

**WISCONSIN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, INC.**

P.O. Box 487 • Thiensville, WI 53092

(262) 242-6409 • Fax: (262) 242-6459

E-mail: wpri@wpri.org • Internet: www.wpri.org

# **EMBARGO**

## **FOR RELEASE ON:**

THURSDAY, November 20, 2008

## **CONTACTS:**

Jim Miller, President  
(262) 242-6409 - Office

# **OPINIONS ABOUT WISCONSIN PUBLIC EDUCATION ARE SIMILAR TO TWENTY YEARS AGO**

## ***A Slight Majority Believe They Received A Better Education Than Students Do Today Residents Support Major Reforms In Teacher Compensation***

There are some issues that seemingly never change. Twenty years ago 49% of Wisconsin residents thought they had received a better education in elementary and secondary schools than students today. In 2008, 47% of Wisconsin residents had the same view. Twenty years ago 70% of our residents rated their local schools as excellent or very good. Today, 69% rated their local schools as excellent or good.

Twenty years ago 76% of our residents supported merit pay for teachers; today 77% of our residents support merit pay for teachers. Twenty years ago 58% of our residents thought that discipline in our public schools was too lenient; today 60% hold this view.

These are among the key findings about statewide policy issues from the most recent survey of 600 Wisconsin residents conducted by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Inc. and Diversified Research between November 9 and 10, 2008.

### ***The Overall Quality Of Education***

47% of the respondents in this survey thought that they had received a better education at the elementary and secondary level than students do today; 44% disagreed. Twenty years ago 49% thought they had received a better education and 45% thought they had not. Demographically there is a large gap in this response based on race — 46% of Whites in 2008 thought they had received a better education, but 90% of Black respondents thought they had received a better education and only 10% thought that students today received a better education.

In the City of Milwaukee 66% of the residents thought they had received a better education than students today, 29% disagreed. Twenty years ago the results were different. Then 53% thought they had received a better education while 40% said they had not. The current results were far different than any other area of the state.

There were other demographic groups where the results were different. By a 54% to 38% spread, Republicans thought they had received a better education. Independents thought they had by 50% to 42%. It was only Democrats who thought they had not received a better education by 53% to 40%. It was similar to by ideology — 56% of Conservatives thought they had received a better education while 36% thought they hadn't. However, among Liberals, 39% thought they had received a better education while 52% thought they had not.

There was also a very large spread between young and old people in our state. Among young people (18 to 24 years old) only 25% thought they had received a better education, while 75% thought they had not. Among our senior citizens (65 and older) 54% thought they had received a better education while 30% thought they had not.

We asked residents to rate the quality of education in their own community as excellent, good, fair or poor. 69% of the respondents rated their local schools positively while only 29% rated them poorly. These numbers were right across all regions of the state except in the City of Milwaukee where only 35% of our respondents rated the quality of public education as excellent or good and 58% rated it as only fair or poor. In fact, this is different from twenty years ago when 60% of the City of Milwaukee respondents in that poll rated their local public schools positively and only 39% had a negative impression of the quality of their schools. On this question of the quality of education there was a huge gap based on race — 71% of the White respondents ranked their schools as excellent or good, only 34% of our Black respondents did likewise.

Finally we asked residents whether they thought the public education in their community had improved, gotten worse or stayed the same over the past five years. 23% thought it had improved, 23% it had gotten worse and 49% thought it had stayed the same. Twenty years ago there was a major difference in these responses. In 1988, 39% thought public education had improved, only 16% thought it had gotten worse, while 37% thought it had stayed the same. Once again in our survey the City of Milwaukee had the most negative views of their schools. Only 13% thought they had improved while 38% thought they had gotten worse. Southeast Wisconsin was similar in these views where only 17% thought their schools had gotten better, while 34% thought they had gotten worse.

The biggest spread on this question was by race. Among Whites, 22% thought their schools had gotten better while only 4% of Blacks answered that way.

### ***Discipline in the Schools***

In this survey 60% of the respondents thought that discipline in the public schools was too lenient, while only 3% thought it was too strict. These are very similar to results from twenty years ago when 58% thought that discipline in the schools was too lenient and only 3% thought it was too strict. Demographically the major differences of opinion fell along political and ideological identification. 79% of Republicans thought discipline was too lenient, while only 48% of Democrats thought so. 45% of Liberals thought we were too lenient, while 82% of Conservatives thought so. Finally there was a gap by age. Among residents who were 18 to 24 only 53% thought we were too lenient in the discipline in our schools. However among our senior citizens (65 and older) 76% thought we were too lenient.

### ***Teachers***

In this survey 38% of our respondents favored giving tenure to teachers while 49% opposed the idea. These numbers were different than when this question was asked twenty years ago when 43% of our respondents favored giving tenure to teachers and only 36% opposed it. The only area of the state that favored tenure was 53% of the residents of Waukesha County while 42% of them opposed it. Interestingly only 31% of the residents of Madison supported tenure, while 48% opposed it. The other major gaps were based on ideology. 49% of Liberals favored tenure for teachers, but only 21% of residents who identified themselves as Conservatives did. Among Republicans, 18% favored giving teachers tenure, while 75% opposed it. However, among Democrats 46% favored tenure while 37% opposed it.

We also asked whether they would support changes to the tenure system, which would make it easier to fire incompetent teachers. There was overwhelming support for this idea. In this survey 89% of the respondents favored this question while only 7% opposed it. These results are almost exactly the same as those from twenty years ago when 87% of our residents supported changing the tenure system and only 6% opposed it. There was support for this idea across all major demographic lines in the state.

