

*Strategic Research
Polling
Focus Groups*

AbacusSM Associates

The Public's Opinion Of Wisconsin's Public Schools

December 10, 2001

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Survey Methodology

Between October 10 and October 13, Abacus Associates conducted a telephone survey with 600, randomly chosen Wisconsin adults. The results are representative of the population of adults in Wisconsin. The margin of error for the entire sample on a question where respondents are evenly divided is plus or minus 4.0% at the 95% confidence level.

Overview

- , The public has overwhelmingly positive opinions about Wisconsin public school teachers and Wisconsin public schools.
- , Nonetheless, the public does not have an accurate picture of how Wisconsin public schools compare to those in the rest of the country.
 - 5 Only about half (46%) of adults believe Wisconsin public schools rank with the top 10 states in the nation.
- , Facts that compare Wisconsin public schools to those in the rest of the nation prove that Wisconsin public schools rank with the top 5 states in the nation.

Overview

When adults learn more about Wisconsin public schools, they become even more positive about public schools.

- 5 For 11 consecutive years, Wisconsin high school students have scored 1st or 2nd on the National ACT college entrance exam.
- 5 Wisconsin's 4th graders rank among the top five states in nationwide tests in reading.
- 5 90% of Wisconsin students complete high school--one of the highest completion rates in the nation.

When adults become more positive about public schools, they become supportive of investing in public schools and less supportive of trying alternatives.

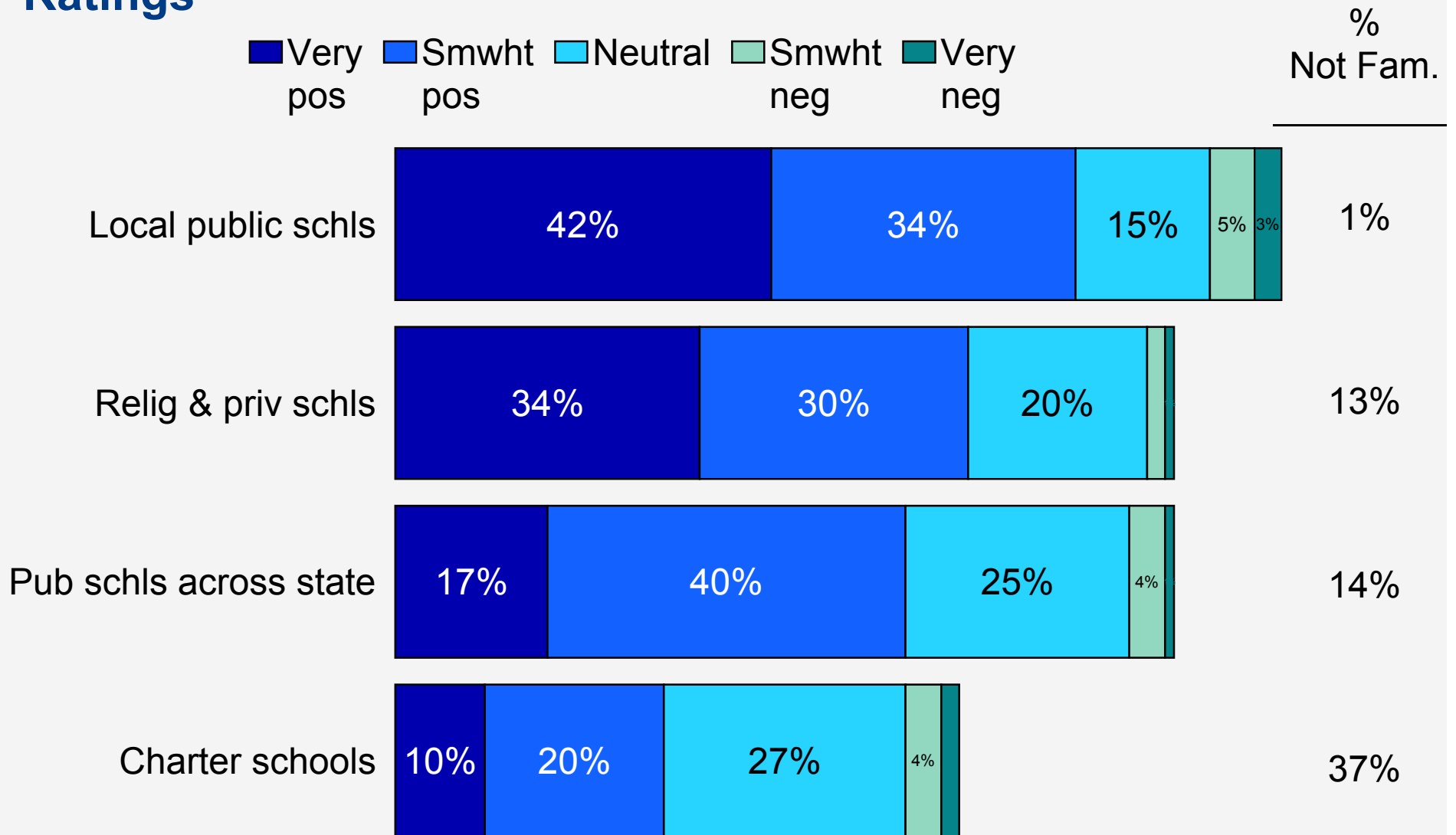
Impressions Of Types Of Schools In Wisconsin

