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# Special Report #6

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## Satisfaction with Local Schools

A survey in collaboration with

**Insideschools.org**

February 2005

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## Introduction and Background

This Special Report discusses findings of an eTownPanel online survey, conducted in collaboration with InsideSchools.org, about people's satisfaction with and attitudes toward local public schools, particularly school financing. InsideSchools.org is a program of Advocates for Children of New York, a non-profit organization that provides a full range of educational support, legal, and advocacy services for parents, young people, and professionals. The survey focused on ratings of various aspects of local schools and on people's willingness to pay taxes to fund various local school reforms.

**Methodological note:** The survey was conducted from December 13 through December 31, and included online responses from 1,340 panelists in the US, 169 of whom live in New York City. The panelists were recruited using the Internet and other sources to participate in online research; they are not a random sample, and thus the results are not scientifically projectable to the larger population. However, results are adjusted by gender, race, age, and geography to more closely reflect the general demographic profile of the US and New York City. See the methodology section at the end of this report for more details.

## Findings

The findings below are reported separately for the nation as a whole and for New York City and are weighted to better reflect the general population (see methodological note above). This section begins with general perceptions of local school quality as well as ratings of specific aspects of local schools. It then focuses on people's attitudes toward taxes and financing of school improvement.

### Overall satisfaction with local schools

As **Figure 1** shows, most New Yorkers surveyed think that things in the public schools are off on the wrong track, rather than heading in the right direction. In comparison, respondents nationally are more evenly divided on this question.

Overall ratings of the public schools in the New York City as whole are negative, as **Figure 2** makes clear. Over 7 in 10 New Yorkers surveyed rate the city's public schools as only fair or poor. Interestingly, when asked about their local neighborhood schools (**Figure 3**), New Yorkers are decidedly more positive, with nearly half rating their neighborhood schools as good or excellent. Nationally, over half of all respondents rate both their city schools as a whole and their neighborhood schools as good or excellent (Figures 2 and 3).

### Ratings of specific features of local schools

When asked to rate specific features of their local schools, such as the quality of teachers and class size, New Yorkers surveyed gave consistently lower ratings than respondents nationwide. As **Figure 4** shows, New Yorkers rate teachers the highest, followed by

principals, curriculum and learning, school safety, and the parents association at their school. Physical education, student behavior, and physical facilities received the lowest ratings.

## NYC schools get a “C”

The survey asked respondents to give their local schools a letter grade, much like students receive a letter grade to denote the quality of their work in school. As **Figure 5** reveals, New Yorkers surveyed were most likely to give their schools a “C”. In contrast, respondents nationally gave more of a mix of “Bs” and “Cs”.

## Financing of local schools

The survey asked a number of questions about financing of local schools, including the general willingness of people to pay more in taxes to improve their local schools. New Yorkers are split, as **Figure 6** demonstrates, with some more willing and other less willing to pay additional taxes for schools. Still, New Yorkers seem slightly more willing than respondents nationally to pay more.

This willingness of New Yorkers surveyed to pay more becomes clearer when they are asked how much, if any, in additional taxes they would pay to improve local schools. As **Figure 7** demonstrates, New Yorkers are willing to pay a significantly larger amount of additional taxes than respondents nationally, most of whom are willing only to pay less than \$100 or nothing at all.

When asked about their willingness to pay taxes for specific school reforms (**Figure 8**), New Yorkers were most willing to pay more for better teachers and reducing class size, followed by school buildings, better principals, and school safety. And they are once again more willing to pay for these reforms than respondents nationally.

Although New Yorkers are consistently more willing to pay taxes to support their local schools, this comes despite a greater level of distrust in their school system to spend the money wisely. As **Figure 9** demonstrates, compared to respondents nationally, New Yorkers have very low levels of trust in their local school system.

Finally, as **Figures 10-12** show, New Yorkers favor increased spending by all level of government for public schools.

## Methodology

The survey was conducted from December 13 through December 31, 2004, and included online responses from 1,340 panelists, 169 of whom live in New York City. The panelists were recruited using the Internet and other sources to participate in online research; they are not a random sample, and thus the results are not scientifically projectable to the larger population. However, results are adjusted by gender, race, age, and geography to more closely reflect the general demographic profile of the US and New York City.

