
WAKE PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

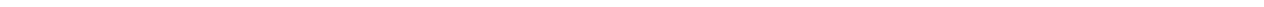
**Fourth Biennial Study of Citizens' Perceptions
of Public Education in Wake County**

September 2004

Conducted by Frederick Polls
for Wake Education Partnership



With support from:



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Uniting Community Resources for Excellence in Public Education

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I. Introduction

The 2004 Wake Public Education Community Assessment offers a snapshot of community attitudes and beliefs about the Wake County Public School System. The biennial poll is one in a series of strategies initiated by Wake Education Partnership, our schools and the community to involve citizens in shaping the future of their public school system. Although the poll is not necessarily reflective of what is actually happening in Wake's schools, it is a clear indicator of what our community perceives to be taking place.

The results of the Assessment will:

- Assist elected officials in adopting policies to strengthen the public schools;
- Provide key stakeholders with useful information about characteristics of effective schools;
- Validate findings from parent surveys conducted by the Wake County Public School System;
- Empower citizens with knowledge needed to become effective partners with public schools in efforts to address issues such as funding, academic standards and school quality; and
- Assess the effectiveness of existing priorities and partnerships in the public schools.

Wake County community representatives served on an advisory committee to guide the process for conducting the poll, from focus groups to final results. These volunteers revised the survey instrument and discussed methods for presenting the results. The Community Assessment Advisory Committee included the following participants:

Karen Banks <i>Wake County Public Schools System</i>	Drew Moretz <i>Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce</i>
Sharon Brown <i>Wake County Government</i>	Ricardo Perez <i>Multicultural Community Advocate</i>
Jennifer Bryan <i>Knightdale Chamber of Commerce</i>	Janice Shearin <i>Wake County Public School System</i>
Marty Clayton <i>Progress Energy</i>	Cyndi Soter O'Neil <i>Wake Education Partnership</i>
Robin Costello, Chair <i>Community Leader</i>	Charlotte Turpin <i>Wake/North Carolina Association of Educators</i>
Michael Evans <i>Wake County Public School System</i>	Lynn Womble <i>Wake County PTA Council</i>
Jim McClure <i>Garner Educational Foundation/ The News & Observer</i>	

The Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce and IBM supported the 2004 Wake Public Education Community Assessment as primary sponsors of the poll.

Overview of the Study

This 2004 study is the fourth in a series of citizen perception studies conducted by the Wake Education Partnership. The 2004 survey, like the 1998, 2000 and 2002 studies, assesses attitudes, preferences and priorities among Wake County citizens on key issues related to Wake County public schools.

The focus of this 2004 Community Assessment is to measure:

- Perceptions of how continued student population growth impacts school district function and needs;
- Trends in “performance gap” measures of Wake schools on a series of characteristics of successful schools, comparing responses for the perceived level of importance vs. the perceived frequency that such characteristics are happening in the schools;
- Whether county voters continue to give low marks to the county schools for “improving over time” as in the 2002 survey;
- Perceptions of President Bush’s No Child Left Behind standards and accountability program, in this nationalized election year where the debate over education policies will be intense, and how this affects Wake schools’ operations, funding challenges and public perceptions;
- Perceptions of the school system following last year’s successful bond campaign – How well do voters anticipate the new revenues will be spent? To what extent do they perceive this bond package “solves” the school system’s problems? Do they still see a need for “more revenue in the future to keep up with growth”?; and
- Opinions on specific school policies related to assignment and diversity, including reactions to factual information about the impact of diversity on student achievement.

Like the 1998 and 2000 studies, this 2004 survey interviews county residents aged 18+. The previous 2002 survey interviewed registered voters because that poll served as a perception measure for an upcoming bond election. This 2004 sample of 650 participants reflects a random cross-section of Wake County residents generated using random digit dialing procedures from a comprehensive list of telephone exchanges active in Wake County. Telephone polling was conducted between July 20-26, 2004, and poll participants were screened for Wake residency and over age 18. The 2004 poll sample demographics are comparable with 2000 census data and with the 2002 cross-section poll sample of Wake residents in gender, race, ethnicity, age and education level. The margin of error is +/- 3.9%.

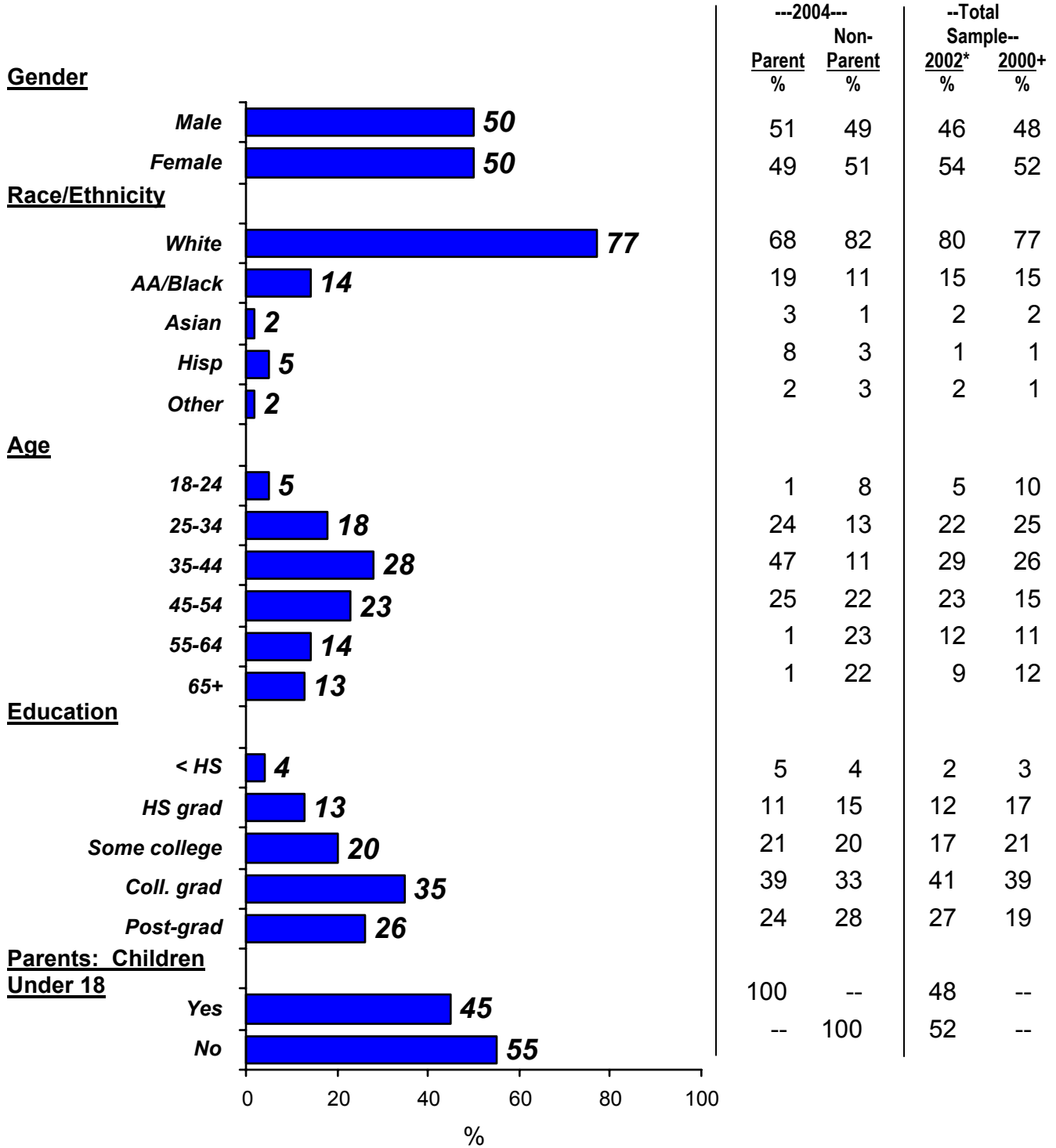
Focus group sessions were held in May 2004 with three groups: community leaders, parents of school-aged children and non-parents. As in 2000 and 2002, these preliminary focus groups provided background information and messaging to test in the follow-up quantitative survey.

The following charts show the demographic composition of the 2004 sample compared to the 2002 and 2000 survey samples, as well as the geographic distribution of 2004 poll respondents by area.

Throughout the poll analysis, the term “parents” generally refers to the 45% of poll respondents who have at least one child 18 years or under living at home. Within this overall “parents” group are 31% of poll respondents who have a child in Wake public schools and an additional 7% who have a child in private or home school.

Demographic Characteristics of Sample

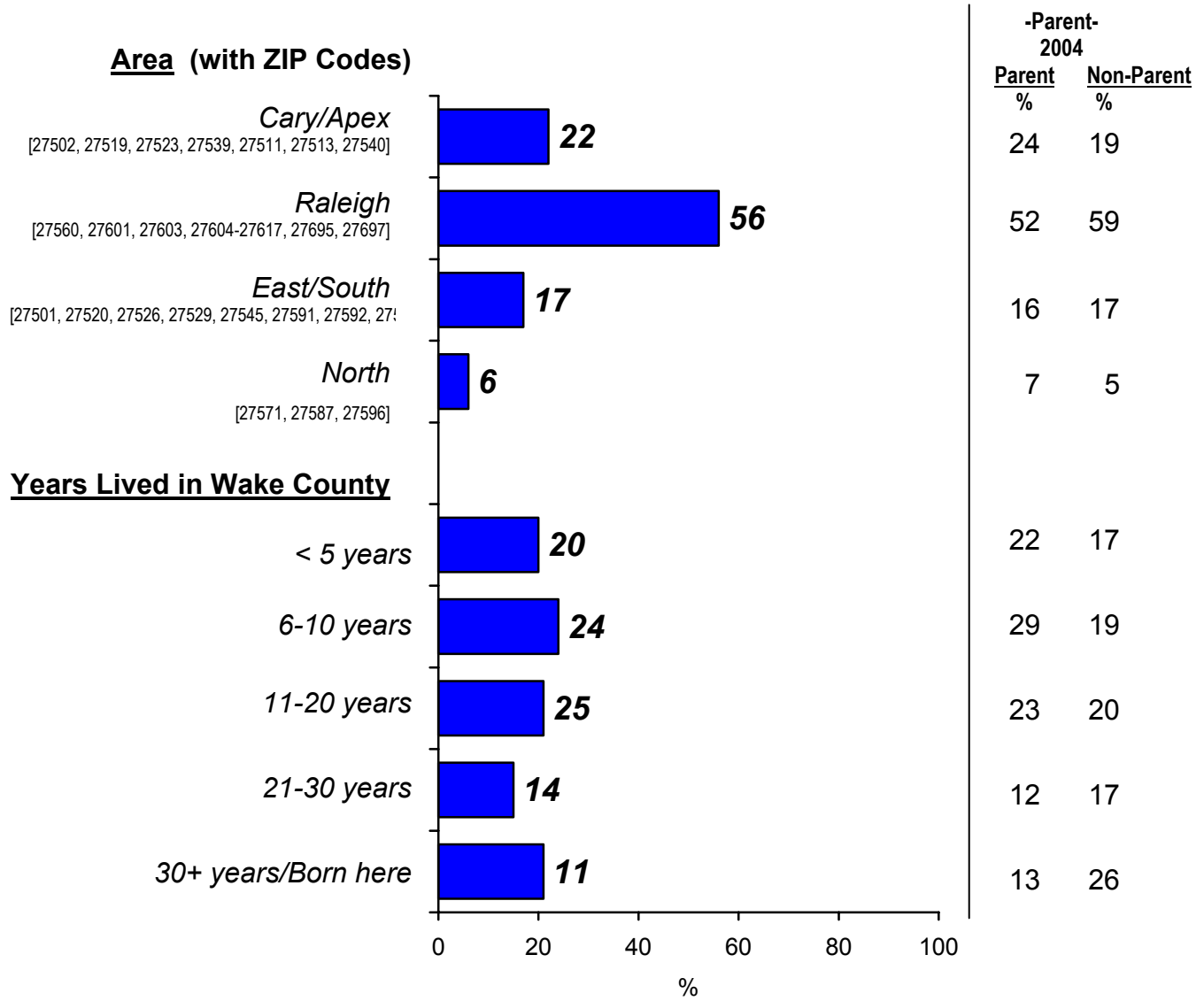
(n=650 Wake County Residents)



* 2002 sample screen = registered voters.
 + 2000 sample screen = Wake Residents

Demographic Characteristics of Sample (continued)

(n=650 Wake County Residents)



Overview of Survey Findings

General perceptions of the Wake County Public School System are positive and represent an upward trend from the 2002 poll. These positive feelings are held by respondents, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender or education level and by both parents and nonparents, and are confirmed both generally and regarding specific success factors.

A majority of those polled believe that the Wake County public schools are a safe place to learn, that Wake citizens are committed to public schools and that the Wake County Public School System is improving over time. Citizens also overwhelmingly prefer the growth measure of Goal 2008 over the standards measure of No Child Left Behind. Respondents continue to be most impressed by the percentage of Wake students who go on to a two- or four-year college after graduation.

Support for the system remains fairly strong around questions regarding fiscal needs. While a majority of respondents believe the school system needs more money and manages its funding effectively, the support for increased funding varies according to age and gender and there is only moderate support for specific revenue options that would increase taxes. The rapid growth rate of the student population presents the strongest case for increased funding for the system, and a majority of those polled believe that Wake schools will need a new bond for school construction in five years or less.

In responding to a series of questions on diversity and student assignment, Wake citizens hold conflicting opinions. Although support for maintaining racial and economic diversity in the schools has increased since 2002 and fewer than one-fourth of those polled say it should not be a priority, still a majority of those polled also believe that students should be permitted to attend the school closest to their home, regardless of overcrowding or student population.

However, the preference for “neighborhood schools” has declined since a similar question was asked in 2002. Most respondents also admitted to knowing nothing or only some about the system’s assignment policy—when given the facts about assignment, support for the policy jumps 22 by percentage points and opposition drops by 8 percentage points.

Although the results of this perception study should not be interpreted as the reality of what is happening in Wake’s schools, they do represent what our community believes to be reality. Understanding these perceptions and beliefs becomes the responsibility of Wake’s citizens and community leaders, including elected officials and the leadership of Wake Education Partnership and the Wake County Public School System.

In addition to reflecting the continued successes of the school system, the rising trends since 2002 in response to school quality questions may also reflect more effective communication efforts by the district and other education organizations and a clearer understanding among community members about the accomplishments of students, teachers, principals and administrators in our schools. However, with a constantly growing and changing population across Wake County, communications efforts must continue to expand.

Where there are persistent gaps between perception and reality, consistent, open communication may help clarify policies and practices—as focus group and poll participants demonstrated, with increased knowledge comes increasing support. However, where there are gaps between community expectations and actual school results, our citizens and our school and community leaders must begin to work together as partners to address these issues.

Results from this study provide further evidence that the public's perceptions of its schools also drive beliefs about our county as a whole. The fate of our county is inextricably tied to the fate of our public schools. County and school leaders must build upon current efforts to address challenges confronting our schools and determine adequate levels of funding to meet even higher academic goals and population growth.

II. Perceptions of Quality

Wake County and its public school system have received a host of accolades from respected publications, including #1 Best City for Education in the 2003 *Places Rated Almanac* and #3 Best Education in the Biggest Cities in the February 2004 edition of *Forbes*. Also in 2004, Superintendent Bill McNeal was named the National Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators.

However, community perceptions of quality may not be based on the same indicators that magazines or associations use for their ratings. Parents often develop opinions based on experiences with their children's schools, while those without children in the system may perceive the system through the eyes of local or national media. Others may apply memories of their own school experiences in other communities to today's classrooms in Wake County. Perceptions of quality can be based on a combination of factors, including perspectives on academic achievement, safety and comfort of school facilities, relationships with teachers, attention from administrators, fiscal management and a range of other factors.

