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From Page:  
B1  
11/14/2004  
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→ 180

**TEXAS POLL**

# Schools, services top list

■ More spending gets support but responses mixed

## on paying the tab

By **JANET ELLIOTT**  
AUSTIN BUREAU

**AUSTIN** — More than three out of four Texans say the state should put more money into public schools and social services, according to a new poll.

Seventy-six percent said the state should provide more money for education, and 69 percent said they are very or somewhat confident that putting more money into schools will lead to improved student perfor-

mance.

More money for social services such as children's health insurance and Child Protective Services was favored by 78 percent of respondents to The Scripps Howard Texas Poll.

Only 16 percent disagreed that schools need more state funding, and 15 percent didn't support additional money for social services. The rest said they didn't know.

The Texas Poll also found broad support for "sin taxes" to provide more money to schools, but less enthusiasm

Please see **POLL**, Page B8

# POLL: Legislature makes funding schools priority

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1**  
for sales tax increases and an income tax.

When the Legislature convenes Jan. 11, finding a new way to fund schools and revising the tax structure will be at the top of the agenda. A state district judge in Travis County ruled in September that the current school finance system is constitutionally inadequate.

Seventy-four percent of poll respondents favored raising the cigarette tax \$1 per pack, compared with 25 percent who opposed. Seventy-two percent supported a \$1 surcharge on tickets for concerts, professional sporting events and amusement parks.

### Gambling on education

On gambling issues, 72 percent favored legalizing state-taxed video lottery terminals at horse and dog tracks, an idea proposed by Gov. Rick Perry to raise money for schools. Perry also proposed the cigarette tax increase and ticket surcharge, but his plan was voted down.

Fifty-eight percent said they favor casino gambling.

There is less support for increasing and expanding the state sales tax. Only 44 percent said they favor increasing sales taxes to fund the state's schools, while 46 percent opposed, 7

percent said it depends and 3 percent didn't know.

Similar results were found for an income tax, even if it reduced property taxes and was used for schools. Forty-four percent wanted an income tax, 49 percent didn't and 7 percent didn't know.

### Interpreting the polls

Public policy advocates on opposite sides of tax and spending issues disagreed on what the poll means.

Michael Quinn Sullivan, vice president of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, an organization that advocates for low taxes and limited government spending, said the results were not surprising.

"It's telling that people say, 'Put more money in, but on the other hand, don't tax me,'" Sullivan said.

"People are saying let's be careful about messing too much with the tax system." He said the public is mistaken in assuming more spending will equate to better schools.

But Scott McCown, executive director of the Center for

*school see the schools struggling to balance budgets and maintain programs."*

—SCOTT MCCOWN,

Center for Public Policy Priorities

### THE TEXAS POLL

As you may know, the Legislature begins its next regular session in January. What is the main issue you think the Legislature should address this session?

Education	24%
School finance	13
Health care	13
Economy/jobs	8
Lower property taxes	6
Immigration	4
Homeowners insurance	2
State budget	1
Increase teacher pay	1
Other*	10
Don't know/no answer	18

\*Various other issues, none over 1 percent.  
The Texas Poll surveyed 1,000 Texans Oct. 11-28; Margin of error ±3 percentage points.

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Public Policy Priorities, which supports an income tax and more government services, said the poll reflects reality.

"I think people believe their eyes. Parents with kids in school see the schools strugg-



gling to balance budgets and maintain programs," he said.

"To meet the goals that the poll shows Texans have, we're going to have to have fundamental tax restructuring."

Texans are divided over the current school funding system, which requires property-wealthy districts to send money to property-poor districts. Fifty percent favored the system and 42 percent opposed it. Eight percent didn't know.

**Property tax split**

The poll also found a split on whether people found their local property taxes to be fair or unfair. Fifty-four percent said the taxes are fair and 43 percent said they are unfair, with 3 percent saying they don't know.

Texans were asked to name the main issue they want the Legislature to address in the upcoming session. Twenty-four percent said education, 13 percent said school finance and 13 percent cited health care. Eight percent said the focus should be on the economy and jobs, 6 percent said lowering property taxes, 4 percent said immigration, 2 percent said homeowners insurance, 1 percent said the state budget, 1 percent said teacher pay and 1 percent didn't know.

Respondents gave mixed ratings to the governor's job performance. Forty-six percent rated Perry as excellent or good, up from 37 percent who gave him those ratings in the spring. But 49 percent said his performance is fair or poor, and 5 percent didn't know.

The Fall 2004 Texas Poll surveyed 1,000 adult Texans by telephone Oct. 11-28. The margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

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 B8  
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