



# ANNUAL POLL 2024

*Parents and Guardians'  
Opinions on K-12  
Public Education in  
New Orleans*

**The Cowen Institute**  
Poll Policy Brief No. 1  
January 2024

# OVERVIEW

The Cowen Institute has conducted annual polls on perceptions of public education in New Orleans since 2007. Our polls are designed to provide insight into how parents, guardians, and the general public view New Orleans' highly decentralized K-12 public education system. Each year, we ask some new questions about the most relevant and pressing issues facing educators and families. We also repeat questions from our previous polls to assess how opinions change over time on a few key topics.

We now release the poll findings in a series of briefs at the start of each year. This is the first of two briefs that will be released in 2024 with results from polling conducted in the fall of 2023. We present the data in this way to make it more accessible and understandable for the general public — the briefs allow us to group the findings by topic, enabling us to surface trends about particular areas of the city's education system.

This brief covers general perceptions about New Orleans K-12 public education; the second brief will delve more deeply into specific areas of education. To capture the experiences and attitudes of a wide range of parents, as we have done since 2020, we polled 1,000 public and private school parents and guardians in Orleans Parish, as well as a small number who homeschool their children.



**1,000**

**90%**

**10%**

**OCTOBER  
16-26, 2023**

**Orleans Parish  
Parents and  
Guardians Polled**

**Reached via  
Cell Phone**

**Reached via  
Landline**

**Polling Conducted  
by LJR Custom  
Strategies**

## METHODOLOGY

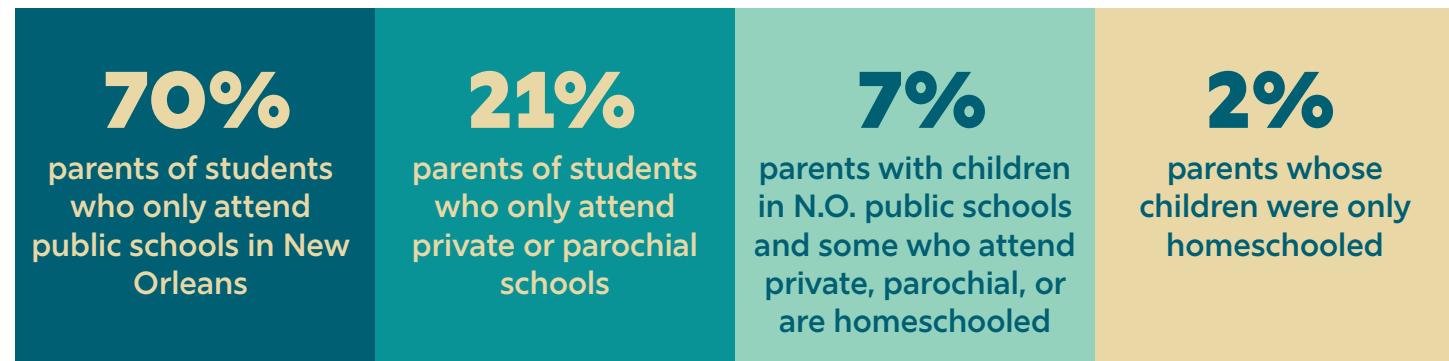
This is the 14th opinion poll on public education in New Orleans published by the Cowen Institute since 2007. The survey items were developed by the Cowen Institute in consultation with LJR Custom Strategies, a strategic research and consulting firm led by Principal Jennifer Johnson. LJR has led our polling over the past six years.

For this poll, LJR surveyed 1,000 adults who reside in Orleans Parish and are the parent/guardian/responsible party for one or more children who currently reside in their household and attend a K-12 school or are homeschooled. The poll was conducted from October 16-26, 2023, via landline and cell phone, with 90% of respondents reached by cell phone and 10% reached by landline. Findings applying to the 1,000 person sample are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 3.1%; subgroups of the sample are subject to error of up to plus or minus 10%. Please note that when percentages in responses do not add up to 100%, it's due to rounding.

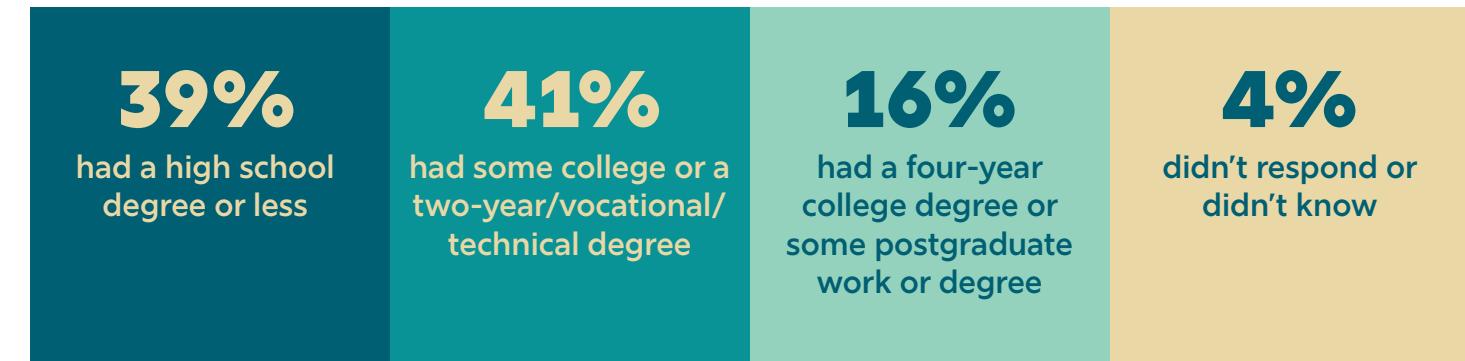
# || DEMOGRAPHICS

Of those polled, our respondents had the following characteristics:

## SCHOOL TYPE



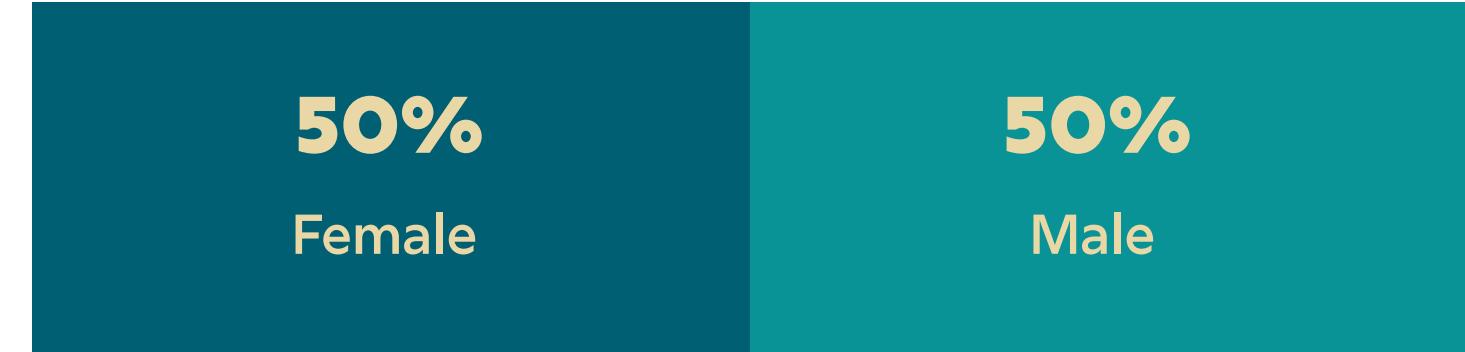
## EDUCATION LEVEL



## RACE



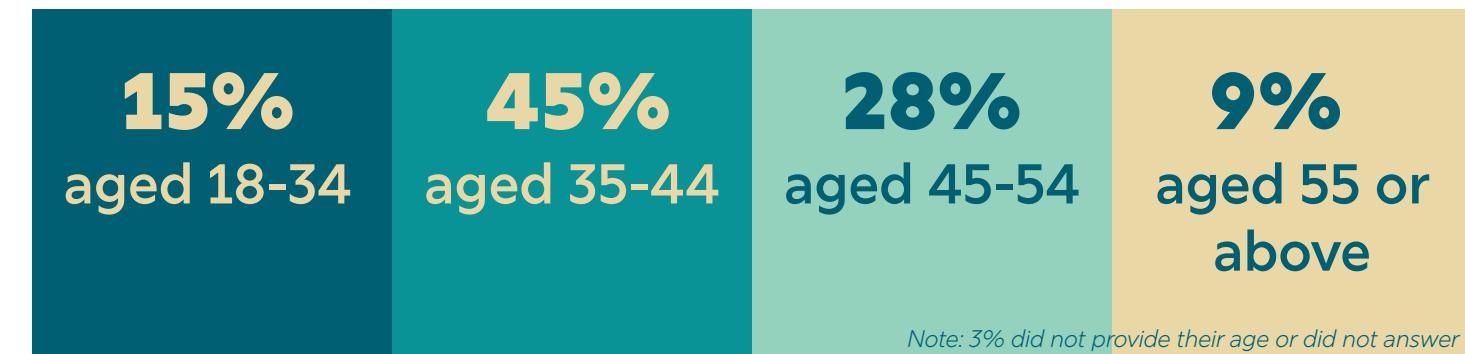
## GENDER



## INCOME LEVEL



## AGE



# KEY FINDINGS



**Overall dissatisfaction:** We found considerable dissatisfaction amongst parents and guardians regarding public education in the city, but also about the direction of New Orleans under its current leadership. Negative perceptions about the city in general and education specifically were higher than at any point over the past five years. Assessments of New Orleans Public Schools (NOLA-PS) have become more negative over the past year, though parents with younger children were more favorable than parents of older children.



**Racial differences:** Generally, Black respondents had higher levels of dissatisfaction with the public education system than White and Hispanic respondents. This echoes previous polling by the Cowen Institute that suggests parents and guardians' experience with public education in the city may vary greatly by their race.



**Socioeconomic differences:** As we have seen in previous polls, respondents from wealthier households typically have more positive views about public education than those from lower-income households. Similar to race, this suggests that the socioeconomic status of families may impact their ability to navigate school choice, as well as their satisfaction with their public education opportunities.

# DIRECTION OF THE CITY

This year, we wanted to place respondents' perceptions about public education in New Orleans in context with how they felt about the overall direction of the city. As a result, we asked how satisfied they were with the direction of New Orleans under its current leadership. A majority of respondents, 52%, stated they were either not very satisfied or not satisfied at all, compared to 46% who stated they were very or somewhat satisfied.

## Subgroup Breakdown

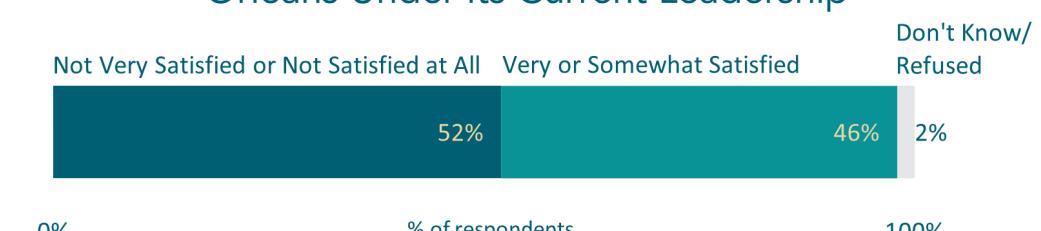
**Income:** Higher income respondents were the least satisfied with the direction of the city, but a majority of respondents from all incomes were dissatisfied: 61% of respondents with household incomes of \$75,000 or higher were either not very satisfied or not satisfied at all, compared to 54% middle income respondents, and 57% of lower income respondents (note: 13% of respondents did not share a response).

**Perceptions of education:** Notably, satisfaction with the direction of the city corresponds very closely to respondents' assessment of public schools. 85% of those who gave schools an A or B grade were very or somewhat satisfied with the direction of the city, while 48% of those who gave schools a C were very or somewhat satisfied and 47% were not very or not at all satisfied, and 77% of those who gave the schools a D or an F were not very or not at all satisfied with public schools.

**Race:** A majority of both Black (56%) and White (54%) respondents were dissatisfied with the direction of the city, while a majority of Hispanic respondents (62%) expressed satisfaction with the direction of the city.

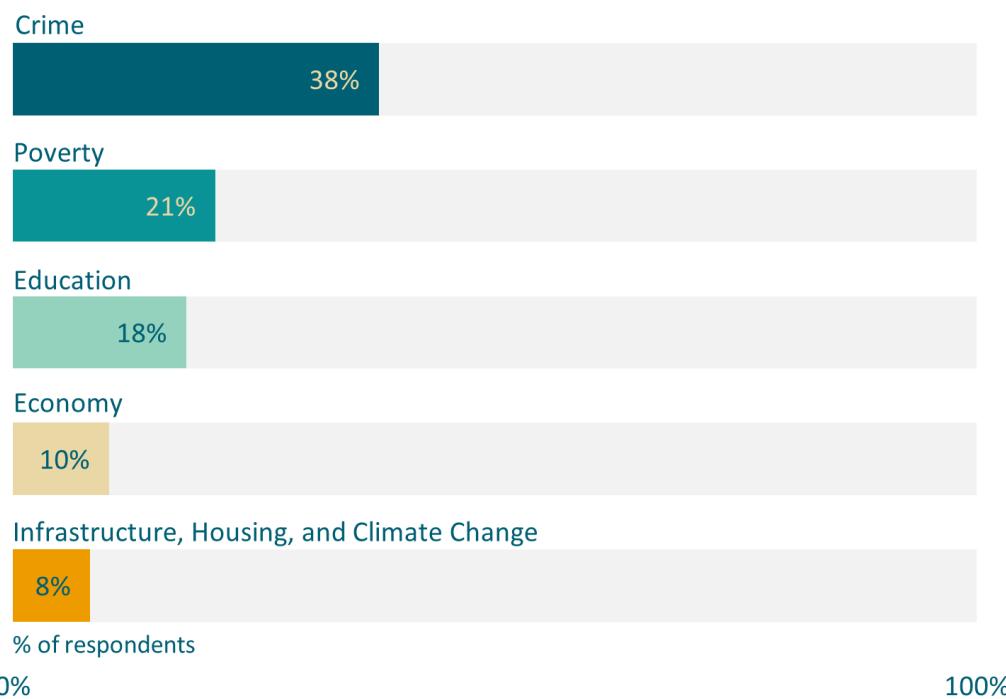
**Education:** A majority of respondents with both lower levels of education (a high school degree or less) and higher levels of education (those with a college degree or more) were dissatisfied with the direction of the city.