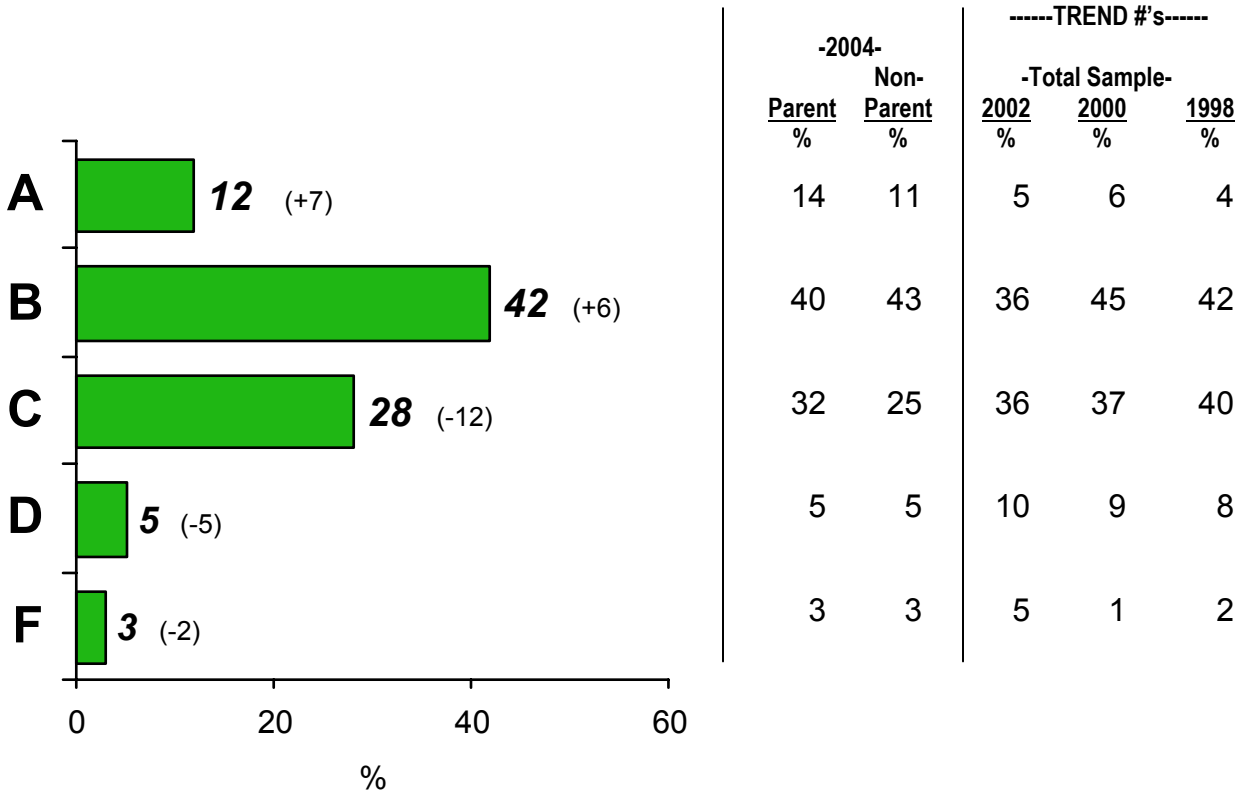
Grading of School Quality

Positive impressions of the quality of Wake schools have increased since 2002 and now are even higher than ratings in 2000 and 1998. Today, 54% grade Wake schools as either an "A" (12%) or "B" (42%), and 82% gave a passing grade ("C" or better). This 54% A/B grading represents a 13-point jump in the top two grades since 2002 and compares to 51% in 2000 and 46% in 1998.

These numbers are slightly higher than the national average—according to the 2004 "Phi Delta Kappa/ Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," 47% of national respondents gave the public schools in their community an "A" or "B" and 80% gave a passing grade.

As was true in 2002, parents and non-parents give similar levels of "A" and "B" grades to Wake schools. Poll respondents under 35 (65% grade "A" or "B") are most positive toward Wake schools, while residents over 65 also rate schools above average (58%). By region, residents in all areas are 55% positive (grade "A" or "B") except in the northern part of the county where only 31% give "A" and "B" grades while 45% give a "C."

Quality of Wake Schools – Grading*

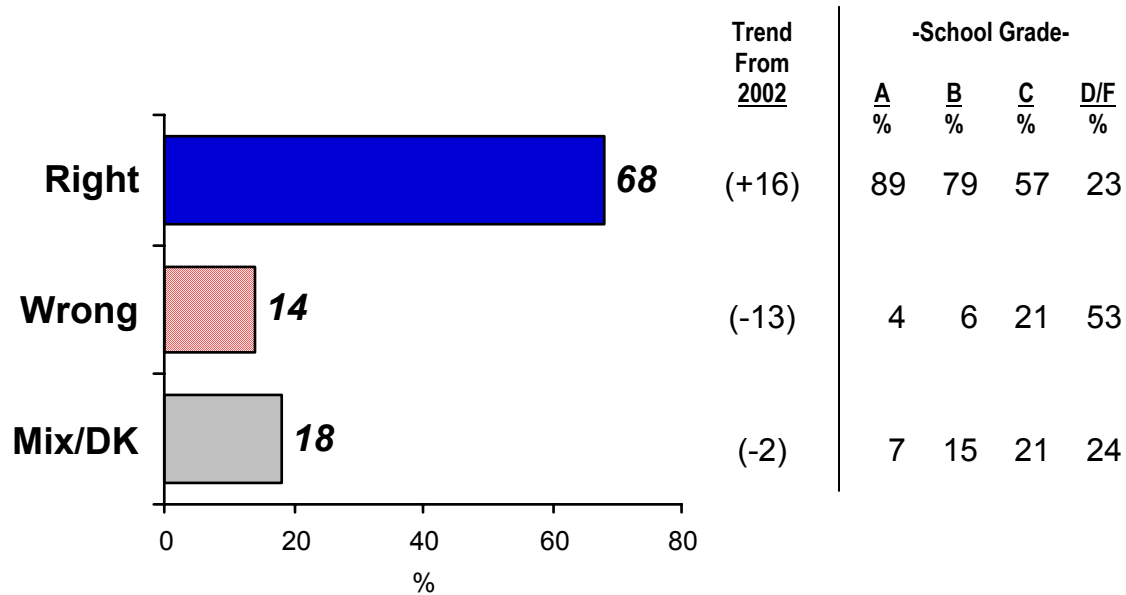


* Exact Q Text: “Students are often given grades A, B, C, D, and Fail to evaluate the quality of their work. Which grade would you give Wake County Public Schools – A, B, C, D, or Fail?”

Feelings about the quality of Wake schools continue to be strongly related to feelings about the overall direction of Wake County. Thus, as positive grades for school quality have gone up, so too have “right direction” ratings (now 68%, +16).

Satisfaction with Wake County Direction and Relationship with School Quality Grade

Do you think things in Wake County are generally heading in the right or wrong direction?



With this shift in attitude toward the positive, Wake citizens are now about 5:1 positive toward the county—a significant improvement from the 2:1 positive ratio in 2002.

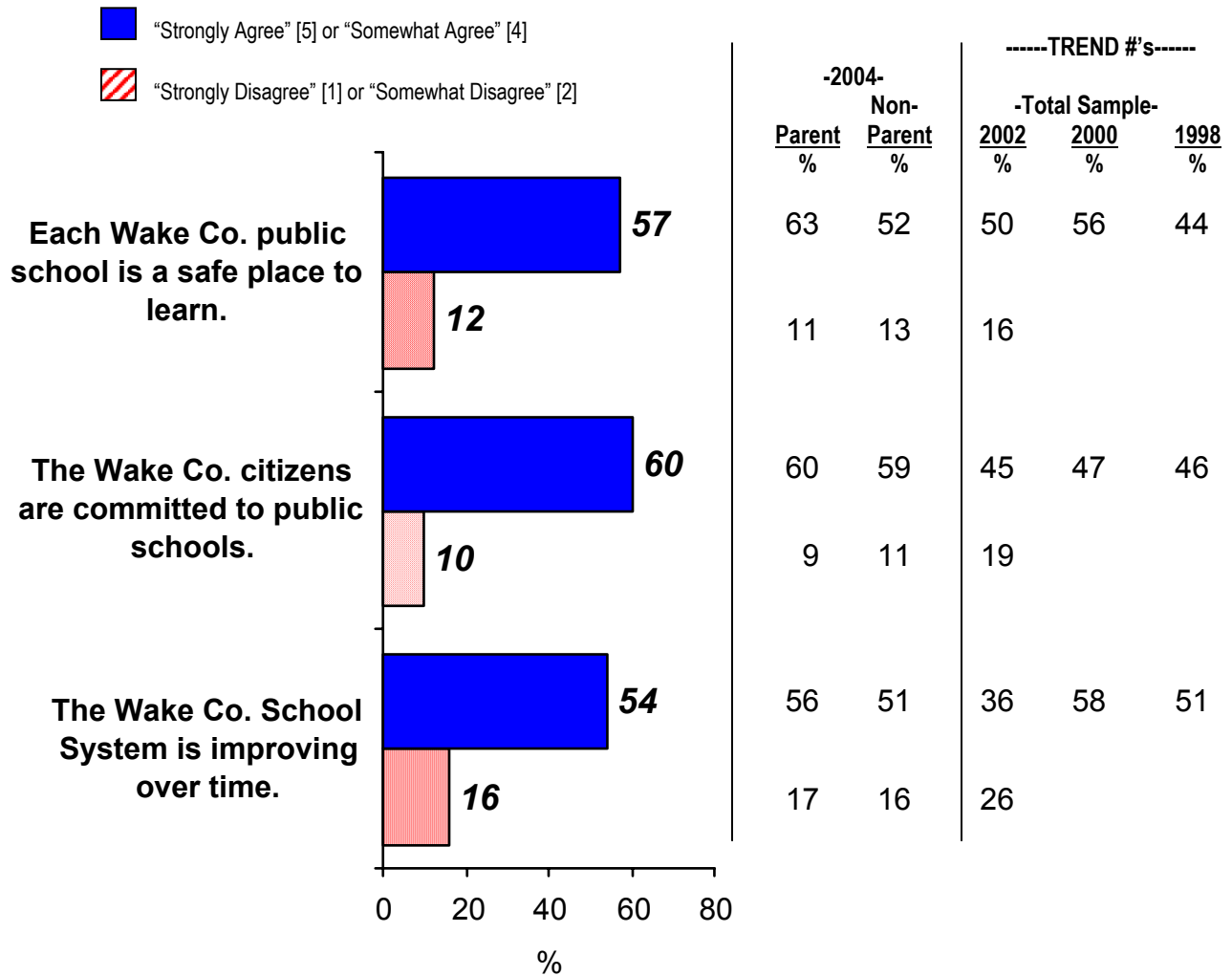
As shown above, about 80% of respondents rating Wake schools as “A” or “B” are positive toward the county’s direction, while the majority of those rating schools “D” or “F” say the county is heading in the wrong direction.

School System Goals

Consistent with the overall improvement of opinions about Wake schools, ratings are up from 2002 for Wake schools on three goal-oriented dimensions:

- Safe place to learn (now 57%; +7);
- Improving over time (now 54%; +18); and
- Having citizens committed to public schools (now 60%; +15).

Trend in School System Meeting Goals*



* Exact Q Text: "Using a scale of five to one, where "5" means you strongly agree and "1" means you strongly disagree, how strongly do you agree or disagree that...?"

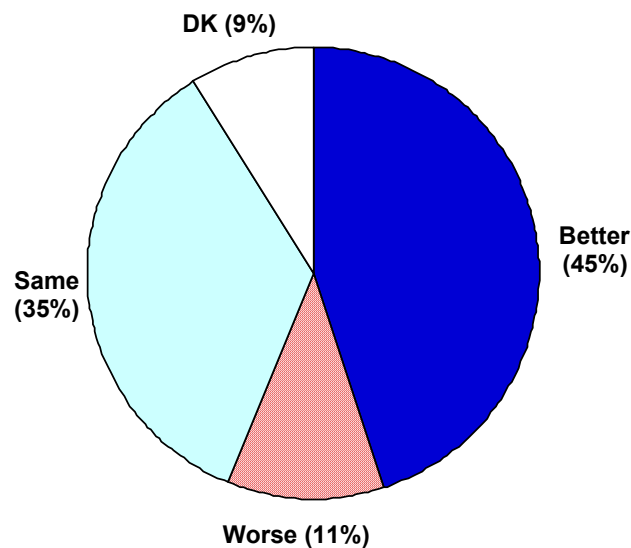
Parents tend to be slightly more positive on "safety" and "improving" than non-parents, likely because non-parents are less familiar with schools and thus have a higher "don't know" response, not a higher negative.

On "safety" and "improving," current ratings represent a bounce back to 2000 levels. On the "citizens committed" dimension, current ratings are higher than ever.

As a follow-up to the “improving over time” evaluation, poll respondents were asked to evaluate whether Wake’s public schools have gotten better, worse or stayed the same over the past five years. More say schools are now “better” (45%) than rate them as “same” (35%) or “worse” (11%). This measure confirms that more Wake citizens perceive improvement in schools today than they did in 2002.

Perception of Quality Trend in Wake Schools

Let me be more specific – do you think over the last 5 years the quality of education provided by the Wake County Public School System has gotten better, worse or stayed about the same?



Parents (47% “better”) and non-parents (43% “better”) have similar views about this trend in school quality. By area, residents of Cary/Apex (39% “better”) and northern Wake County (37% “better”) tend to be below average in their positive view, while those in Raleigh (49% “better”) are slightly more positive.