Question for Figure 1:

I'm going to start off by listing some types of schools in Wisconsin. I'd like you to rate your general impression of each one as either very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative or very negative. If you are not familiar with a particular type, just say so and we'll go on.

5-Figure 1

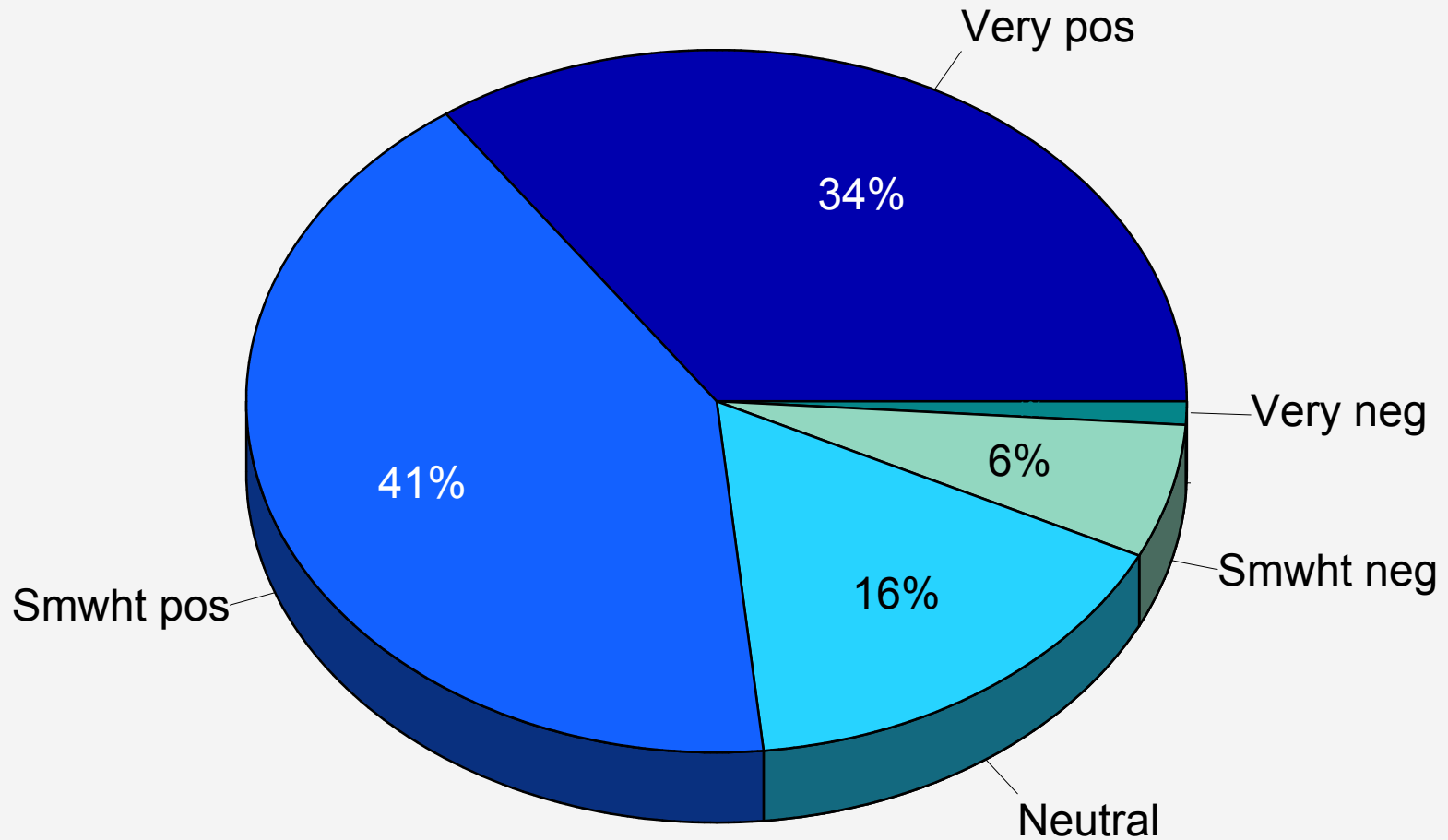
Adults Give Their Local Public Schools The Most Positive Ratings



Remainder "Not familiar."