## Satisfaction with the Overall Direction of New Orleans Under its Current Leadership



## Top Issues Facing New Orleans

# TOP ISSUES //



In our recent polls, we have offered parents and guardians a list of issues that New Orleans is facing and then asked them which issue concerns them the most. Our list has changed slightly overtime: this year, it included the economy, education, poverty, crime, infrastructure (like roads and the sewer and water system), housing costs, and climate change/extreme weather.

A plurality of respondents, 38%, stated that crime was their top concern — crime was also the top concern last year, but the percentage who cited it increased in 2023, rising 11% from the 27% who named it last year. Poverty (21%) and education (18%) were the other top two concerns of respondents, which were largely consistent with last year's results (poverty and education were both at 21% in 2022). The economy was cited by just 10% of respondents, which was a large drop from last year, when 19% of respondents named it as their top concern.

Housing costs, infrastructure, and climate change combined were the top concern for less than 10% of respondents overall.

### Subgroup Breakdown

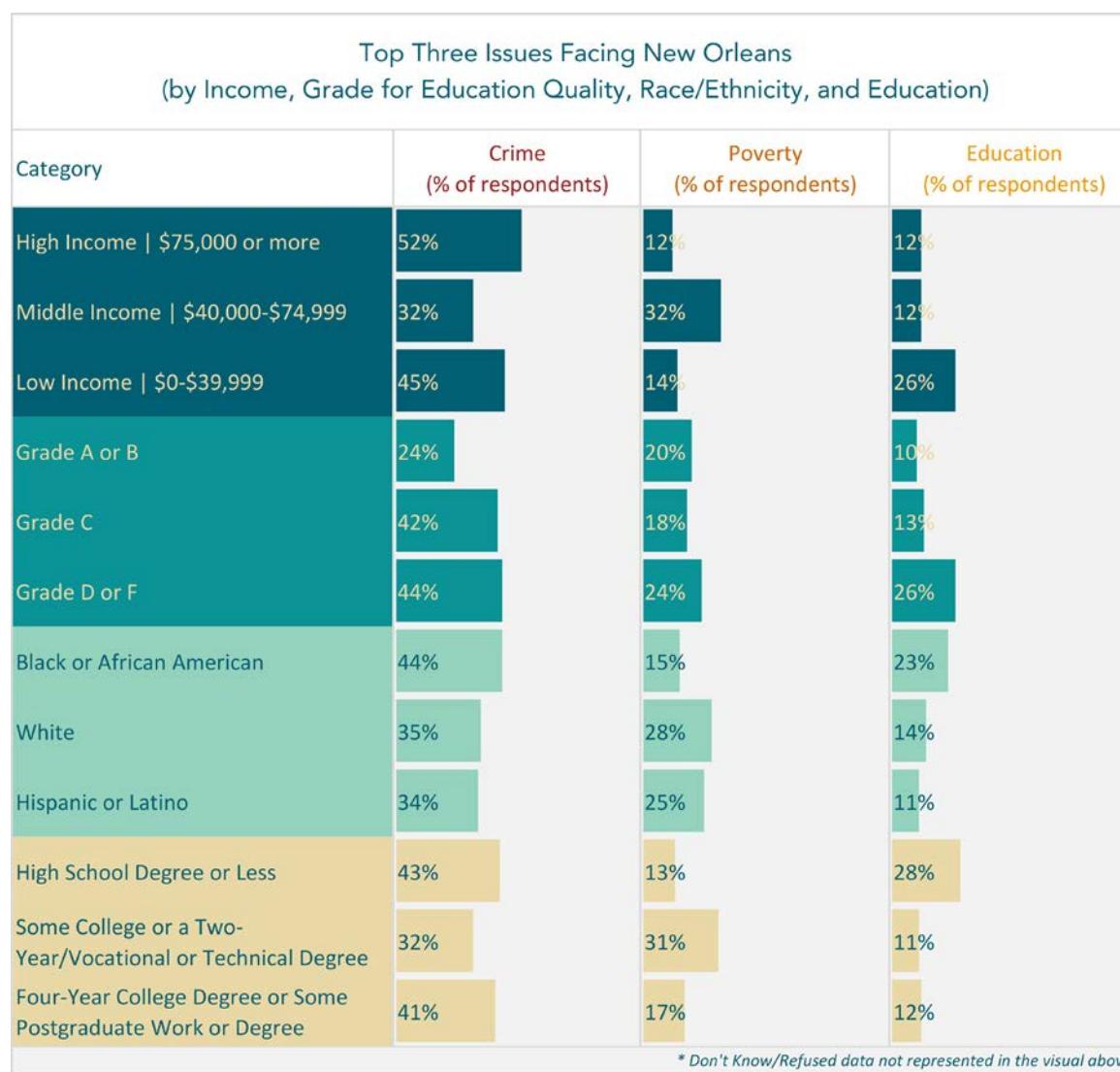
**Income:** Crime was the top concern of a majority of wealthier respondents (52%) and lower income respondents (45%). For middle income respondents, crime (32%) and poverty (32%) tied as the top concerns. Education was the second highest concern for lower income respondents.

**Race:** Black respondents (44%) were the most likely to name crime as their top concern, though it was also the top concern for White (35%) and Hispanic (34%) respondents. Black respondents (23%) were also more likely to name education as their top concern than White (14%) or Hispanic (11%) respondents. Nearly twice the number of White respondents (28%) cited poverty as their top concern compared to Black respondents (15%).

**Perceptions of Public Education:** Respondents who named crime as their top concern correlated with those who also gave public schools in the city more negative grades.

**Education:** Crime was by far the highest concern for both those with a college degree or more (41%) and those with a high school degree or less (43%), compared to respondents with some post-secondary education (32%).

**Age:** Responses were generally consistent across all age groups.



# NOLA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

New Orleans has a highly decentralized public education system in which most major decisions (such as hiring and firing of staff, as well as curriculum choices) that happen in schools are controlled by charter leaders and Charter Management Organizations (CMOs). Compared to most other U.S. school districts, New Orleans Public Schools (NOLA-PS), the central office and administrative entity that oversees the vast majority of public schools in the city, plays a far less top-down role. Instead, NOLA-PS' main role is that of authorizer for the charter schools under its purview, which includes holding those schools accountable to agreed upon metrics and standards. NOLA-PS is led by Superintendent Dr. Avis Williams and its work is overseen by a seven-member school board.

Each year, we ask parents and guardians to weigh in on how they feel about NOLA-PS. This year, we found favorability towards NOLA-PS had declined compared to 2022, while negative ratings had increased. Overall, this year, 29% of respondents stated they had a very or somewhat positive view of NOLA-PS compared to 31% in 2022. More notably, 42% said they had a very or somewhat negative view of NOLA-PS, which was a noticeable jump from the 11% who gave those answers last year. This continues a trend in our polling of decreasing favorability ratings for NOLA-PS since 2020. The percentage of respondents stating they have very or somewhat positive views of NOLA-PS has gone from 44% in 2020 to 34% in 2021 to 31% and 29% the past two years.

