

# WHAT MATTERS IN EDUCATION

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

*Annual Poll Policy Brief No. 1*



**NOVEMBER 2022**

# INTRODUCTION

The Cowen Institute has conducted annual polls on perceptions of public education in New Orleans since 2007. These polls are designed to provide a snapshot about 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 carry over questions from our previous polls to assess how opinions change over time on a few key topics.

Beginning last year, we began releasing the poll findings in a series of briefs. Prior to 2021, we had presented the complete findings for a given year in a single comprehensive report. We made the change to make the data more accessible and digestible for the general public – the briefs allow us to group findings by topic, enabling us to surface trends about particular areas of the city's education system.

This is the first of two briefs we will release on our poll this year. 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. The breakdown for this year's respondents is detailed below:

81%

Parents and guardians whose children only attend New Orleans Public Schools (NOLA-PS)

2%

Parents and guardians who have some children who attend public schools and some who attend private schools

15%

Parents and guardians whose children only attend private and parochial schools

2%

Parents and guardians whose children are exclusively homeschooled



# METHODOLOGY

This is the 13th opinion poll on public education in New Orleans published by the Cowen Institute. It was conducted between September 6-15, 2022. 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 five years.

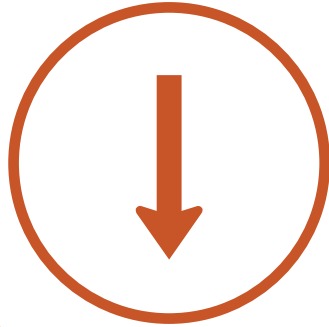
The poll surveyed 1,000 adults who reside in Orleans Parish and are the parent/guardian/responsible party for one or more children who currently reside in their household and attend a K-12 school or are homeschooled. Of those adults surveyed, 90%

were reached by cell phone and 10% were reached by landline. The sample was representative of the location of residence of the population of New Orleans. Findings from the full 1,000 person sample are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 3.1%. Subgroup analyses are subject to error of up to plus or minus 10%.

A full overview of question format and item-level descriptives are included on our website:

[cowendata.org](https://cowendata.org)

# OVERALL TRENDS



Overall, respondents this year were noticeably more negative about education generally, and specific areas of the city's K-12 public education system than in the past few years. As is shown in the key findings section, respondents were more pessimistic about the overall direction and quality of education in the city, as well as about charter schools and New Orleans Public Schools (NOLA-PS).



We also saw a notable jump in the percentage of respondents providing no response or answering they were not aware of the topic they were being asked about. While we can only speculate about the cause of the increased proportion of non-response categories, we want to draw attention to it throughout the poll brief.



As in previous years, there are noticeable differences in responses among socio-demographic groups, with some of the largest differences occurring based on socioeconomic status and educational attainment. This indicates that families' experience with K-12 education can vary greatly depending on their income and educational level and that equity remains a vital issue for educators and policymakers to continue to address.