6-Figure 2

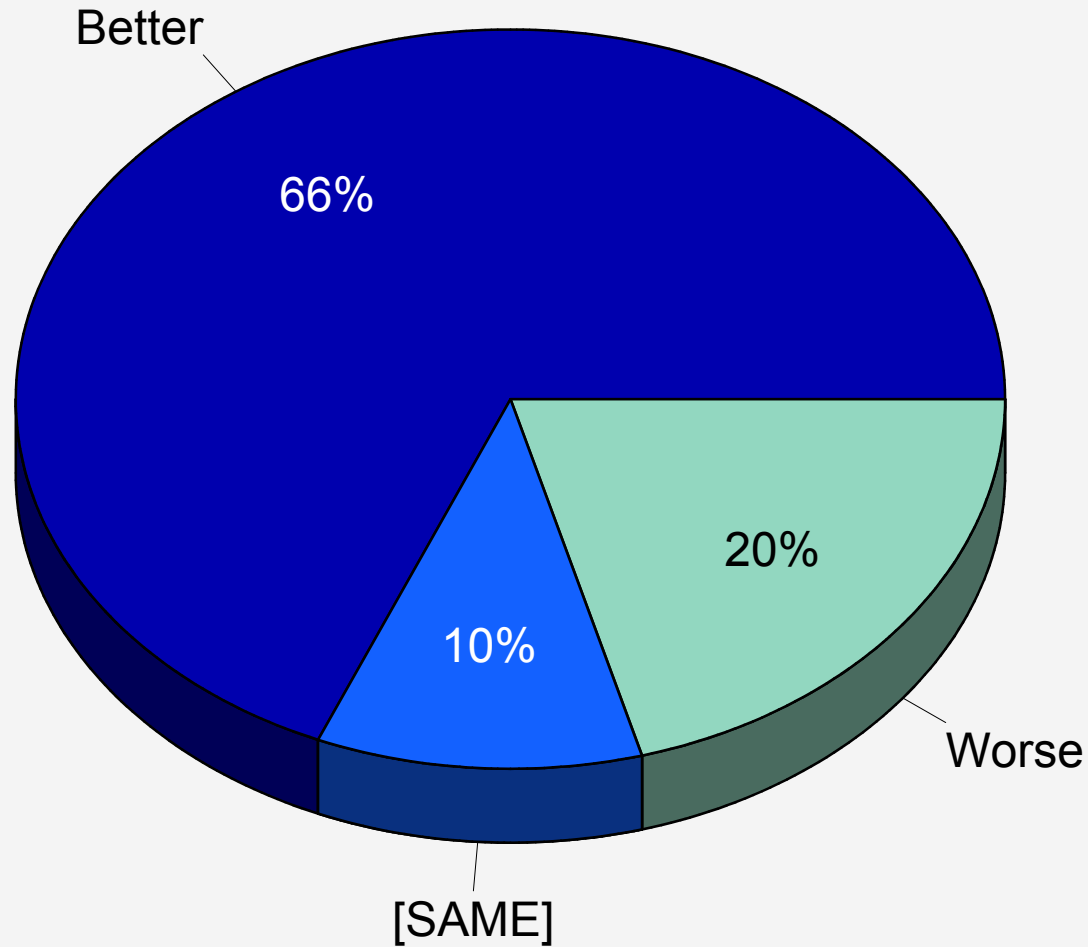
Wisconsin Adults Hold Overwhelmingly Positive Impressions Of Teachers



Remainder "Not familiar."