We asked people whether they would favor or oppose merit pay for teachers based on performance. 77% of our residents favored this idea and only 18% opposed it. This is almost the exact same result as twenty years ago when 76% of our respondents favored merit pay and only 19% opposed it. What is interesting on this issue is that there is support for this idea from all demographics throughout the state, even 70% of the Liberals in Wisconsin favor merit pay and only 24% oppose it. Conservatives are slightly higher with 82% favoring it and only 13% opposing it. 84% of Republicans favored merit pay, while

73% of Democrats favored it. By race, 77% of Whites favor merit pay compared to 92% of our Black respondents. Finally there was a slight gap based on gender where 81% of men favored merit pay while 73% of women favored merit pay for teachers.

We then asked residents if we needed higher salaries to attract better teachers. In this survey, 72% of our respondents favor the idea while only 23% oppose it. This is up slightly from twenty years ago when this question was asked, where 67% of the respondents then favored higher salaries for teachers while 29% opposed it.

Again there was broad support for this idea among all demographic groupings in the state. Politically, 53% of Republicans supported this while 79% of Democrats did likewise. Ideologically, 86% of Liberals favored this, as did 60% of Conservatives. There was no group or area across the state that opposed this.

### ***The Future***

We asked our residents whether they expected their children to be better off financially when they reach your age. 45% of our respondents thought their children would be better off while 17% thought they would do worse. This is slightly lower than when we asked this question in 1992 when 53% of our residents thought their children would be better off financially and only 14% thought they would be worse off. What is interesting is that the most optimistic group in the state was in the City of Milwaukee where 53% thought their children would do better financially and only 14% thought they would do worse. This is almost reversed in the Milwaukee Suburbs where only 37% thought their children would be better off financially while 17% thought they would be worse off and 37% thought they would be the same. Among Whites, 44% thought their children would be better off while 18% thought they would be worse off and 24% thought they would be the same as the respondents. However, among Blacks, 62% thought their children would be better off, and only 8% thought their children would be worse off.

Finally we asked respondents whether how they thought state government was doing in creating a place for the next generation of Wisconsin residents. In this survey 55% thought that the state was doing a good or very good job in creating a better future and only 41% thought they were doing not such a good job. This is very similar in results from sixteen years ago when we last asked this question in 1992. At that time 59% thought the state was doing a very good job and 38% thought they were not doing a very good job.

In this survey there were some very large demographic differences. In the City of Milwaukee 39% thought the state was doing a good job, but 47% disagreed with that. However, in Madison 61% of our citizens thought the state was doing a good job while only 35% thought the state was not doing a good job. There were sharp differences on this question based on your politics and ideology. 72% of Democrats thought the state was doing a very good job for the future, but only 38% of the Republicans agreed. Ideologically, 70% of Liberals thought the state was doing a very good job of creating a better place for the next generation of Wisconsin residents, but only 29% of Conservatives agreed with them. 55% of Whites thought the state was doing a very good job, but only 23% of Blacks agreed with that. Only 46% of the males in this survey thought the state was doing a very good job of creating a better future, but 62% of the women supported that idea.

### ***Summary***

One of the interesting results in this survey is that the attitude towards teachers has not changed over the last generation. Most Wisconsinites believe that there should be more money paid to teachers, but they also believe that teachers should be made more accountable. They overwhelmingly support the idea of merit pay, but there is much less support for the idea of tenure. They overwhelmingly believe by 89% for to 7% against that the tenure system should be changed to make it easier to fire incompetent teachers.

It is remarkable that after twenty years these issues have not been implemented in terms of improving our educational system. It is important to point out that in a recently published survey by the

Institute, most Wisconsin residents have a very high view of the honesty and integrity of the teachers in the state and a very poor view of labor union leadership.

Despite the enormous negative impact on economy over the last several months, Wisconsin residents still want to believe that their children will prosper in the future and that the state should continue to create a positive atmosphere for the next generation of Wisconsin residents.