# KEY FINDINGS

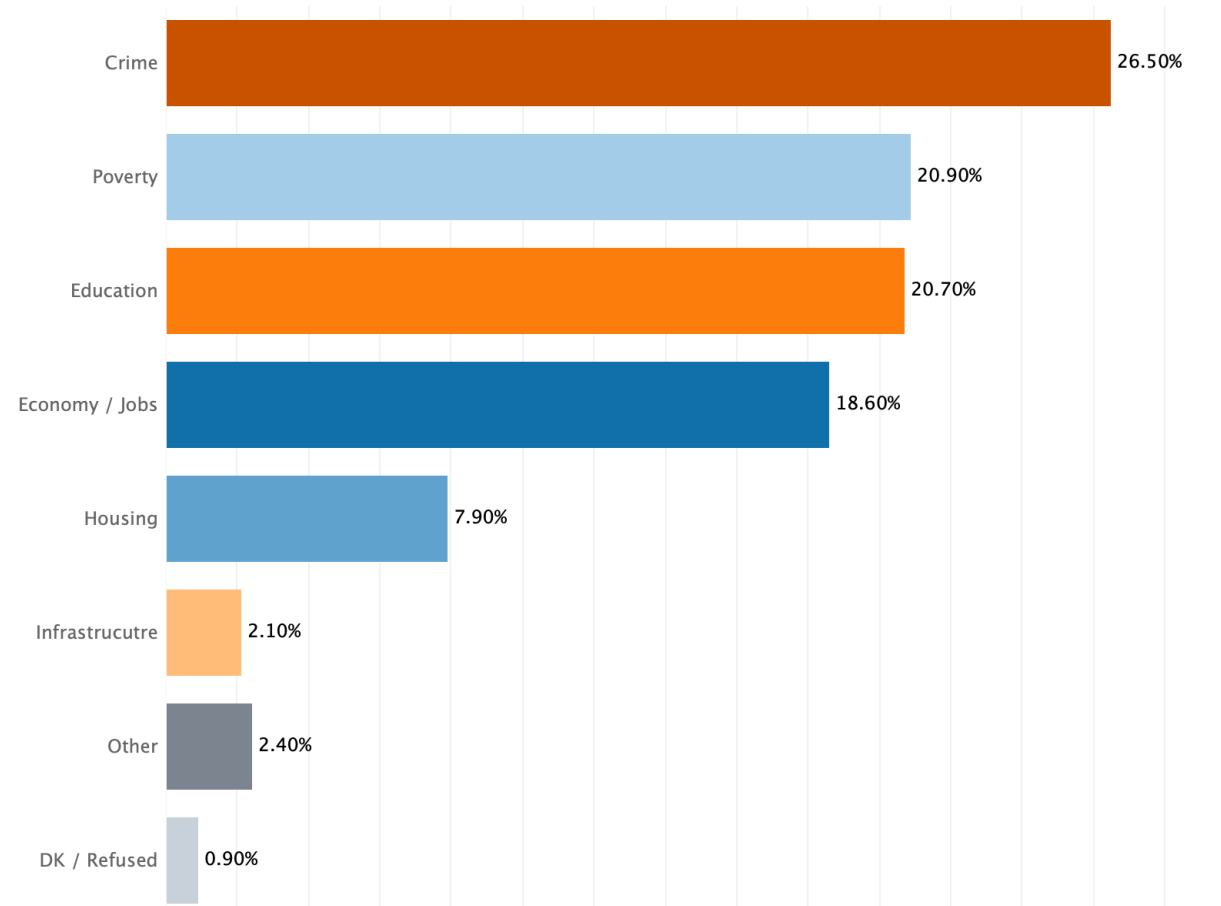
## The Top Issues Facing New Orleans

As we noted in our second poll brief in 2021, education is no longer the issue respondents name as the most pressing concern facing the city as it had been in the past. Instead, as was true in 2020 and 2021, respondents named crime as their top concern out of the city's most pressing issues. In 2022, as was true the past two years, education ranked as the third most important concern; however, this year, poverty was the second highest concern. In 2020 and 2021, the economy and jobs was the second ranked concern, but that issue was ranked fourth this year. However, it is worth noting that there was little separation in the results for education, poverty, and the economy – all were named by close to 20% of respondents as their top concern.

### Subgroup Breakdown

- » Education was the top concern for college graduates (36%), while poverty was the prime issue for those with a high school degree or less (34%).
- » 53% of respondents making \$75,000 or over cited crime as their top concern, compared to just 21% of those making under \$40,000.
- » 39% of White respondents ranked education as their highest concern, compared to 27% of Hispanic and 13% of Black respondents. Poverty and crime were the most commonly named concerns for Black parents and guardians.

### What is the top issue facing New Orleans? (All respondents)



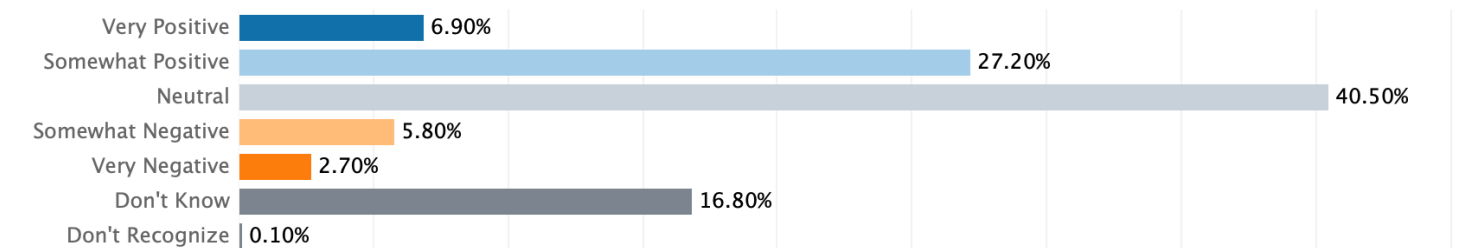
## Charter Schools

As we found in our poll last year, positive sentiments about charter schools continued to drop in 2022. (New Orleans' K-12 public education system is unique within the U.S. as it is the only district composed entirely of publicly funded charter schools.) The overall favorability toward public charter schools has dropped from 54% in 2020 to 46% in 2021 to 34% this year. Additionally, in 2022, more respondents opted not to offer a rating or are neutral: 41% stated they were neutral compared to 44% last year, while 17% did not provide an opinion, compared to just 1% last year. Only 8% of respondents this year stated they had very or somewhat negative views, compared to 9% last year.