**Table 1** presents the demographic profile of the survey respondents, both weighted and unweighted, and compares this profile to data from the US Census. As the unweighted results in Table 1 show, respondents nationally are disproportionately white, female, and in the 25 to 44 age group. Respondents nationally over-represent the Northeast and under-represent Blacks, Hispanics, those 65 and older, and those in the lowest income group. The unweighted results, by design, more closely mirror the Census figures nationally. The unweighted New York City respondents, compared to Census figures for New York City, are again disproportionately white and female, and they under-represent Blacks, Hispanics, those 65 and older, and the lowest income group. By design again, the weighted results bring the profile of New York City respondents into line with Census figures for the city (except for income, which was not a weighting variable). The results in this report for both New York and the nation are all weighted results.

The weighting procedure involved two steps. First, weights were constructed to bring the sample into geographic balance based on the population of Census regions. This geographic weight was then applied to the data, and new weights were calculated to align the sample to the Census in terms of gender, race, and age. This weighting procedure was carried out separately for New York City and the nation. Income was not used as a weighting variable because of missing data and because of the difficulties comparing income across surveys.

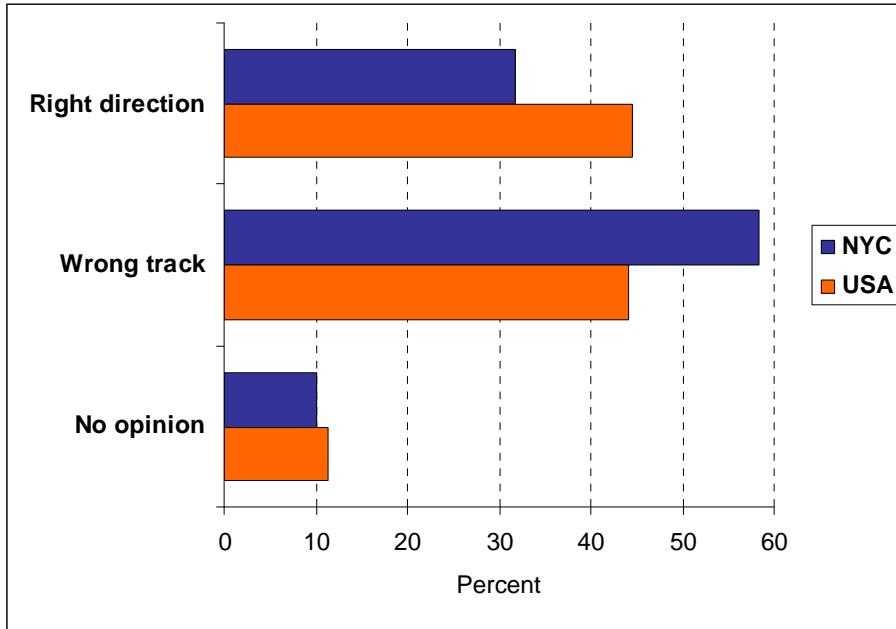
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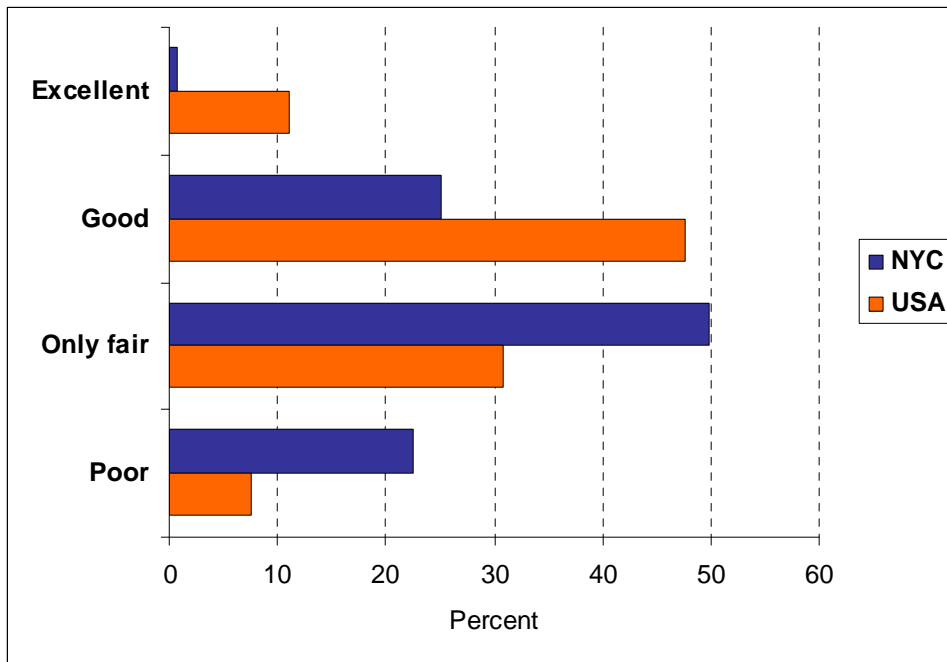
**About eTownPanel.** eTownPanel is a university-based, nonprofit project that aims to expand the potential of the Internet as a tool for measuring the quality of life in communities across the US and for providing citizen-driven feedback on the performance of local governments. eTownPanel also serves as a cost-effective research tool for local nonprofit organizations and government agencies that seek to understand what citizens think about important local issues. The project currently focuses on New York City but will soon include additional cities and towns from across the US.

