

Florida's Opinion on K-12 Public Education Spending

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Prepared by

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Poll taken by

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Poll released jointly by:



About the Author

Greg Forster, Ph.D., is a senior fellow and the director of research at the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, where he conducts research and writes about school choice policy. He has conducted empirical studies on the impact of school choice programs in Milwaukee, Florida and Texas, as well as national empirical studies of participation in school choice programs and the impact of charter schools. He also has conducted empirical studies of other education topics, including accountability testing, graduation rates, student demographics and special education.

His research has been published in the peer-reviewed journal *Teachers College Record* and his articles on education policy have appeared in the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *New York Post* and numerous other publications. He is co-author of the book *Education Myths: What Special-Interest Groups Want You to Believe about Our Schools - and Why It Isn't So*, from Rowman & Littlefield.

He received a Ph.D. with Distinction in political science from Yale University in 2002 and a B.A. *summa cum laude* from the University of Virginia in 1995. After graduate school he worked with Jay Greene, one of the world's leading education-policy researchers, before coming to the Friedman Foundation. His book *John Locke's Politics of Moral Consensus* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2005.

Executive Summary

This scientifically representative poll of 1,200 Floridians finds that public opinion about K-12 public education spending is seriously misinformed. Floridians think public schools need more money, but the main reason is that they are badly mistaken about how much money the public schools actually get. The poll was conducted by Susan Schuler, president of the Tampa polling company Susan Schuler and Associates. Dr. Schuler has more than 25 years' experience in public opinion research.

Key findings include:

- Half of Floridians (50 percent) think Florida spends no more than \$4,000 per student on the operating costs of K-12 schools, not including school construction. Almost two thirds (62 percent) think it spends no more than \$6,000. Only 5 percent gave the correct response – between \$7,000 and \$8,000 – and 7 percent said it spends more. The other 25 percent declined to answer.
- When asked how much money Florida ought to spend on K-12 schools, half of Floridians (51 percent) said it should spend less than \$6,000 per student – below what it currently spends. Another 15 percent said Florida should spend between \$7,000 and \$8,000, the amount it currently does spend. So two thirds of Floridians (66 percent) think Florida ought to spend either the amount it currently spends on schools, or less. Only 17 percent said it should spend more; another 17 percent declined to answer.
- Respondents who are public school employees (4 percent of the total) were more likely than the general population to say that Florida spends \$6,000 or less per student – 75 percent of public school teachers chose one of the three responses that underestimate actual spending, compared to 62 percent of all Floridians.
- Respondents who are public school employees were also more likely to say that Florida ought to spend \$6,000 or less per student – 59 percent of public school teachers chose one of the three responses recommending a level of spending less than actual spending, compared to 51 percent of all Floridians. (Due to the smaller sample size, results for public school teachers should be interpreted with caution.)
- Among all Floridians, 36 percent describe themselves as “very familiar” with public education in Florida, another 36 percent describe themselves as “somewhat familiar,” and 28 percent describe themselves as “not at all familiar.”
- Floridians are most likely to say that their information on public education comes from newspaper articles (36 percent), having their own child in school (36 percent), television news (27 percent), friends and neighbors (18 percent) and newspaper editorials (14 percent). These figures are not mutually exclusive – respondents could name more than one source of information.

Method

This study provides a statistically valid representation of the views of Florida residents regarding current and desired funding levels for the public school system. A total of 1,200 completed interviews were obtained. This provides statistical significance more than sufficient for decision-making purposes. The statistical margin of error at the conventional 95 percent confidence level is smaller than plus or minus 3 percentage points.

For this study, a random-digit dial sample of telephone households residing throughout Florida was used. Households were drawn at random in proportion to their occurrence in the State. This method satisfies the criteria for results from a sampled population to be statistically valid. A pretest was conducted on December 29, 2005 to test the survey instrument, with 53 interviews completed. Based on evaluation of the pretest results, no changes were made. Interviews were conducted from December 29, 2005 through January 8, 2006, during the hours of 3:00 to 9:00 p.m. on weekdays and 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekend days. Computer-generated starting and ending times for interviews indicate that the average interview time was 5 minutes.

Trained, experienced telephone interviewers, working in a supervised telephone data collection facility, conducted the interviews. Each interviewer was briefed on the study and received practice time before actual interviewing. Routine observation is performed by the interviewer supervisor on duty. A bilingual Spanish-speaking interviewer interviewed residents who were unable to complete the survey in English.