### Subgroup Breakdown

- » 31% of respondents making under \$40,000 did not provide an answer to the question, compared to 12% making between \$40,000 and \$74,999, and 8% making \$75,000 or more. Those making \$75,000 or more were also more positive about charter schools or more than those in other income brackets, with 40% stating they were very or somewhat positive, compared to 22% of those making under \$40,000.
- » There were no notable differences in responses based on race for this question.

### How do you feel about public charter schools? (All respondents)



### How do you feel about public charter schools? (By income level)



% of Total Count of Cowen 2022 Raw Data-2.csv for each Income SHT broken down by Attitudes - Public Charter Schools. Color shows details about Att Schools. The data is filtered on Edu Short, which excludes N/A.

# New Orleans Public Schools (NOLA-PS)

The vast majority of public charter schools in New Orleans are overseen by New Orleans Public Schools, or NOLA-PS. NOLA-PS serves to authorize, oversee, and hold accountable the charter schools under its purview in the city, amongst other duties; however, unlike most other central districts across the U.S., it does not directly control issues like staffing, curriculum, and compensation at schools.

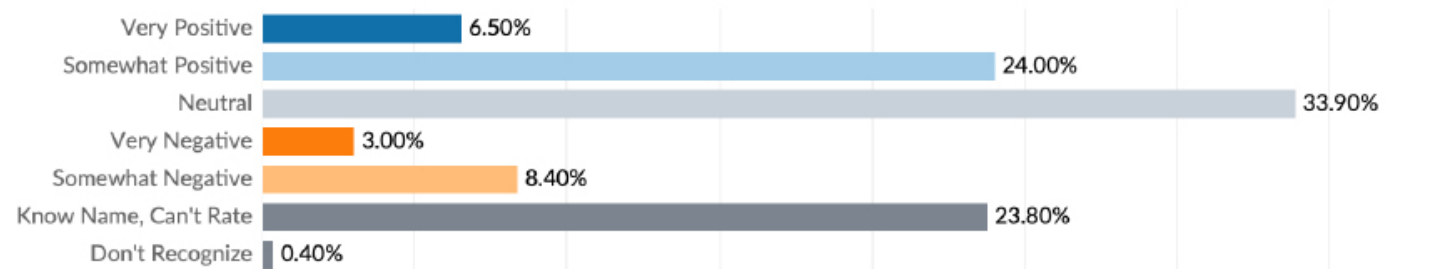
This year, there was slightly less positive parental sentiment towards NOLA-PS than in 2021: in 2022, 31% of respondents stated they were either very or somewhat positive about NOLA-PS, compared to 34% last year. The rate of negative perceptions remained the same as last year (around 12%), though, while those stating they were neutral dropped dramatically (from 51% last year to 34% this year). Again, a marked portion of respondents (24%) could name but did not want to offer an opinion about NOLA-PS, a large jump from the 3% in that category in 2021.

## Subgroup Breakdown

» College graduates and respondents making \$75,000 or more were far more negative about NOLA-PS than other subgroups, with 18% and 32% responding they felt somewhat or very negative about NOLA-PS, respectively. By comparison, just 6% of both those with a high school degree or less and those making under \$40,000 had negative perceptions.

- » As with other questions, a large percentage (46%) of respondents making under \$40,000 offered no opinion on NOLA-PS, compared to 8% of higher income respondents; the trend was mirror in education levels with 40% of respondents with a high school degree or less not offering an answer, compared to 14% of college graduates.
- » White respondents gave neutral as their answer most frequently (45%), and noticeably more than Black (30%) and Hispanic (29%) respondents. Black (29%) and Hispanic (24%) respondents were more likely to not provide an answer than White respondents (14%).
- » Among households without a public school student, NOLA-PS' rating was 13% positive and 33% negative.
- » Ratings were relatively low among households with a student in Kindergarten through 5th grade, and rose notably to 43% positive in households with students in 9th-12th grade.

## How do you feel about NOLA-PS? (All respondents)



## How do you feel about NOLA-PS? (By income level)



% of Total Count of Cowen 2022 Raw Data-2.csv for each Income SHT broken down by Attitudes - NOLA-PS. Color shows details about Attitudes - NOLA-PS. The data is filtered on Edu Short, which excludes N/A.

