



Fallon Research & Communications, Inc.

WASHINGTON, DC: 202-263-7292 COLUMBUS, OH: 614-341-7005
FAX: 202-318-0346 MAIL: P.O. Box 12181, Columbus, Ohio 43212

October 8, 2009

TO: Interested Parties

FR: Paul Fallon

RE: Survey Data on Ohio Teacher Pay and Compensation

As governments of all types are forced to adopt measures to withstand the faltering economy, there has been growing attention focused on pay and compensation for public employees. The realm of public school teacher pay and compensation has become a highly-charged topic in some school districts where boisterous campaigns led by well-organized anti-tax opposition groups are being waged. A recent statewide poll of Ohio voters conducted by Fallon Research & Communications, Inc. not only included the subject of teacher pay, but also explored the topics of benefits and how various forms of compensation could affect potential levy outcomes.

Giving Teachers Their Due!

Although letters to the editor and angry, sometimes anonymous, fliers might suggest something different, few voters in Ohio begrudge the amount of pay that their school districts give to teachers. Only **11%** of the voter-respondents said that they felt the amount of pay that their public school districts give its teachers is too high, while **45%** say pay is generally pretty fair, **34%** feel it is too low and **10%** are unsure. Even among normally tax-conscious Republican voters, only **13%** feel that teacher pay in their districts is too high. On the other hand, pluralities of 18 to 29 year-olds (**47%**) and Democrats (**45%**) think teacher pay in their districts is too low! There were two interesting findings in this area: public school parents (**38% say teacher pay is too low**) do not have substantially different views about teacher pay than non-parents (**33% too low**), but African-American voters (**60% too low**) were much more sympathetic than any other voting sub-group, including white voters (**31% too low**).

Not surprisingly, given the relatively insignificant amount of ardor that seems to exist about high teacher pay, its affect on voting preferences is commensurately low, as well. Overall, only **25%** of voters say that teacher pay will have a lot of influence on how they may vote on future school operating levies that might be on the ballot in their school districts, while **39%** say that it may have some effect, **13%** feel it will not have much effect, **21%** say it will not affect their decisions at all and **2%** were unsure. Even among the very narrow group of voters who feel that teacher pay is too high – which was only 11%, as you may recall from the previous paragraph – barely half of them (**52%**) are aggrieved enough about it to let it affect their voting intentions, and the percentages are considerably lower for the vast majority of voters that do not think teacher pay is too high.

It's About the 'Bennies'...or, Maybe It's Not?!?!

When campaign leaders become drawn into public debates about teacher pay, opponents often try to adroitly switch the topic from pay to the murkier issue of benefits, like health insurance. Such forms of compensation are often more difficult for campaign leaders to explain, and the public to understand, so they make great fodder for anti-tax activists that want to divert focus from primary matters, such as the quality of education.

Attitudes about the benefits given to teachers do not seem to be markedly different from those about teacher pay. Only **11%** of the voters said that they felt the amount that their public school district gives its teachers in the form of benefits is too high, while a clear majority, **56%**, say it is generally pretty fair, **14%** feel it is too low and **19%** are unsure. Perhaps because it is not an easy topic to comprehend, the two most intriguing differences between attitudes towards pay and attitudes towards benefits is that there was a much higher level of uncertainty (**10% unsure about the amount teachers are given in pay, compared to 19% for benefits**), and majorities among most of the state's critical voting sub-groups exhibited contentment about the amount teachers are being given in the form of benefits (**58% of parents, 55% of non-parents, 62% of Republicans, 56% of Democrats and 56% of senior citizens all say that the amount given to teachers in the form of benefits in their districts is generally pretty fair**). Among the largest voting sub-groups, only African-Americans dissented (47% say the benefits given to teachers are generally pretty fair), because a sizeable proportion (**28%**) felt the benefits were not generous enough!

Once again, the amount being given to teachers in the form of benefits seems to have little impact on how voters may vote on future school operating levies that might be on the ballot in their school districts. Only **21%** of voters say that the amount of benefits given to teachers will have a lot of influence on how they may vote on future school operating levies, while **40%** say that it may have some effect, **17%** feel it will not have much effect, **19%** say it will not affect their decisions at all and **3%** were unsure. Even among those who say that the amount of compensation given to teachers in the form of benefits is too high (which was only **21%**), just a slim majority of them (**52%**) say it will have a lot of influence on their levy voting. As with pay, the percentages are considerably lower for the majority of voters that do think benefits are too high.

What It All Means

The data indicates that, even in a politically-charged atmosphere like this one in which school levy opponents and the media are putting more emphasis on monetary minutiae and detail, the most successful campaigns will be the ones that spend energy and resources talking the about the issues and topics of greatest importance to their local voters and avoid becoming mired in debates that will not change minds or win votes. Although there may be some school districts that are exceptions, the survey data shows that teacher pay or benefits will not be decisive issues in most campaigns.

Please feel free to call me if you want to discuss this information in greater detail. I can be reached at 614-341-7005 and will be glad to answer any questions about the results or research methodology.

This information is based on survey research that was conducted through telephone interviews of 806 randomly-selected registered voters in Ohio. The interviews were performed during the period of September 30, 2009 to October 2, 2009. The overall estimated margin of sampling error is +/- 3.45%, based on a confidence level of 95%, although it varies for each individual question. This means that if this survey was repeated, 95 times out of 100 the results would be within plus or minus 3.45% of those provided herein. Further adjustments were made to proportionately weight the results toward the demographic characteristics of the state.

About Paul Fallon...



Paul Fallon is an Ohio-based public opinion researcher, political pollster and advisor for levy committees, school districts, interest groups, political candidates and teachers' unions. He specializes in land-use policy research, education and public funding ballot issues, and referendums.

Paul has worked on issues and campaigns in more than 32 different states throughout the country. He has served as the pollster for numerous campaigns to get voter approval for public funding requests for school districts of all sizes, from large urban districts to small suburban districts, and districts in industrial and manufacturing communities, ranging from Florida to California.