



The Public School System in Coahoma County, Mississippi

Education matters when it comes to improving an individual's chances of getting a good job and earning a decent wage or salary. Despite the tough economic times many people in Arkansas and in many parts of the United States face today, those with higher levels of education are not only the least likely to be employed, but also are the ones most likely to earn higher incomes. So, having a quality public education system that helps prepare young people to enter into a technical school program, community college, and/or four-year university is quite important since these post-high school education experiences are likely to shape the student's long-term financial security once they enter the workforce as adults.

Overall Rating of Public Schools

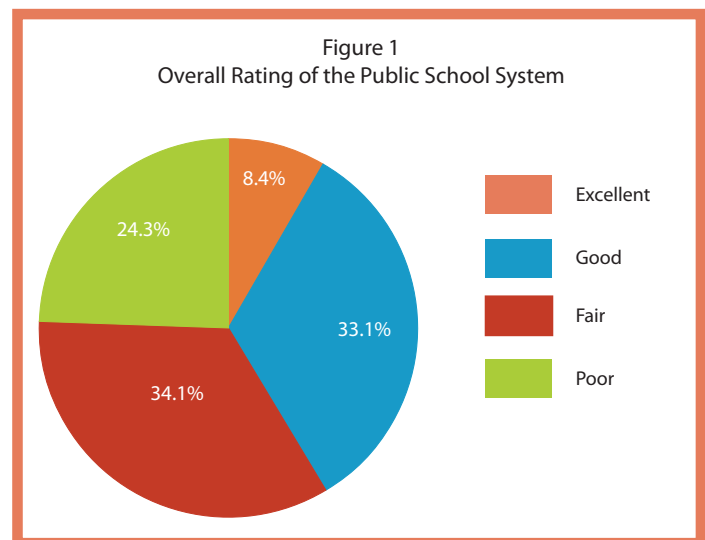
One of the critical questions that survey participants were asked to respond to was the following: "Overall, how would you rate the public school system in the county?" People taking part on the countywide survey expressed some mixed opinions about the public school system; about 58 percent stated that it was "poor" or "fair" while about 41.5 percent noted that it was only "good" or "excellent" (Figure 1).

The respondents' backgrounds seemed to play an important role in their response to this question, as particularly described below:

- Nearly 61 percent of those with less than high school perceived the public school system as "poor" or "fair," similar to the 61.8 percent of those with a bachelor's degree or more who viewed the public school system to be "poor" or "fair."
- White residents were more likely to rate the public school system as "poor" or "fair"

that were African Americans (70.8 percent versus 54 percent).

- Those ages 65 years of age or more were more inclined to judge the public school system in the county as "poor" or "fair" compared to those 18-44 years of age (67.2 percent versus 54.3 percent).

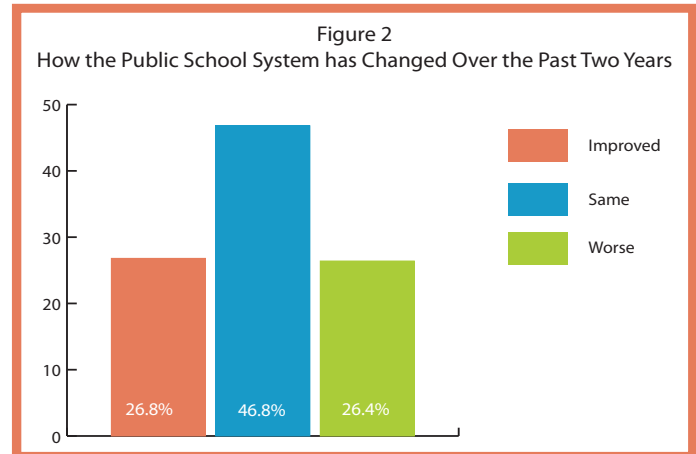




*C*hanges in the Public School System

Adding further insight into the residents' views of the public school system in the county, a second question was posed. Individuals were asked, "Over the past two years, would you say the public school system in Coahoma County has gotten worse, is about the same, or has improved?" According to Figure 2, almost half of the respondents said that the public school system has not changed over the past two years. About a quarter of residents responded they felt it had gotten worse while another 1 in 4 residents said it had improved.