7-Figure 3

Wisconsin Adults Believe Public Schools Will Be Better 5 Years From Now

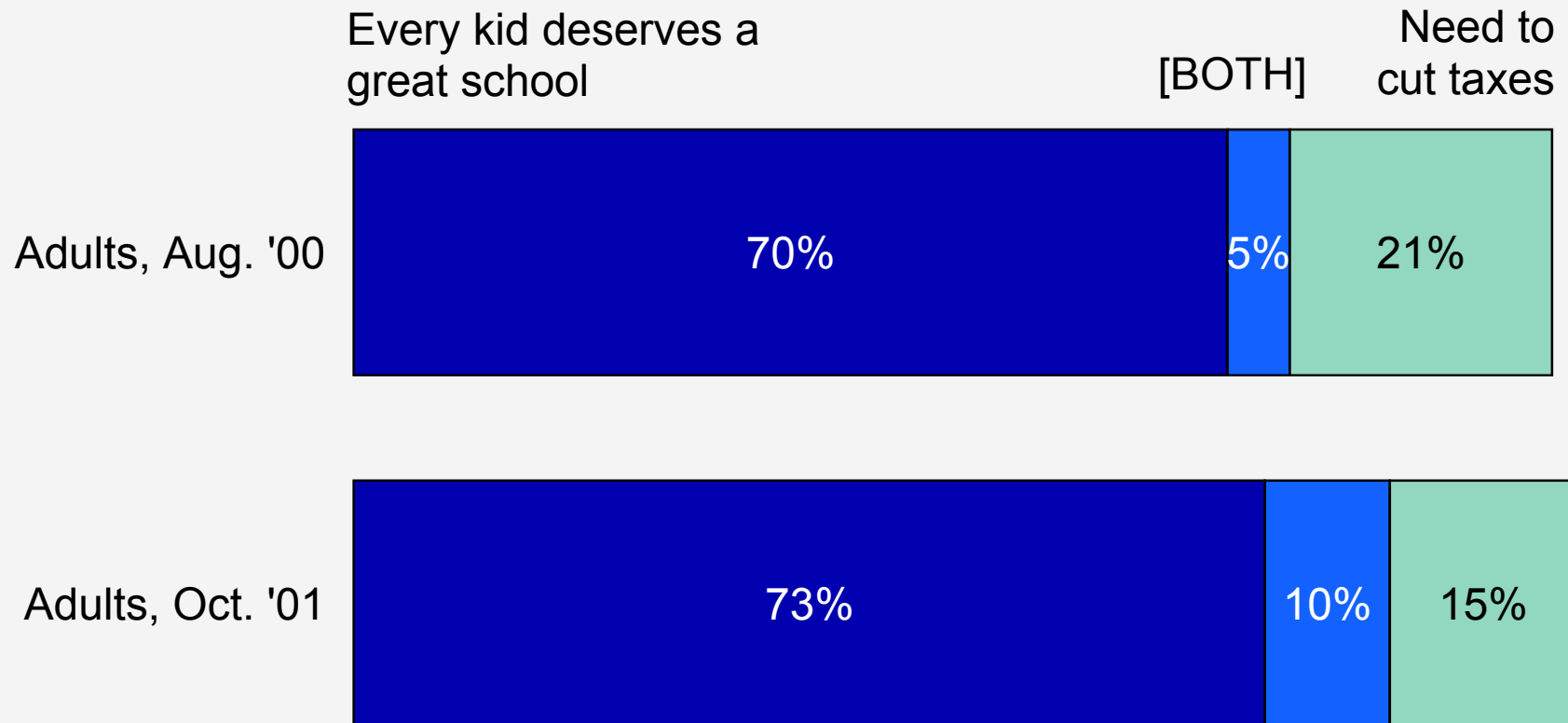


Remainder "Not sure."

8-Figure 4

Wisconsin Adults Overwhelmingly Support A Candidate For Better Schools Over A Candidate For Cutting Taxes

Percentage who support candidate who stresses...



Remainder "Not sure."