## Subgroup Breakdown

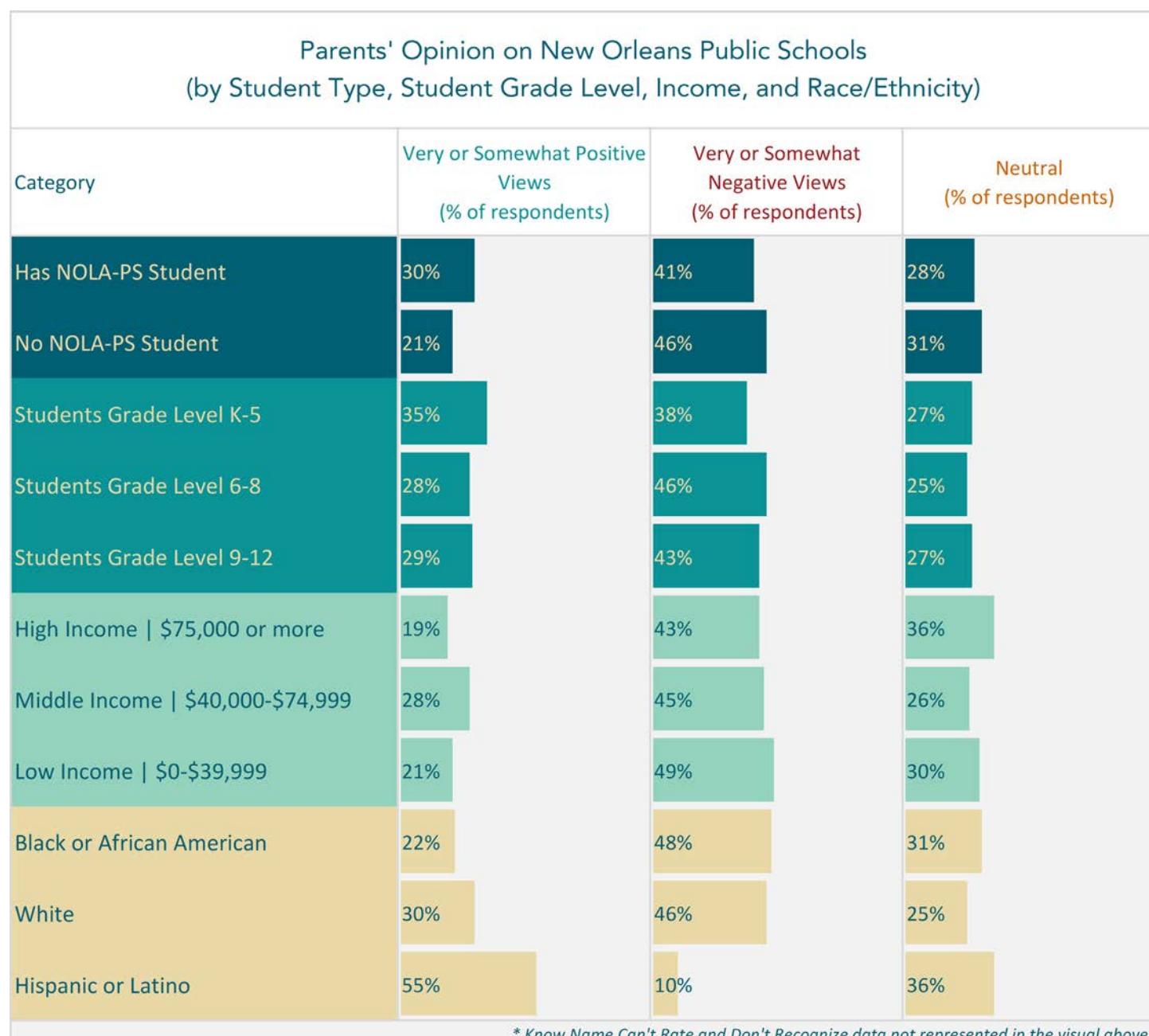
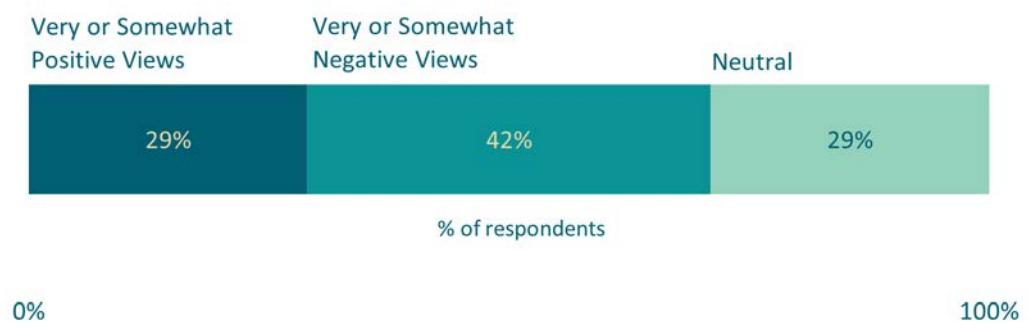
**Public versus non-public:** Among families with a student who attended a NOLA-PS school, 30% had very or somewhat positive views of NOLA-PS, while 41% had very or somewhat negative perceptions. Respondents without a student in NOLA-PS schools had far lower favorability ratings, with 21% having very or somewhat positive views, compared to 46% with very or somewhat negative ones.

**Grade level of students:** Interestingly, respondents with children in K-5 grades had the most positive attitudes towards NOLA-PS (35%), while ratings dropped among those with students in grades 6-8 (28%) or 9-12 (29%).

**Income:** Positive perceptions of NOLA-PS were nearly consistent among the highest (19%) and lowest income (21%) respondents.

**Race:** 22% of Black respondents had positive views of NOLA-PS, compared to 30% of White respondents (negative views were nearly equal at 48% and 46%, respectively). Interestingly, Hispanic respondents were one of the few subgroups with majority positive views of NOLA-PS (55% positive to 10% negative).

## Parents' Opinion on New Orleans Public Schools



# PUBLIC EDUCATION

Annually, we ask parents and guardians whether they believe public education in the city is getting better, staying the same, or getting worse. This year, we found responses were slightly more negative than in 2022.

Overall, 23% of respondents said public education was getting better, compared to 20% in 2022 (by comparison, in 2020, 41% of respondents said it was getting better). A plurality, 42%, said public education was getting worse (up from 35% last year), while 30% said it was staying the same (down from 35% last year).

## Subgroup Breakdown

**Public versus non-public:** Negative perceptions were essentially the same for respondents with and without a NOLA-PS student (43% to 41%, respectively), though respondents with a student in a NOLA-PS school were more likely to say schools were getting better (25% to 15%).