Gap Analysis: School Characteristics and Incidence of Happening

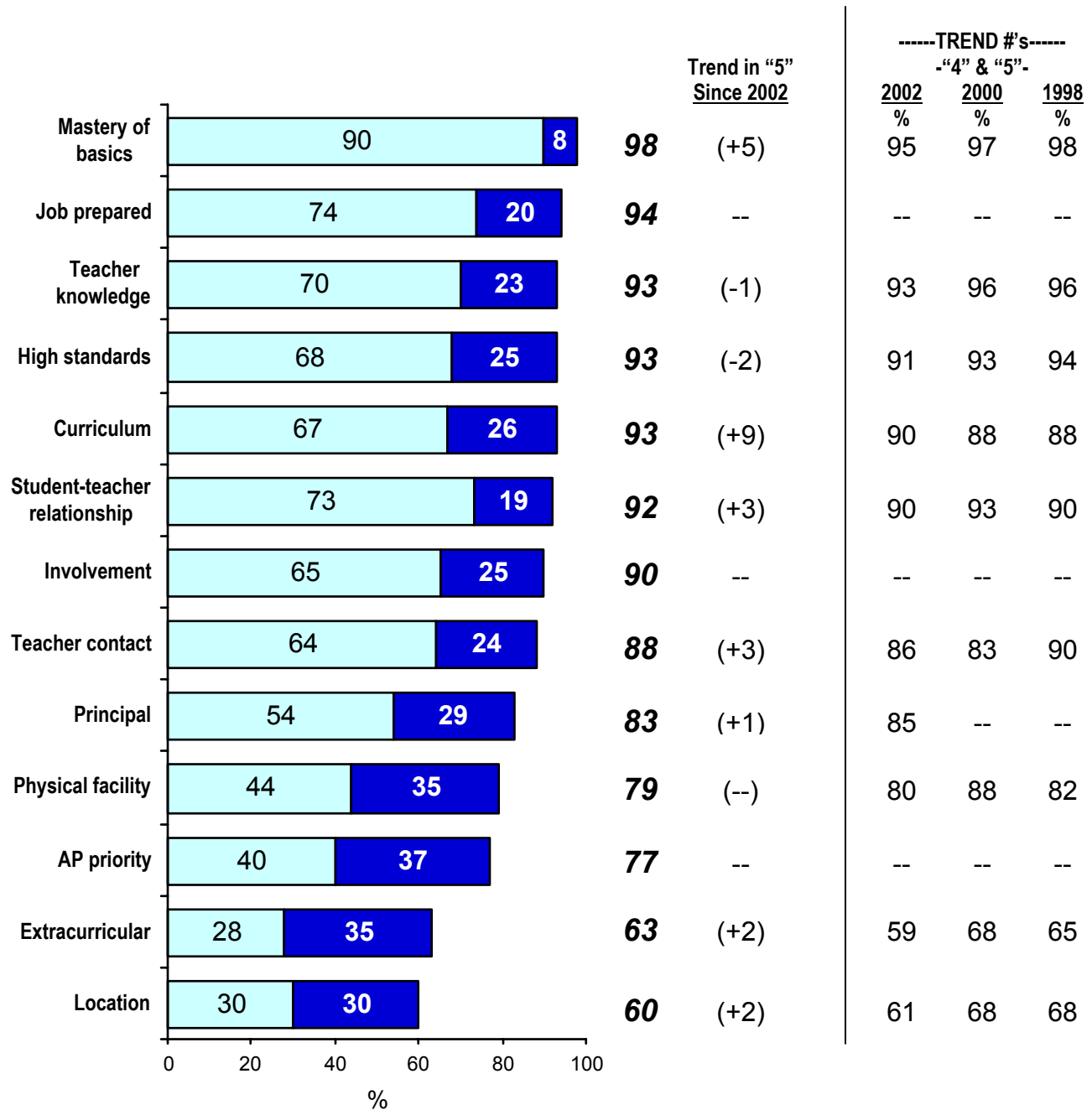
School Characteristics

The most highly valued school characteristic continues to be “mastery of basics.” Today, 90% of Wake residents rank this a “5” on a 1 to 5 scale of importance—a +5 trend since 2002 in such ratings. Several other measures score near or just above the 70% level as “5” on the successful schools importance level: “prepared students,” “qualified teachers,” “positive student-teacher relationship,” “high academic standards” and “challenging curriculum.” Each of these characteristics is rated roughly as it was in 2002 (except curriculum +9) and above 90% “important” when the “4” and “5” ratings are combined. Thematically, each has to do with the classroom environment—competently and successfully teaching the right things.

The following characteristics are discussed in the next three charts:

- a. Mastery of basics – such as reading, writing and math.
- b. Students are prepared to take jobs or continue on to higher education.
- c. Teachers with strong subject matter knowledge.
- d. High academic standards.
- e. Curriculum challenges students to meet their potential.
- f. Positive teacher-student relationships where students are treated fairly.
- g. Involvement from parents, local business and the community.
- h. Teachers initiate contact with parents about their child’s progress.
- i. Visionary leadership from the principal.
- j. Sound physical facility.
- k. Making advanced placement courses for high school students a priority.
- l. Enough choices of extracurricular activities.
- m. Convenient location.

Importance Rating of Characteristics of a Very Successful School*



* **Exact Q Text:** "Schools can be successful for a number of reasons. I would like you to tell me how important each of the following characteristics is in having a very successful school. On a 1 to five scale, where "5" is having great importance, "4" is having much importance, "3" is of some importance, "2" is of little importance, and "1" is not at all important, how important is each of the following reasons for a school to be successful.

Following the top tier of successful schools' characteristics are two items related to interactions with the exterior world – “having involvement from parents, businesses and the community” and “having teachers initiate contact with parents.” Each is mid-60s in “5” ratings, but still about 90% when “4” and “5” are included.

In the next tier of characteristics are “visionary principal,” “sound physical facility” and “advanced placement courses,” followed by “convenient location” and “extracurricular activities.”

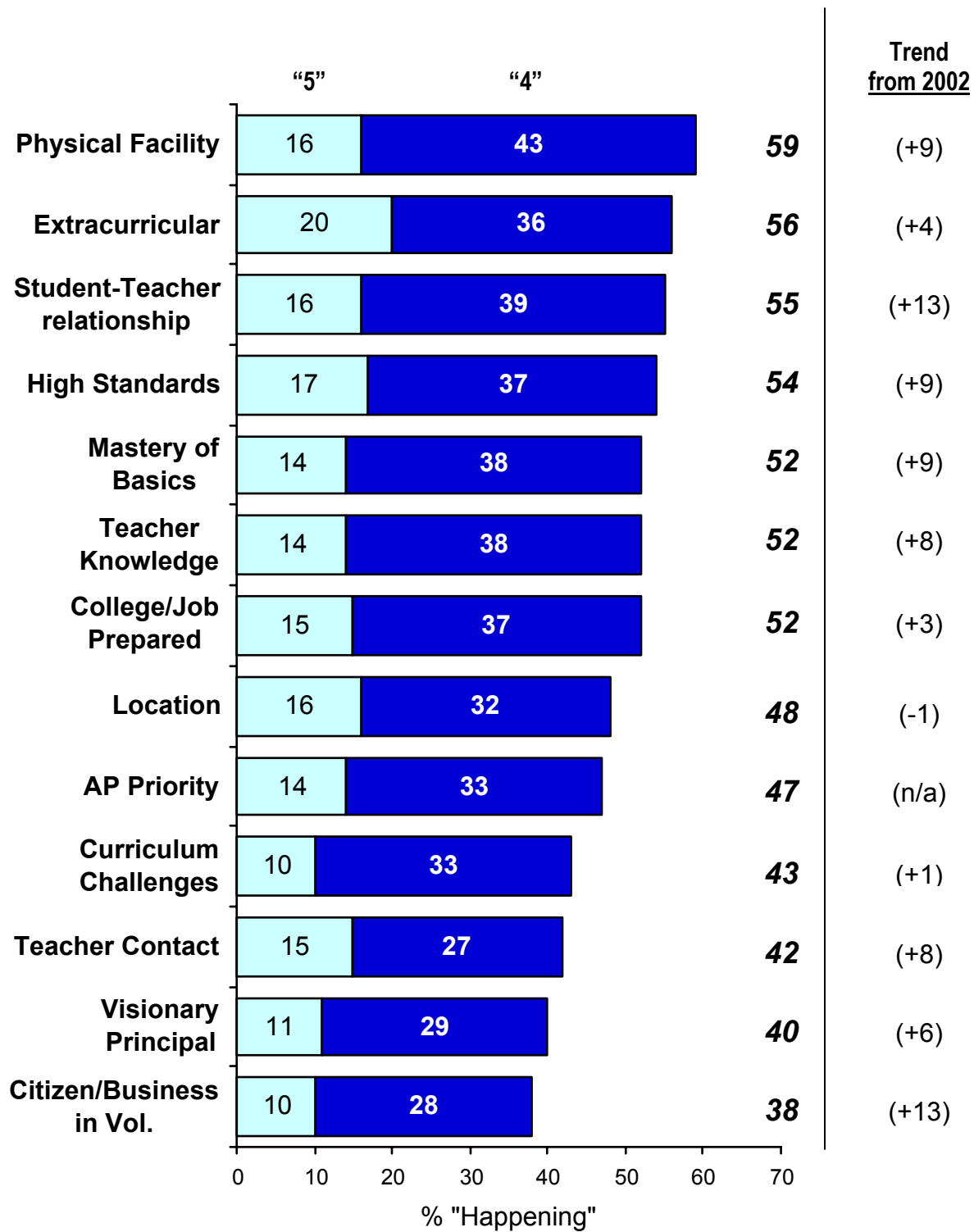
Where applicable, trends are fairly flat on these importance ratings.

Rating of Wake Schools

Wake schools get their highest achievement marks for good physical facilities, having lots of extracurricular activities and having positive student-teacher relationships. Ratings on these, as well as several other dimensions (“4” and “5” ratings), are mostly up 8 to 13 points over 2002 ratings.

Again, this increase confirms that positive feelings about Wake schools are up not only generally but also specifically over the past two years. Even on the lowest rated dimension—having a high level of citizen and business involvement in schools—the “happening” score is up 13 points since 2002.

Likelihood of “Very Successful School” Characteristics to Occur in Wake County Public Schools



Gap Analysis: “Importance” vs. “Happening”

As has been true since 1998, Wake residents continue to put a higher value on the importance of a wide range of successful school characteristics than the ratings they give to Wake schools for achievement (“happening”) on those dimensions. This creates “gaps” that are still maintained today.

But, on several dimensions, the “gaps” have reduced significantly over time, including:

- Having lots of extracurricular activities;
- Quality of physical facilities;
- Positive student teacher relationships; and
- Teacher outreach to parents.

As the following table shows, the smallest gaps are for “extracurricular activities” and “convenient location.” Largest gaps are for “community involvement,” “challenging curriculum” and “high academic standards.”

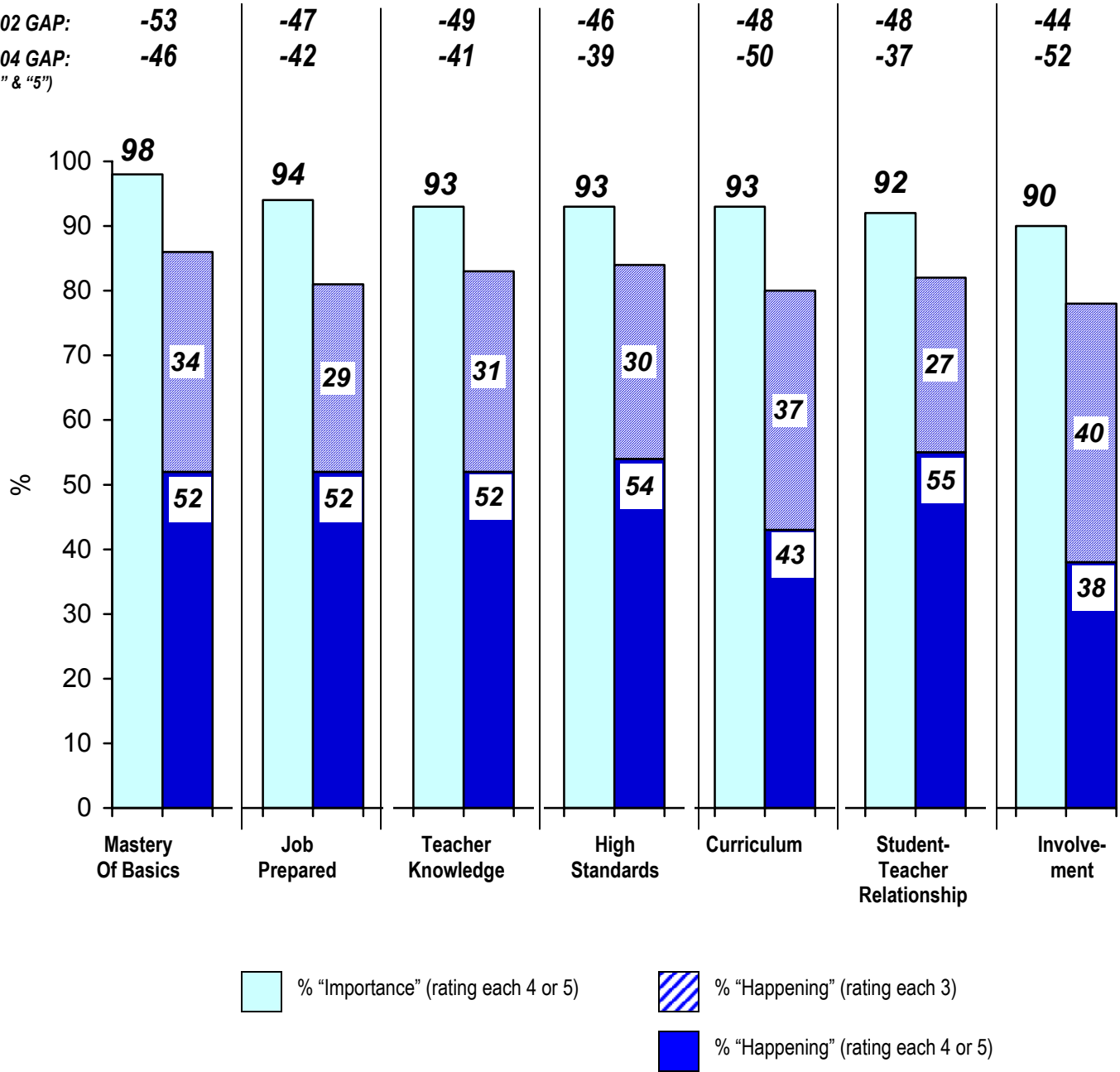
On the highest rated “importance” characteristic—mastery of basics—the gap is 46 points. This represents a consistent trend among parents, but a reduction in the gap among non-parents. In fact, this trend of a smaller gap among non-parents occurs on each of the following dimensions...

- High academic standards;
- Mastery of basics;
- Visionary principals;
- Knowledgeable teachers;
- Positive student-teacher relationships;
- Condition of physical facilities; and
- Convenient location.

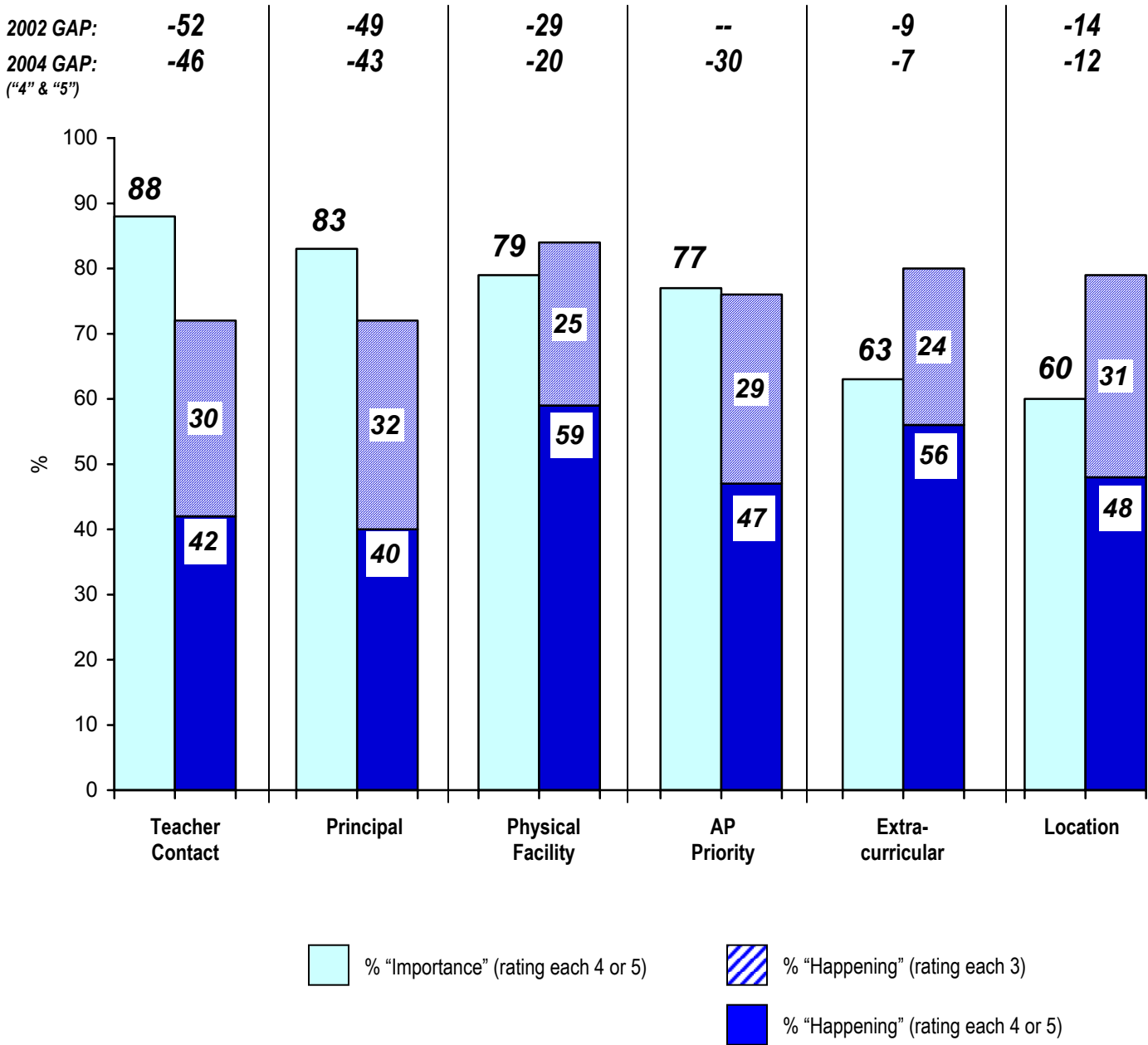
This trend of significantly reduced performance gaps confirms the improved attitude among Wake citizens—but especially non-parents—toward Wake public schools over the last two years. Among parents, the performance gap also is reduced on the dimension of “physical facilities.” This may signal a positive impact from the passage of the 2003 school bond package resulting in school building investments.