For more information visit [www.ETownPanel.com](http://www.ETownPanel.com) or email [info@ETownPanel.com](mailto:info@ETownPanel.com)

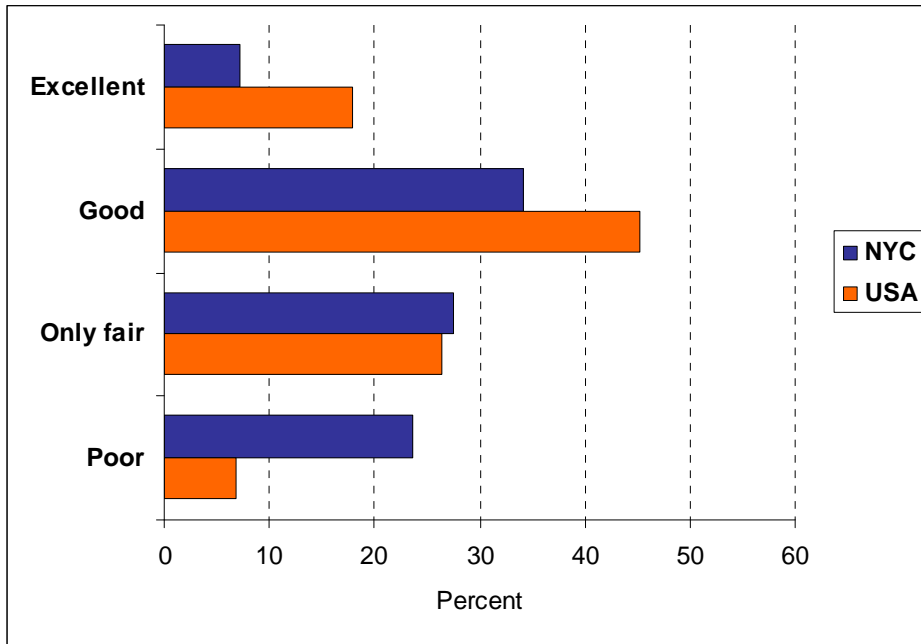
**FIG 1. All in all, do you think that things in the local public schools are generally headed in the right direction, or do you feel that things are off on the wrong track?**