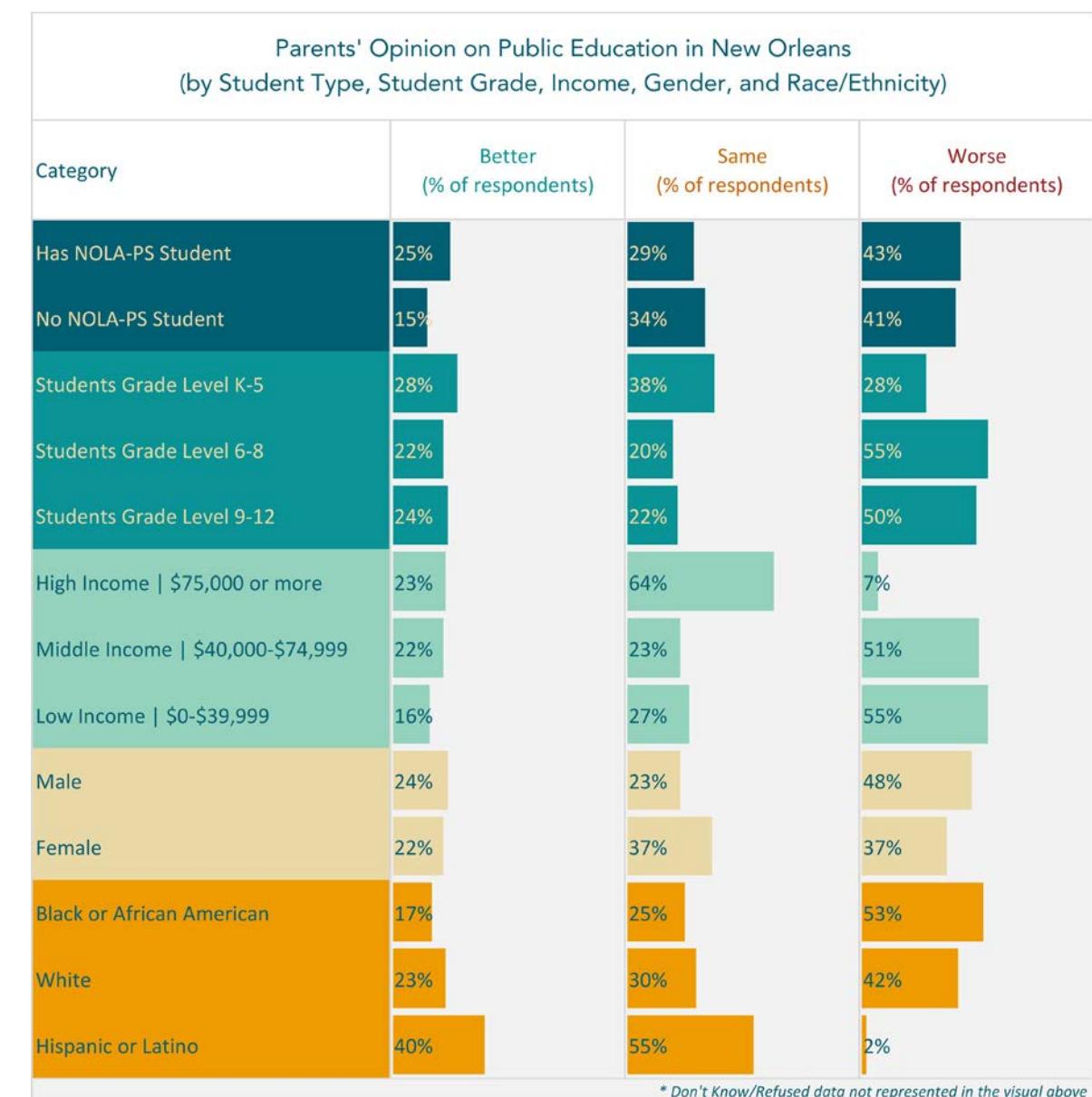
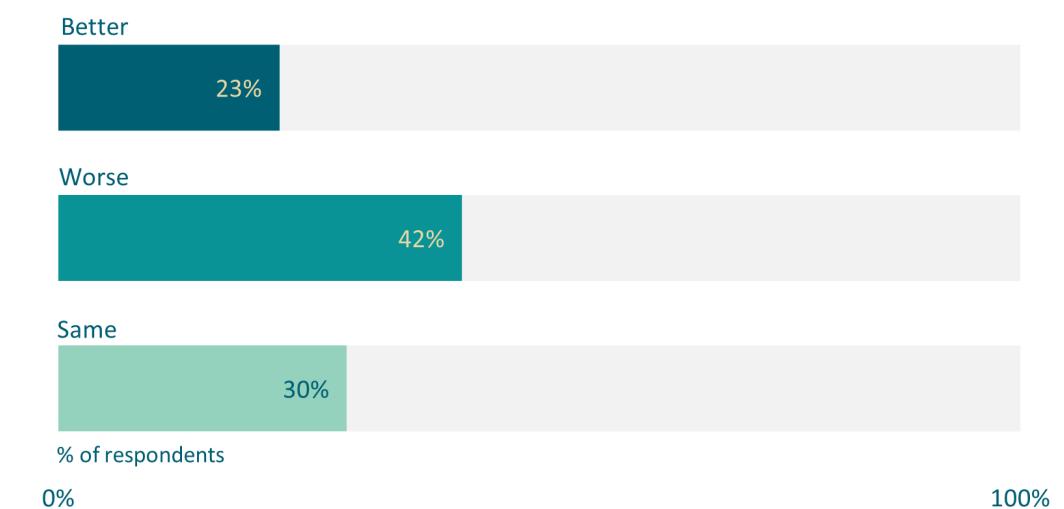
**Grade level of students:** Responses seemed to be impacted by the age of students: A majority of respondents with students in grades 6-8 (55%) and 9-12 (50%) stated public education was getting worse, which was nearly twice the percentage of those with students in grades K-5 (28%).

**Income:** Notably, wealthier respondents were far less likely to say public education was getting worse compared to lower-income parents. Just 7% of wealthier respondents said schools were getting worse, compared to 51% of those from middle income households, and 55% of those from lower income households.

**Gender:** Men were more likely to say public education was getting worse (48%) than women (37%).

**Race:** Black respondents had the most negative views of public education, with a majority, 53%, saying it was getting worse, compared to 42% of White respondents, and just 2% of Hispanic respondents.

## Parents' Opinion on Public Education in New Orleans



# EDUCATION QUALITY

Each year, we also ask parents and guardians to grade the quality of education offered by public schools in New Orleans. Responses this year once again were more negative than in previous years. Overall, a plurality of respondents, 30%, gave the quality of education a D grade — the first time the D grade has been the most common response in our polling. Last year, just 9% gave D as their answer, indicating a more than three-fold jump this year. 27% of respondents gave public education a C, 19% a B, 16% an F, and 7% an A (compared to 55% for C, 20% for B, 3% for F, and 4% for A last year). That means that, this year, 46% of respondents gave public education a D or F grade, which is nearly four-times higher than the 12% who did so last year. By means of comparison, in 2021, we found that 48% of respondents gave public education an A or B grade; this year, 26% did so.

## Subgroup Breakdown

**Public versus non-public:** Ratings were slightly higher for respondents with a student in a NOLA-PS school than for those without one, but 45% of NOLA-PS respondents gave public education a D or F grade.

**Grade level of students:** Once again, parents and guardians of K-5 students were more positive than those with older students — 35% of K-5 parents and guardians gave schools a C, compared to 19% of those students in grades 6-8, and 23% of those with students in grades 9-12. A majority of those with students in grades 6-8 (55%) and 9-12 (50%) gave schools a D or F, which was far higher than K-5 parents and guardians (33%).