Gap Analysis: Likelihood of “Very Successful School” Characteristics to Occur in Wake County Public Schools vs. Importance Rating

2002 GAP: -53
 2004 GAP: -46
 (“4” & “5”)



Gap Analysis: Likelihood of “Very Successful School” Characteristics to Occur in Wake County Public Schools vs. Importance Rating (continued)



Evaluation of Local Schools

A majority of parents continue to believe the quality of local Wake County public schools in their area are “better” (53%) than those in other parts of the county, representing a stable to slightly downward trend (-2). Only 8% of parents (down 4 points from 2002) say their local schools are “worse”; only 4% of non-parents say “worse.”

Evaluation of Local Wake County Public School vs. Others

Overall, would you say that the quality of local schools that either your child attends or are near your home are better, worse, or about the same as those in other parts of the Wake County Public School System?

	-Parents-					-Area-			
	<u>Total</u> %	<u>Parent</u> %	<u>Trend from 2002</u>	<u>Non-Parent</u> %	<u>Trend from 2002</u>	<u>Cary/ Apex</u> %	<u>Raleigh</u> %	<u>East/ South</u> %	<u>North</u> %
Better	46	53	(-2)	40	(-1)	56	49	29	34
Worse	6	8	(-4)	4	(-)	4	4	17	3
Same	39	32	(+5)	45	(+4)	33	37	47	55
Don't Know	9	7	(+1)	11	(+2)	8	10	7	8

Perceptions vary by area of the county. Cary/Apex citizens are most likely to say their schools are “better” (56%) followed by Raleigh residents (49%). However, residents in the southeastern (29% “better” and 47% “same”) and northern part of the county (34% “better”/55% “worse”) are less likely to see local school superiority, but instead parity.

Even parents who home-school their children or send them to private school (8% of all poll respondents) are more likely to say their local community schools are “better” (51%) than “worse” (9%) or “same” (31%) in other parts of the county.

III. Perceptions of Finances

With an annual operating budget of more than \$780 million, the Wake County Public School System is the 24th-largest school system in the county and the third-largest employer in the Raleigh-Durham area. As might be expected, the expenditure of this level of public funds is subjected to a rigorous budgeting process and significant oversight, including various audits by an independent accounting firm and multiple reviews by community groups—all have shown the system to be a good steward of the public’s dollars. The system is funded by a variety of revenue sources that are separated into federal (5%), state (62%) and local (28%) categories. Local funding is allocated by the Wake County Board of Commissioners.¹

While the operating budget addresses instructional and administrative costs as well as the maintenance and repair of existing facilities, the capital budget addresses larger facilities projects with budgets of \$100,000 or more. Since 1986, more than 50 new schools have been added and dozens of schools have been expanded to accommodate the growing student population. This expansion has been funded in six phases, including the current Plan 2000, a \$550 million school building program approved by the public in November 2000, and Plan 2004, a \$550 million building program that includes \$450 million from the bond referendum that voters approved in October 2003.

Fiscal Condition of Schools

The vast majority of Wake citizens continue to believe Wake schools need more money (65%) despite a slight trend down (-5) in this measure from the 2002 poll conducted before passage of the 2003 school bond. By 2.5:1, Wake citizens still believe the school district “needs more money” versus already “having enough” to meet its needs. There is no significant difference between how parents (64-27) and non-parents (65-25) feel about the continuing need for more money for Wake schools.

Opinions of whether or not Wake schools have enough money to meet their needs vary by age and, to some extent, by gender. As the respondents’ age increases, they are more likely to think the system has “enough money”:

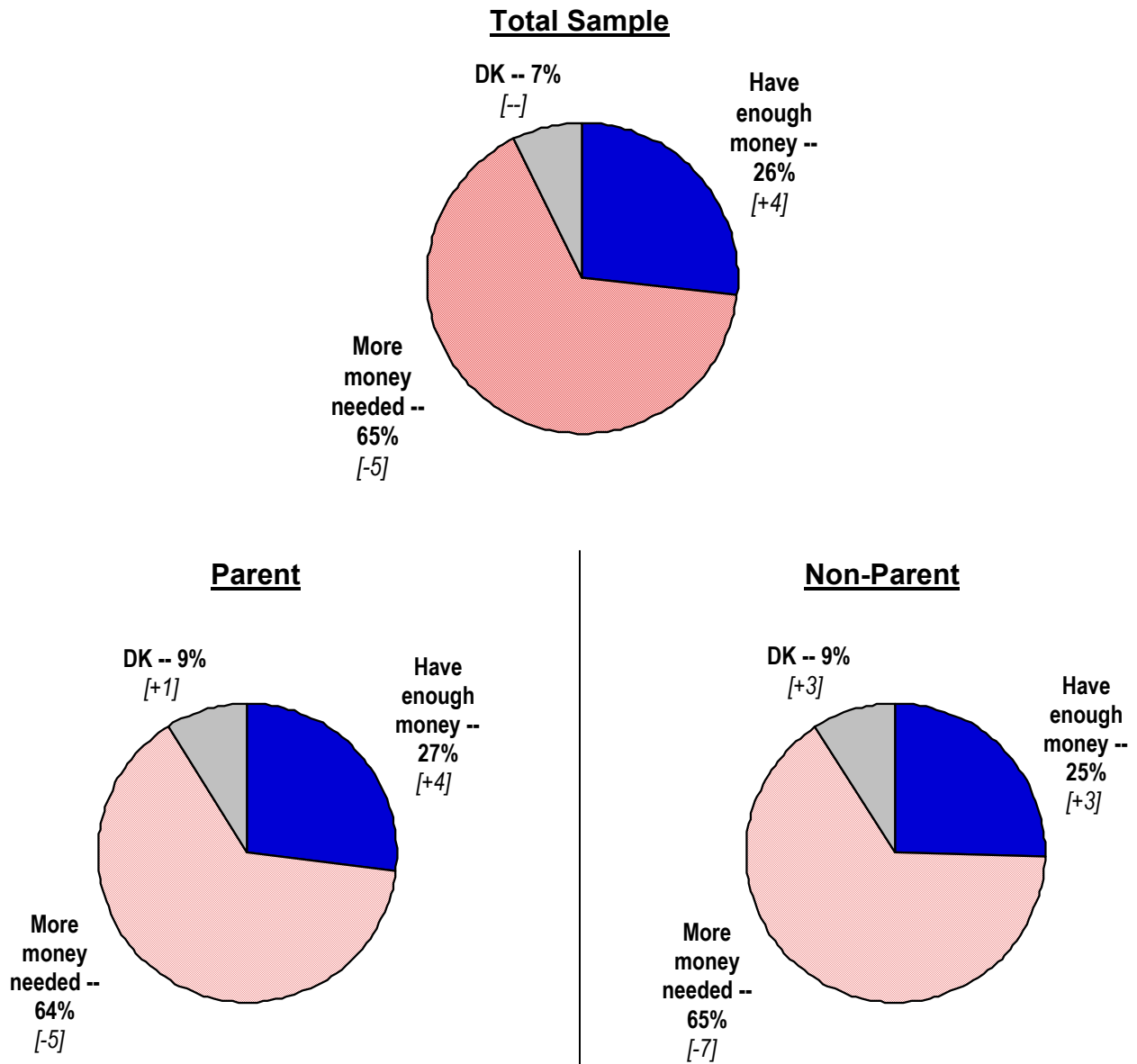
- 18-34: 15% say the system has “enough”
- 35-44: 26% say the system has “enough”
- 45-54: 28% say the system has “enough”
- 55-64: 31% say the system has “enough”
- 65+: 34% say the system has “enough”

¹ See Wake Education Partnership’s report, “Quality Matters 2004: A Wake Community Review of the Public’s Schools,” published in April 2004 for more information about spending.

In fact, among men age 55 and over, this figure reaches 44%. But among those over age 55, women (20% “have enough” vs. 67% “need more”) are much more open to additional school revenue than are men (44% “have enough” vs. 50% “need more”).

Evaluation of Fiscal Condition of Wake County Public School System

In your opinion, do Wake County’s public schools have enough money to meet their needs over the next three to five years or is more money needed?

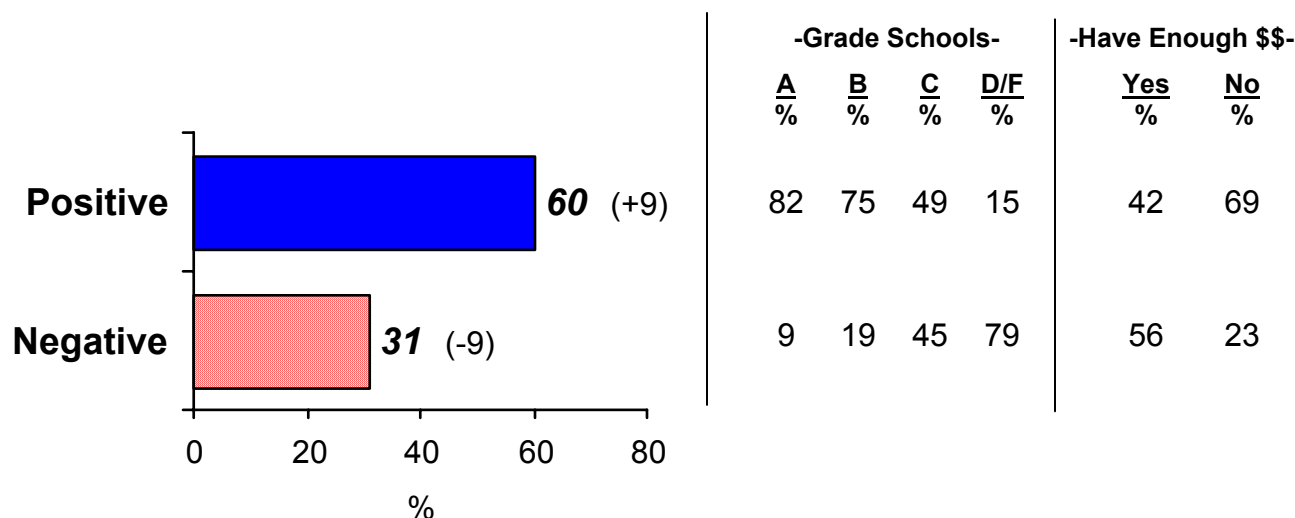


Fiscal Management

A solid majority also positively rates the Wake County Public School System for its effective management of tax dollars (60% positive). This overall 2:1 positive rating is equally consistent among parents (60-32) and non-parents (60-30). As with other poll measures, Wake citizens have become more positive about the district's financial management abilities since 2002; the trend is up 9 points in the positive matched by an equal 9-point drop in the negative.

Evaluation of How Well the Wake County Public School System Manages Money

In general, how would you rate the job the Wake County public school district does efficiently managing the tax money it receives and spends -- excellent, good, not so good, or poor?



As expected, positive grade ratings for overall quality of schools are associated with a positive fiscal management rating and vice versa. Those rating schools a "C" are split 49% positive to 45% negative regarding fiscal management, while "A/B" graders are overwhelmingly positive and "D/F" graders are overwhelmingly negative.

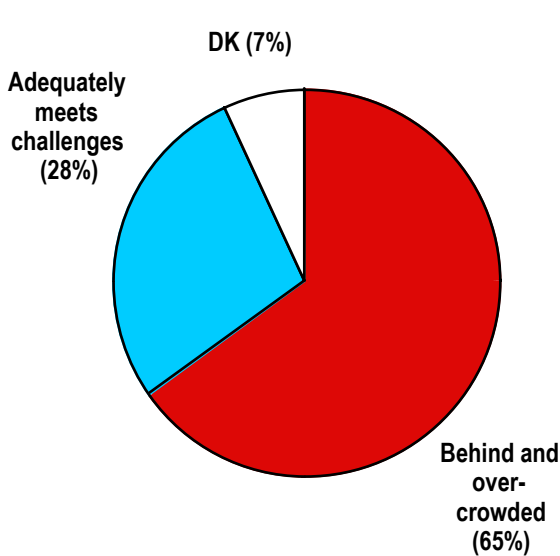
Of those who feel Wake schools need more money, 69% are positive and 23% are negative toward the district for its fiscal management skills, suggesting that citizens do not blame bureaucratic waste for the lack of money. Thus, the district has reasonably good credibility to ask for additional tax revenues.

Growth and Bond Money

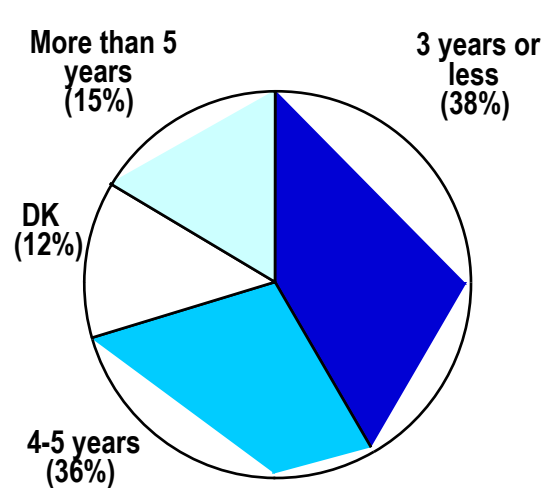
As focus groups showed, Wake citizens closely link student population growth with the need for additional funding. In a result similar to the “need more money vs. have enough” measure, Wake citizens say by 68% to 28% (roughly 2.5:1) that Wake schools are not keeping up with student enrollment growth and overcrowding remains a problem.

As a result, 64% believe another school bond (to build new schools to handle overcrowding) will be needed in five years or less, and 38% believe the need will come in three years or less.

Growth: Opinion of WCPSS’ Ability to Handle Growth and Estimate of Years Before Next Schools Bond is Needed



Do you feel the Wake school system today adequately meets the challenges of rapid student population growth OR are schools behind in meeting this need and overcrowded as a result?