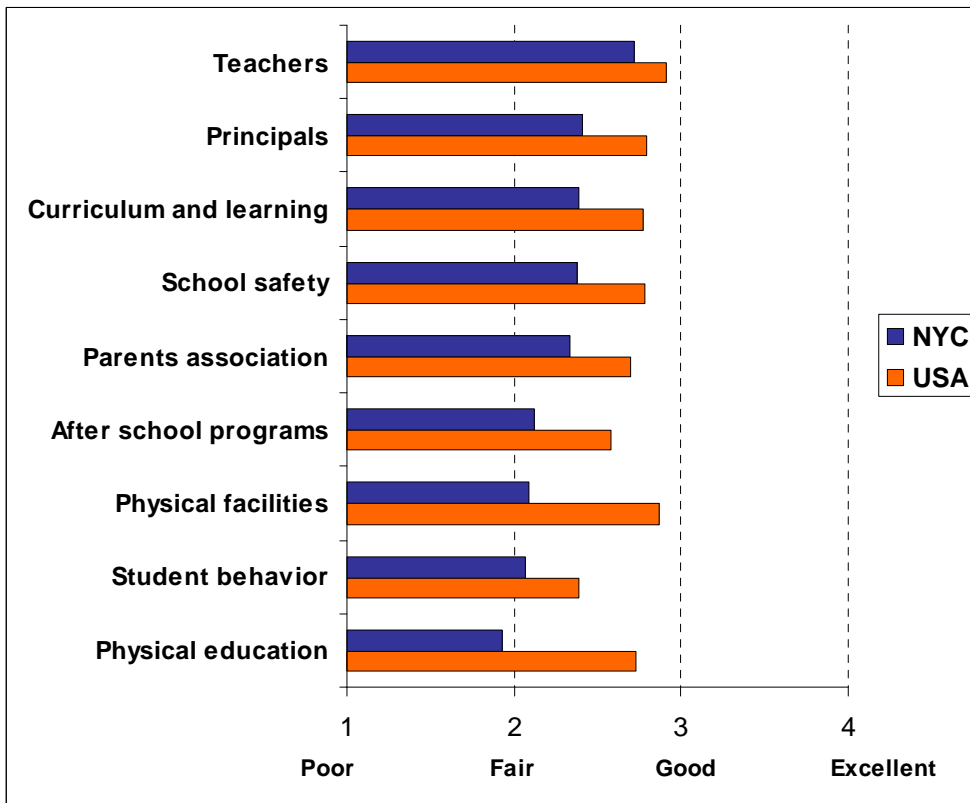
**FIG 2. Overall, how would you rate the public schools in your city or town?**



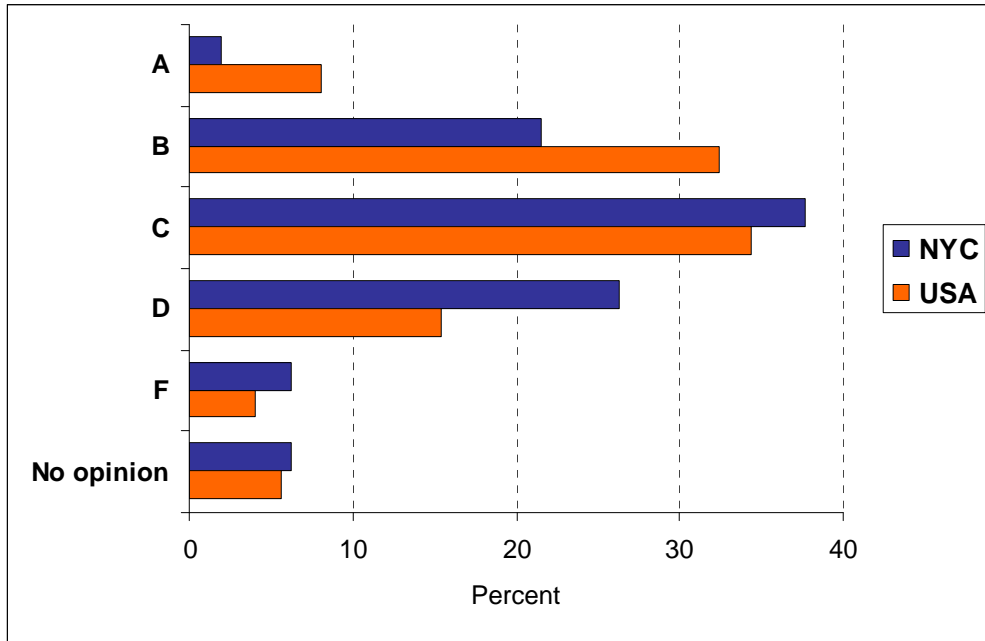
**FIG 3. Overall, how would you rate the public schools in your neighborhood?**