Confidentiality of survey responses was maintained by means of interviewer training and by data handling procedures. All interviewers signed confidentiality agreements to confirm they understand that all information collected is confidential and is not to be discussed with anyone other than supervisors. All sample frames and data files were kept on electronic media, which cannot be accessed except by analysts. Respondent identities were not provided to the sponsors of the study.

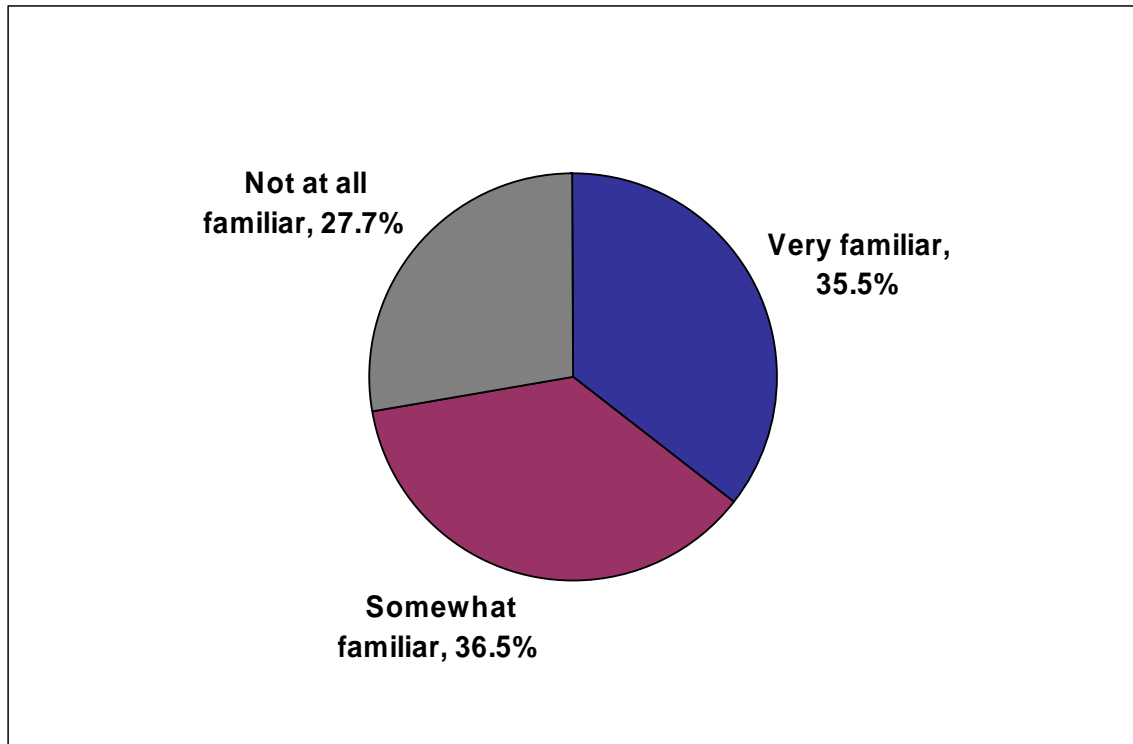
Non-response bias is present in survey data to the extent that individuals who are eligible for the survey and included in the calling list, but who are not interviewed, are not representative of the entire population. Non-response bias is minimized by scheduling calling at various times of the day, and by repeated attempts on unresolved telephone numbers. The survey system is set up to complete the call back sequence for unresolved numbers until a minimum number of attempts is reached. Then the system allows other numbers to be attempted.

Respondents qualified for this survey by confirming they make their primary residence in the State of Florida. Completed interviews were grouped into eight geographic regions; calling was controlled so as to represent each region in proportion to its proportion of the state population as measured by the U.S. Census. Survey tabulations of age, gender and race categories were compared to Census data for the adult Florida population. This comparison showed that survey results were within the margin of error with respect to gender and race/ethnicity representation without the need for statistical weighting. Results were statistically weighted so that age categories would match the Census proportions.

Results

The following are the results of the poll. Results for racial and ethnic subgroups are statistically representative at or above the conventional 95 percent level of certainty, but results for other subgroups (e.g. public school teachers) should be interpreted with caution due to their smaller sample sizes.

How familiar are you with K-12 public education in Florida today?



