

MISSOURI SCHOOL RATINGS AND COVID'S IMPACTS ON FAMILIES

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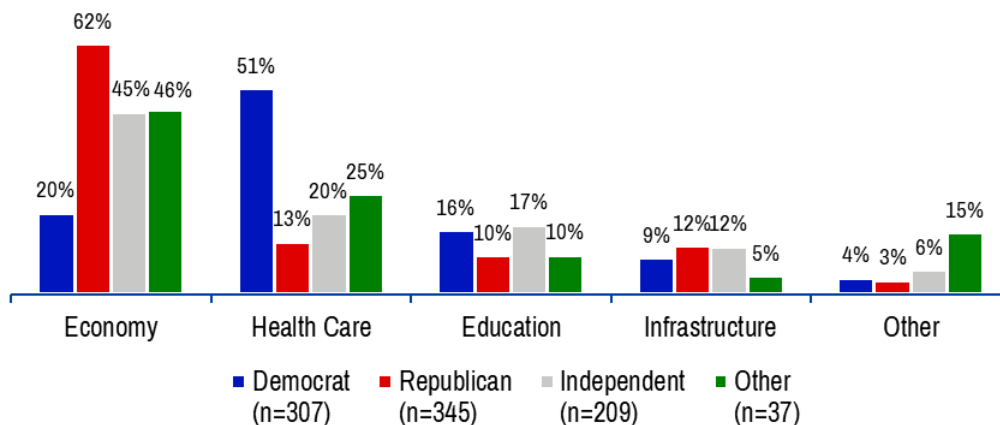
Introduction

Between June 23 and July 1, 2020, we worked with YouGov to interview 900 likely voters from the state of Missouri. Along with a host of election and policy-related questions, we asked Missourians to rate schools in their communities and across the state. We also asked respondents to indicate how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their daily lives and their child's schooling. Like national trends, Missourians reported they believe their local schools are better than schools across the state. It is important to note that few Missourians rate their local schools or Missouri's schools as excellent, with most rating their schools as good or fair. Respondents with school-aged children reported they've been impacted by COVID more than those without. Additionally, female voters are more likely to have been adversely impacted by homeschooling as a result of the COVID pandemic.

Missourians' Priorities

The COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted an enormous impact on nearly every aspect of Missourians' lives. Amid these circumstances, our poll asked Missourians to choose what they believe the top priority should be for the state government. While the economy was the most popular option, there was a clear partisan divide. Among Republican voters, 62% rated the economy as the top priority, followed by health care (13%), infrastructure (12%), and education (10%). Conversely, Democrats rated health care as the most important (51%), followed by the economy (20%), education (16%), and infrastructure (9%). The economy and health care are closely intertwined with the COVID pandemic, so it comes as no surprise that these two issues stand out above the rest. However, education and schooling have also been impacted by the COVID shutdown.

Figure 1: Top Priority of Missouri Government



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Special points of interest:

- The economy is the top priority of voters, with education coming in third.
- Women's professional lives were more likely to be adversely impacted by homeschooling during the shutdown.
- Missourians give higher ratings to their local schools than schools across the state.
- Voters' school ratings differ by voter race, political party identification, and whether voters have school-age children.

COVID's Impact on Families

In mid-March, schools began to close voluntarily to slow the spread of the virus. On March 21, the state ordered all schools remain closed.¹ Our poll found that most Missourians (65%) approved of the way their school district leaders responded to the pandemic. However, we also found that 59% of likely voters agreed with the statement that Missouri's schools should have face-to-face instruction in the fall. This was likely due to the level of disruption families experienced as a result of the pandemic.

To better understand Missourians' lives amid the pandemic, we asked a series of questions about daily life under the shutdown, including questions concerning education. Voters with school-age children were more likely to report they have been impacted by the pandemic than those without, as 58% of voters with school-age children reported they implemented some sort of homeschooling due to the pandemic. Figure 2 describes some of the experiences of voters with children during the shutdown. As shown, 21% indicated they were alternating work hours with someone else in their household, 19% indicated a family member or friend is providing homeschooling or childcare, and 17% said they were working less hours in order to provide homeschooling or childcare.