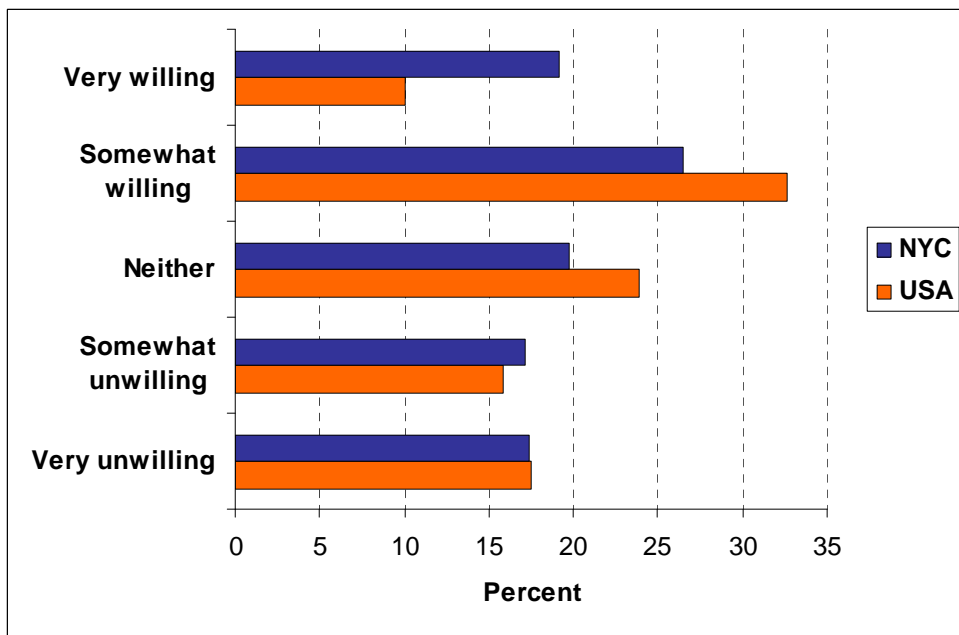
**FIG 4. Please rate the following features of your local public schools . . .**



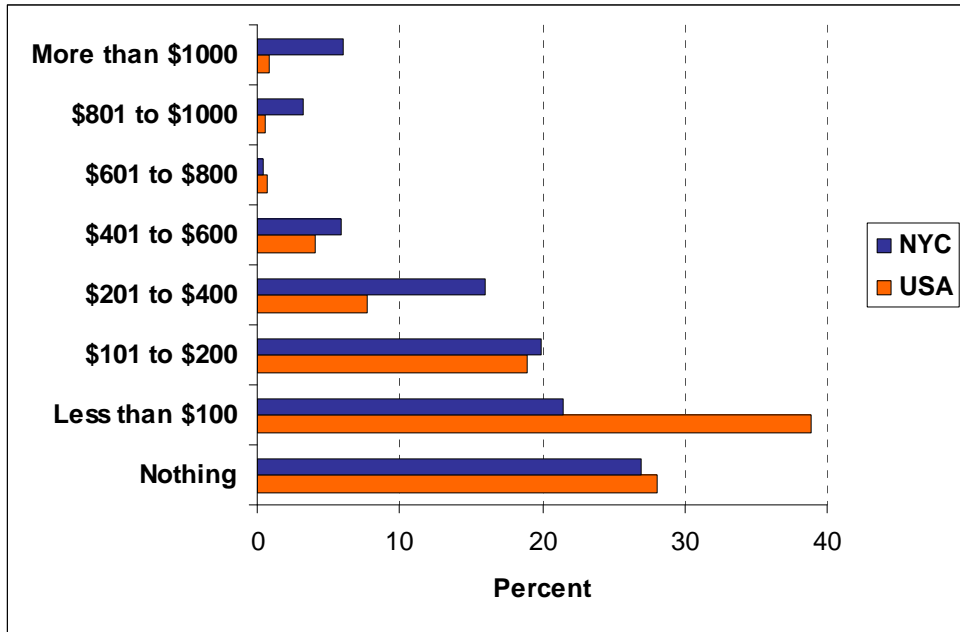
**FIG 5. Students are often given the grades of A, B, C, D, and F to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves, in your community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give to your local public schools?**