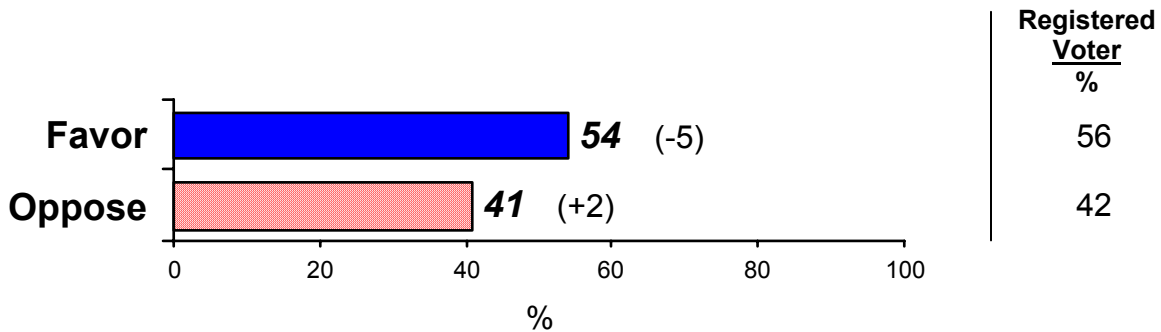
As you may know, Wake voters last year ... in 2003, approved a \$400 million school bond ballot issue to build new schools. Approximately how many years worth of student growth do you think this bond will cover before voters must be asked to support a new bond issue?

Revenue Options

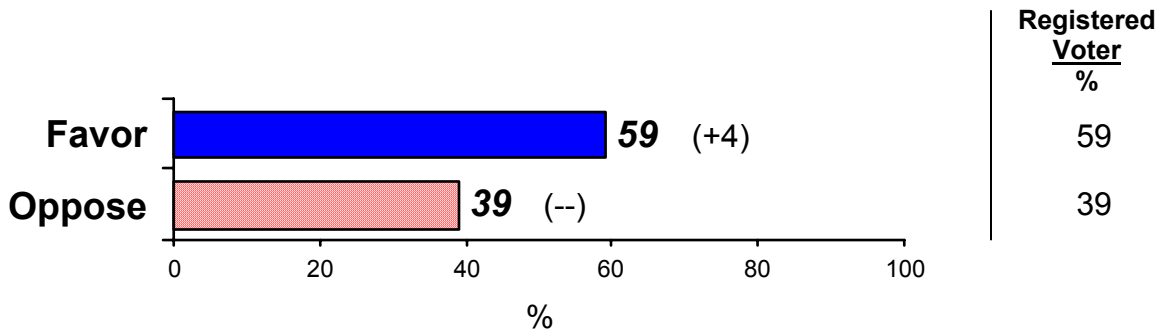
Relatively slim majorities of Wake citizens support each of three tested revenue options for raising money for Wake schools, but all at a level lower than the 65% who say “more money is needed” or the 65% who say Wake schools are “behind in meeting the needs of overcrowding.” Still, a fairly strong 59% claim to favor a half-cent sales tax for schools (a +4 trend in support), followed by 54% support for a schools impact fee and 53% support for higher property taxes.

Support for Various Revenue Raising Options (Trend from 2002)

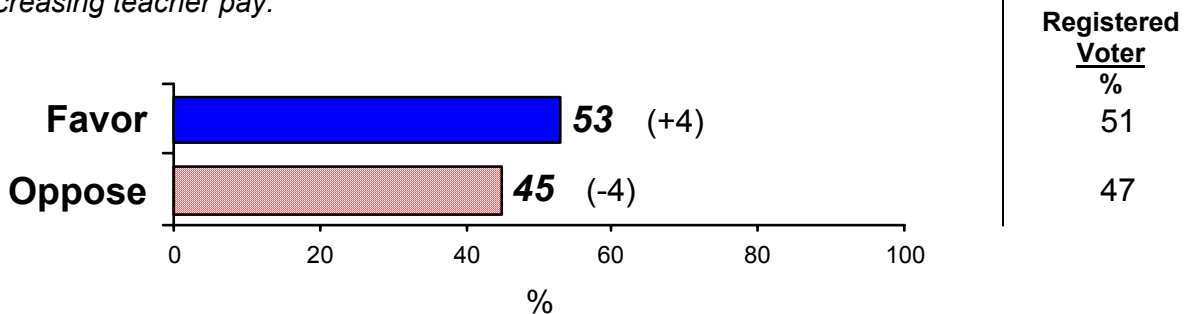
Imposing an impact fee on new homes built in Wake County with the money going to schools.



Raising the local sales tax in Wake County by one-half percent and dedicating all the money to schools.



Increasing county property taxes to pay for hiring more teachers, replacing retiring teachers and increasing teacher pay.

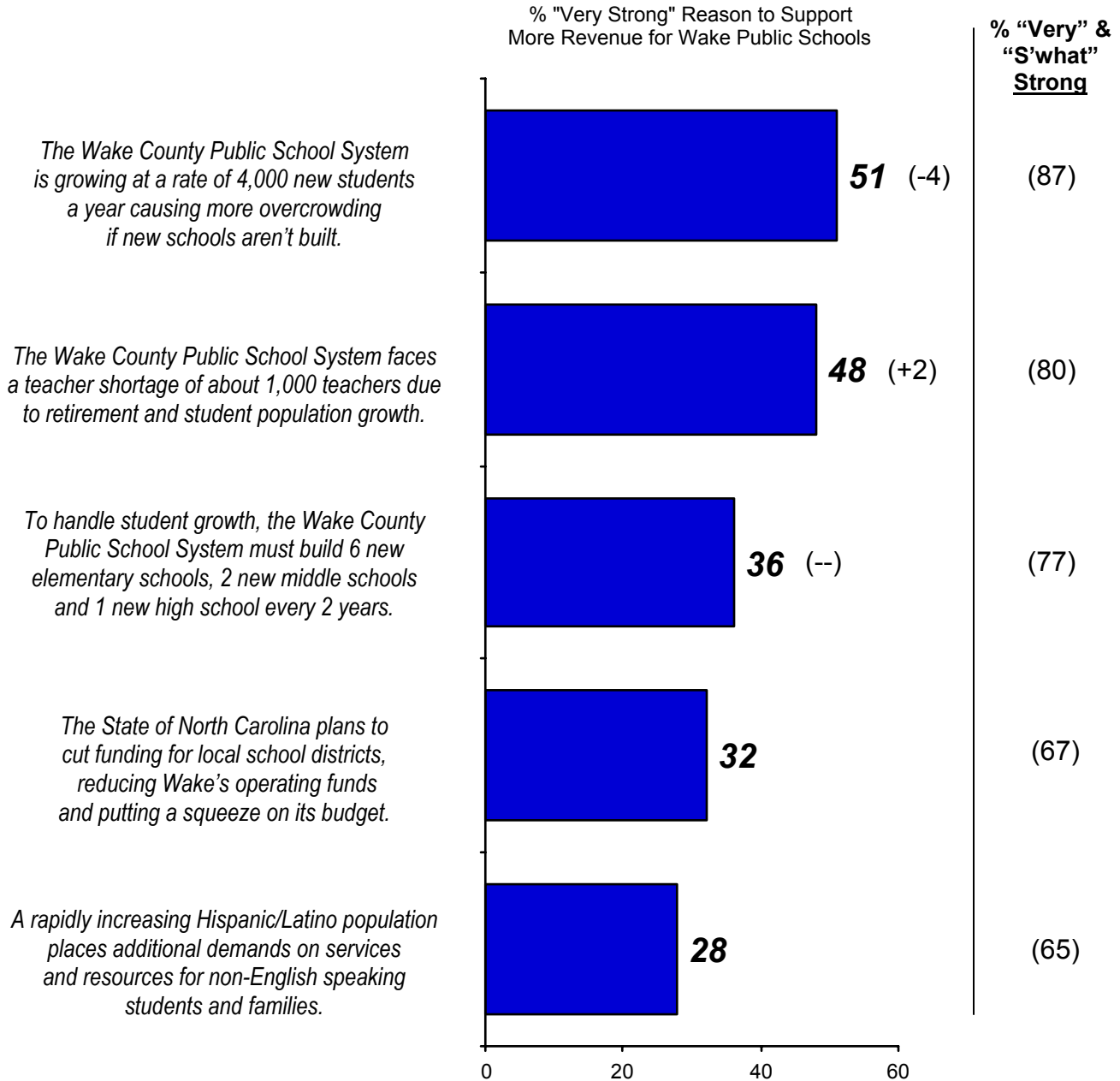


The schools sales tax concept is equally supported by parents (59%) as non-parents (59%), with the exception of private/home school parents who actually oppose (56%) more than support (42%) higher school sales taxes. Still, among seniors, support for a sales tax is a strong 64%, with women over 55 (70%) more positive than men over 55 (50%). Seniors are still positive (53%) but less so for a schools property tax increase. Older men oppose a property tax increase by 10 points—54% to 44%.

Growth in the number of students and shortage of teachers are the two most powerful reasons to motivate support for new school revenues. These dynamics of overcrowding messages each score around 50% “very strong” and above 80% as at least “somewhat strong.”

Detailing the specific number of schools needed to handle growth appears slightly less persuasive than highlighting the number of new teachers and new students. Still, 77% find this “secondary” message about building needs to be at least “somewhat persuasive.” Threats of state budget cuts and the growing ESL needs also score in the second tier of persuadability, with decent secondary persuasive strength.

Persuasiveness of Pro-Revenue Statements
(Trend from 2002)



IV. Perceptions of Issues

In addition to asking about perceptions of school quality and school finance, issues-related questions in this poll focused on diversity and student assignment, district accomplishments, English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, goal setting and awareness of Wake Education Partnership. Previous polls have also considered communication efforts, volunteer involvement, school size and vouchers.

Diversity and Student Assignment

With sustained growth in student enrollment and the requisite opening of new schools in ever more outlying sections of the county, populating new schools and maintaining balanced enrollment will continue to present challenges to school leaders and the community. At the start of the 2004-05 school year, the Wake County Public School System welcomed more than 113,950 students—an increase of more than 5,400 over the previous year—into 134 schools across the county.

Understandably, parents tend to view changes in assignment through the lens of their family and the needs of their own children. School administrators and the Board of Education, however, are charged with serving the needs of all children who attend Wake's public schools, sometimes seemingly placing them at odds with the very community they serve. Research indicates that the policies of the Wake County Public School System to limit the number of poor children being served in any one school are sound and provide academic benefits for all students, not just those who are at-risk.² Questions in this section of the Community Assessment attempt to clarify community support for and understanding of these policies.

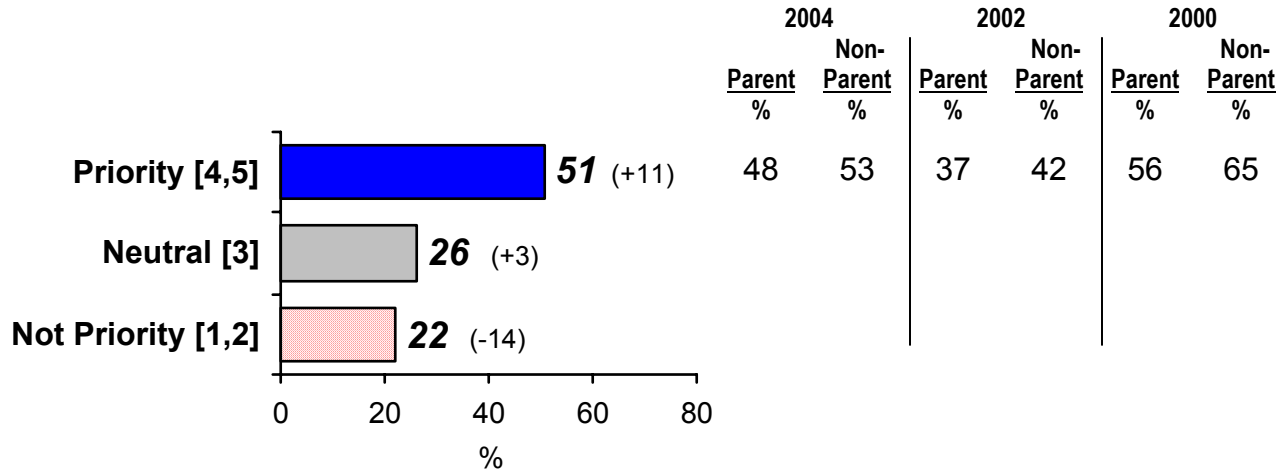
Priorities

The trend in importance of achieving diversity and limiting concentration of low performing students has gone up since 2002. Now, 51% would make achieving racial and economic school diversity a priority, up 11 points from 2002 although still below 2000 levels. Limiting the percentage of low performing students per school as a priority is up eight points since 2002, now equal to 2000 levels at 37%. Equal percentages now say this "is not" (36%) as "is" (37%) a priority. Parents and non-parents tend to have equal opinions on low-performing student limits, while school diversity continues to be a slightly higher priority for non-parents than parents.

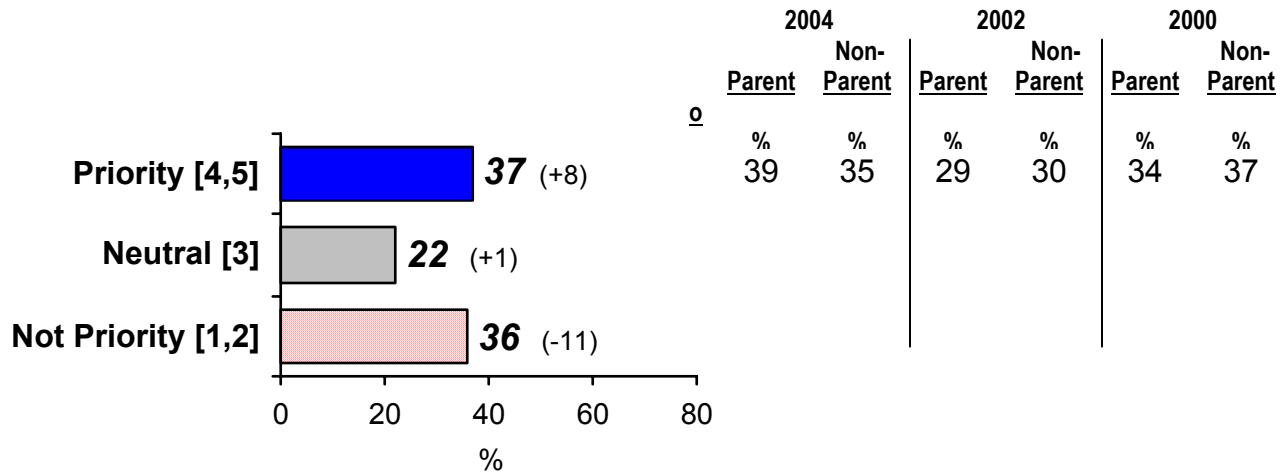
² See Wake Education Partnership's report, "Making Choices: Diversity, Student Assignment and Quality in Wake's Public Schools," published in April 2003 for a review of this research.

Opinions on School Diversity Priorities*
(Trend from 2002)

a. To maintain racial and economic diversity in the schools.



b. To limit the number of low-performing students at each school in order to protect the quality of schools.