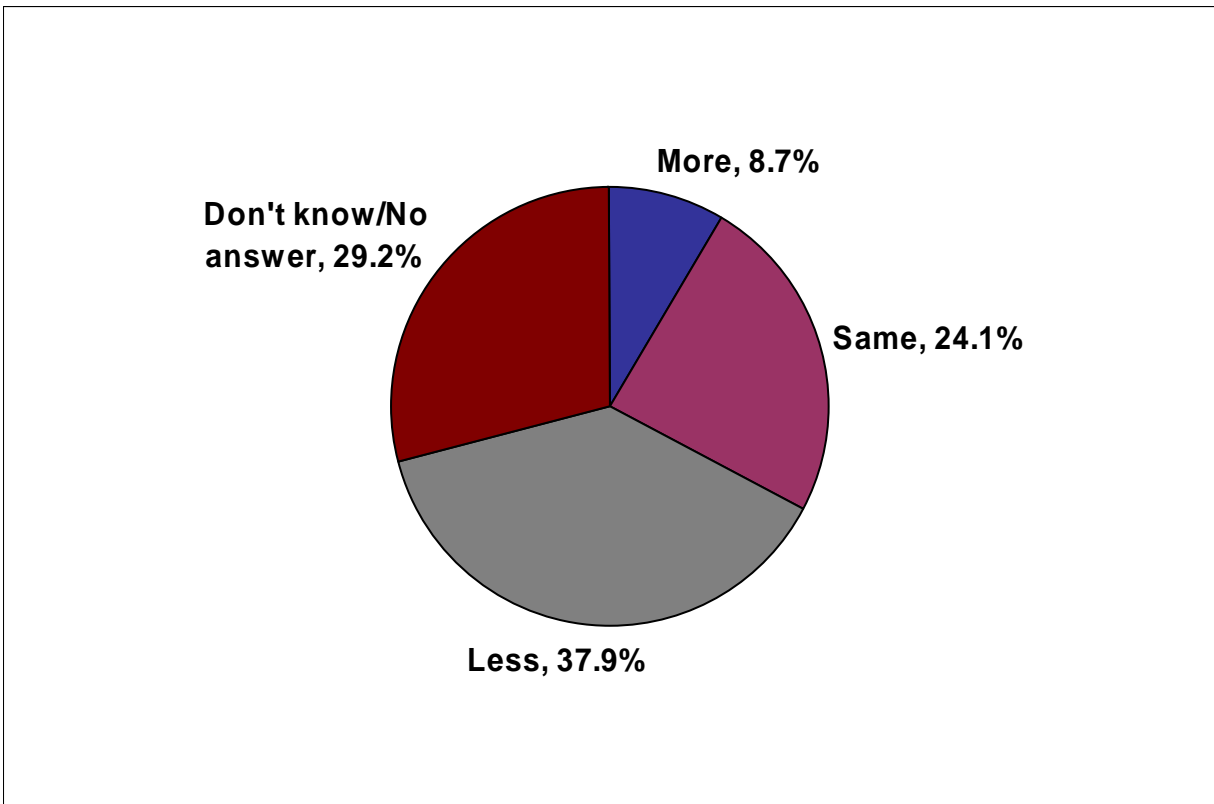
- Among all Floridians, 36 percent describe themselves as “very familiar” with public education in Florida, another 36 percent describe themselves as “somewhat familiar,” and 28 percent describe themselves as “not at all familiar.”
- Respondents who are public school employees (4 percent of the total) were more likely than the general population to say that they were very familiar with public education – 88 percent v. 36 percent. Respondents who have other family members who are public school employees (12 percent of the total) were also more likely to say that they were very familiar with public education – 48 percent v. 38 percent.
- Black respondents were the most likely (41 percent) to say that they were very familiar with public education, followed by white non-Hispanic respondents (35 percent) and Hispanic respondents (33 percent).

**What sources do you get most of your information
about K-12 public education from?**

[may give more than one answer]