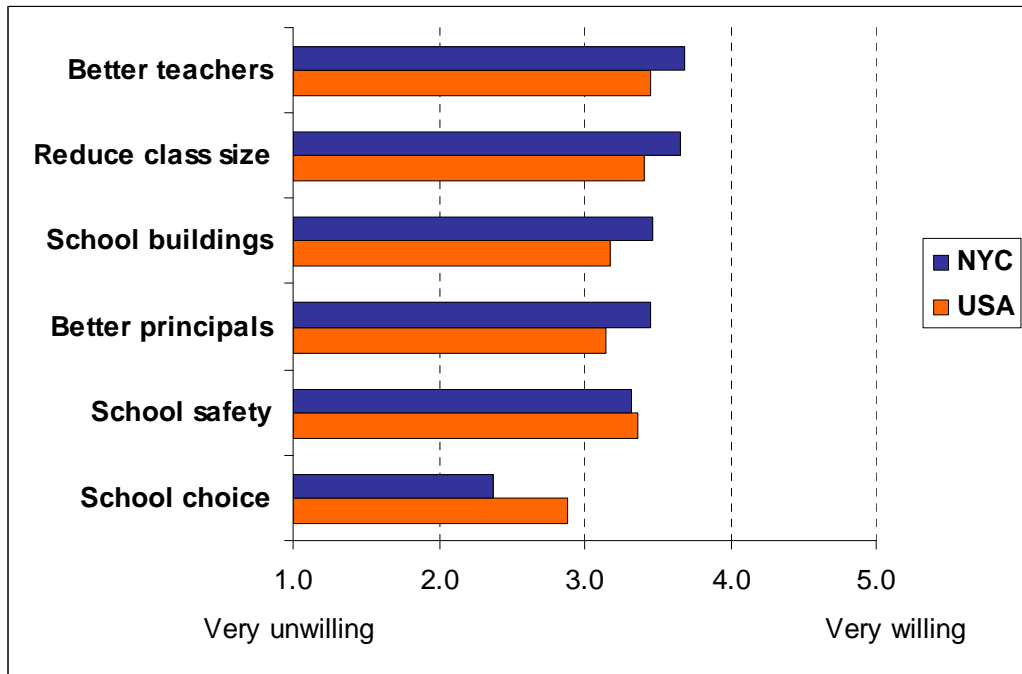
**FIG 6. Generally speaking, how willing or unwilling would you be to pay more in taxes for your public schools?**



**FIG 7. About how much would you be willing to pay, if anything, in additional local taxes each year to improve your public schools?**