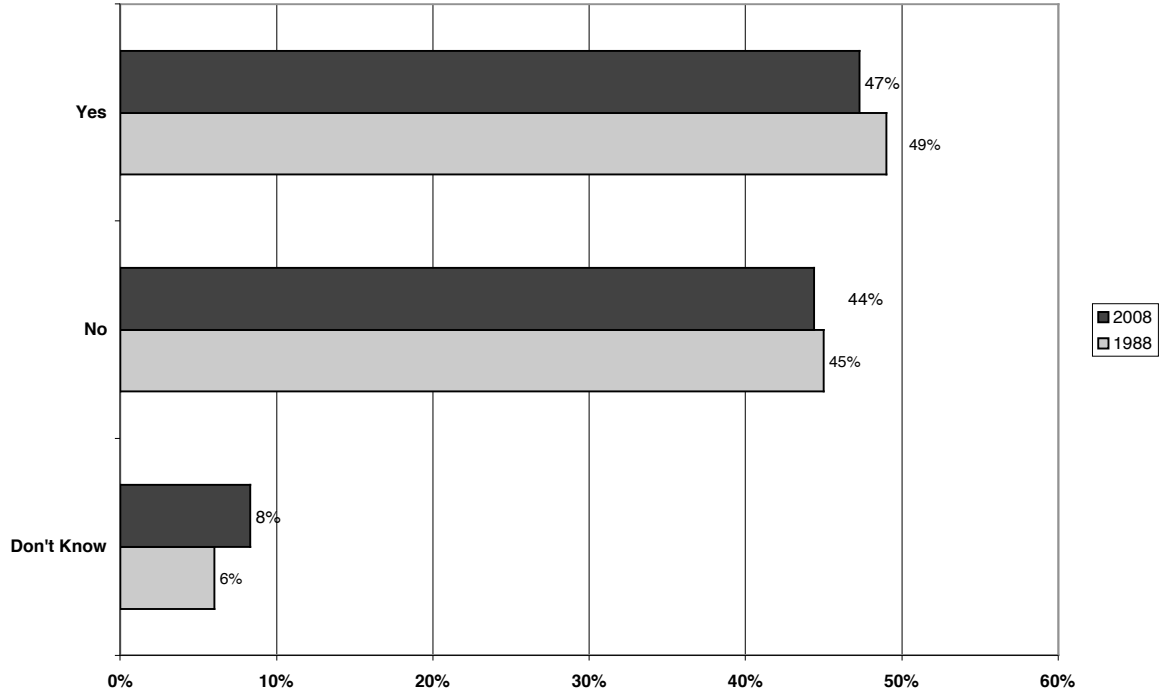
#### **ABOUT THE STUDY**

This study of 600 Wisconsin residents was conducted by telephone between November 9 and November 10, 2008. A total of 600 Wisconsin residents were interviewed. The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 4% for percentages of the whole sample. For a percentage near 50%, for example, this means that repeated samples would produce results between 47% and 53%, 95 times out of 100.

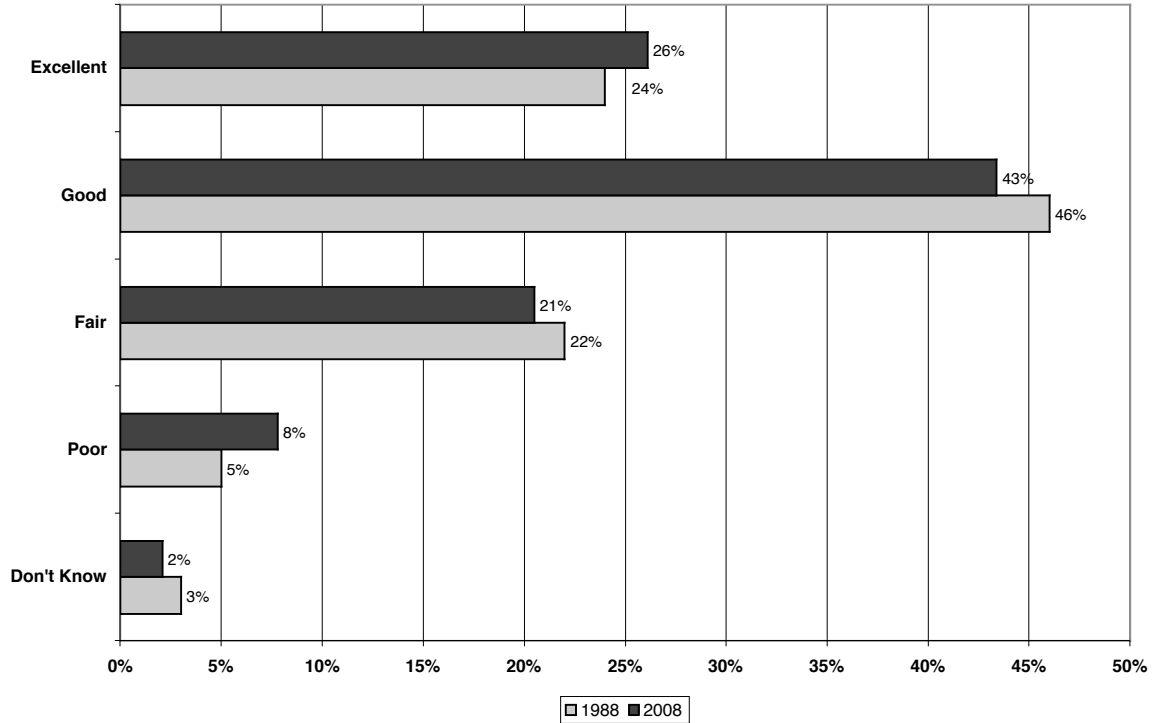
This study was commissioned by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Inc. The Institute was founded in 1987, and its mandate is to examine issues of public policy facing Wisconsin, using a non-partisan approach.

Dr. Michael LaVelle, President of Diversified Research, a nationally known survey research company supervised the project. Dr. LaVelle has a Ph.D. and has taught statistics and social research methods at the university level. He has been President of Diversified Research since 1982 and has over thirty years experience in survey research.

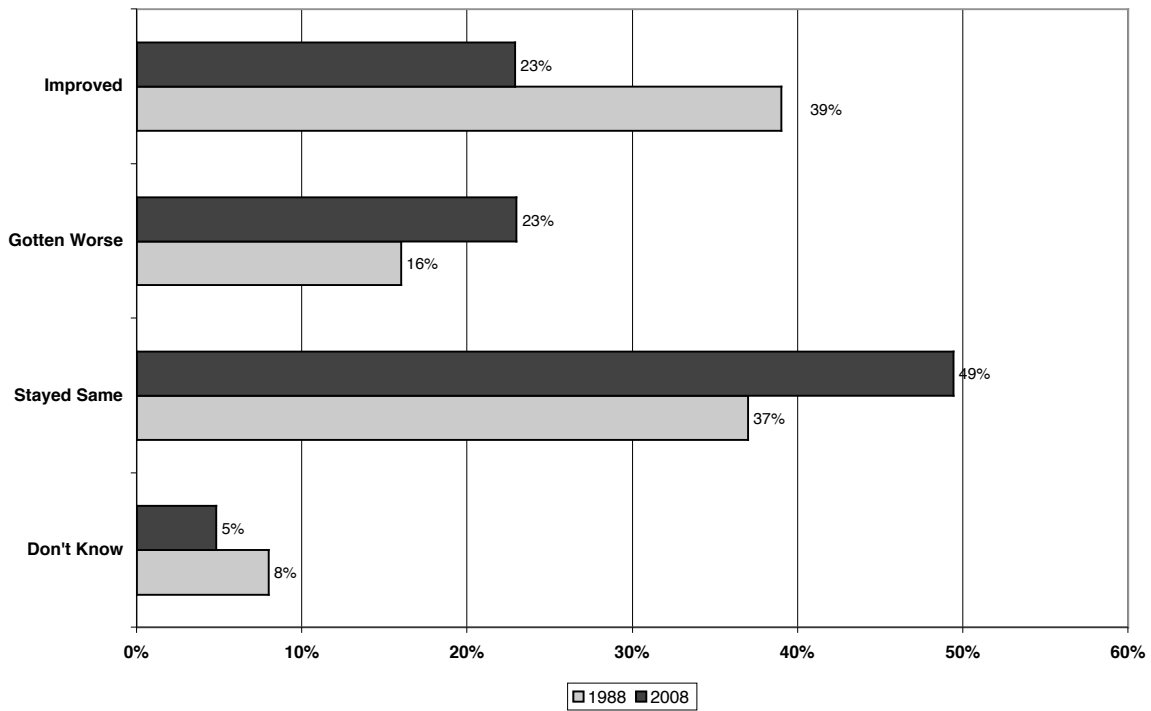
**Do You Think That You, Yourself, Received A Better Education At The Elementary And Secondary Level Than Students Do Today?**