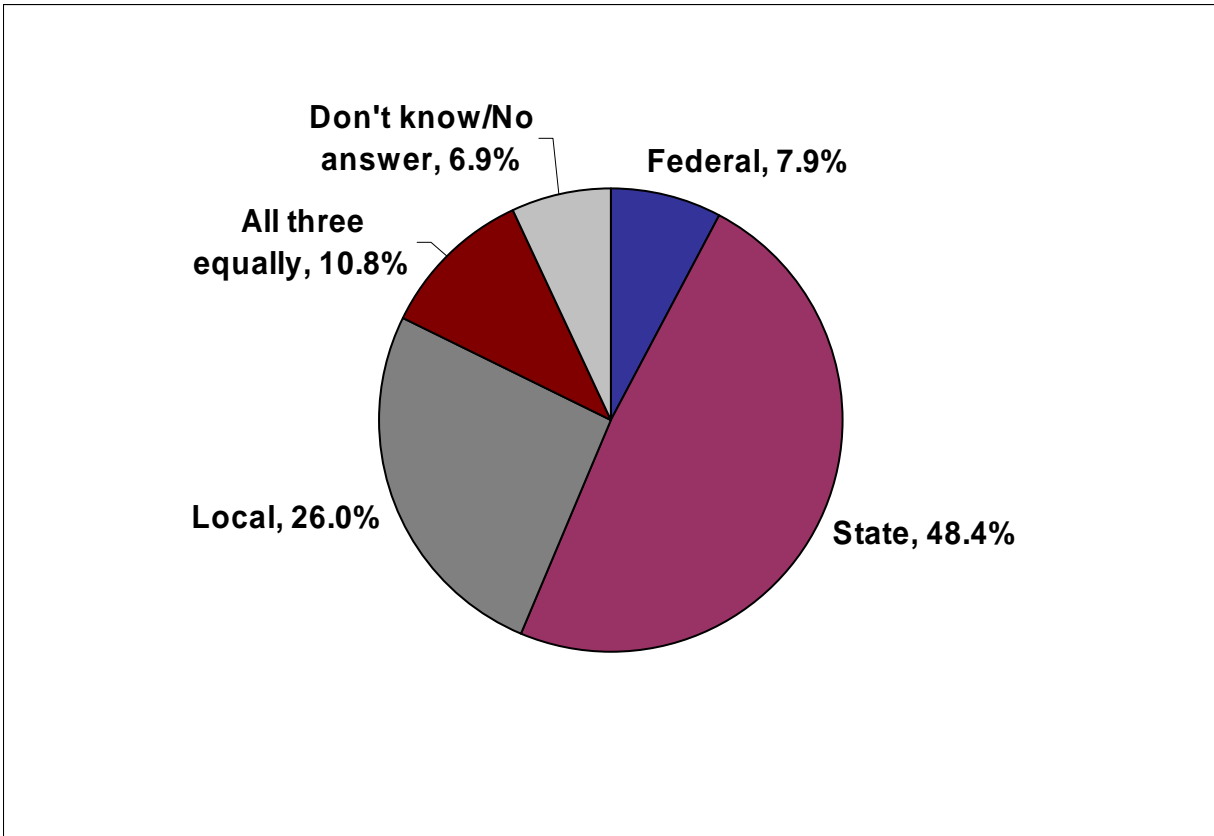
Newspaper articles	36.1 percent
Have/had children in school	35.9 percent
TV news	26.6 percent
Friends & neighbors	18.5 percent
Newspaper editorials	13.9 percent
Work in school system	6.6 percent
Teacher in family	4.3 percent
Internet	2.9 percent
Radio	2.5 percent
Other relatives in school	2.1 percent
None	1.2 percent
Personal experience	1.1 percent
School newsletter	0.9 percent
Volunteer service	0.9 percent
Books & journals	0.9 percent
Job-related	0.7 percent
Family members	0.5 percent
Other	0.2 percent

Compared to other states, do you think Florida spends more, less or about the same amount of money per student on K-12 public education?