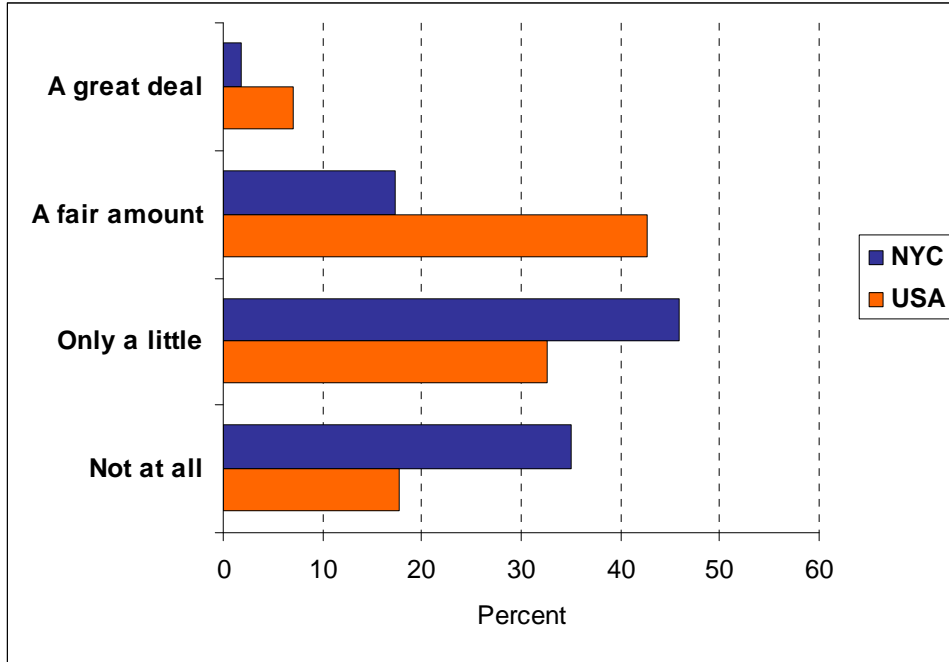


**FIG 8. How willing, or unwilling, would you be to pay more in local taxes for ...**

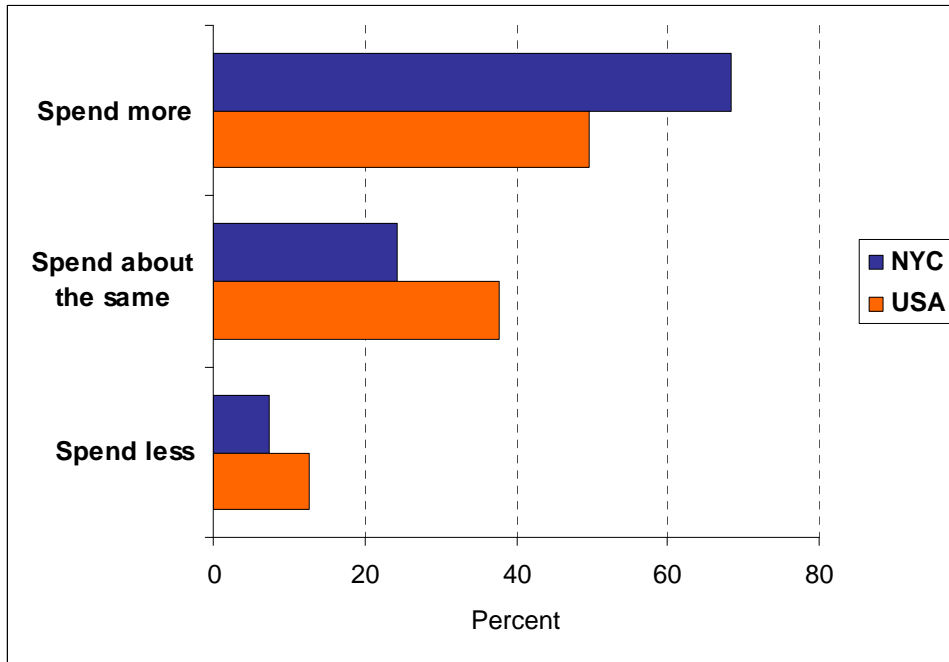




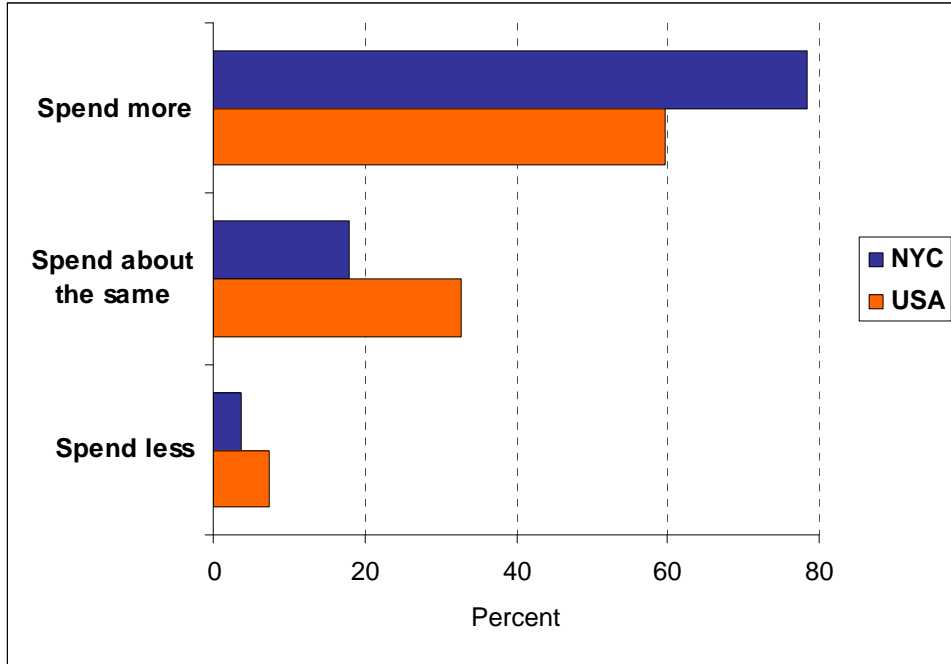
**FIG 9. How much do you trust your local school system to spend the tax money it receives wisely?**