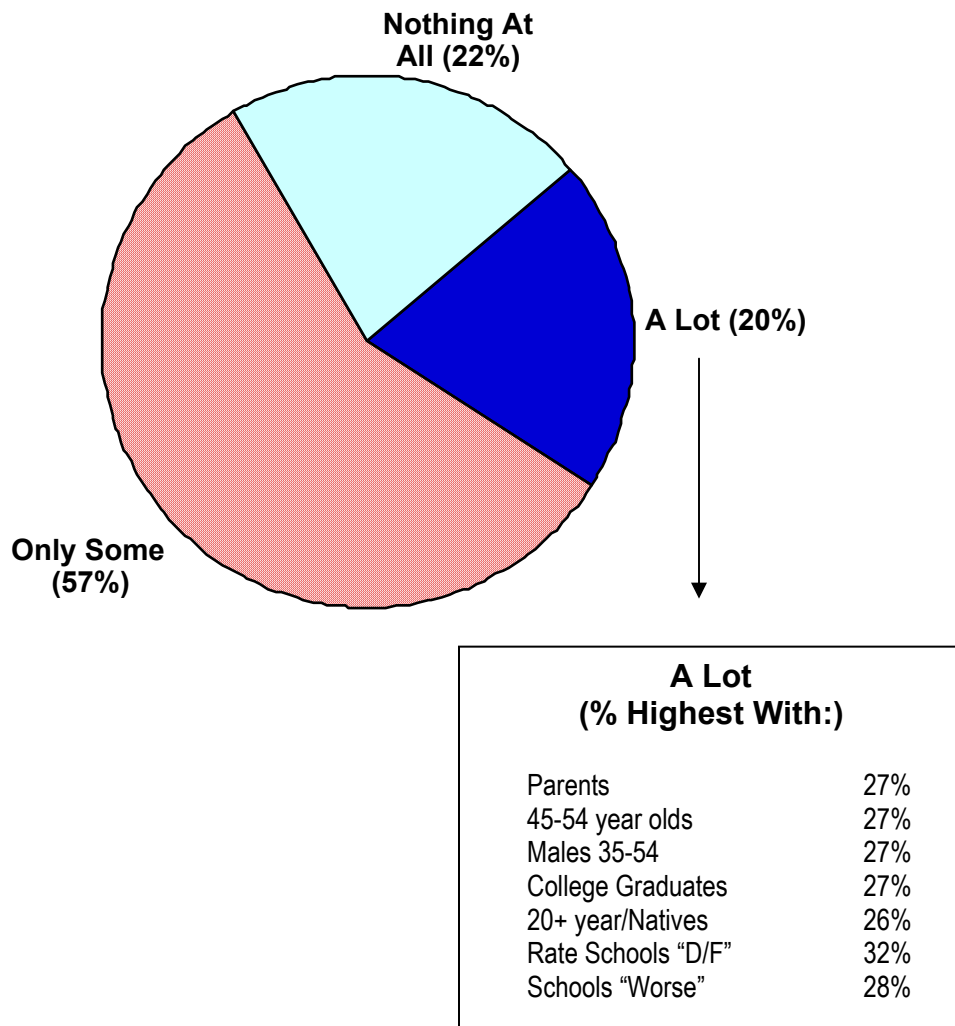
* Exact Q Text: "Tell me how big a priority these two actions should be for the Wake County public schools. Use a scale from one to five, where "1" means "not a priority" and "5" means "top priority."

Assignment Awareness

Most Wake citizens (77%) have at least some familiarity with the schools' assignment policy and one-in-five claim to have "a lot" of knowledge. Parents (27%) are higher than non-parents (14%) in having "a lot" of awareness about assignment. Among these parents of children 18 and under, those with a child in Wake schools rate 34% in having "a lot" of awareness vs. 16% for private/home school parents.

Assignment Policy – Awareness

How much would you say you know about the Wake County Public School System's assignment policy – a lot, only some or nothing at all?

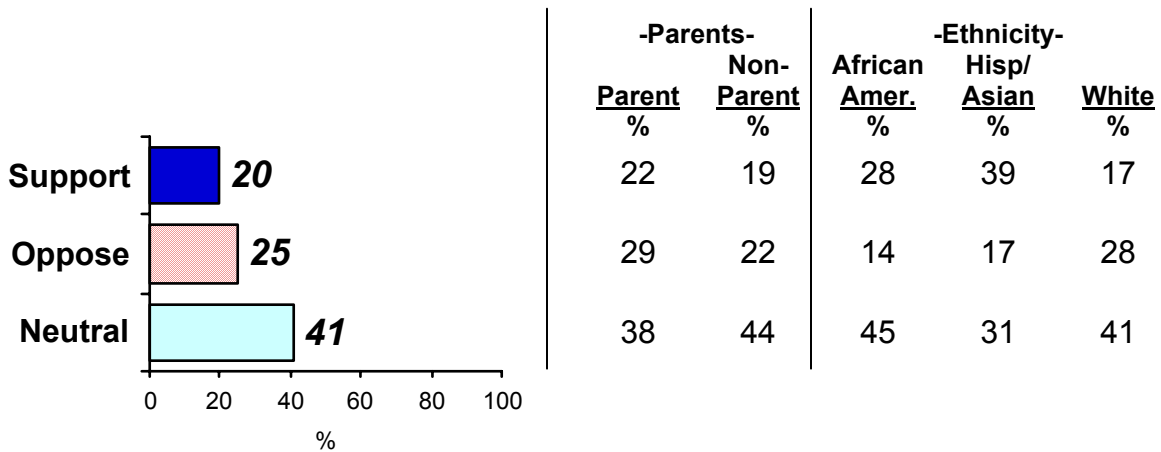


Assignment Opinions

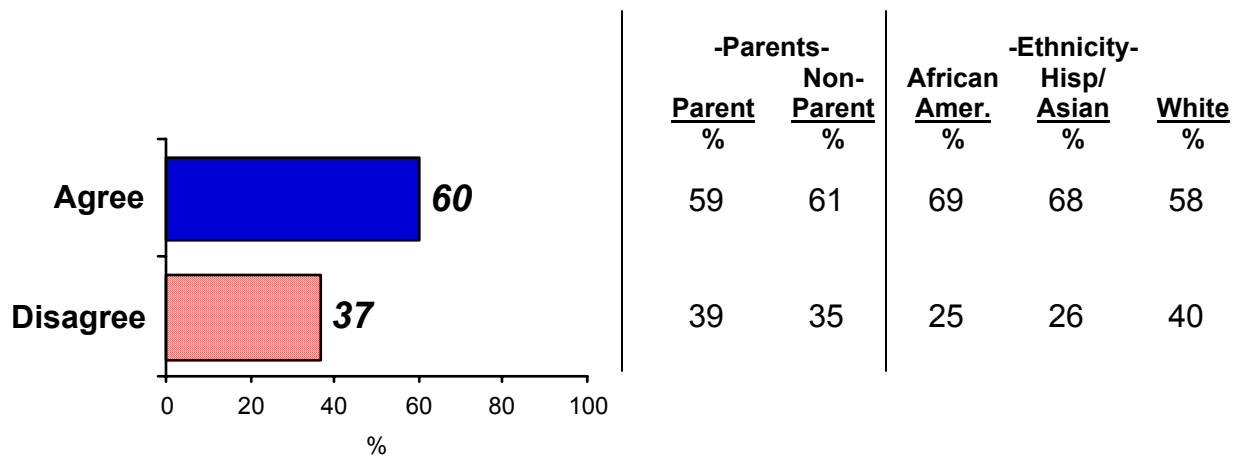
In general “conceptual” opinion, Wake voters tend mostly to be “neutral” (41%) about assignment. Those taking a position are slightly more opposed (25%) than supportive (20%) of the assignment policy based on current knowledge and media reports.

Opinions of Assignment

General Opinion: *In general, would you say you are more in support of, more in opposition to or more neutral toward this assignment policy?*



Informed Opinion: *As you may know, students in Wake County are assigned to schools in order to fill new schools, ease crowding at existing schools and maintain student body diversity. First of all, tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with this policy?*



When told of the purpose of assignment—fill new schools, ease overcrowding, and maintain student body diversity—support for assignment jumps to 60% (up 40 points over initial positive reaction). As seen in 2002 and in recent focus groups, the specifics about the assignment policy—how it works, why it is in place, what it achieves—must be communicated regularly to Wake citizens to build understanding and support.

In initial “general” opinions on assignment, African-Americans are 2:1 in support (28%) over opposition (14%), with a similar support ratio among Hispanic and Asian citizens (38% vs. 17%). While general opinions are more negative (22-29) among all parents of children 18 or under, among just parents of Wake public school students opinions are slightly more positive (27%) than negative (25%). Private/home school parents, however, are much more negative (42%) than positive (11%) about assignment.

The pattern of higher support among African-Americans, Hispanics and Asians than whites continues after information about assignment is provided—minority opinion moves toward 69% positive vs. 25% negative, while white citizen opinion moves to 58% positive vs. 40% negative. Private/home schools parents stay negative (42% positive, 54% negative) even after assignment information is provided.

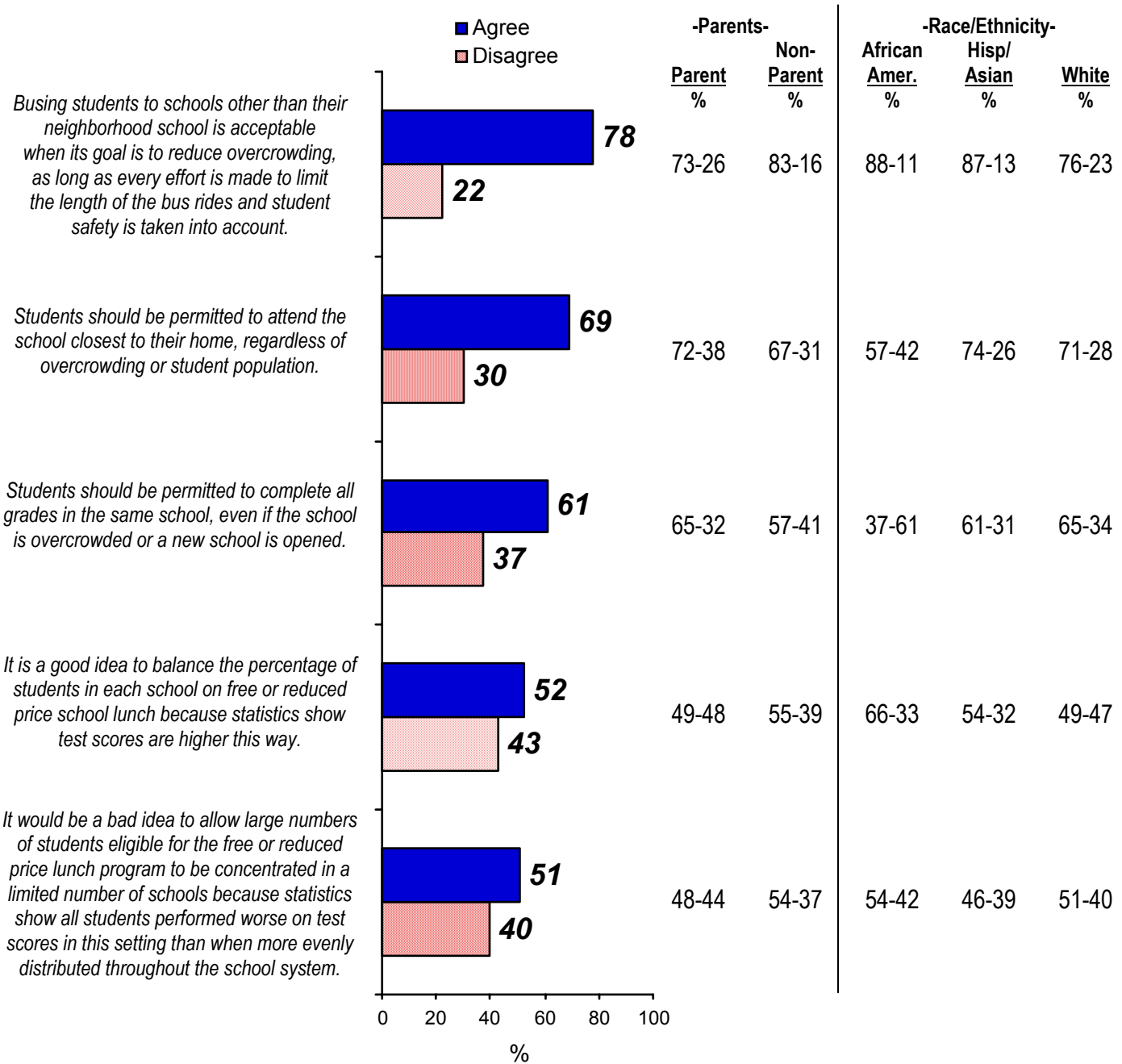
Assignment Policy Statements – Pro and Con

A large majority of Wake citizens (78%) support busing students to reduce overcrowding when provided assurances that the length of ride is limited and student safety is taken into account. This response is much higher than the slight majority support for two concepts behind limiting the number of free or reduced lunch students per school. By 52-43, Wake citizens agree to have such limits because “statistics show test scores are higher this way” and by 51-40 they agree it would be a bad idea NOT to have such limits, resulting in concentration in just a small number of schools.

Still, a higher 69% agree with the “closest to home” proposition, even if school overcrowding results, and 61% agree to “complete all grades at the same schools” concept even if that school is overcrowded. Thus, it appears opponents of assignment have simpler and more acceptable arguments—close to home and allow for full completion at one school—than do assignment proponents.

However, the idea of neighborhood schools has declined in popularity over the last four years. In a similar question in the 2000 Community Assessment, 79% of respondents supported allowing students to attend closest school, “even if it means schools may not be diverse,” while 19% opposed such a plan.

Opinions of Assignment Policy Statements



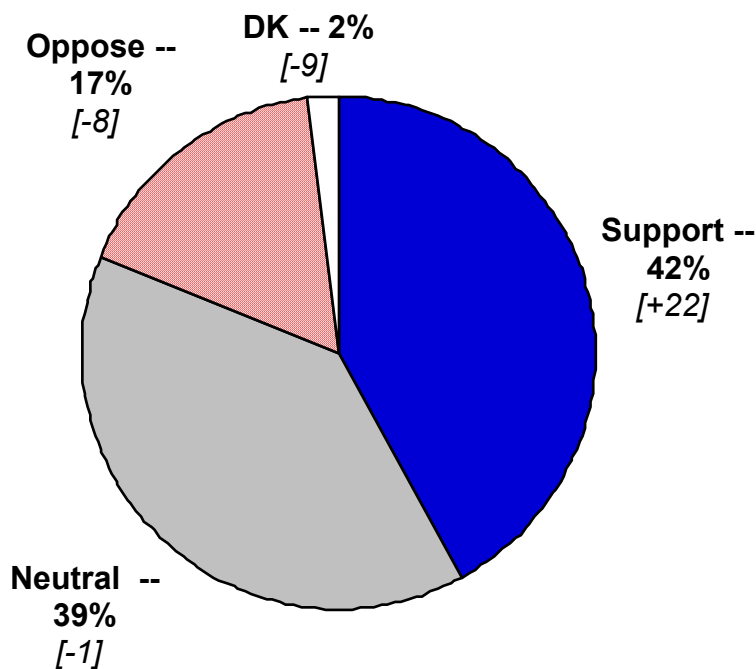
African-Americans consistently take a stronger pro-assignment view than others on all of these statement tests. Parents tend to be slightly less enthusiastic than non-parents in taking the pro-assignment position while Hispanic and Asian citizens express strong preference for “neighborhood” schools.

Assignment – Informed Opinion
(Change From Initial Opinion)

On assignment, here are some facts:

1. *On average, fewer than 4 percent of Wake students are reassigned each year;*
2. *86 percent of students attend a school within 5 miles of their home; and*
3. *National research and Wake County results, show that assignment policies which limit the number of students on subsidized meals to no more than 40 percent per school results in HIGHER TEST scores for all students by not isolating lower income students into just a few schools.*

Knowing this, is your opinion of the Wake Schools’ assignment policy...mostly supportive, mostly opposed, or neutral?



English as a Second Language Policy

More than 80 different languages are spoken within the Wake County student population and more than 4,400 students are served through the system's English as a Second Language (ESL) program. At current growth rates, ESL enrollment in Wake County is projected to be 14,000 students by 2008-09.