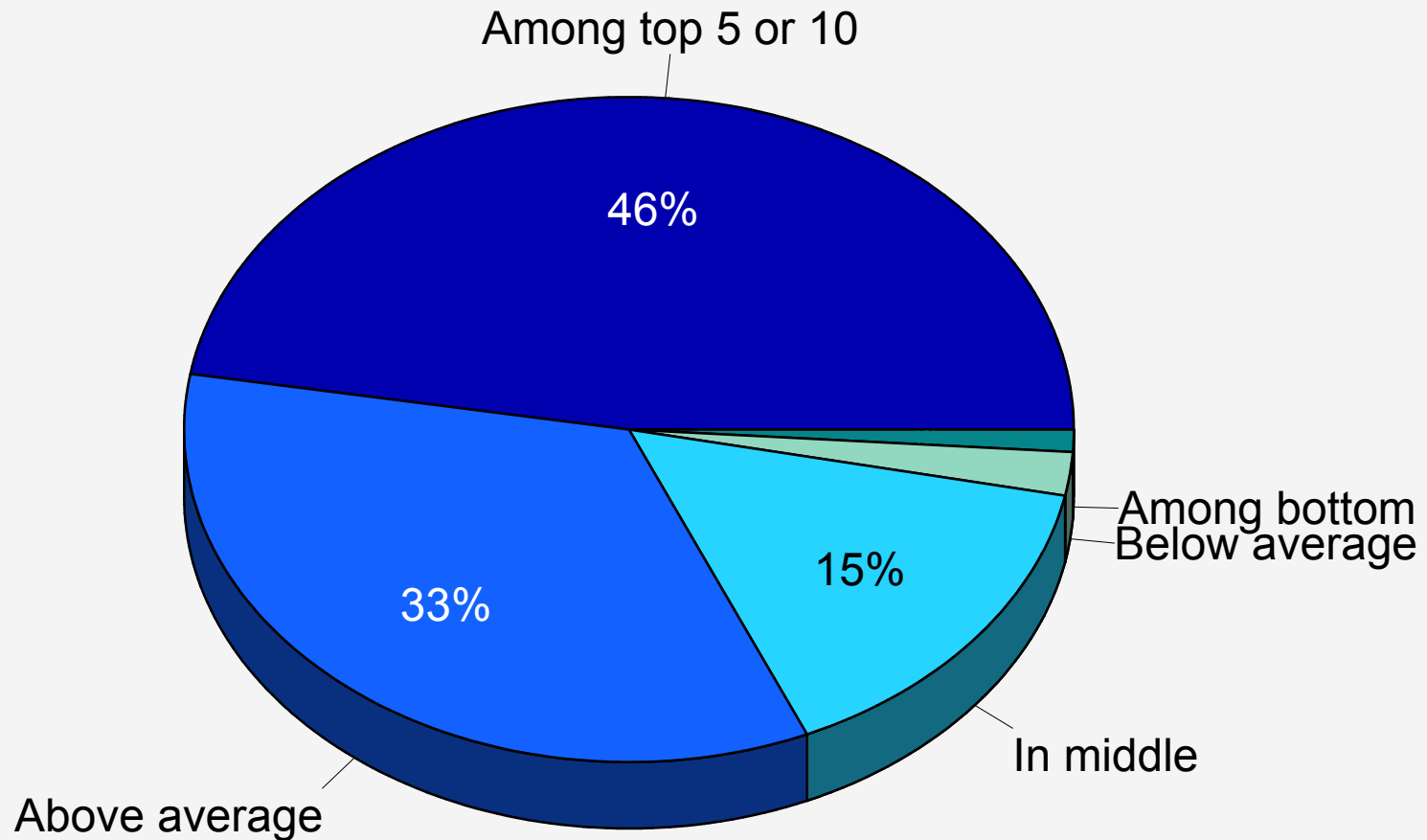
How Adults Believe Wisconsin Public Schools Compare To Those In Other States

Question for Figure 5:

Compared to the other 49 states' public school systems, which of the following would best describe how you would rank Wisconsin's public school system -- among the top few states, among the top 10 states, above average but not in the top 10, in the middle of the states, below average, or among the bottom states?

10-Figure 5

About Half Of Wisconsin Adults Believe WI Schools Are Among The Top In The Nation



Remainder "Not sure."

Respondents Hear Facts About Wisconsin Public Schools

Question for Figure 6:

Next, I'm going to list some facts about the Wisconsin public schools. For each fact, please tell me on a scale from 1 to 5 how much that fact raises your opinion of the public schools. A '1' means it raises your opinion a 'great deal,' a '5' means it raises your opinion a 'little,' and you may use any number between 1 and 5.

12-Figure 6

Public Opinion Improves The Most When Respondents Hear These Facts About Wisconsin Public Schools

■ Great deal ■ ... ■ ... ■ ... ■ A little

For 11 consecutive yrs,
WI high school students score
1st/2nd on ACT exams



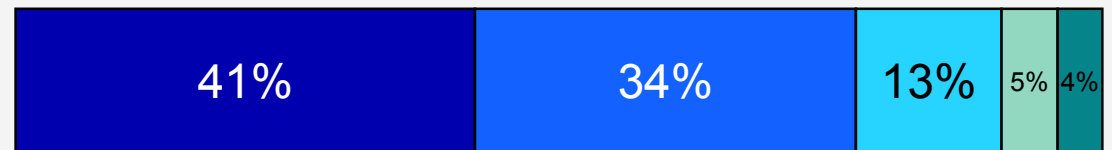
4th graders rank
among the top 5 states in
nationwide tests in reading



90% of WI students complete
high school--one of the
highest rates in the nation



Since 1994, ACT exam scores
in WI have risen at almost
twice the national average



See www.WEAC.org for sources and links for these facts and more.