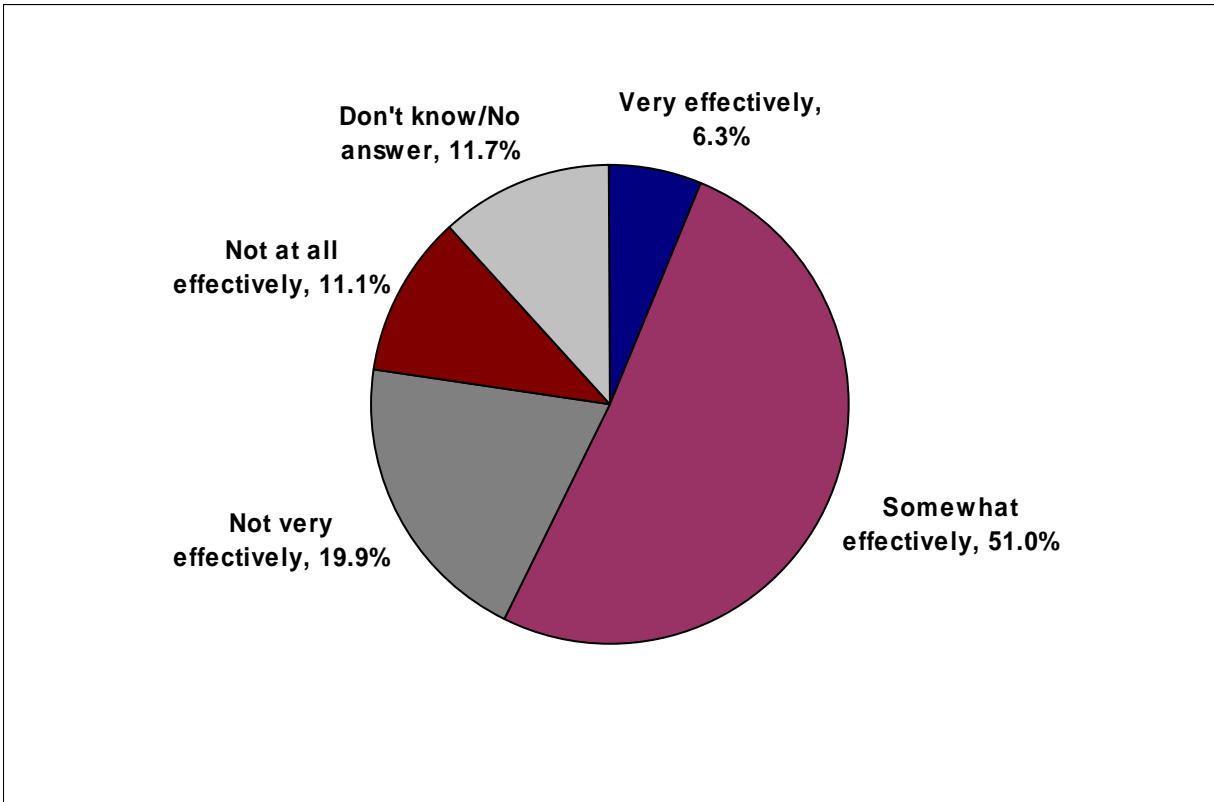
- Among all Floridians, 38 percent say Florida spends less than other states, 24 percent say it spends about the same amount, and 9 percent say it spends more.
- Respondents who are public school employees (4 percent of the total) were more likely than the general population to say that Florida spends less than other states – 48 percent v. 38 percent. Respondents who have other family members who are public school employees (12 percent of the total) were also more likely to say that Florida spends less than other states – 51 percent v. 38 percent.
- White non-Hispanic respondents were most likely to say Florida spends less than other states (39 percent), followed by black respondents (38 percent) and Hispanic respondents (32 percent).

What level of government has the primary responsibility for funding Florida K-12 public schools?