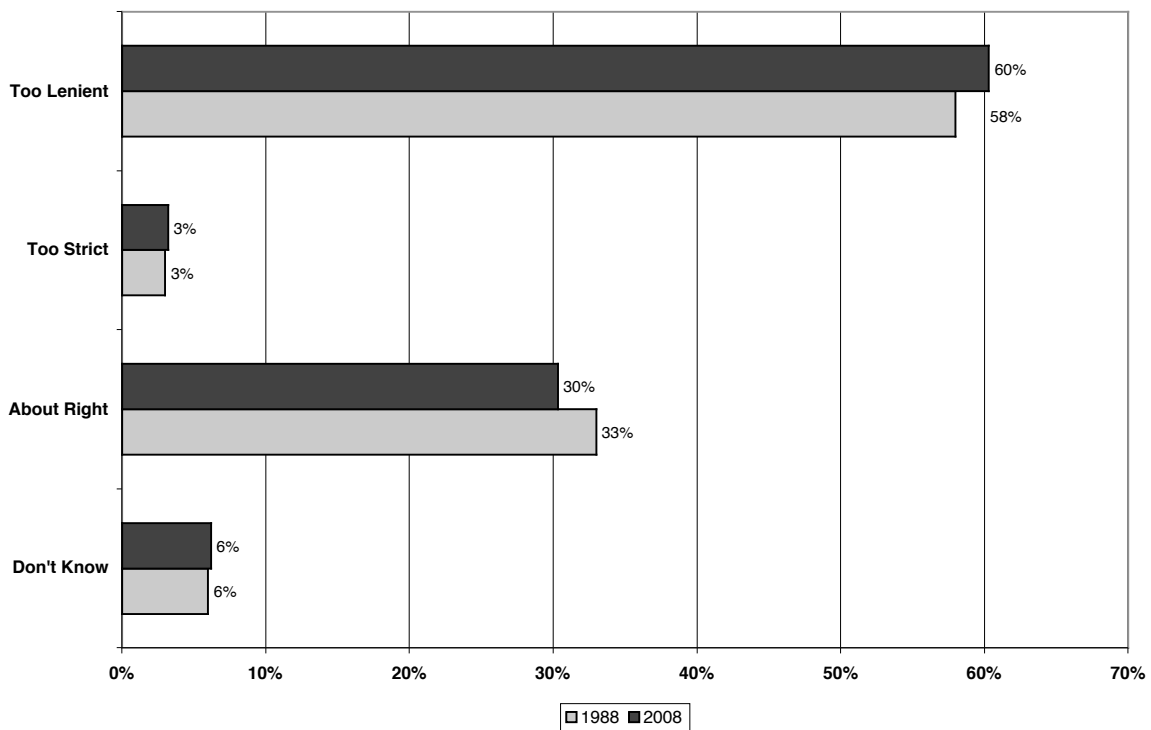
**Wisconsin Residents' Perception of the Quality of Their Community's Public Education**