# New Orleans Common Application (NCAP)

As we found in 2021, sentiments about the New Orleans Common Application (NCAP, formerly called OneApp), the system by which families apply to admission in NOLA-PS schools, are less positive than those concerning charter schools or NOLA-PS overall. In 2022, 22% of respondents had somewhat or very positive feelings about NCAP, down from 24% last year, while those who were neutral about it dropped from 47% to 34%. The percentage of those with somewhat or very negative views dropped, however, from 24% in 2021 to 18% in 2022. The percentage of respondents not offering an opinion or saying they were unfamiliar with NCAP increased dramatically, from 5% last year to 25% this year.

Those relatively dissatisfied opinions were echoed in more targeted questions we asked about the application system. A majority of respondents, 54%, stated they were either somewhat or very dissatisfied with their children's enrollment placement over the past few years, compared to 39% who said they were very or somewhat satisfied.

Part of the reason for the negative sentiments about NCAP seem to be that parents do not find the system easy to use: 63% of parents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that NCAP is easy to use, compared to 31% who agreed or strongly agreed that it is.

Another source of this dissatisfaction seems to emanate from the way in which the NCAP algorithm assigns students to schools. Our polling indicates that parents strongly desire to be able to send their child to a school close to their home. 65% stated they would prefer their child was assigned to the school closest to their home, regardless of the letter grade of the school, whereas 26% said they would not prefer this assignment method. Yet, this should not be taken as an indication that parents do not care about school performance when selecting a school: 58% of respondents stated that the academic performance of the school is the most important factor when selecting a school, which was more than five times the 11% for location, the second most popular response.

Additionally, 69% of respondents said they would prefer NCAP just assign students to the school closest to their home no matter what. Parents appear to want more local school options, while still retaining the ability to apply to open choice schools, as 88% said they either agreed or strongly agreed that they preferred to be able to be assigned to a neighborhood school, with an option to apply at an open choice school.

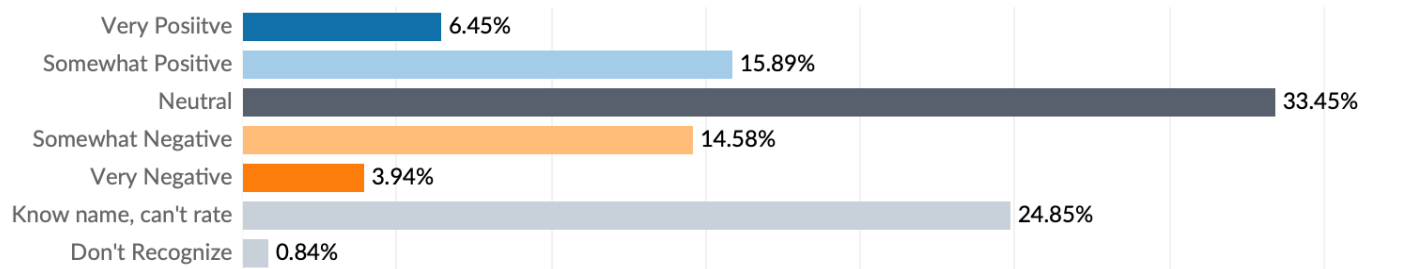
Yet, an overwhelming percentage of respondents also want to have a say in where their child goes to school – 92% said they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that it was important for them to have a say in where their child attends school, regardless of the location.

The name change seems to have impacted parents' and guardians' ability to rate NCAP. Last year, only 3% knew the name, but couldn't rate it, while this year, 25% were in that category.

### Subgroup Breakdown

- » College graduates and those making between \$40,000 and \$74,999 were the most likely to offer neutral opinions about NCAP, while 47%, a near majority, of those making under \$40,000 could name NCAP, but did not rate it. 42% of those with a high school degree or less also did not provide an answer to the question.
- » White respondents (53%) provided "neutral" as their answer at more than twice the rate of Black (26%) and Hispanic (20%) respondents; Black (31%) and Hispanic (25%) respondents offered no rating at far higher levels than White parents and guardians (9%).

## How do you feel about NCAP, formerly called the OneApp? (All respondents)



% of Total Count of Cowen 2022 Raw Data-2.csv for each Attitudes - NCAP. Color shows details about Attitudes - NCAP. The view is filtered on Attitudes - NCAP, which excludes Refused/NA.