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An Additional 10 Facts About WI Public Schools Also Raise Opinions a “Great Deal” (See Figure 7)

- , In the 1950s only one-third of WI adults had a high school diploma and only 13% of adults continued their education after high school. Today, 90% complete high school -- one of the nations highest rates -- and 76% continue their education after high school.
- , 76% of WI students continue their education after high school.
- , A typical public school teacher has a master's degree and 16 years of teaching experience.
- , Both verbal and math SAT scores of WI public school students are consistently higher than private and religious school SAT scores.
- , 98% of WI public schools have Internet access and 91% have computers available for students after school.

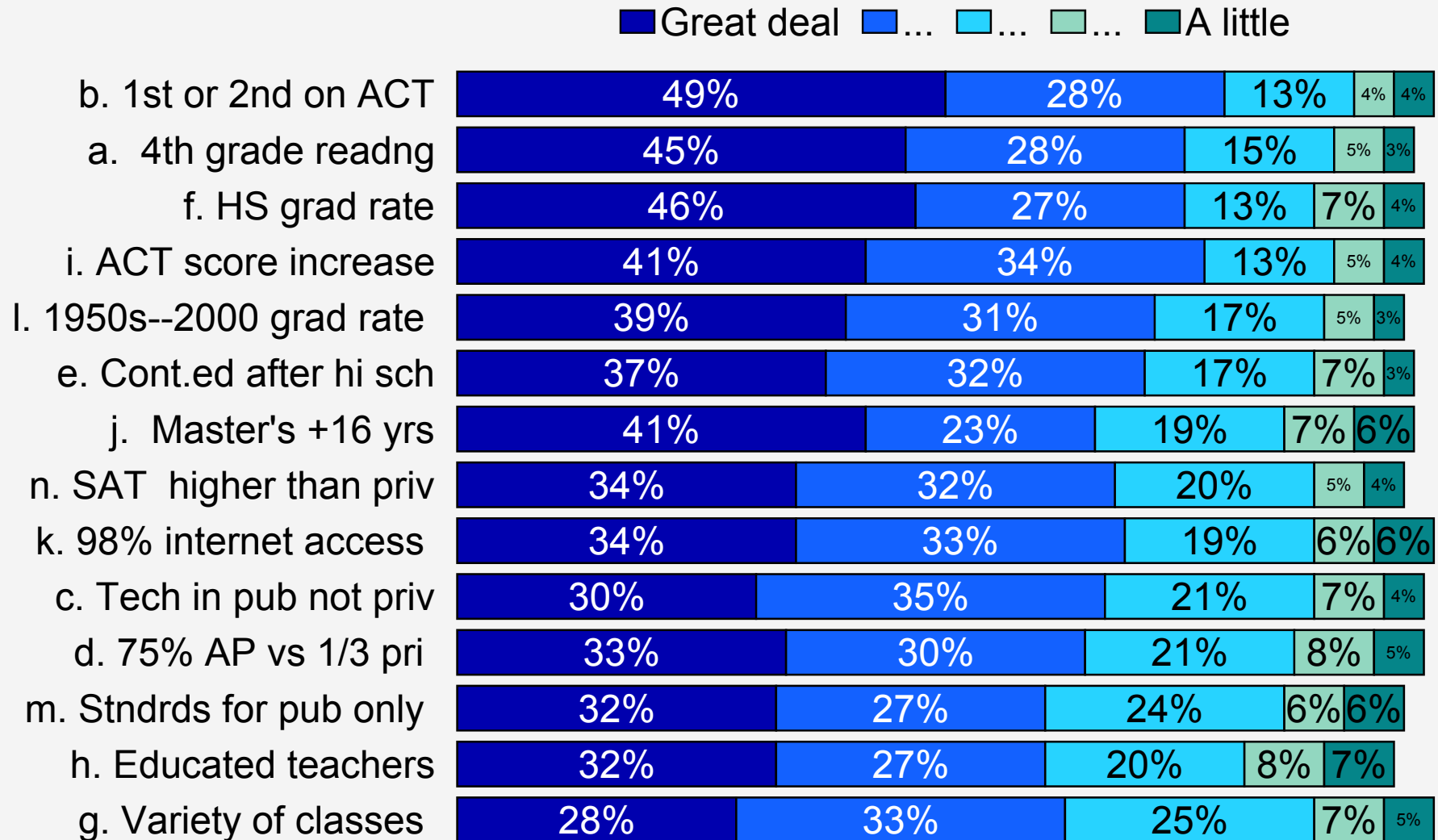
See www.WEAC.org for sources and links for these facts and more.