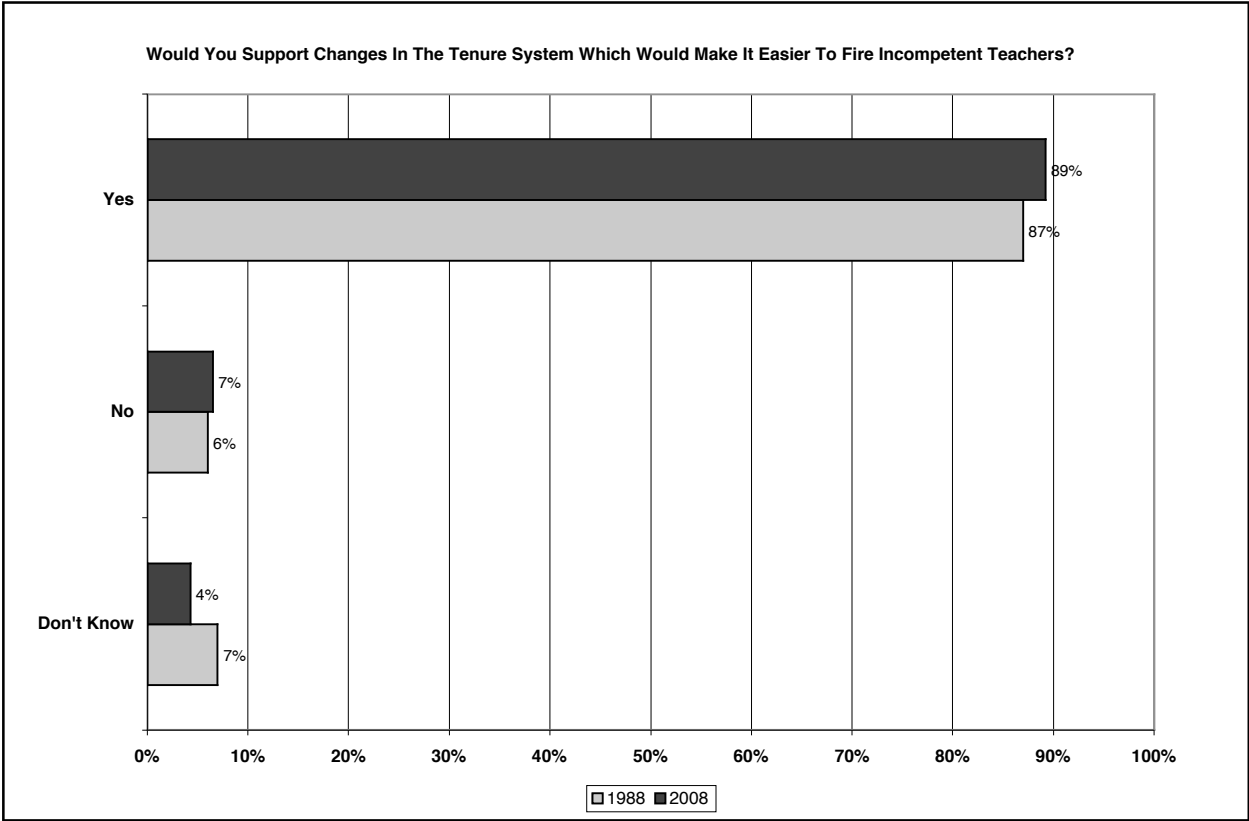
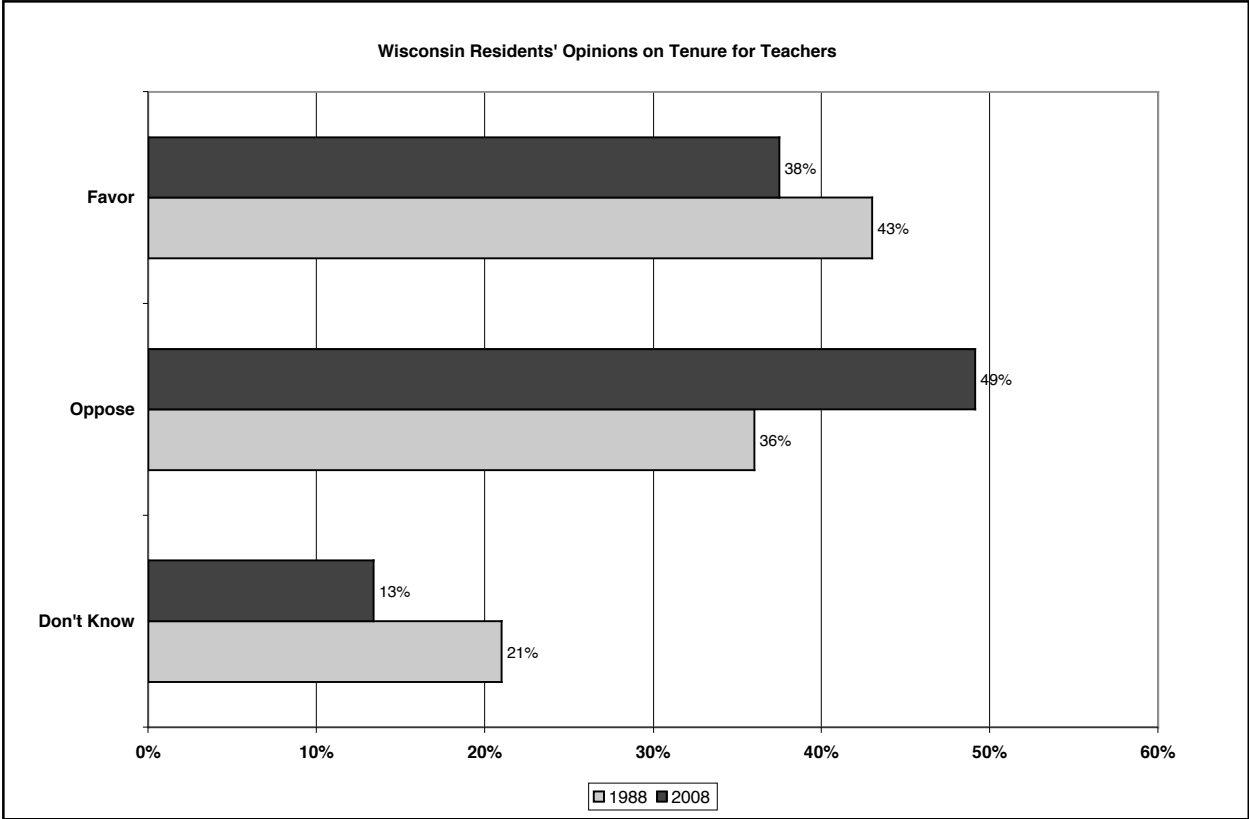