## Quality of Education in New Orleans Public Schools

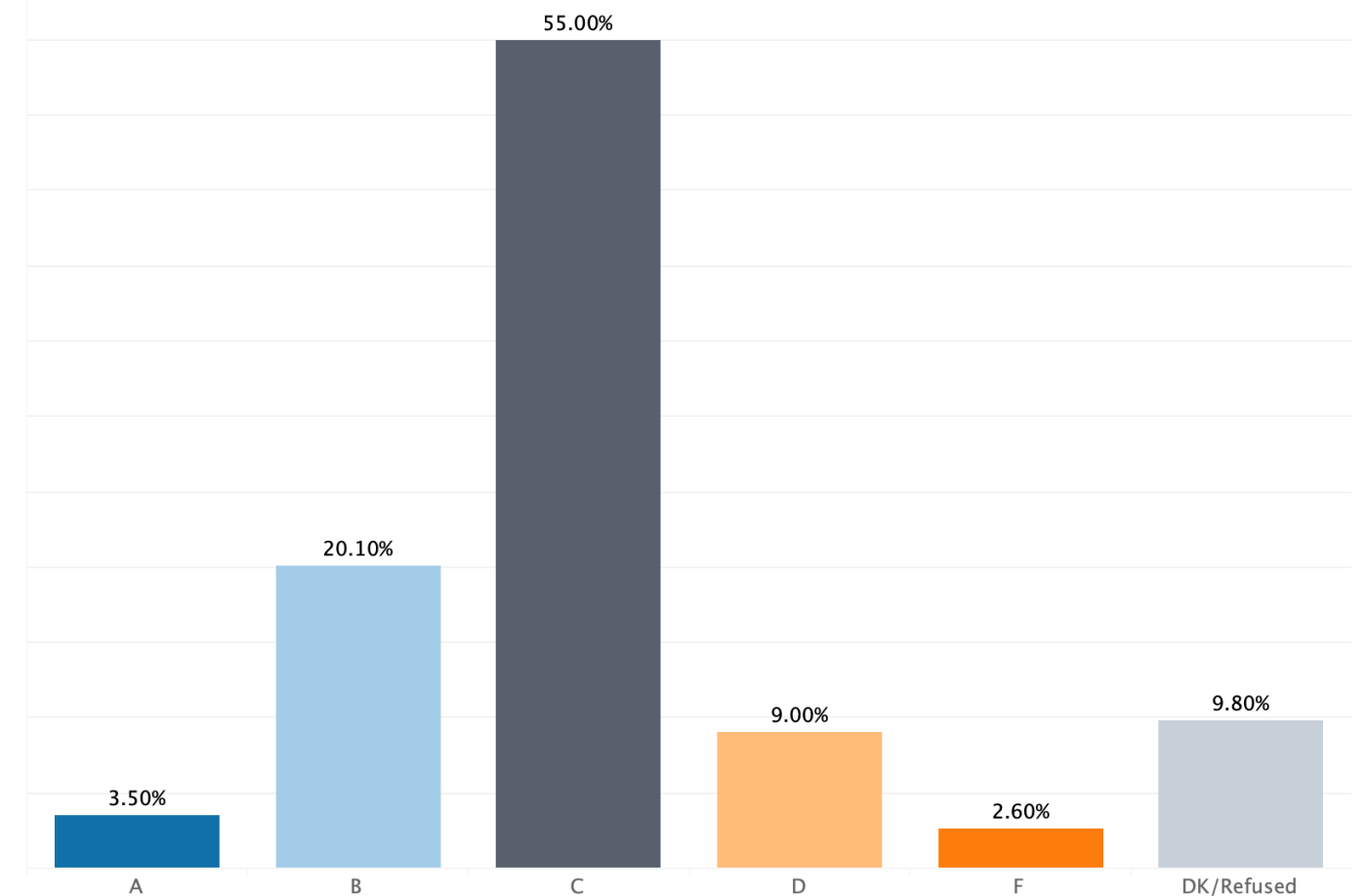
Annually, we ask parents and guardians to assign a letter grade indicating their overall perception of the quality of education offered by public schools in the city. In 2021, we saw a notable increase in respondents giving public schools an A or B grade; in 2022, opinions appear to have declined, as far more parents and guardians gave schools a C letter grade.

This year, 55% of respondents gave schools a C, compared to 24% who ranked it an A or B, and 12% who gave it a D or F. By contrast, last year, 48% of parents and guardians gave schools an A or B, 33% a C, and 11% a D or F. Thus, as in many of the other categories covered in this poll, while overall negative perceptions are not increasing, positive opinions are declining. Respondents seem to feel far more neutral or mediocre feelings about education in New Orleans in 2022 than they did in 2021.