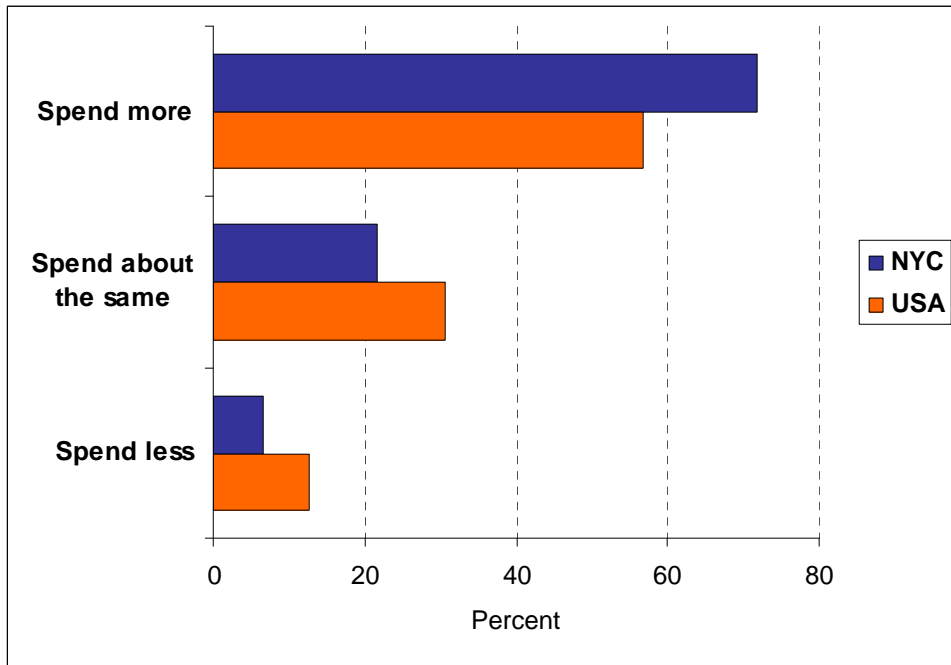
**FIG 10. In your opinion, should LOCAL GOVERNMENT spend less, more, or about the same as they do now on public schools?**



**FIG 11. In your opinion, should STATE GOVERNMENT spend less, more, or about the same as they do now on public schools?**



**FIG 12. In your opinion, should the FEDERAL GOVERNMENT spend less, more, or about the same as they do now on public schools?**



**Table 1. Demographic profile of survey respondents (percents)**

	The Nation (n=1340)			New York City (n=169)		
	Census	Weighted	Unweighted	Census	Weighted	Unweighted
Northeast	19.0	20.9	31.3	100.0	100.0	100.0
South	35.6	35.9	26.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Midwest	22.9	20.1	24.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
West	21.9	23.1	18.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
White, non-Hispanic	69.1	71.4	85.8	35.0	38.2	69.8
Black or African American	12.3	10.4	5.2	24.5	24.5	12.4
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.7	3.2	3.5	9.7	10.5	8.9
Hispanic or Latino	12.5	12.4	4.2	27.0	20.5	6.5
Other	2.4	2.6	1.3	3.8	6.3	2.4
Male	49.0	50.9	25.9	49.0	44.6	31.0
Female	51.0	49.1	74.1	51.0	55.4	69.0
18 to 24 years	13.4	14.8	6.8	13.1	15.8	6.0
25 to 44 years	40.7	42.0	54.6	43.5	47.3	52.1
45 to 64 years	29.6	31.2	35.9	27.9	29.0	40.1
65 years and over	16.7	12.0	2.7	15.5	8.0	1.8
Less than \$25,000	28.7	19.8	16.6	34.9	9.7	10.9
\$25,000-\$49,999	29.3	35.9	36.0	25.7	32.6	26.6
\$50,000-\$74,9999	19.5	22.3	26.0	16.7	24.4	26.6
\$75,000 or more	22.5	21.9	21.4	22.7	33.3	35.9

Note: Census figures from American FactFinder, 2000 Census Quick Tables, available at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).

Weighted results reflect post-stratification adjustments for region, race, age, and gender.