An Additional 10 Facts About WI Public Schools Also Raise Opinions a “Great Deal”(See Figure 7)

- , WI public schools offer extensive technical/vocational training to prepare all students for jobs. That training is rarely available in private or religious schools.
- , 75% of WI public high schools now offer AP courses, through which students can earn college credit. Only one-third of WI private high schools offer these advanced courses.
- , WI public schools are subject to strict state standards of performance and accountability, standards that private and religious schools are not required to meet.
- , Public school teachers have much more experience, training, education, and are more likely to be certified than teachers in private schools.
- , WI public schools offer a much greater variety of classes and activities, including theater, music, art and sports, than private or religious schools.

15-Figure 7

Many Facts About Public Schools Raise Opinions Of WI Public Schools A “Great Deal”



Remainder "Not sure."

The Public's Preferred Direction For The Future Of Public Schools

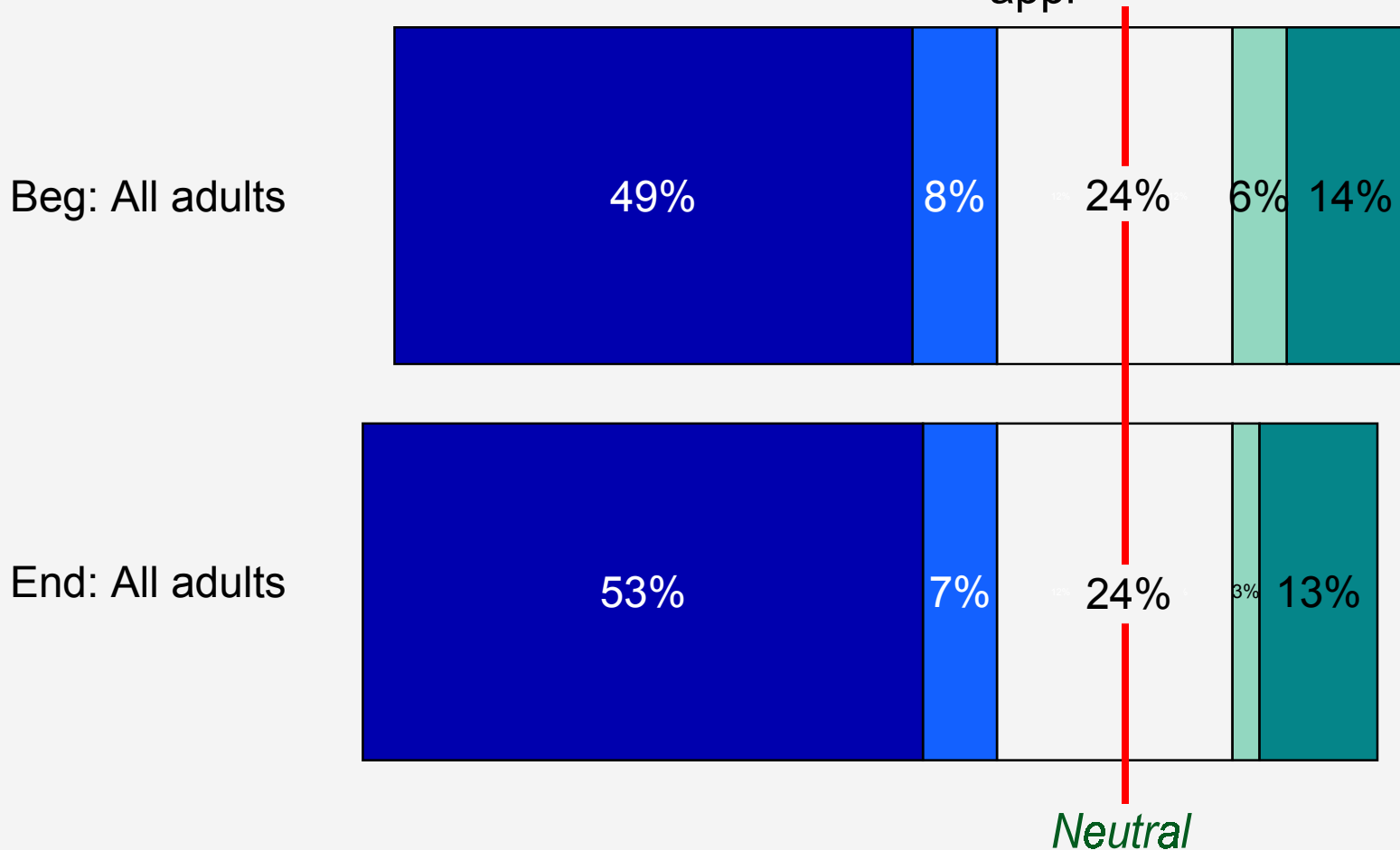
Question for Figure 8:

- If you had to choose between one of the following two options, which would you choose: investing more money in our public schools to make them even better; or looking for new alternatives and approaches such as private school vouchers and charter schools that give students more choice.