Among likely voters with children, the pandemic has disproportionately impacted women. This is especially true regarding the implementation of home learning programs. A quarter of likely voters identified as female stated they are alternating work hours due to home learning, compared to 17% of men. Women also were more likely to report they have been working outside of normal business hours. Unsurprisingly, men were more likely to state that a family member or friend is taking care of their children (25% versus 14%). Given the overall impact of the pandemic and ensuing shutdown on daily life in Missouri, it comes as little surprise that so many voters would

Figure 2: Homeschooling & Childcare Impacts on Missourians

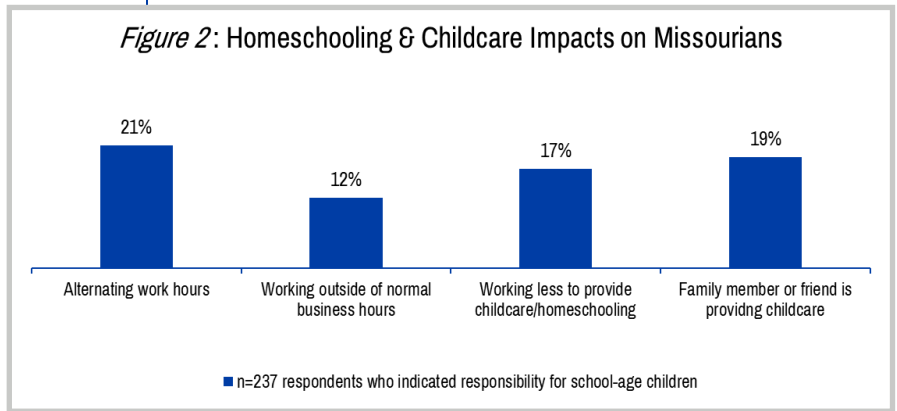


Figure 3: Homeschooling & Childcare Impacts on Men and Women

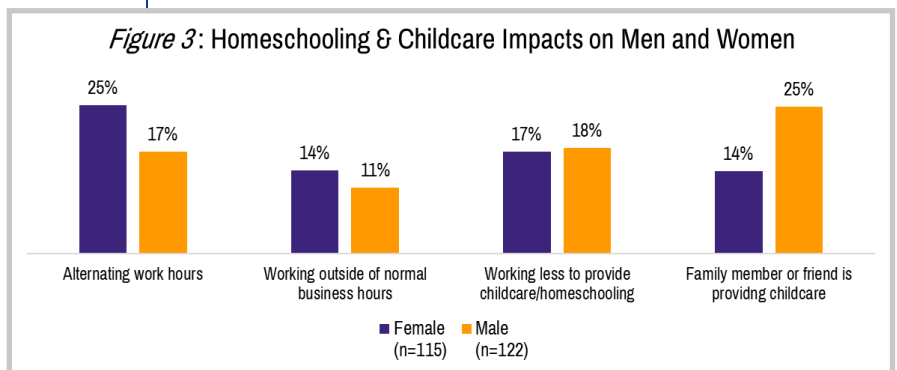
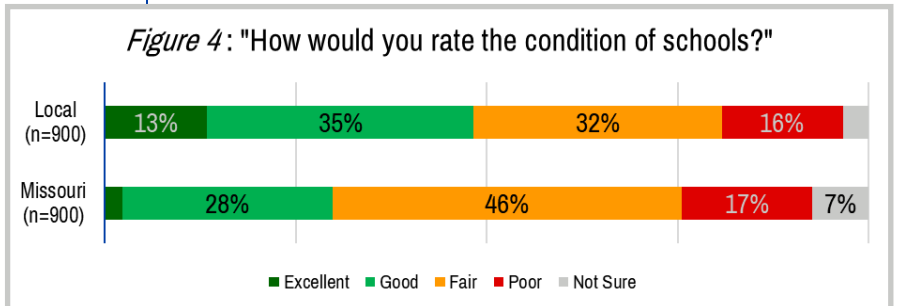


Figure 4: "How would you rate the condition of schools?"



like to return to in-person schooling. Missourians were asked to rate the condition of schools in their community and across the state.

Rating Missouri's Schools

Most Missourians rated their local schools as good (35%) or fair (32%) and few would rate their schools as excellent (13%) or poor (16%) (Figure 4). The most popular rating for schools across the state was fair, as 46% rated the state's schools as such. Just over a quarter (28%) of respondents rated the state's schools as good, 17% rated Missouri's schools as poor, and only 2% rated schools as excellent.