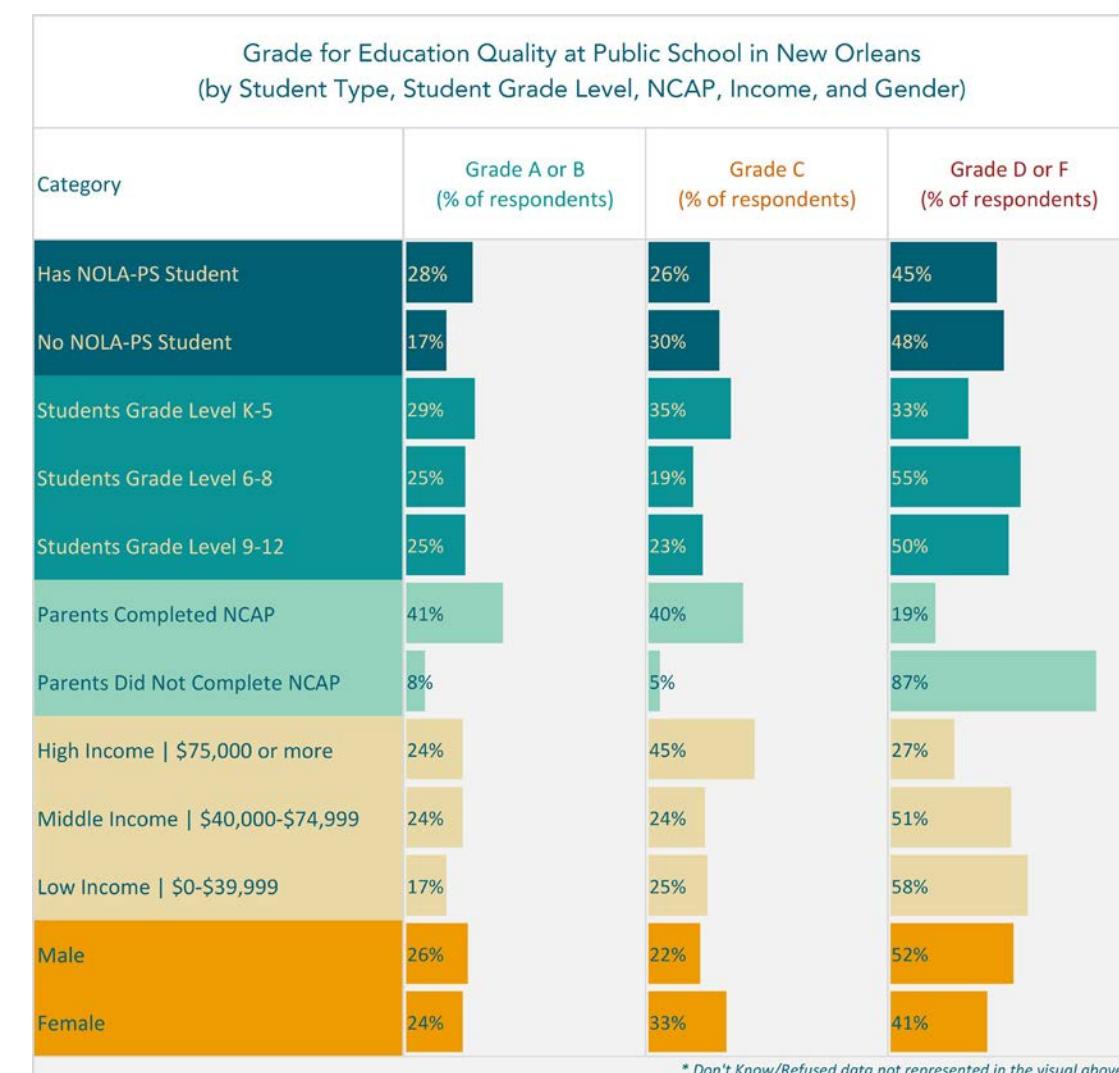
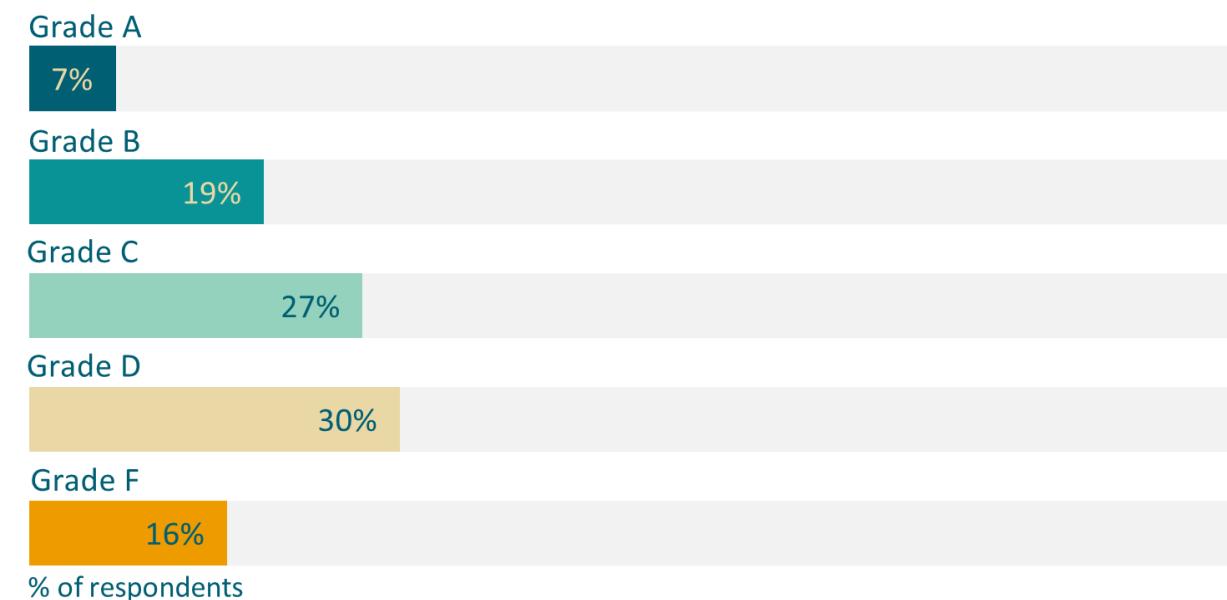
**New Orleans Common Application (NCAP):** It's worth noting that respondents who completed the NCAP were far more positive towards public education than those who had not gone through the admissions selection process or had not completed the NCAP for their family. 41% of parents and guardians who had gone through NCAP gave public education an A or B, 40% gave it a C, and 19% gave it a D or F; comparatively, 87% of respondents who had not gone through NCAP gave public education a D or F.

**Income:** Ratings for public education rose with respondents' income level. A majority, 58%, of lower income respondents gave schools a D or F, compared to 27% of wealthier respondents.

**Gender:** Men were once again more likely to give lower ratings, with 52% giving schools a D or F compared to 41% of women.

**Race:** Black respondents were again more likely to have negative views of public education, with a majority, 56%, giving schools a D or F, compared to 47% of White respondents, and just 8% of Hispanic respondents.

## Grade for Education Quality at Public School in New Orleans



# INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS

This year, we introduced a new question to assess how satisfied parents and guardians with student(s) in a NOLA-PS school were with the quality of education provided by the school(s) their child(ren) actually attended. We wanted to assess whether respondents had different perceptions about the educational experience of their children compared to their perceptions of the system overall.

Notably, respondents were far less negative about the quality of education provided by their children's schools than they were of public education in the city generally: 41% of parents and guardians gave the quality of education at their school an A or B grade, compared to 18% who gave it a C, and 21% who gave it a D or F. It should also be noted that 22% did not provide a grade for their child(ren)'s school.