The 2003 budget for the ESL program is just under \$7 million, including federal, state and local funds. As the number of ESL students continues to grow, funding must accelerate to keep up with this fast-paced growth. For every additional 50 English-language learners, approximately \$40,000 of additional funding is required to maintain the program at current student/teacher ratios. Support for materials and supplies is an additional cost. Projected growth will require \$6.4 million in additional funding to maintain the ESL program.

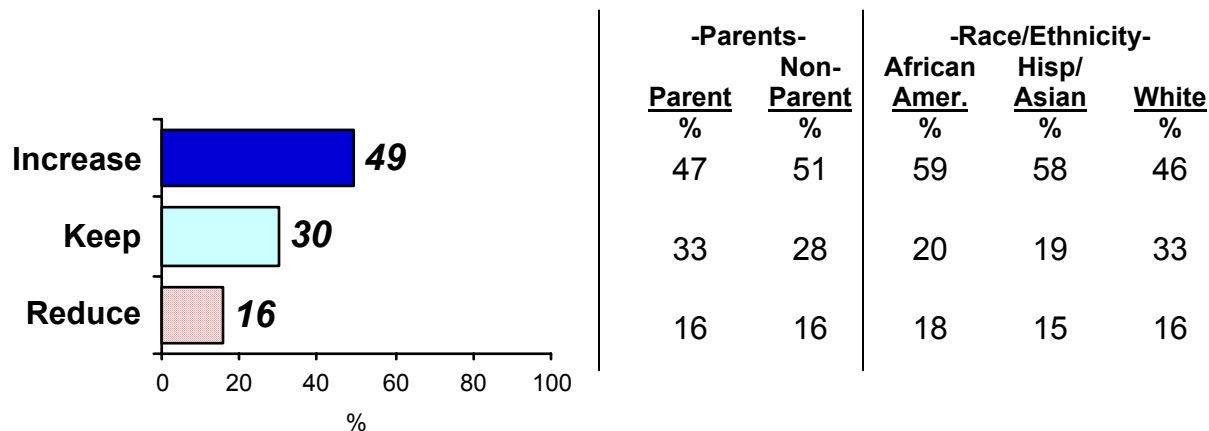
Perceptions of spending for ESL Programs

When presented with the challenges that the growing number of students who do not speak English as their primary language create for Wake schools, about half of the poll respondents say they favor an increase in spending resources to address these needs. The rest would either keep the current spending levels as they are (30%) or reduce spending for ESL and redirect the money elsewhere (16%).

Preferred Spending Policy for ESL Programs

With the growing number of students in Wake public schools speaking a language other than English as their first language and with such students performing far below other students on standardized tests, which policy do you feel Wake should have?

- Increase spending to handle growing numbers of students who don't speak English so they can succeed in the classroom.
- Keep current spending where it is.
- OR--
- Reduce this type of spending and direct the money toward other needs.



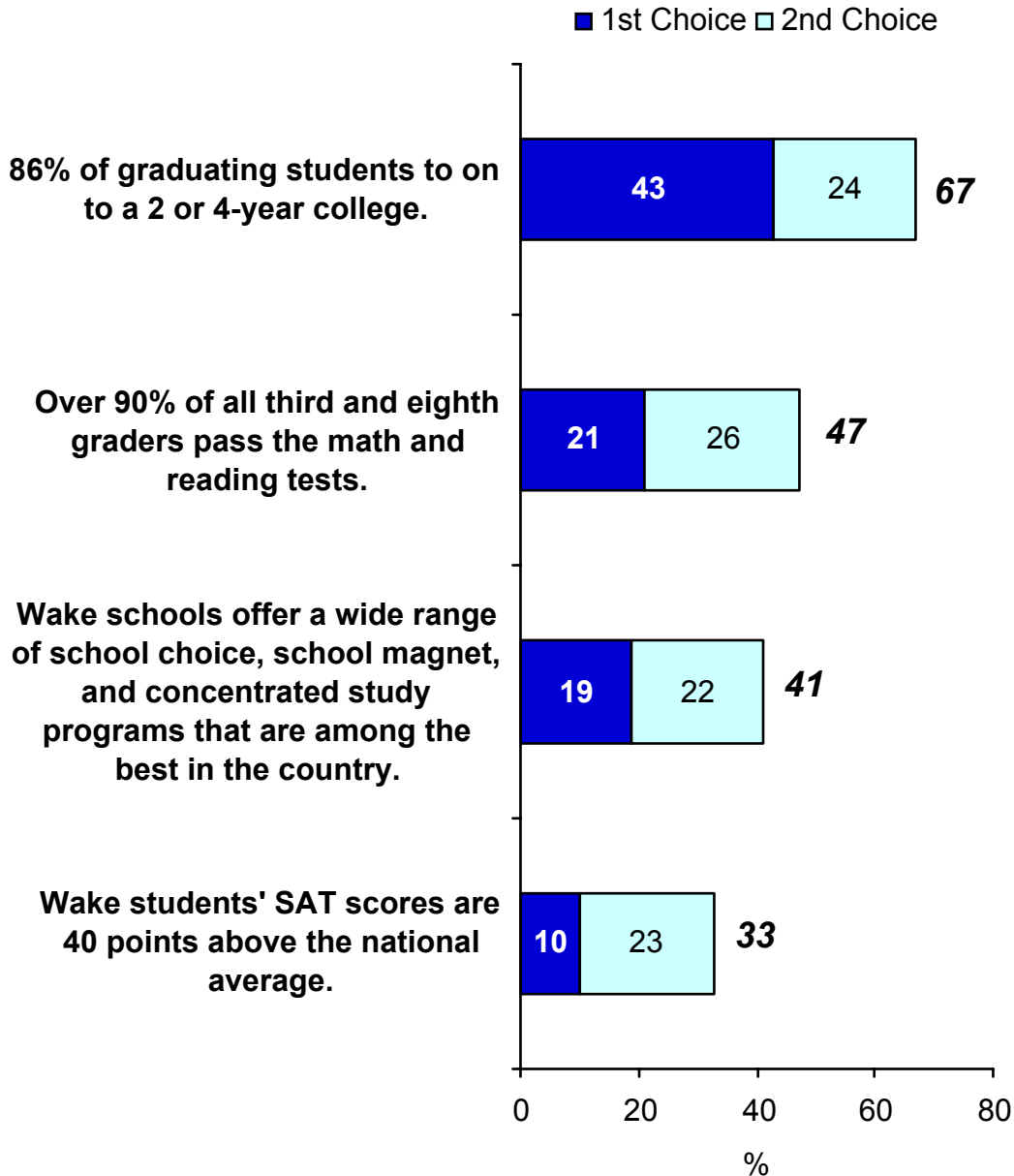
These results tend to fit with the previously reported results to pro-revenue statement tests earlier in the poll. Two-thirds of Wake citizens say it is at least a “somewhat persuasive” reason to raise taxes for schools to meet the demands “a rapidly increasing Hispanic/Latino population places on services and resources for non-English speaking students and families.” This is a “very” persuasive message to 28%—the lowest of five tested.

Thus, general support for more ESL-oriented investment exists, but not intensely so. As the above chart shows, African-American, Hispanic and Asian respondents are highest in their support for increased spending to meet ESL needs—about 12 to 13 points higher than whites.

District Accomplishments

Focus group research continues to show that Wake citizens (both parents and non-parents) are impressed but generally unaware of the significant success Wake schools have achieved on a number of performance measures. When asked to make a choice of four tested, the most positive accomplishment is the extremely high number of graduates who go on to a two- or four-year college—the first choice of 43% of respondents and combined first or second choice of two-thirds.

**Evaluation of Most Positive Accomplishment of
the Wake County Public School System (2 Choices)**



Two other achievements—high level of 3rd- and 8th-graders passing math/reading tests and the wide range of high quality school choice—each score as first choices to around 20%. Those rating Wake schools quality an “A” tend to be more impressed with the range of school choice than do others. College matriculation seems to be a stronger message for those under 35 or middle-aged and male than for others.

Goal Setting: No Child Left Behind and Goal 2008

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a sweeping education accountability law signed by President Bush in January 2002, holds schools and school districts accountable for the achievement of all students. Although the legislation includes requirements for teaching quality and other factors, the overarching goal is that “All students (100 percent) must perform at or above grade level in reading and math by the 2013-14 academic year.” All student subgroups (including categories for race, ethnicity, poverty and limited English proficiency) must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in order for a school to meet NCLB requirements. The measurement determines grade level performance using the State of North Carolina End-of-Grade or Course tests, but does not measure growth from one year to the next.

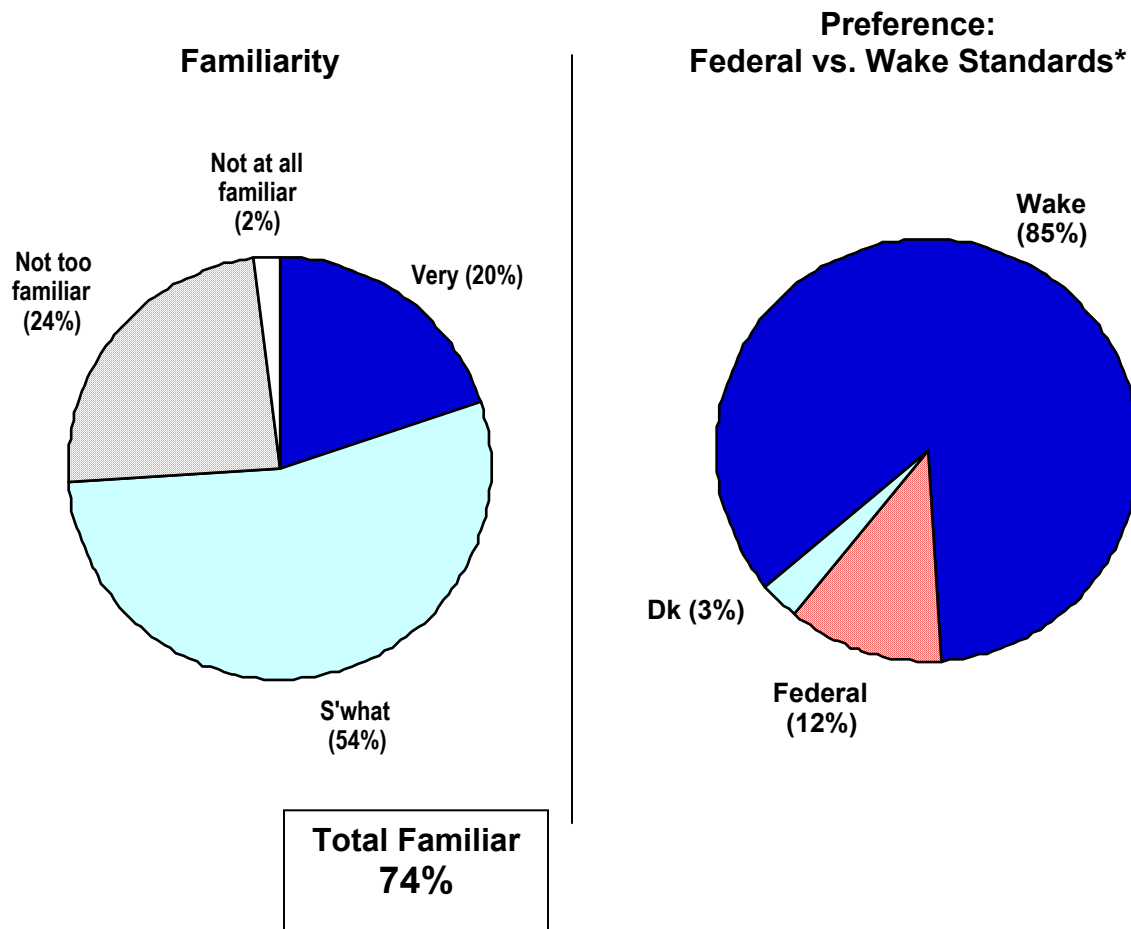
Goal 2003, set in 1998, and the current Goal 2008, adopted in 2003, were established by the Wake County Board of Education with input from the community through the Wake Education Summit and other engagement opportunities. Goal 2008 builds on Goal 2003 and states that, “By 2008, 95 percent of students in grades 3 through 12 will be at or above grade level as measured by the State of North Carolina End-of-Grade or Course tests, and all student groups will demonstrate high growth.” The growth component of the goal establishes expectations that the academic achievement of all students will improve over the course of a year, regardless of whether they are at Level I/II (below grade level), Level III (at grade level) or Level IV (above grade level).

Awareness and Perceptions of Goals

About three-fourths of Wake residents claim to have at least some familiarity with the federal No Child Left Behind policy; 20% are “very familiar.”

When given an explanation and choice, Wake residents express an overwhelming 85% to 12% preference for the current Wake County approach to goal setting and achievement measurement over the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) plan.

Federal “No Child Left Behind” Policy



* **Exact Q Text:**

The “No Child Left Behind” plan requires that each and every student, regardless of prior performance or special classification, perform at or above grade level on standardized tests but does not address growth for students who have already reached that standard. In your opinion, which is more appropriate...?

- Meeting this federal goal that sets the same target for all children.

--OR--

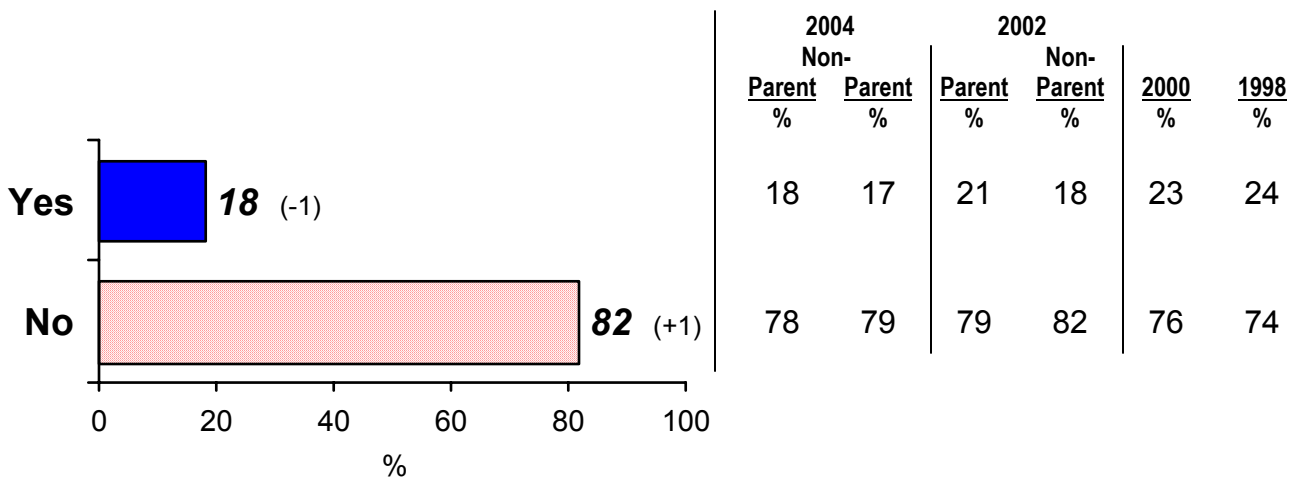
- Meeting the goal set by Wake Schools to have 95 percent of students at or above grade level by 2008 and to have all students demonstrating academic growth each year.