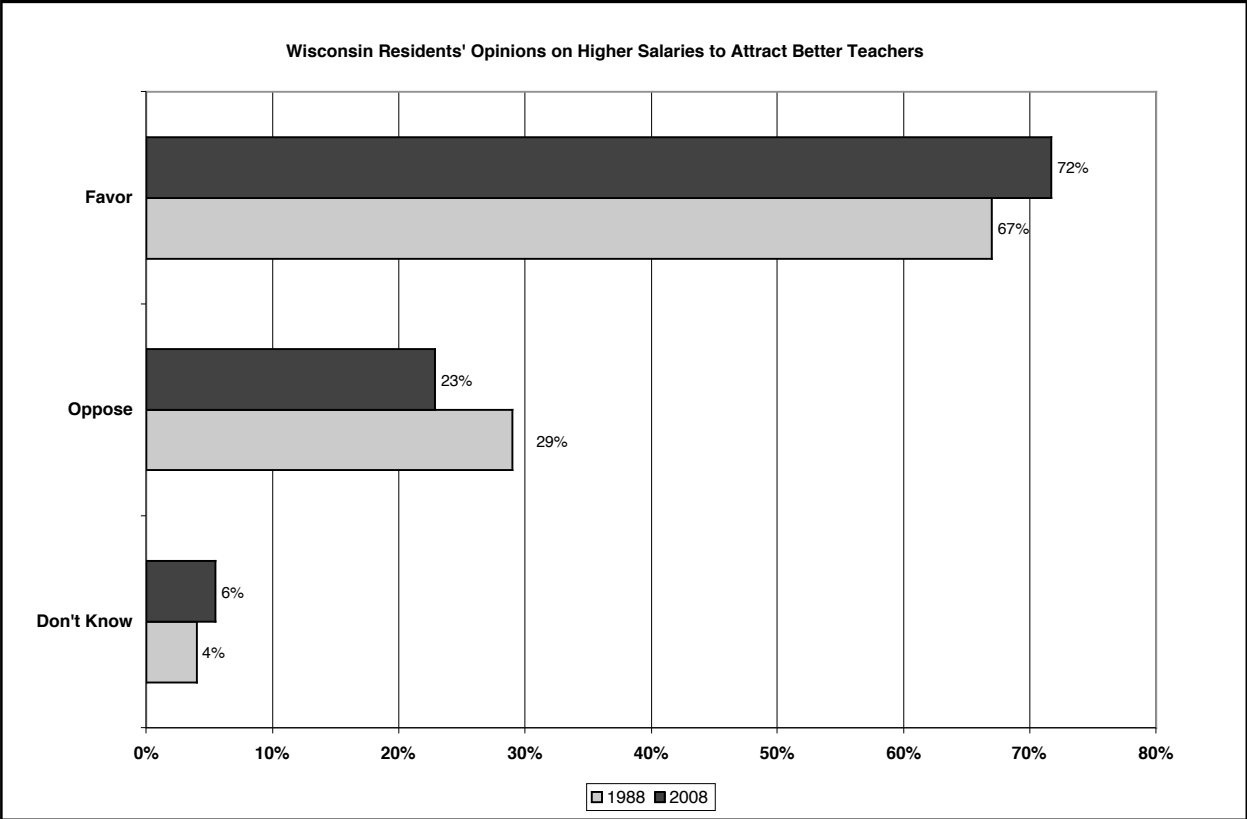
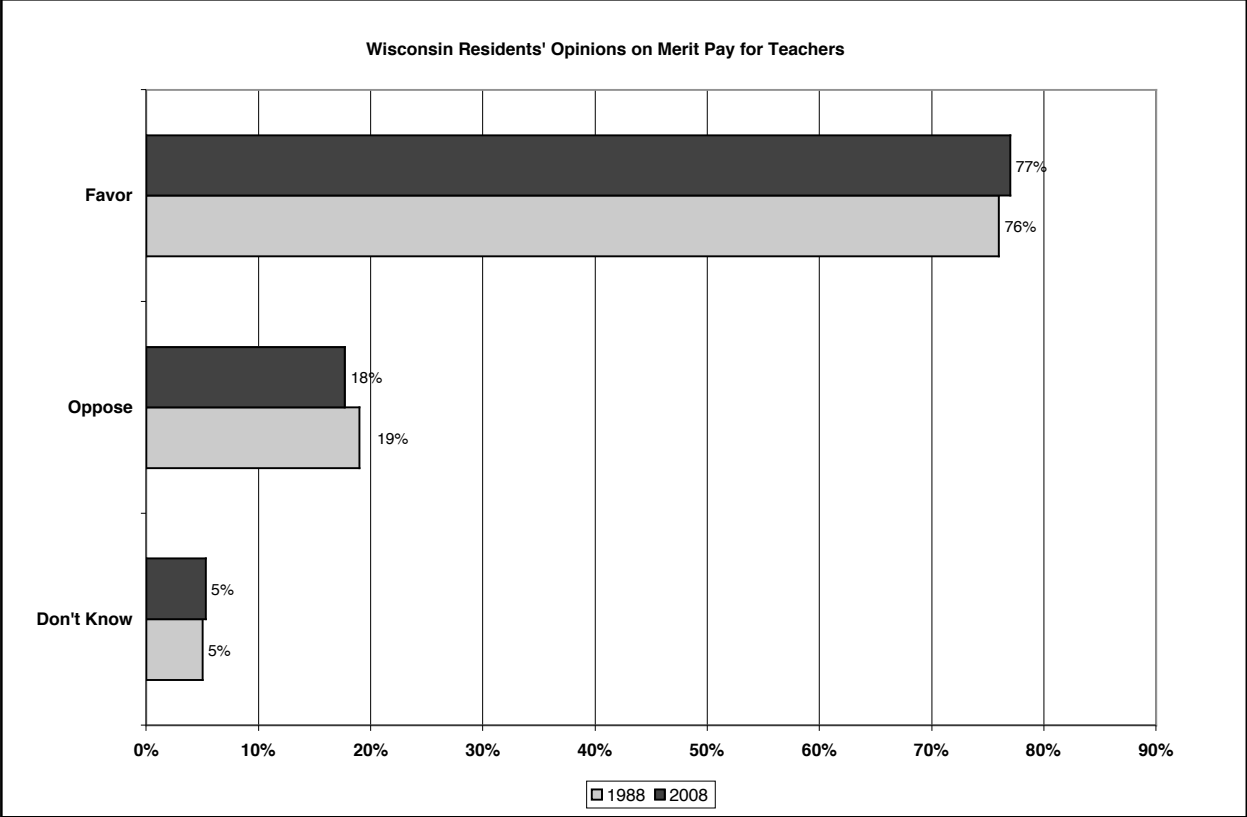
Wisconsin Residents' Perceptions of Improvements in Their Community's Public Education Compared to Five Years Ago



Would You Say The Discipline In The Public Schools Is Too Lenient, Too Strict, Or About Right?