## Subgroup Breakdown

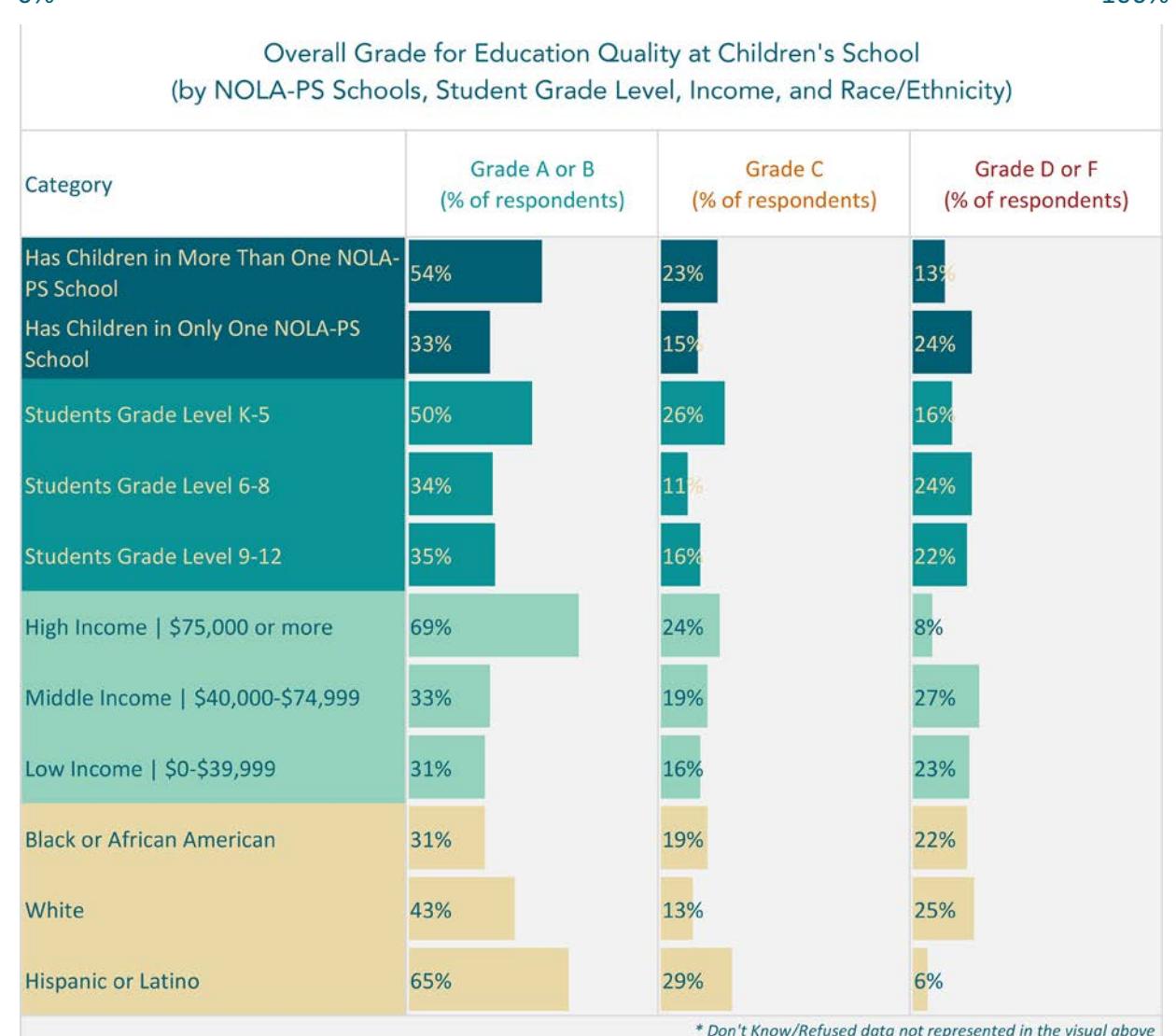
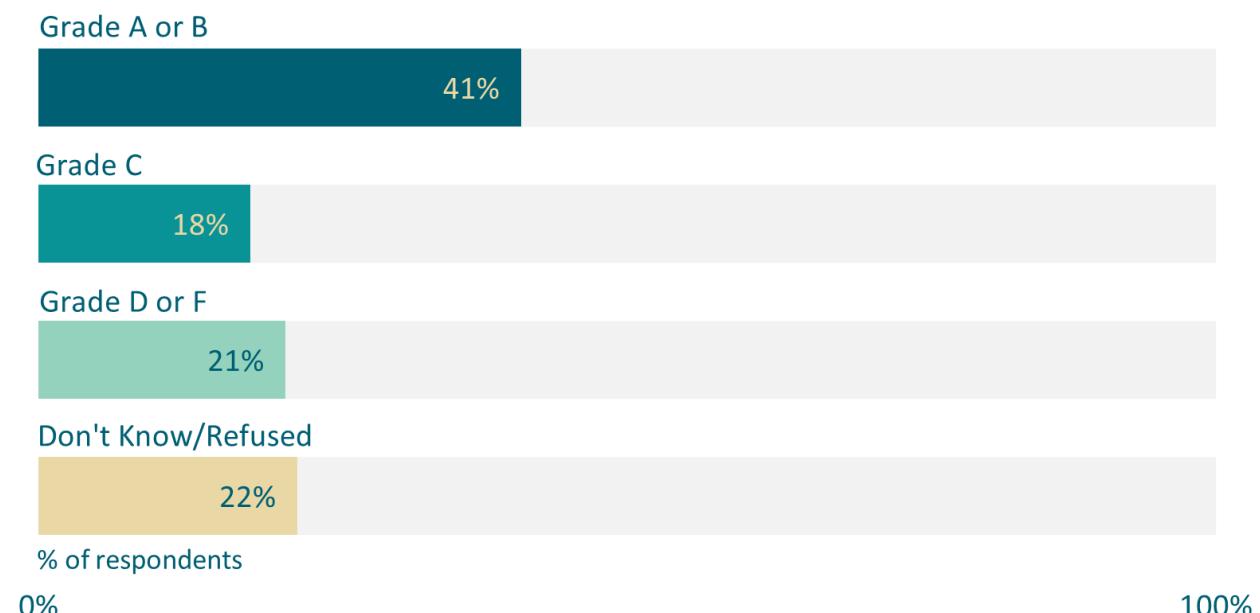
**Public versus non-public:** Parents and guardians with a child in a NOLA-PS school were more likely to give schools an A or B if they had children in more than one school, than if they only had a child attending a single public NOLA-PS school. A majority, 54%, of respondents with children in more than one NOLA-PS school, gave the quality of education at those schools an A or B, compared to 33% of those who only had experience with one school.

**Grade level of students:** Parents and guardians of younger students were again more positive than those with older students. A majority of K-5 parents and guardians, 50%, gave the quality of education at their students' schools an A or B, compared to 34% of those with students in grades 6-8, and 35% of those with students in grades 9-12.

**Income:** Wealthier respondents were far more satisfied with the quality of education at their child(ren)'s school than lower income respondents, with 69% of wealthier parents giving an A or B grade, compared to 31% of lower income respondents, and 33% of middle income. Notably, 31% of lower income respondents did not give their child(ren)'s school a grade.

**Race:** Black respondents offered lower ratings for their child(ren)'s schools than White respondents, with 31% giving their schools an A or B, compared to 43% of White respondents; 65% of Hispanic respondents gave their child(ren)'s school an A or B.

## Overall Grade for Education Quality at Childrens' School



# BEST ASPECTS

For the first time, this year, we asked NOLA-PS parents and guardians to tell what they believed was the best thing about public education in the city (this was a free response question). 31% of respondents did not provide an answer or refused to do so. For those who did respond, negative perceptions were once again apparent, as "Nothing" was stated by 18% of respondents. "Teachers" (12%), "Free" (7%), and "Available to all" (6%) were the next three most common answers.