Recent national polling paints an inconsistent picture of public opinion on local schools. For example, in the 2019 iteration of the *EducationNext*² poll, 60% of

survey respondents gave their local schools an A or B rating. Conversely, Missourians perceptions of their local schools are more in-tune with the most recent *Phi Delta Kappan*³ poll, which found only 44% of respondents graded their local schools an A or B. However, 76% of respondents to the *Phi Delta Kappan* poll gave the school where their child is enrolled an A or B.

Differing Opinions on Schools

While Missourians are generally less than enthusiastic about their local schools, they still rate them higher than schools statewide. However, this finding is not consistent among all voters. Whereas half of white Missourians rated their local school as good or excellent, only 39% of nonwhite respondents rated their local schools similarly (Figure 5). The remaining 33% rated their local schools as fair and 14% rated as poor. Only 14% of white voters rated their local schools as poor. This pattern was similar for statewide school ratings. Nonwhite voters tend to have a more negative view of schools in Missouri, with 53% of respondents rating Missouri’s schools as fair and 22% poor. Though white voters’ statewide ratings were less negative, 45% rated the schools as fair and 16% as poor.

Much like opinions regarding other issues in the state, Missouri’s school ratings also are divided along partisan lines. Over half of Republican likely voters (56%) rated their local schools as good or excellent, while only 43% of Democrats reported the same. Republicans are less supportive of schools across the state than their local schools, with 45% rating the state’s schools as good or excellent. Democrats expressed a much bleaker view, with 71% rating the state’s schools as fair or poor.

While families with school-age children are likely to be more in touch with their schools, we observe similar ratings for local schools among families with children as those without children.