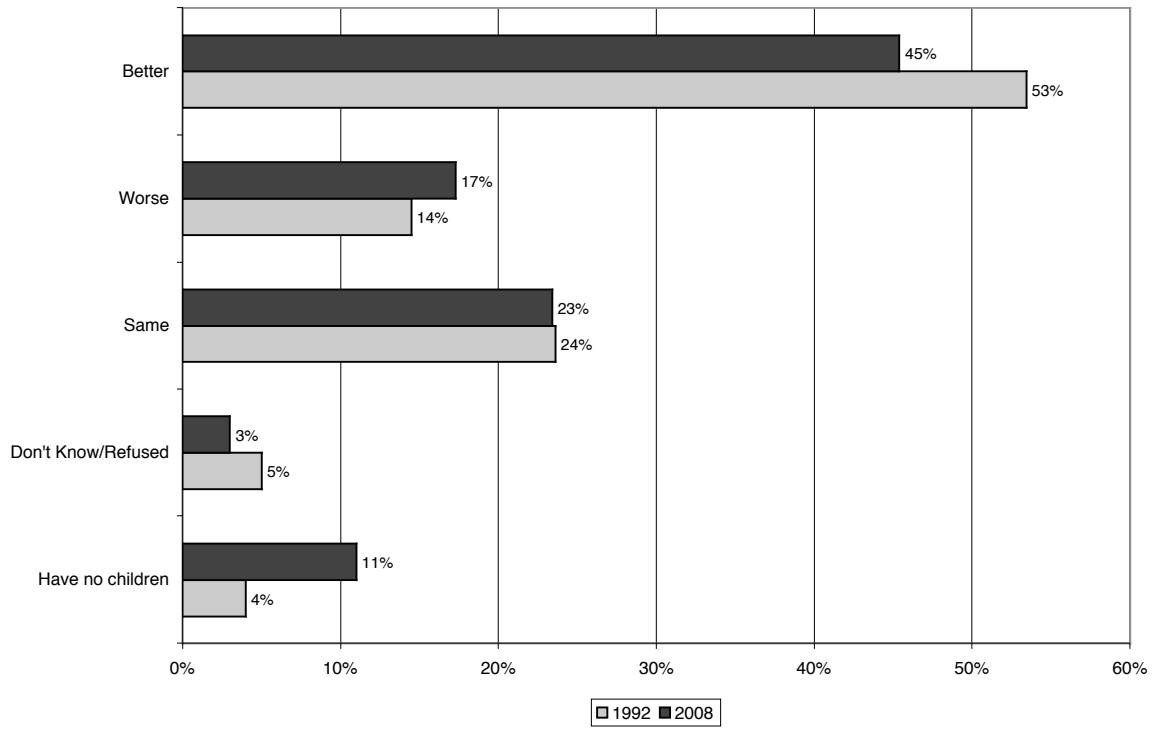




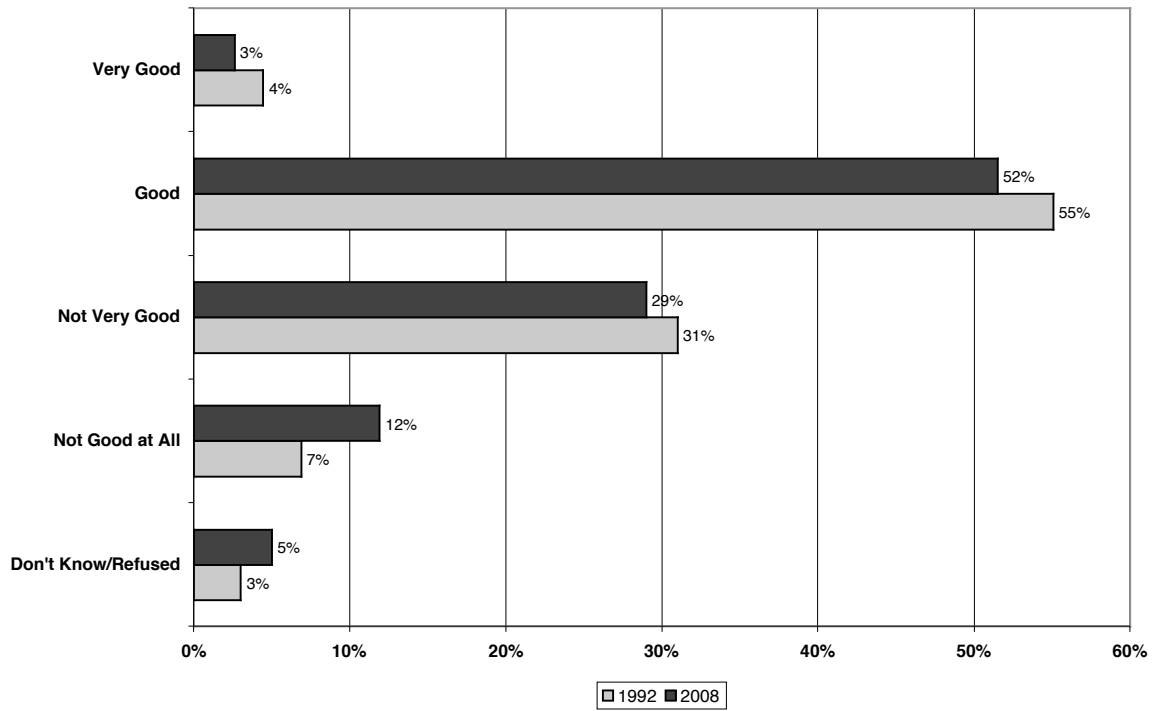




Wisconsin Residents' Opinions on Whether Their Children Will Be Better Off Financially Than They Are