# WHAT CAN CHANGE

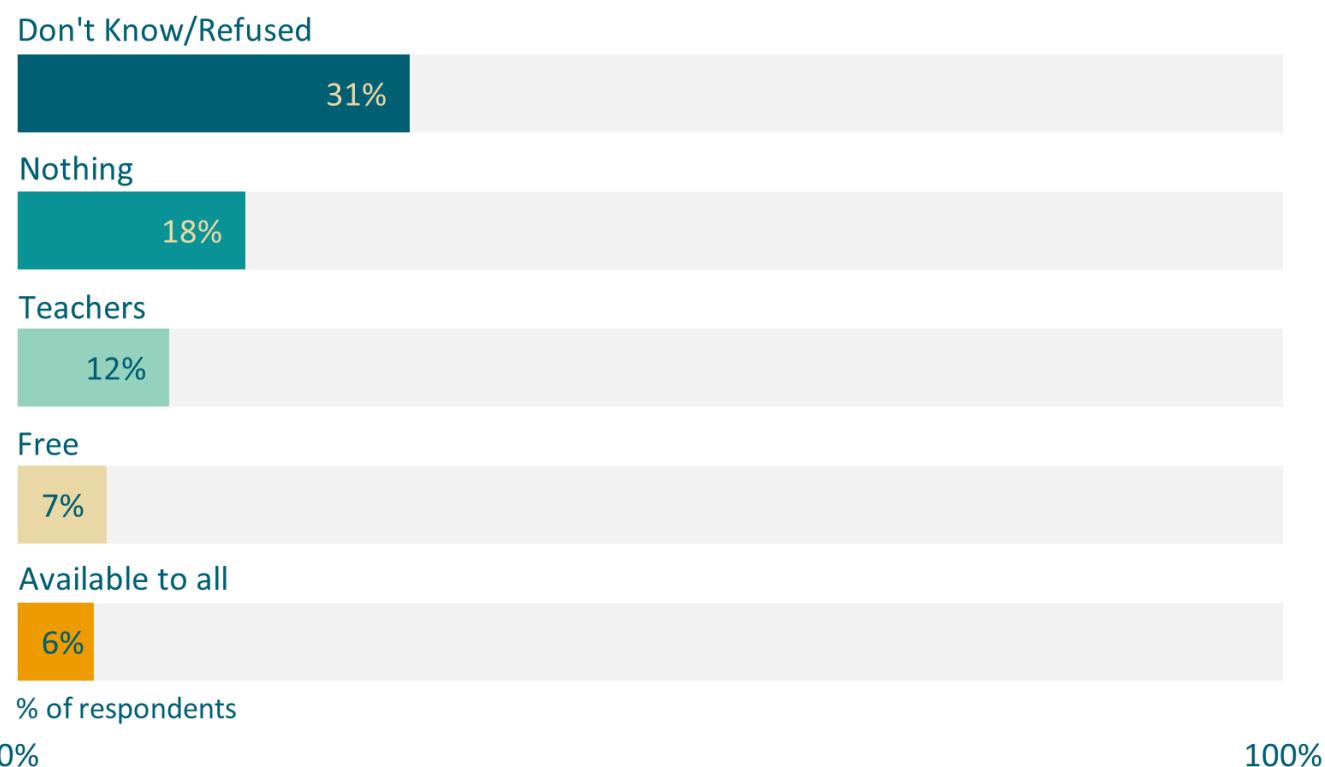
We also asked NOLA-PS parents and guardians what was the most important thing they believed should be improved about public education in New Orleans. Notably, 81% of respondents provided a suggestion (19% did not provide an answer or refused to do so). The most common answer, given by 13% of respondents, was "Everything", followed by safety/security (9%), teacher quality (7%), smaller classes/reducing overcrowding (6%), and the overall quality of education (5%).

# CONCLUSION

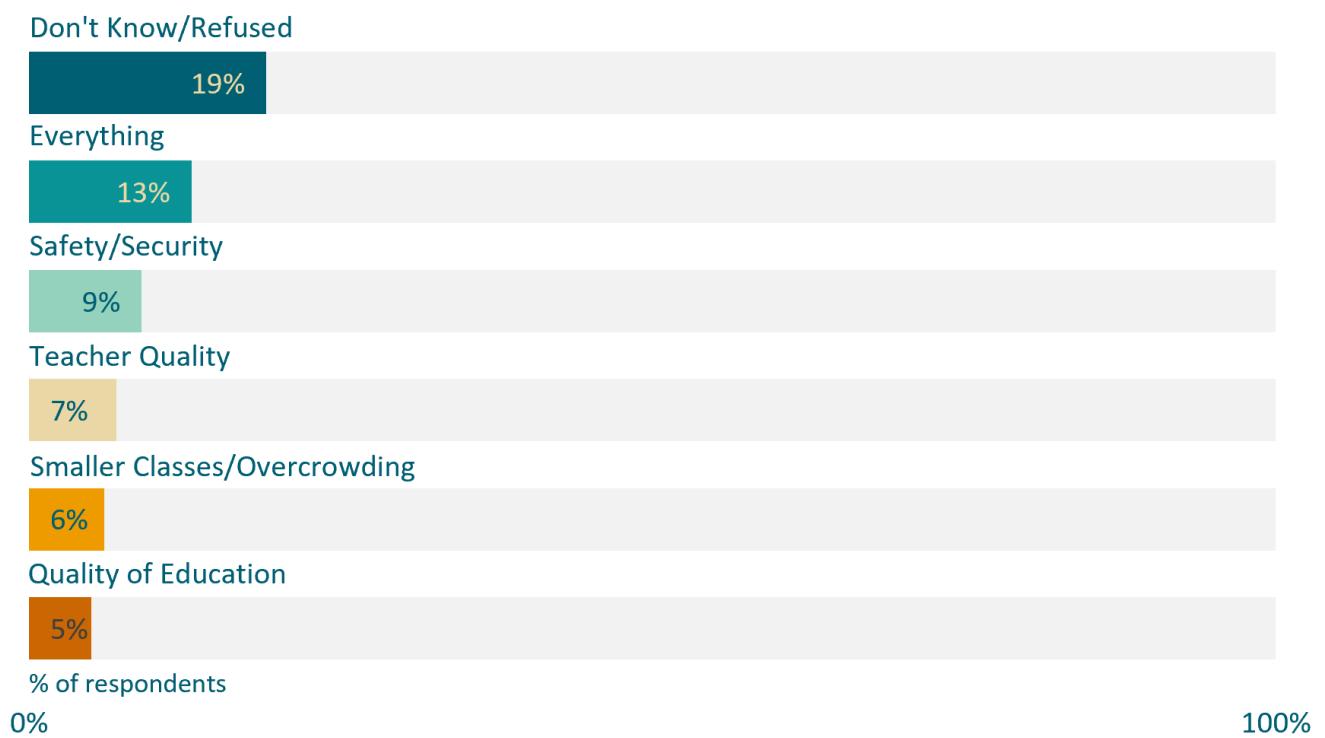
As mentioned earlier, this is the first of two briefs chronicling the results from the Cowen Institute's polling for the 2023-2024 school year. The second brief will be released in February 2024.

That brief will delve into more granular issues about education in the city. The results from those questions also illustrate higher levels of dissatisfaction with the direction of the city overall and public education in New Orleans specifically than our previous polls. That brief also will reinforce the finding from this brief that the experience of families with public education in the city varies greatly depending on their socioeconomic and education status, along with their race.

## Best Aspects of the Public Education System in New Orleans



## What Parents Would Most Like to See Improved in Public Education in New Orleans





# Cowen Institute

TULANE UNIVERSITY

To explore the data in greater depth and  
for interactive poll visuals, visit:  
**[cowendata.org](http://cowendata.org)**