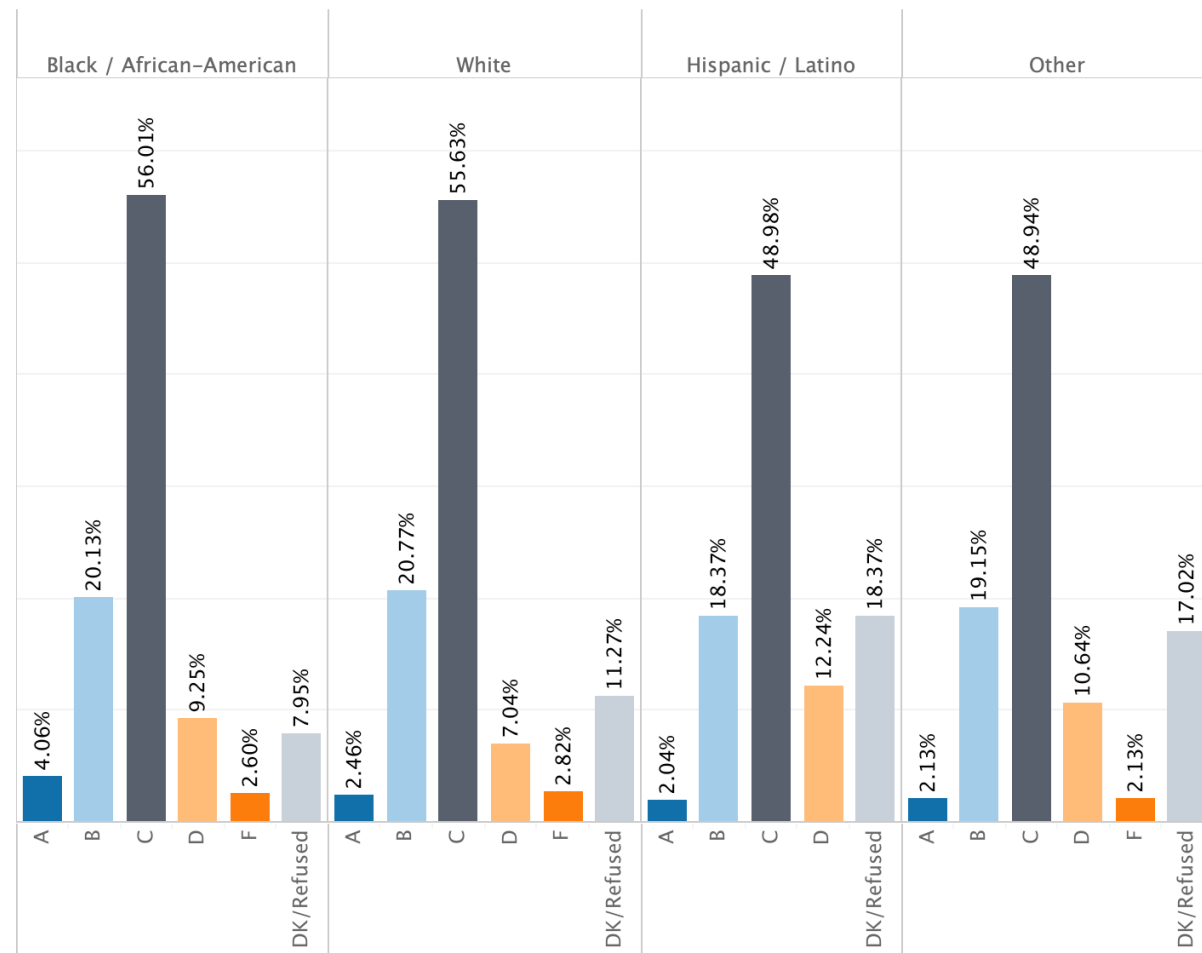
### Subgroup Breakdown

- » While positive responses were mainly consistent across education and income levels, respondents with a high school degree or less (60%) and making under \$40,000 (69%) gave the education system a C grade at far higher rates than college graduates (50%) and those making \$75,000 or more (44%). College graduates and higher income earners had the highest rates of D and F responses.
- » Responses were mainly consistent across racial subgroups.
- » Respondents with high school students were the most favorable toward the schools, a trend that carried throughout the poll results.