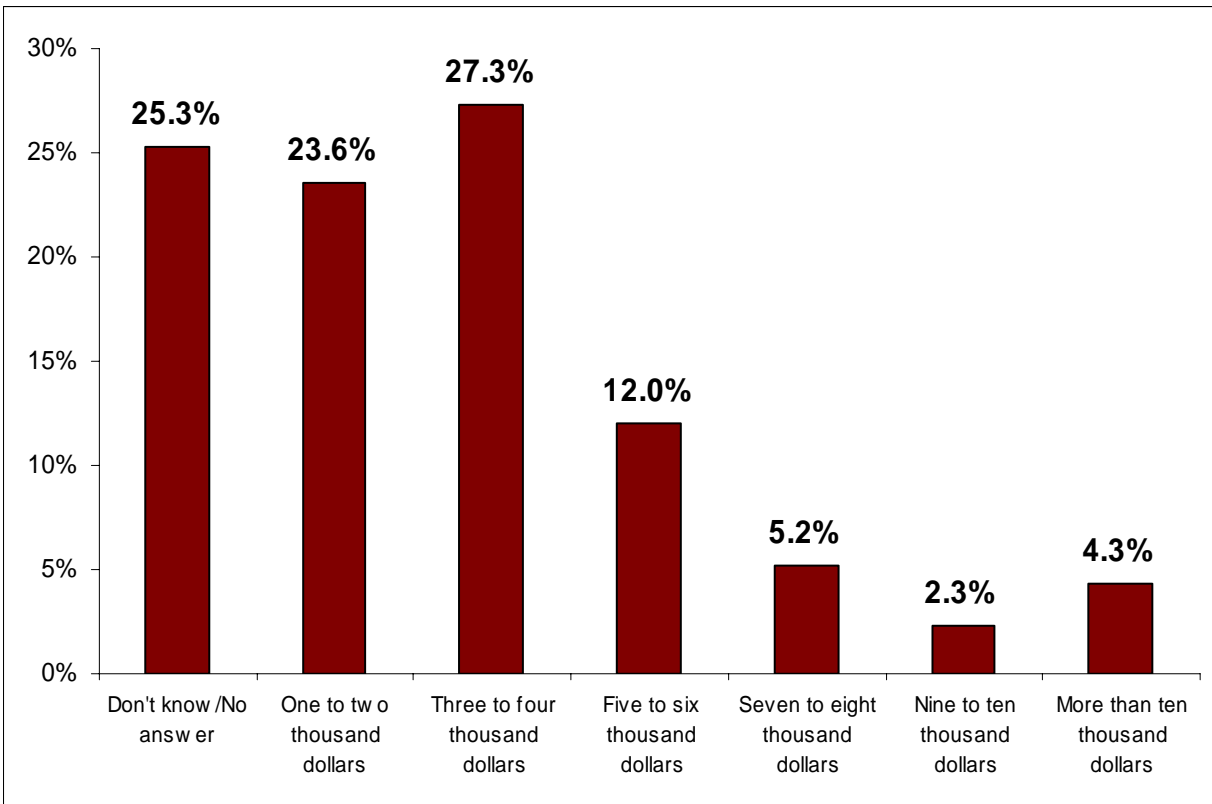
- Among all Floridians, 48 percent say the state has primary responsibility for funding education, 26 percent say local government has primary responsibility, 8 percent say the federal government does, and 11 percent say all three levels of government are equally responsible.
- Respondents who are public school employees (4 percent of the total) were more likely than the general population to say that state government has the primary responsibility for funding Florida schools - 55 percent v. 48 percent. Respondents who have other family members who are public school employees (12 percent of the total) were also more likely to say that state government has primary responsibility - 58 percent v. 48 percent.
- White non-Hispanic respondents were most likely to say that state government has the primary responsibility for funding Florida schools (52 percent), followed by Hispanic respondents (43 percent) and black respondents (41 percent).

In your judgment, how effectively do K-12 public school officials spend the funding they receive from taxpayers?



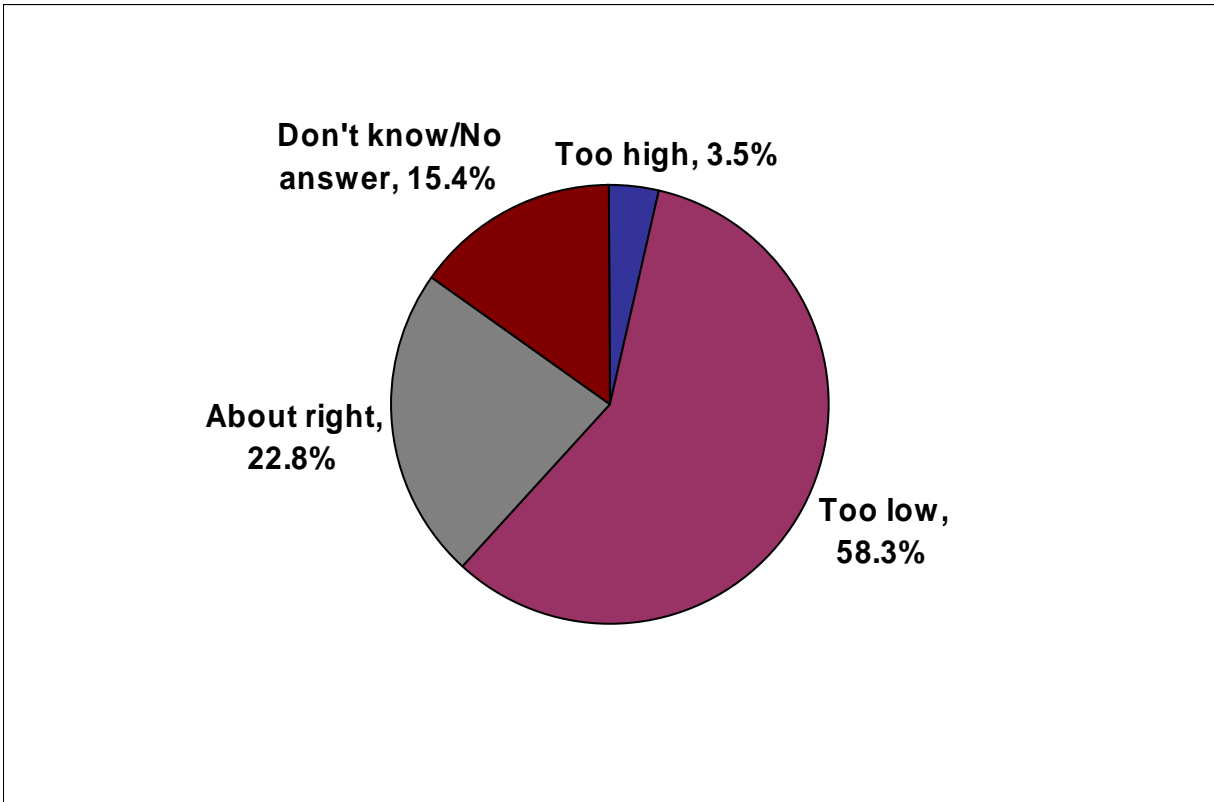
- Among all Floridians, 6 percent say public school officials use money very effectively, 51 percent say they use it somewhat effectively, 20 percent say they use it not very effectively, and 11 percent say they use it not at all effectively.
- Respondents who are public school employees (4 percent of the total) were more likely than the general population to say that public school officials use money very effectively or somewhat effectively – a total of 68 percent v. 57 percent selected one of those two response categories.
- Black and Hispanic respondents were slightly more likely than white non-Hispanic respondents to think that Florida public schools use money very effectively or somewhat effectively – 60 percent of each minority group chose one of those two responses, compared to 56 percent of white non-Hispanic respondents.
- College-educated respondents were the least likely to say that public schools use money very effectively or somewhat effectively (48 percent), followed by respondents with some college (58 percent), respondents who did not graduate from high school (62 percent) and respondents who are high school graduates (66 percent). College-educated respondents were 37 percent of the total, respondents with some college were 22 percent, respondents who graduated from high school were 32 percent and respondents who did not graduate from high school were 9 percent.

