Public Perceptions of Oregon’s K-12 and Higher Education Schools

by

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Abstract

Public Perceptions of Oregon’s K-12 and Higher Education Schools

This study explores Oregonians’ attitudes about and perceptions of public education. Specifically, perceptions about education quality were analyzed, looking at the perceived quality of education today and how it has changed over the last 5 years. Questions posed to respondents about education funding, explored views on additional state funding needed and better use of state funds leading to higher quality education. The general consensus among Oregonians was that a problem exists in the quality of education provided, both in K-12 and higher education. It was also found that very few people believed that K-12 or higher education had improved over the last 5 years. Responses to quality and funding questions were explored through child-situational variables, i.e. having a child, having a child currently enrolled in K-12 public school, or having a child currently enrolled in public higher education. Analyses from this study identified that parents with children in public K-12 were more likely to report that K-12 quality today was a big problem, and that the quality over the last 5 years was slightly worse, when compared to respondents that did not have children in public K-12. Similarly, parents with children in public higher education were more likely to report that higher education quality today was a big problem, and that the quality over the last 5 years was slightly worse, when compared to responses from individuals that did not have a child in public higher education.
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Introduction:

At the forefront of education news today are words like: “reform,” “improvement,” “change,” and “turn-around.” Changes to education programs, the structure of education instruction, content, classrooms and schools have all been central in efforts to increase the capacity of education. However, a cyclical failure has occurred within the system. The institution of education is in a perpetual tug-of-war between liberal and conservative powers. As the controlling party changes, so do the views and objectives of the decision makers in power. Education is often looked at with a failed past and a hope for future transformations that will create a quality product.

In the democratic national platform for the 2008 presidential race, Renewing America’s Promise, was the following statement regarding education reform: “We will fix the failures and broken promises of No Child Left Behind – while holding to the goal of providing every child access to a world-class education, raising standards, and ensuring accountability for closing the achievement gap” (Democratic National Platform, 2008: 19). The continual need for re-tooling education, and news of failures among schools and children, has left the American public with a negative perception of public education.

Observing perceptions of public education through social construction theory allows for better defining groups of individuals that share experiences and that have similar opinions of education (Burr, 1995). Assumptions of this theory are that social processes and interactions define our knowledge of the world (Schneider and Ingram, 1993). Applying social construction theory to public perceptions of
education attributes perceptions primarily to personal experiences and connections to education. The theory provides a structure for categorizing groups of individuals that share common experiences and that may have a collective opinion based upon shared experiences.

This study looks at individual characteristics associated with perceptions of the quality and funding for Oregon’s public K-12 and higher education institutions. Public perceptions of both K-12 and higher education are examined through the influence of having a child in the education system. Some groups of people argue that public education is wasteful and fails to efficiently deliver services while others argue it is under-funded, yet still performs a good job. These perceptions are analyzed by identifying individuals’ characteristics that are associated with common perceptions.

The literature makes evident that the general public views education more positively when asked about services provided locally. Previous studies have also found that perceptions of K-12 and higher education are different. There is a lack of literature looking at the specific characteristics of individuals that are associated with perceptions toward K-12 and higher education. There is therefore also a lack of information about what shapes Oregonian’s opinions about education. This study addresses these issues.
Literature Review:

Perceptions of K-12 Public Education:

Many studies have found that education is viewed as being higher quality when in closer proximity to that person (Newport, 2009; Public Opinion, 2008; Public Agenda Foundation, 1999). Survey respondents reported their states’ education as being better than the nations’ education quality, and schools in their community as being better than in their states’. Parents with children in K-12 were also found to report satisfaction with education more frequently than the general public.

In Doing Comparatively Well (1999), Immerwahr discusses a study by Phi Delta Kappa in which only 18% of the public gave K-12 schools nationwide a grade of “A” or “B.” When asked about schools in their own areas, nearly half (46%) gave their local schools an A or a B (1999:9-10). In 2009, only 45% of the general public reported being satisfied with education in the U.S. (Newport, 2009). Gallup also conducted surveys to find the percent of satisfied parents in the education of their children attending K-12. Over the past 10 years they have found that the percent reporting satisfaction with their own child’s education has been between 30-40 percentage points higher than the general public’s reporting on U.S. education. A 2008 public opinion survey conducted in Indiana found that 54% of all respondents reported Indiana public schools provided an excellent or good education. When asked about public schools in their own community, that number rose to 63% reporting excellent or good (Plucker, Spradlin, Burroughs, and Hiller, 2009: 16).
These consistent findings about people’s higher valuation placed on nearby schools support the general idea that local education is viewed as being better quality than education outside their jurisdiction. Although responses were better for the quality of education when people were asked about education at a more local level, public education has received low ratings for quality in all of the studies reviewed (Newport, 2009; Public Opinion Survey, 2009; Public Agenda Foundation, 1999, 2000, 2004, 2007; Macomb County Survey, 1983). Social construction theory would suggest that since people receive benefits from local schools, they are prone to view them as more positive. Social construction occurs within cities or school districts, where policymakers define boundaries and distribute benefits. In this case, education is the benefit. However, education can be viewed negatively with failures and constraints. The assessment can then be made that education in a person’s district or community is higher quality, and education provided in their state or the United States is lower quality (Ingram, Schneider and deLeon, 2007).