Those with some college were more likely to say the public school system had gotten worse which contrasted with the views of persons with less than a high school degree (34.7 percent versus 20 percent). Female respondents were more likely than males to say the school system had gotten worse over the past two years (31.6 percent versus 19.5 percent). The biggest difference in opinions on this issue was uncovered between white and African American residents. About 40 percent of the former thought the public school system had gotten worse over the past two years compared to only 22 percent of the latter.



*T*he Public School Teachers and Leaders

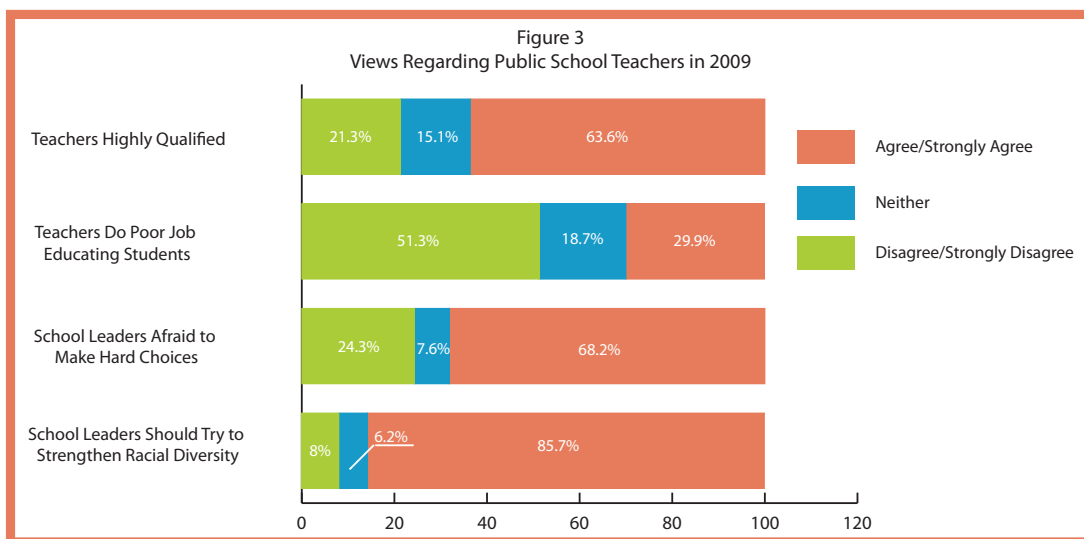
Designed to capture how local residents perceived the effectiveness of the public school system's teachers, the survey presented a series of statements to residents. Their overall responses are presented below:

- **Statement: County public school teachers are highly qualified:** The largest share of residents (63.6 percent) agreed with this statement, while 21.3 percent disagreed.
- **Statement: County public school teachers don't do a very good job educating students:** More than half of Coahoma County residents rejected the notion that teachers do a poor job educating local students, while almost 30 percent agreed.
- **Statement: School leaders are afraid to make hard choices needed to improve public schools in the county:** The survey results make it quite clear that a large number of respondents (over 68 percent) agreed with this statement. On the other hand, approximately 1 in 4 persons disagreed.
- **Statement: School leaders should do all that they can do to strengthen the racial diversity of students enrolled in the public school system:** This question assessed whether local residents felt that school leaders should take a more active role in advancing racial diversity in the public school system. About 8 in 10 residents agreed that school leaders should do so.

Concluding Comments



The importance of a quality education almost goes without saying. Without question, the individuals taking part in the countywide surveys had their views of the public educational system in Coahoma County. Overall, we discovered that: (1) a larger share of residents believe the public school system is fair to poor rather than good to excellent; (2) close to one-half of the survey participants state that the school system has not changed (either for the better or worse) over the past two years; (3) teachers are seen as being of high quality, and many believe they are doing a good job teaching local youth; (4) the majority of residents state that school leaders must be willing to make the type of hard choices that are needed to improve public education in the county; and (5) most believed that school leaders should work to advance greater diversity in the local public school system. The bottom line is, while many have registered concerns with public schools, they do want school leaders to do more to advance the quality of public education and to strengthen the demographic mix of students attending public schools in Coahoma County.



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For More Information:
Contact the Southern Rural
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Or visit us online at
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About these Surveys

The surveys used for this brief were conducted in the fall of 2007 and 2009. Telephone interviews with adult respondents from households in the target counties were conducted using a random digital dialing sampling procedure for telephone numbers.

A total of 800 respondents (two counties) participated in 2007 and 1,279 respondents (three counties) participated in 2009. The surveys were weighted based on gender, educational attainment, and age groups to ensure they were representative of the communities.

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