five years or less	- 11%
Age 35 to 49	- 7%
Age 50 to 64	- 4%
Income over \$100,000	- 8%
Union households	- 7%
Registered Independents	- 4%
Government employees	- 6%

Here and throughout the survey, these groups emerge as pivotal on the question of public school funding:

- Newer residents
- Child-rearing years
- Upper-income
- Better-educated
- African-Americans
- Kids in school

Segmenting the overall electorate by overlapping several of these characteristics only seems to increase the effect – for example, upper-income African-Americans with children in public school.

By contrast, these are groups that would be much less susceptible to an argument to raise taxes for education:

- Whites, at least those who do not have children in public school
- Longer-term residents, especially those over 25 years
- Seniors – without a doubt, one of the least productive groups
- Anyone who has chosen to put their kids in non-public school

Thornton Commission

Despite wide news coverage, it does not appear that Thornton is very well-known in Prince George's County, at least by name. Only one-quarter (24%) of the county's voters say that they have heard of the Thornton Commission's plan.

A plurality like what they hear about Thornton, even if they are hearing it for the first time. Hearing that Thornton would provide more than \$1 billion to the county's schools over the next five years, 45% would choose full funding of Thornton "even if other state programs have to be cut." Thirty-three percent would not opt for full funding in the face of other state budget cuts.

Media Behavior

The Washington Post enjoys extremely broad readership in Prince George's County, with 85% saying they read it at least once a week. No other publication comes close. *The Gazette* has made inroads at 13% weekly readership, essentially tied with *The Journal* at 10%. *The (Baltimore) Sun* only achieves 2% weekly readership.

Two-thirds (63%) of those interviewed subscribe to cable TV.

Conclusion

Prince Georgians are deeply concerned about their public schools. They give the schools low marks, and generally want to see them better funded. The challenge, of course, is finding the consensus for new funding. TRIM remains very popular with voters, most of whom have become skeptics about the way public money is spent.