Figure 5: Rating the Condition of Local Schools by Race

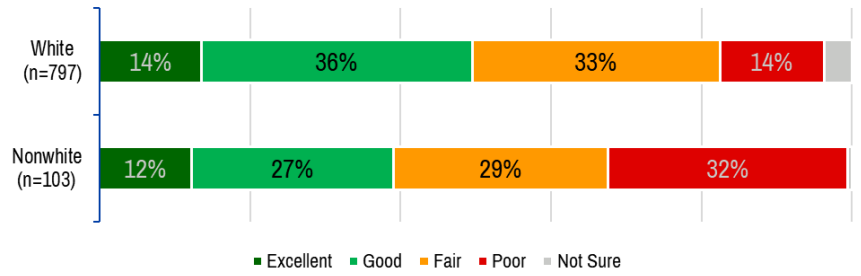


Figure 6: Rating the Condition of Missouri Schools by Race

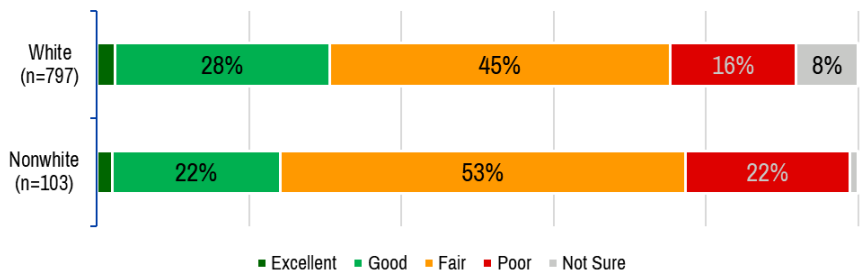


Figure 7: Rating the Condition of Local Schools by Political Party

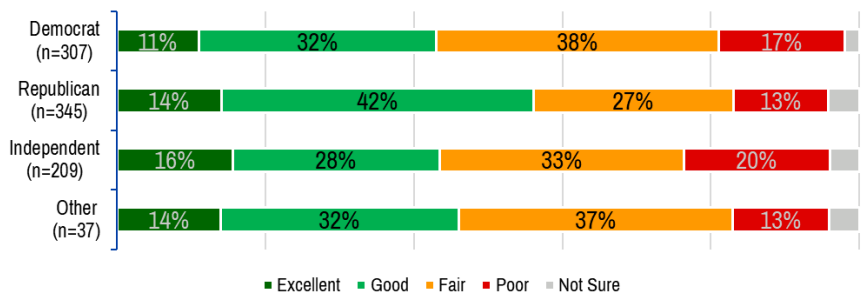


Figure 8: Rating the Condition of Missouri Schools by Political Party

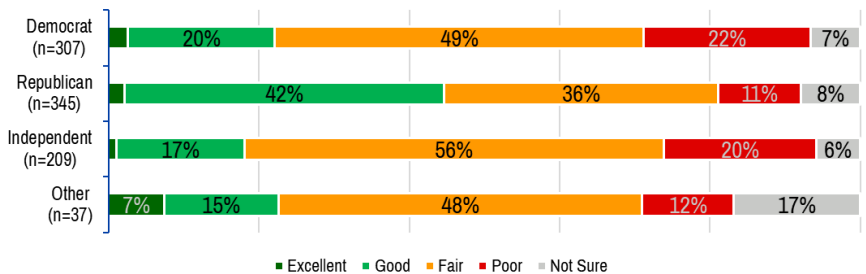
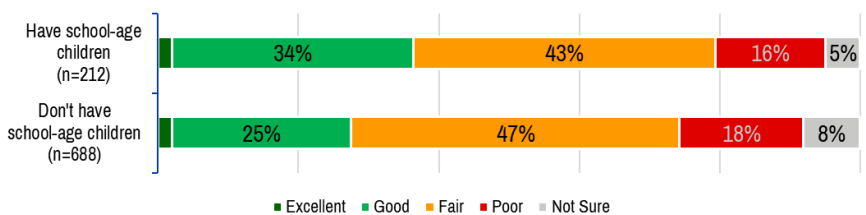


Figure 9: Rating the Condition of Missouri Schools by Parental Status



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Conversely, voters without children have a less positive view of schools across the state. Thirty-seven percent of voters with children rated the state's schools as good or excellent, while just 26% of voters without children rated the state's schools as such. Similar percentages of voters with and without children rated the state's schools as poor (16% vs. 18%).

Conclusions & Lessons

In our poll of likely Missouri voters, we learned Missourians think their local schools are better than schools across the state, but are as likely to rate local schools as fair or poor as they are to rate schools as good or excellent. We also found that school ratings vary by respondents' race. Nearly one-third (32%) of nonwhite voters rated their local schools as poor, while only 14% of white voters rated schools similarly. White voters also have a more positive view of schools statewide than do their nonwhite peers.

We also learned more about how the pandemic and the resulting shutdown impacted families. Likely voters with school-age children, especially women, were more likely to report they have been impacted by the pandemic. Over half of respondents with children indicated they implemented some sort of home learning because of the shutdown.

Overall, we found that Missourians think their schools could be doing better. As schools prepare to resume, many in a virtual or hybrid capacity, it will be interesting to see if voters' opinions of schools improve or worsen. Voters with children, especially female voters, have felt the impacts of the pandemic in their everyday lives. If these pandemic-induced disruptions continue to affect schools and families with school-age children, education could become a more important issue across Missouri.

Notes

The number of respondents varied for questions used in Figures 2 and 3, as not all 900 participants selected a response to each item. A previous version of this policy brief incorrectly reported counts instead of percentages in Figure 2.

References

- ¹ Erickson, K. (9 April 2020). Governor: Missouri schools will not reopen this spring. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. <https://bit.ly/3gOWilw>
- ² Henderson, M. B., Houston, D. M., Peterson, P. E., & West, M. R. (2020). Public Support Grows for Higher Teacher Pay and Expanded School Choice: Results from the 2019 *Education Next* Survey. *Education Next*, 20(1), 8-28.
- ³ PDK Poll (2019). Frustration in the schools: Teachers speak out on pay, funding, and feeling valued. *Kappan*. Retrieved from: <https://pdkpoll.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/pdkpoll51-2019.pdf>.

Acknowledgement

Questions related to the COVID shutdown and its impacts on families were written by Ellen K. Barnidge, Ph.D., M.P.H. Dr. Barnidge is associate professor of behavioral science and health education in the College for Public Health and Social Justice at Saint Louis University.

About the SLU/YouGov Poll

YouGov interviewed 900 Missouri likely voters between June 23, 2020 and July 1, 2020. The YouGov panel, a proprietary opt-in survey panel, is comprised of 1.2 million U.S. residents who have agreed to participate in YouGov Web surveys and regularly used by CBS News and The Economist. Using their gender, age, race, and education, YouGov weighted the set of survey respondents to known characteristics of registered voters of Missouri voters from the 2018 Current Population survey. The margin of error for the weighted data is 3.95%.