Would you estimate that Florida K-12 public school spending per student per year falls between...



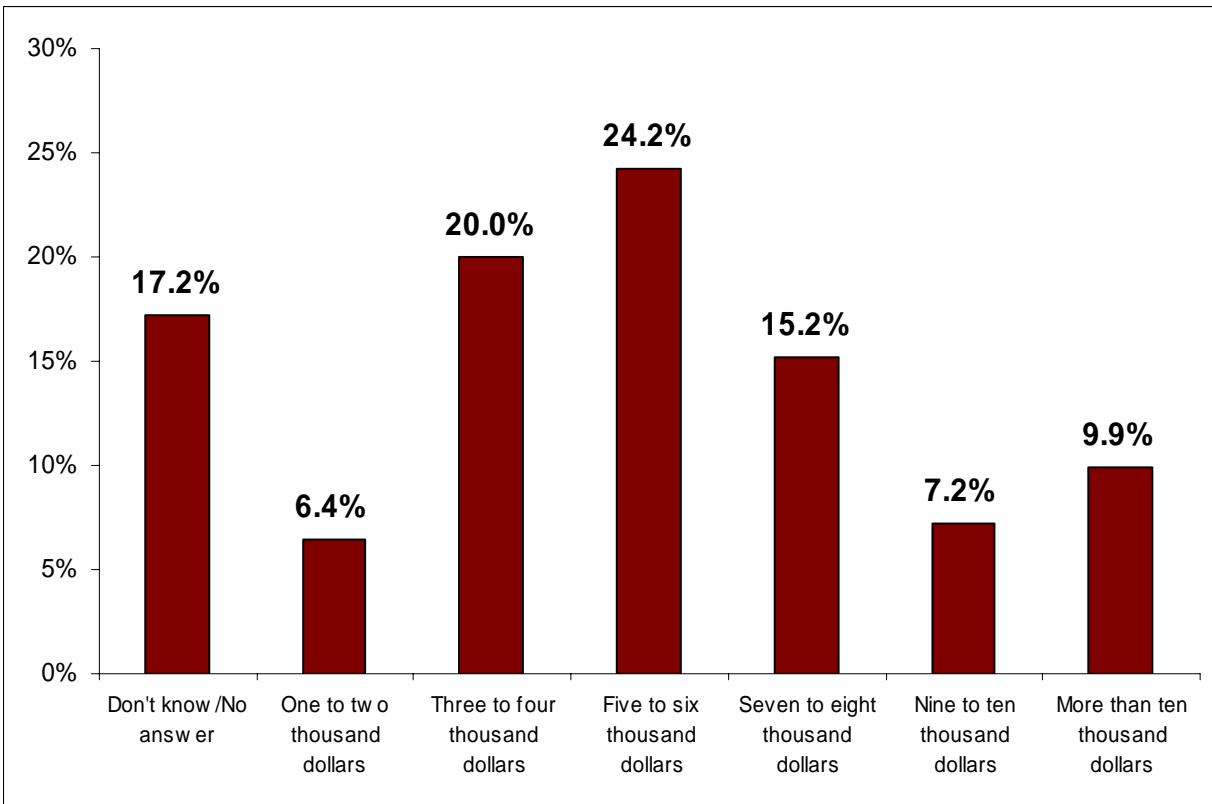
- **Half of Floridians (50 percent) think Florida spends no more than \$4,000 per student on the operating costs of K-12 schools, not including school construction. Almost two thirds (62 percent) think it spends no more than \$6,000. Only 5 percent gave the correct response – between \$7,000 and \$8,000 – and 7 percent said it spends more.**
- Respondents who are public school employees (4 percent of the total) were more likely than the general population to say that Florida spends \$6,000 or less per student – 75 percent v. 63 percent chose one of the three responses that underestimate actual spending. But respondents who have other family members who are public school employees (12 percent of the total) were not substantially more likely to underestimate school spending – 65 percent v. 63 percent.
- About the same percentage of white non-Hispanic respondents (63 percent), black respondents (64 percent) and Hispanic respondents (65 percent) say that Florida spends \$6,000 or less per student. Black respondents were the most likely (8 percent) to select the correct answer of between \$7,000 and \$8,000, followed by white non-Hispanic respondents (5 percent) and Hispanic respondents (3 percent).
- Those who have a child or grandchild in public school (43 percent of the total) were more likely than those who do not (57 percent of the total) to underestimate actual spending – 66 percent v. 61 percent.