17-Figure 8

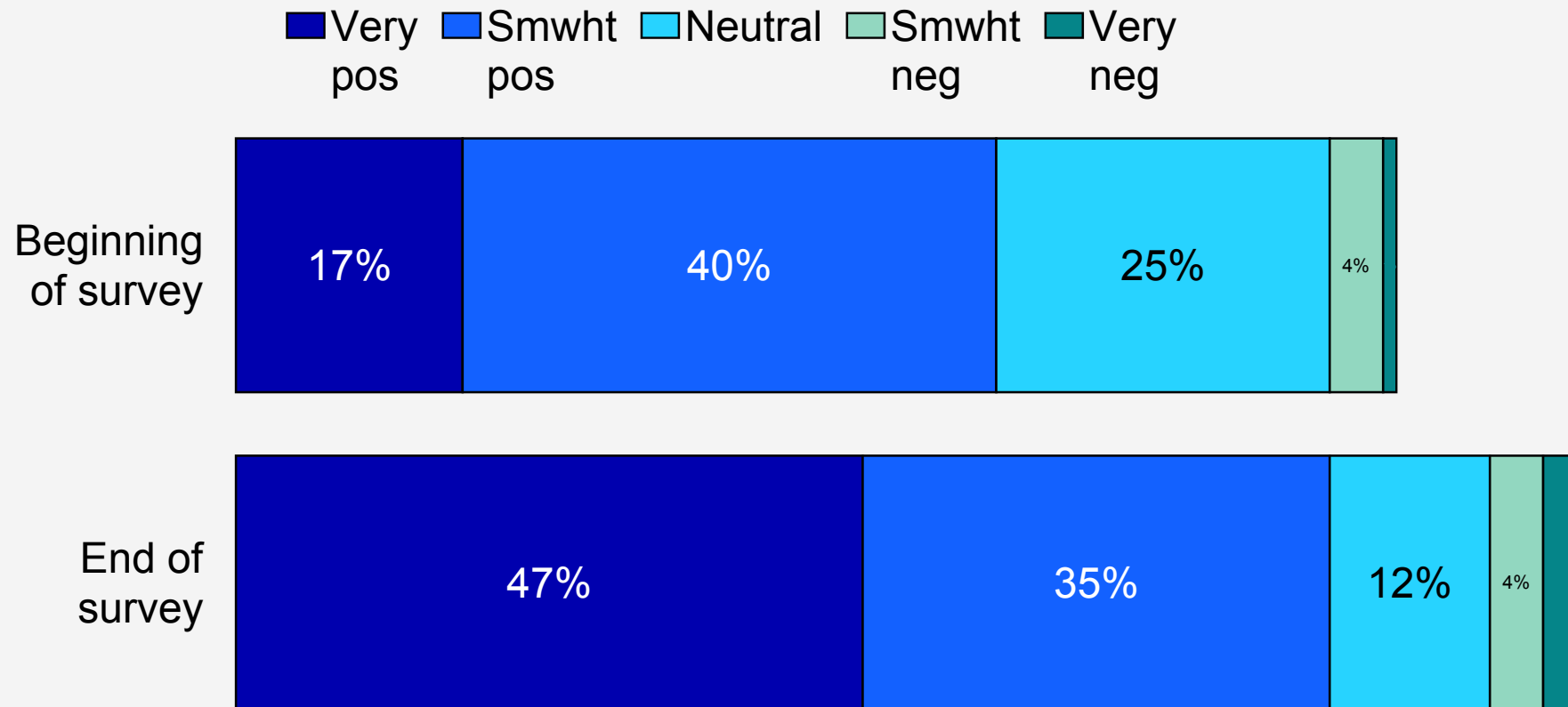
Adults Strongly Support Investing More Money In Public Schools

■ Str invest ■ Not str invest □ Not sure ■ Not str new appr ■ Str new appr



18-Figure 9

After Hearing Information About Wisconsin Public Schools, Impressions Of Schools Statewide Improve Substantially



Remainder "Not sure." All Adults

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Summary

Residents in Wisconsin strongly support public schools.

Residents believe public education should be a priority when elected leaders make budgetary decisions.

Many residents know that Wisconsin public schools are great, but more need to know that Wisconsin is among the top five states in the nation on important measures of student performance and school quality.