Wisconsin Residents' Opinions on How Good a Job State Government is Doing to Create A State That Will Be a Better Place for the Next Generation of Wisconsin Residents



**In general, how would you rate the quality of public education in your community? Is it excellent, good, fair or poor?**

	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
<b>Excellent</b>	26%	14%	29%	49%	25%	32%	26%	14%	27%
<b>Good</b>	43%	21%	41%	29%	51%	46%	45%	46%	49%
<b>Fair</b>	21%	27%	19%	11%	18%	20%	20%	29%	20%
<b>Poor</b>	8%	31%	10%	10%	5%	1%	4%	10%	2%
<b>Don't Know/Refused</b>	2%	7%	1%	1%	1%	1%	4%	1%	2%

**Compared to five years ago, do you think public education in your community has improved, gotten worse or stayed the same?**

	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
<b>Improved</b>	23%	13%	24%	27%	18%	35%	31%	17%	25%
<b>Gotten Worse</b>	23%	38%	20%	20%	18%	9%	26%	34%	23%
<b>Stayed the Same</b>	49%	39%	55%	54%	60%	47%	36%	47%	47%
<b>Don't Know/Refused</b>	5%	10%	2%	0%	5%	8%	7%	2%	5%

**Do you think that you, yourself, received a better education at the elementary and secondary level than students do today?**

	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
<b>Yes</b>	47%	66%	45%	46%	47%	47%	41%	52%	42%
<b>No</b>	44%	29%	38%	46%	48%	48%	47%	43%	49%
<b>Don't Know/Refused</b>	8%	6%	17%	8%	5%	6%	12%	5%	9%

**Would you say the discipline in the public schools is too lenient, too strict, or about right?**

	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
<b>Too Lenient</b>	60%	66%	60%	50%	65%	53%	63%	60%	60%
<b>Too Strict</b>	3%	1%	2%	1%	4%	3%	2%	9%	3%
<b>About Right</b>	30%	24%	23%	46%	31%	40%	29%	27%	31%
<b>Don't Know/Refused</b>	6%	10%	16%	3%	1%	5%	6%	5%	7%

**In general do you favor or oppose giving tenure to teachers?**

	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
<b>Favor</b>	<b>38%</b>	35%	32%	53%	36%	36%	31%	43%	39%
<b>Oppose</b>	<b>49%</b>	48%	56%	42%	50%	43%	48%	45%	52%
<b>Don't Know/Refused</b>	<b>13%</b>	17%	11%	6%	14%	22%	21%	13%	9%

**Would you support changes in the tenure system which would make it easier to fire incompetent teachers?**

	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
<b>Yes</b>	<b>89%</b>	83%	87%	93%	92%	90%	81%	89%	93%
<b>No</b>	<b>7%</b>	12%	11%	3%	5%	7%	10%	7%	2%
<b>Don't Know/Refused</b>	<b>4%</b>	5%	2%	4%	30%	3%	9%	4%	5%

**Do you favor or oppose merit pay for teachers based on performance?**

	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
<b>Favor</b>	<b>77%</b>	73%	76%	86%	76%	89%	71%	81%	73%
<b>Oppose</b>	<b>18%</b>	17%	14%	13%	20%	6%	25%	13%	24%
<b>Don't Know/Refused</b>	<b>5%</b>	10%	10%	2%	4%	5%	4%	6%	3%

**Do you favor or oppose higher salaries to attract better teachers?**

	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
<b>Favor</b>	<b>72%</b>	76%	61%	82%	72%	59%	83%	75%	70%
<b>Oppose</b>	<b>23%</b>	16%	30%	16%	25%	30%	13%	20%	26%
<b>Don't Know/Refused</b>	<b>6%</b>	8%	9%	2%	3%	11%	4%	5%	4%

**Do you expect YOUR CHILDREN to be better off financially, worse off or about the same as you when they reach your age?**

	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
<b>Better</b>	45%	53%	37%	43%	48%	48%	44%	51%	42%
<b>Worse</b>	17%	14%	17%	18%	17%	13%	14%	26%	18%
<b>Same</b>	23%	19%	37%	35%	21%	27%	27%	13%	18%
<b>Have no children</b>	11%	11%	5%	4%	8%	9%	16%	8%	21%
<b>Don't Know/Refused</b>	3%	2%	5%	0%	7%	3%	0%	2%	2%

**How good a job do you think State Government is doing in creating a state that will be a better place for the next generation of Wisconsin residents?**

	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
<b>Very Good</b>	3%	3%	5%	0%	2%	3%	6%	0%	3%
<b>Good</b>	52%	36%	43%	57%	50%	53%	55%	47%	63%
<b>Not Very Good</b>	29%	33%	29%	34%	26%	32%	29%	33%	25%
<b>Not Good at All</b>	12%	14%	18%	9%	17%	3%	6%	16%	7%
<b>Don't Know/Refused</b>	5%	15%	5%	0%	4%	9%	4%	4%	3%