Do you believe the amount spent in Florida on K-12 public schools per student per year is...



- Among all Floridians, 58 percent say public education spending is too low, 23 percent say it's about right, and 4 percent say it's too high.
- Respondents who are public school employees (4 percent of the total) were more likely than the general population to say that Florida education spending is too low – 65 percent v. 58 percent. Respondents who have other family members who are public school employees (12 percent of the total) were also more likely than the general population to say that state government has primary responsibility, by the same margin – 65 percent v. 58 percent.
- Black respondents were the most likely (66 percent) to say that Florida education spending is too low, followed by white non-Hispanic respondents (58 percent) and Hispanic respondents (53 percent).

How much do you think the state of Florida ought to spend per student per year on K-12 public education?



- **When asked how much money Florida ought to spend on K-12 schools, half of Floridians (51 percent) said it should spend less than \$6,000 per student – below what it currently spends. Another 15 percent said Florida should spend between \$7,000 and \$8,000, the amount it currently does spend. So two thirds of Floridians (66 percent) think Florida ought to spend either the amount it currently spends on schools, or less. Only 17 percent said it should spend more.**
- Among those who thought current Florida public education spending is too low, 45 percent said it ought to spend \$6,000 per student or less – an amount lower than what is actually spent. Another 17 percent it should spend between \$7,000 and \$8,000, the actual current spending level. So almost two thirds (62 percent) of those who say current spending is too low think the proper spending level is either the same as or less than what is actually spent.
- Respondents who are public school employees (4 percent of the total) were more likely than the general population to say that Florida ought to spend \$6,000 or less per student – 59 percent v. 51 percent. But respondents who have other family members who are public school employees (12 percent of the total) were slightly less likely to say that school spending should be \$6,000 or less – 47 percent v. 51 percent.
- Hispanic respondents were the most likely (59 percent) to say that Florida ought to spend \$6,000 or less per student, followed by white non-Hispanic respondents (50 percent) and black respondents (43 percent).

Contact Information



The Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, dubbed “the nation’s leading voucher advocates” by the *Wall Street Journal*, is a non-profit organization established in 1996. The origins of the foundation lie in the Friedmans’ long-standing concern about the serious deficiencies in America’s elementary and secondary public schools. The best way to improve the quality of education, they believe, is to enable all parents with the freedom to choose the schools that their children attend. The Friedman Foundation builds upon this vision, clarifies its meaning to the public and amplifies the national call for true education reform through school choice.

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