## What grade would you give the quality of education offered by New Orleans public schools? (All respondents)



## What grade would you give the quality of education offered by New Orleans public schools? (By race)



## Direction of Public Education in New Orleans

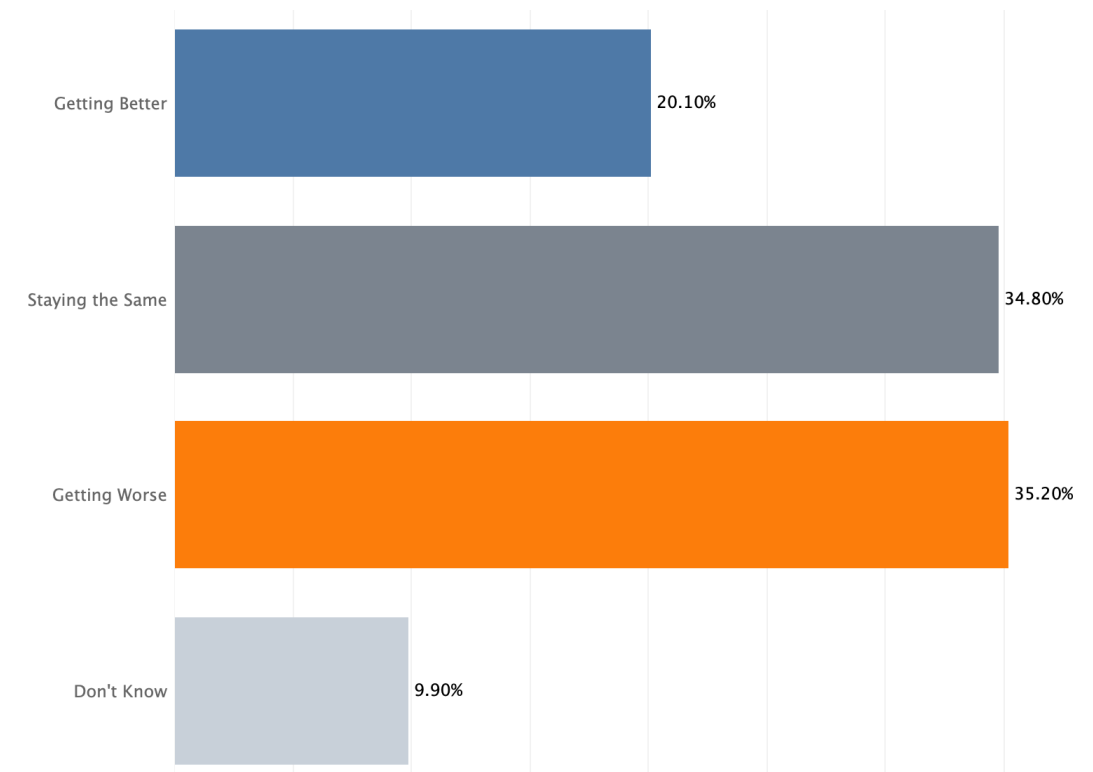
Additionally, each year we also ask respondents whether they believe education in the city is collectively getting better, worse, or staying the same. This year, we saw a notable rise in the number of respondents stating education was getting worse compared to our 2021 results. That was coupled with a decrease in the percentage of respondents saying public education was either improving or staying the same.

In 2022, 20% of respondents stated education was getting better, 35% said it was staying the same, and 35% also believed it was getting worse. In 2021, 26% indicated it was getting better, 54% said it was staying the same, and 13% believed it was getting worse. Thus, the percentage of respondents saying it was getting worse nearly tripled from 2021 to 2022.

### Subgroup Breakdown

- » Lower income earners and those with less education were the most pessimistic: 48% of respondents with a high school degree or less and 51% of those making \$40,000 or less said education was getting worse, compared to 34% of college graduates and 24% of respondents making \$75,000 or more.
- » Black respondents (39%) were more likely to say education was getting worse than White (30%) and Hispanic (22%) respondents.
- » Families with students in Kindergarten through 5th grade had far higher negative responses than families with high school students.

## Would you say the direction of public education in the city is getting better, getting worse, or staying the same? (All respondents)



## Would you say the direction of public education in the city is getting better, getting worse, or staying the same? (By race)