Awareness of Wake Education Partnership

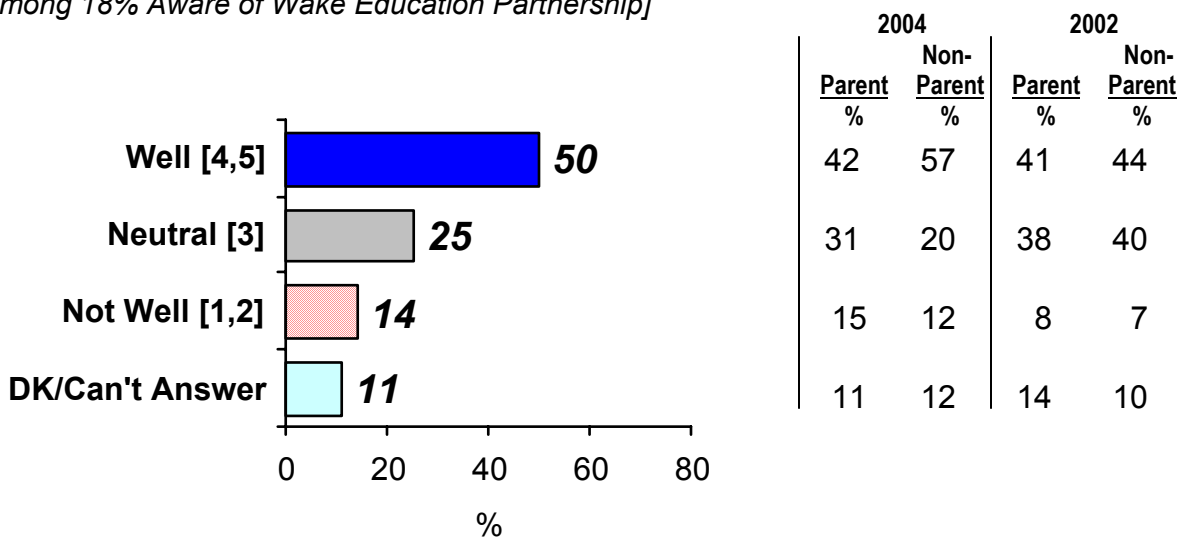
Wake Education Partnership continues to be known to just under one-in-five (18%) Wake citizens—the same for registered voters as well as for parents and non-parents. Awareness of the Partnership moves up into the mid-20s level with women 35 to 54, longest-term Wake residents (20+ years) and those grading schools an “A.” Among the 18% aware of Wake Education Partnership, half rate the organization highly for fulfilling its mission “well.” Most of the rest rate the Partnership as neutral or offer no rating, suggesting unfamiliarity.

Awareness and Opinions of Wake Education Partnership

Are you familiar with the mission of Wake Education Partnership?

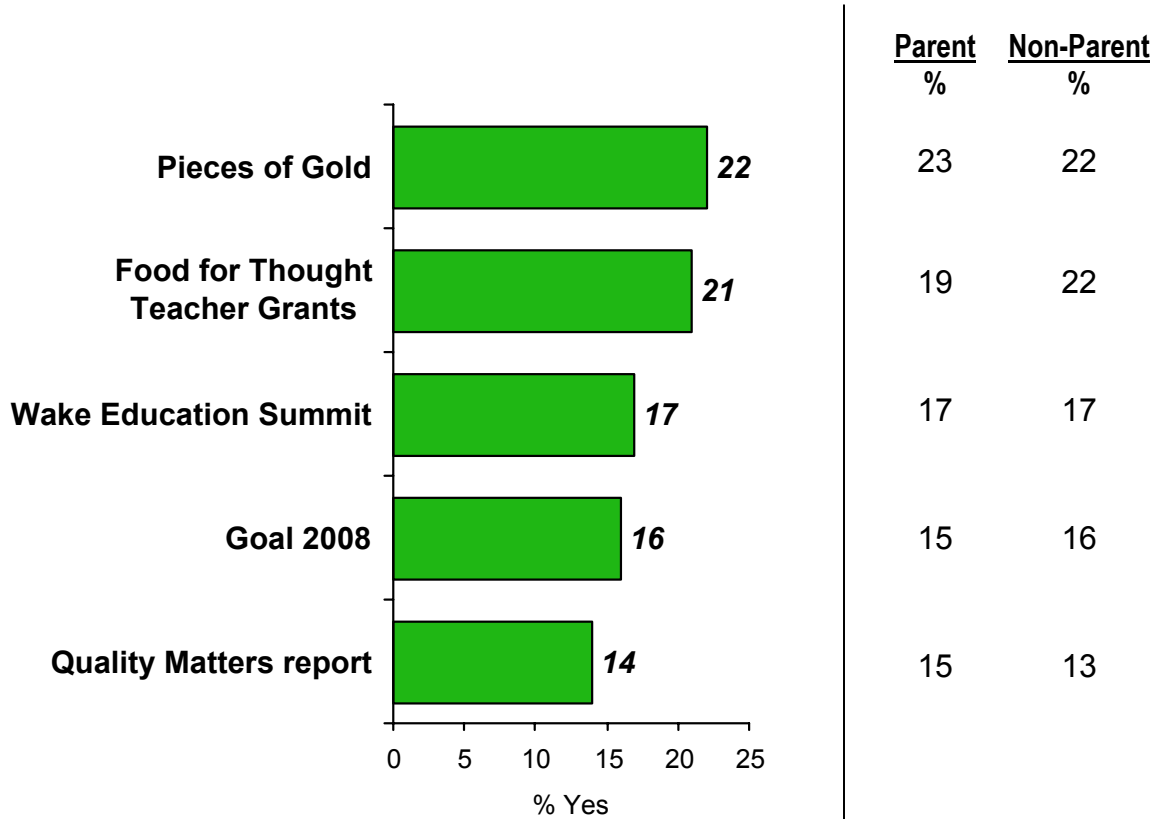


Using a scale of one to five, with “1” being not well at all, and “5” being extremely well, please tell me how well you feel Wake Education Partnership is fulfilling its mission in the community? [Among 18% Aware of Wake Education Partnership]



Among all poll respondents, awareness of various Partnership and school system initiatives ranges from a high of 22% to a low of 14%, within 4 points either way of the Partnership’s overall awareness level. Parents of Wake public school students, especially the moms, tend to be slightly higher in knowing about each of these programs.

Awareness of Various Wake Education Partnership Programs (% “Yes”)



V. Background

FrederickPolls

Keith Frederick is the owner of the nationally active opinion research firm of FrederickPolls, LLC, based in Arlington, Va. Prior to establishing FrederickPolls in January 2000, Keith Frederick was partner in the firm Frederick Schneiders Research, the opinion research arm for the Cassidy Companies, Washington, D.C.'s largest lobbying and public affairs company. FrederickPolls practices the art of unlocking the underlying opinion structure that causes Americans to make a judgment in favor of one political candidate over another, one side on a ballot measure over another, or one corporate interest over its rivals. In his 25 years of polling experience, Keith Frederick has conducted projects for political campaigns, public policy and education policy, public financing and state and local referendums, including community assessments in several states.

Wake Education Partnership

Founded in 1983, Wake Education Partnership is an independent, community-based public school advocacy and support organization that works to unite community resources for excellence in public education. Ongoing quality improvement and public participation in the Wake County Public School System are central to the Partnership's Program of Work.

Three strategic goals guide the Partnership's intent to affect change in the community and the public schools and to improve the academic achievement of all students:

- Provide **leadership and professional development** for teachers, principals and administrators to raise the performance level of those charged with educating students;
- Foster **community engagement** to build public awareness and create meaningful dialogue between schools and the community that leads to action; and
- Conduct **research and advocacy** regarding current education issues to cultivate knowledgeable community members on fundamental education issues and needs.

More information about Wake Education Partnership is available online at www.WakeEdPartnership.org.

Question Path

1. First of all, do you think things in Wake County are generally headed in the right direction or the wrong direction?

2. Moving from the county as a whole to focusing specifically on the county's schools, students are often given grades A, B, C,D, or Fail to evaluate the quality of their work. Which grade would you give to Wake County Public Schools – A, B, C, D, or Fail?
 - 2a. [IF "D/FAIL" IN Q2] What is the reason you give Wake Schools a grade of [D/FAIL]?

3. Using a scale of 1 to 5, where "1" means you strongly disagree, and "5" means you strongly agree, how strongly do you agree or disagree that...?
 - a. Each Wake County public school is a safe place to learn.
 - b. The Wake County citizens are committed to public schools.
 - c. The Wake County School System is improving over time.

4. Let me be more specific – do you think over the last 5 years the quality of education provided by Wake County Public Schools has gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?

5. Schools can be successful for a number of reasons. I would like you to tell me how important each of the following characteristics is in having a very successful school. On a one to five scale, where "5" is having great importance, "4" is having much importance, "3" is of some importance, "2" is of little importance, and "1" is not at all important, how important is each of the following reasons for a school to be successful. How about...?
 - a. Mastery of basics – such as reading, writing and math.
 - b. Curriculum challenges students to meet their potential.
 - c. Teachers with strong subject matter knowledge.
 - d. High academic standards.
 - e. Sound physical facility.
 - f. Convenient location.
 - g. Enough choices of extracurricular activities.
 - h. Positive teacher-student relationships where students are treated fairly.
 - i. Students are prepared to take jobs or continue on to higher education.
 - j. Teachers initiate contact with parents about their child's progress.
 - k. Visionary leadership from the principal.
 - l. Involvement from parents, local business and the community.
 - m. Making advanced placement courses for high school students a priority.

6. Please rate how likely these characteristics are to be happening in Wake County Public Schools. On a one to five scale, please rate "1" if the characteristic is not happening at all, "2" if it seldom happens, "3" if it sometimes happens, "4" if it happens frequently, or "5" if the characteristic happens all the time. How about...?
 - a. Mastery of basics – such as reading, writing and math.
 - b. Curriculum challenges students to meet their potential.
 - c. Teachers with strong subject matter knowledge.
 - d. High academic standards.
 - e. Sound physical facility.
 - f. Convenient location.
 - g. Enough choices of extracurricular activities.

- h. Positive teacher-student relationships where students are treated fairly.
 - i. Students are prepared to take jobs or continue on to higher education.
 - j. Teachers initiate contact with parents about their child's progress.
 - k. Visionary leadership from the principal.
 - l. Involvement from parents, local business and the community.
 - m. Making advanced placement courses for high school students a priority.
7. Overall, would you say that the quality of local schools that either your child attends or are near your home are better, worse, or about the same as those in other parts of the Wake County Public School System?
8. In your opinion, do Wake County public schools have enough money to meet their needs over the next three to five years or is more money needed?
9. In general, how would you rate the job the Wake County public school district does efficiently managing the tax money it receives and spends – excellent, good, not so good, or poor?
10. Do you feel the Wake school system today adequately meets the challenges of rapid student population growth OR are schools behind in meeting this need and overcrowded as a result?
11. As you may know, Wake voters last year ... in 2003, approved a 400 million dollar school Bond ballot issue to build new schools. Approximately how many years worth of student growth do you think this Bond will cover before voters must be asked to support a new Bond issue? 2 years, 3 years, 4 years, 5 years, between 5 and 10 years, more than 10 years or forever.
12. Next tell me if you would strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose each of the following ways to generate more money for Wake County public schools.
- a. Increasing county property taxes to pay for hiring more teachers, replacing retiring teachers and increasing teacher pay.
 - b. Raising the local sales tax in Wake County by one-half percent and dedicating all the money to schools.
 - c. Imposing an impact fee on new homes built in Wake County with the money going to schools.
13. Next I will read you some reasons why supporters might say Wake County Public Schools need more money. Tell me if you think each is a VERY STRONG reason, a SOMEWHAT STRONG reason, or NOT A STRONG reason for supporting either a tax increase or a future school Bond for Wake County Schools.
- a. The Wake County school system is growing at a rate of more than 4 thousand new students a year, causing more overcrowding if new schools aren't built.
 - b. The Wake County school system faces a teacher shortage of about one thousand teachers due to retirement and student population growth.
 - c. The State of North Carolina plans to cut funding for local school districts reducing Wake's operating funds and putting a squeeze on its budget.
 - d. To handle student growth, the Wake school system would need to build six new elementary schools, two new middle schools, and one new high school every two years.
 - e. A rapidly increasing Hispanic/Latino population places additional demands on services and resources for non-English speaking students and families.

14. Next, tell me how big a priority these two actions should be for the Wake County public schools. Use a scale from one to five, where “1” means “not a priority” and “5” means “top priority.”
- To maintain racial and economic diversity in the schools.
 - To limit the percentage of low-performing students at each school in order to protect the quality of schools.
15. How much would you say you know about the Wake County Public School system’s assignment policy – a lot, only some, or nothing at all?
16. In general, would you say you are more in support of, more in opposition to, or more neutral toward this assignment policy?
17. As you may know, students in Wake County are assigned to schools in order to fill new schools, ease crowding at existing schools and maintain student body diversity. First of all, tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with this policy
18. Next, tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements about assignment and Wake Schools
- It is a good idea to balance the percentage of students in each school on free or reduced price school lunch because statistics show test scores are higher this way.
 - Students should be permitted to attend the school closest to their home, regardless of overcrowding or student population.
 - Busing students to schools other than their neighborhood school is acceptable when its goal is to reduce overcrowding, as long as every effort is made to limit the length of the bus rides and student safety is taken into account.
 - Students should be permitted to complete all grades in the same school, even if the school is overcrowded or a new school is opened.
 - It would be a bad idea to allow large numbers of students eligible for the free or reduced price lunch program to be concentrated in a limited number of schools because statistics show all students performed worse on test scores in this setting than when more evenly distributed throughout the school system.
19. Lastly on assignment, here are some facts:
- On average, fewer than 4 percent of Wake students are reassigned each year;
 - 86 percent of students attend a school within 5 miles of their home; and
 - National research and Wake County results, show that assignment policies which limit the number of students on subsidized meals to no more than 40 percent per school results in HIGHER TEST scores for all students by not isolating lower income students into just a few schools.

Knowing this, is your opinion of the Wake Schools’ assignment policy ... mostly supportive, mostly opposed or neutral?

20. Next, I will read you four different statistical facts about the performance of Wake County public school students. Tell me which you find to be most positive. And what is the next most positive?
- Eighty-six percent (86%) of graduating students go on to a 2 or 4-year college.
 - More than 90 percent of all elementary and middle school students pass the math and reading tests – a passing rate that has continued to improve year to year.
 - Wake students' S.A.T. scores are 40 points above the national average.
 - Wake schools offer a wide range of school choice, school magnet, and concentrated study programs that are among the best in the country.
21. With the growing number of students in Wake Public Schools speaking a language other than English as their first language and with such students performing far below other students on standardized tests, which policy do you feel Wake Schools should have?
- Increase spending to handle growing numbers of students who don't speak English so they can succeed in the classroom.
 - Keep current spending where it is.
- OR--
- Reduce this type of spending and direct the money toward other needs.
22. Are you familiar with the mission of Wake Education Partnership?
23. Using a scale of one to five, with "1" being not well at all, and "5" being extremely well, please tell me how well you feel Wake Education Partnership is fulfilling its mission in the community?
24. Are you familiar with any of the following programs of Wake Education Partnership?
- a. Pieces of Gold.
 - b. Food for Thought Teacher Grants.
 - c. Wake Education Summit.
 - d. Quality Matters report.
 - e. Goal 2008.
25. How familiar are you with the "No Child Left Behind" program – very familiar, somewhat familiar or not too familiar?
26. The "No Child Left Behind" plan requires that each and every student, regardless of prior performance or special classification, perform at or above grade level on standardized tests but does not address growth for students who have already reached that standard. In your opinion, which is more appropriate...?
- Meeting this federal goal that sets the same target for all children.
- OR--
- Meeting the goal set by Wake Schools to have 95 percent of students at or above grade level by 2008 and to have all students demonstrating academic growth each year.