## Dr. Avis Williams, the New NOLA-PS Superintendent

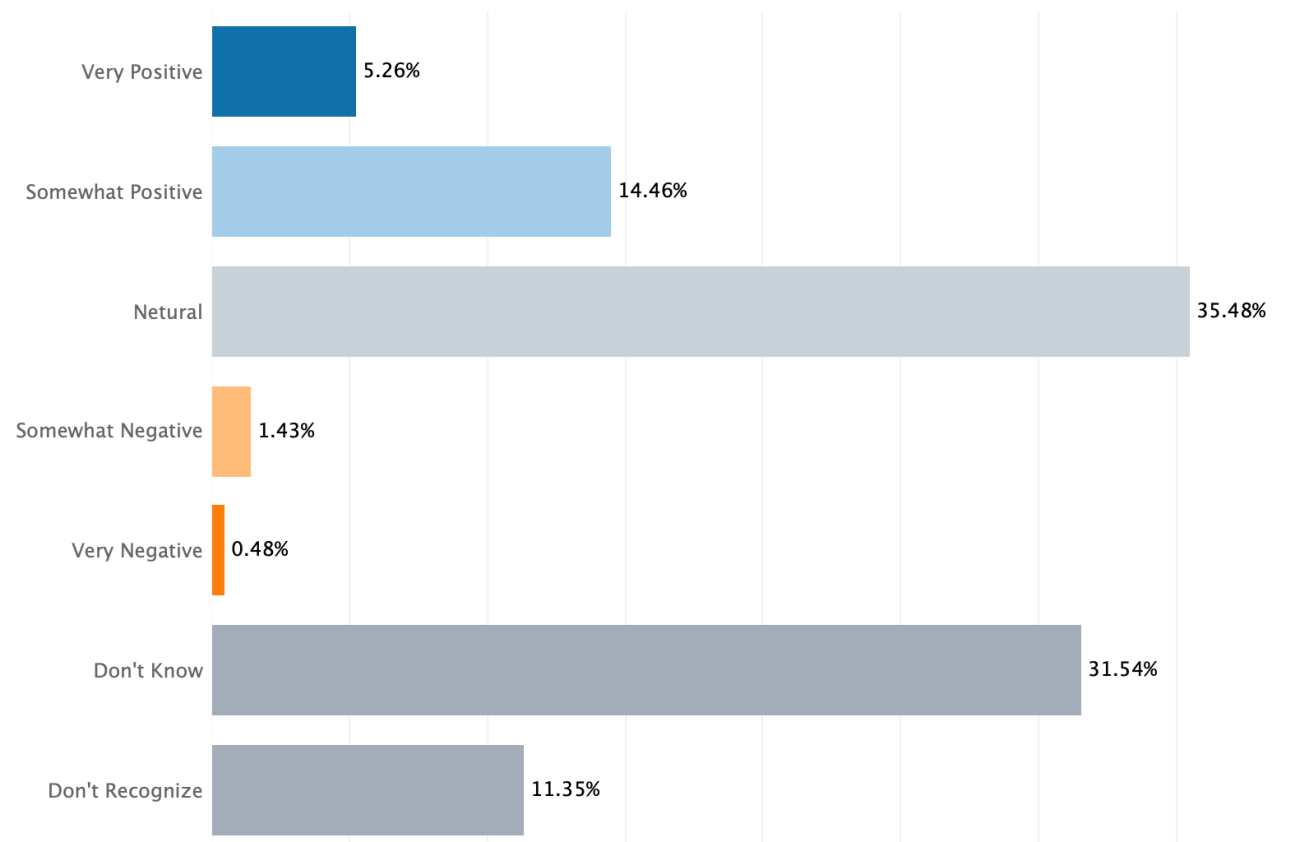
In March 2022, Dr. Avis Williams was selected by the Orleans Parish School Board as the new Superintendent for NOLA-PS. She officially took over from former Superintendent Dr. Henderson Lewis in July. To assess how familiar parents were with the district's new leader, we asked respondents about her.

Overall, our results indicate that although parents are still familiarizing themselves with the new NOLA-PS Superintendent, those who are familiar with Dr. Williams generally have positive or neutral opinions about her. 20% of respondents stated they had very or somewhat positive views about her (compared to just 2% who had very or somewhat negative perceptions), while 36% stated they were neutral; 32% said they did not know Dr. Williams well enough to offer an opinion.

### Subgroup Breakdown

- » A majority of both college graduates (50%) and respondents making \$75,000 or more (57%) offered "neutral" responses, while respondents with a high school degree (37%) or less or making under \$40,000 (42%) stated they knew Dr. Williams but couldn't rate her, which was the most common response to the question for both subgroups.
- » White respondents most frequently expressed neutral responses, with 49% providing that answer compared to 30% of Black and 25% of Hispanic respondents. 43% of Hispanic and 34% of Black respondents stated they knew Dr. Williams but couldn't rate her, compared to 24% of White respondents.

### How do you feel about the new superintendent of NOLA-PS, Dr. Avis Williams? (All respondents)



## How Parents Gain Information About Schools

When asked about the most common ways in which they receive information about NOLA-PS, 69% stated teachers as one of their top two responses (for this question, respondents were asked to give their top two choices).

### Subgroup Breakdown

- » Responses were highly differentiated based on education and income levels: 82% of respondents with a high school degree or less and 80% of those making less than

\$40,000 cited teacher as their main avenue for information about public schools, compared to 53% of college graduates and 42% of those making \$75,000 or more. College graduates and higher income earners were more likely to name the district website and school principals as their information source than other subgroups.

- » White respondents (41%) were also far more likely to name the district website as one of their top two information sources than Black (15%) and Hispanic (10%) respondents.







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To explore the data in greater depth and  
for interactive poll visuals, visit:

[cowendata.org](https://cowendata.org)