**Perceptions of Public Higher Education:**

Higher education has the same approval pattern as K-12, with respondents reporting higher quality provided more locally. Perceptions of public higher education changed very little during the 90’s and early 2000’s (Public Agenda, 2004). In 2004, Immerwahr reported very little change in the public’s values regarding higher education. However, since the 2004 study by Public Agenda, perceptions of higher education have started to decline. In 2007, the percent reporting their state’s higher education system needed to be completely overhauled had risen from 39% in 1998 to 48% in 2007. This finding was coupled with news
that more than half of those surveyed reported colleges today are more like a business and mainly care about the bottom line. Suggestions are that the declining public perception of higher education can be attributed to decreased access and rising costs (Public Agenda Foundation, 1999). Access to education encompasses geographic access, legal access, academic access, and financial access (Lee, 2003: 1).

All of these barriers to obtaining education have led to a more negative perception of public higher education over time and approval has been eroding at a quickening rate (Public Agenda Foundation, 2004). Social construction theory identifies four major groups constructed around political power and resources, and either a positive or negative social attribution. The dependent group, which often includes students, is constructed around having low political power but is positively viewed. The lack of political power from university and college students disconnects them from choices about access and funding and can lead them to view higher education more negatively, if benefits are insufficient (Ingram, Schneider and deLeon, 2007).

**Perceptions of K-12 versus Higher Education Quality:**

There is a significant disparity in the way that the public views K-12 and higher education today in the U.S. (Public Agenda Foundation, 2007). Here I focus on the differences of perceived quality. However, research indicates that the general public reports differences in knowledge, perceived responsibility and funding, safety, access, and alternatives between K-12 and higher education (Assessment and Institutional Research Office, 2004).
In 2000, 34% of the public surveyed gave excellent or good responses for public high schools in their state, but 57% believe that colleges in their own state were excellent or good. Four-year colleges received 55% approval and two-year community colleges were slightly less at 50% (Public Agenda Foundation, 2000). The 2004 Environmental Scanning Report addresses some of the differences between perceptions of K-12 and higher education. The lack of understanding about higher education is represented through a knowledge gap between those that have experienced higher education and those that have not. The majority of people have experienced and know a lot about K-12 education. If they have not continued into higher education, they will use their K-12 education experience as a source for comparison (Assessment and Institutional Research Office, 2004: 10).

Through personal experiences with K-12 education, opinions are formed. Social construction theory would argue that opinions for K-12 education quality are a result of individual’s experiences. The 2004 Environmental Scanning Report discusses this trend with their interpretation consistent to a social construction theory approach. They suggest that the better ranking for higher education is the result of a personal connection to those institutions.

Specifically looking at the quality of education, public schools get relatively low marks from the public. Higher education however, is generally perceived as a world-class product (Public Agenda Foundation, 1999: 9). The news often reports negative trends for U.S. education and that children in other countries are outperforming American children. Twenty years ago, the U.S. was first among industrialized nations for the percent of the population who have at least a high
school degree and the percent holding a college degree. Today, among adults age 25 to 34, the U.S. is ninth among industrialized nations in the percent of its population who possess at least a high school degree. In the same age group, the U.S. ranks seventh, for the percent of the population who hold a college degree (Lagorio, 2005). In contrast to K-12 education, higher education has a better reputation, has more pride associated with the institutions, and is connected with the respect given for research done at universities. The overall perception of higher education is better than K-12 and people believe that failures to succeed are due to the person, not the institution; and that the student is paying for his/her education and not the public (Assessment and Institutional Research Office, 2004).

**Perceptions of Education Funding:**

**K-12 Education Funding:**

Survey respondents asked about education are typically taxpayers as well. Thus, attitudes about education are likely to be related to their own estimations of how tax dollars are used. As a result, education funding is a controversial subject. Taxpayers and property owners share the bulk of responsibility for funding public education, however there is a lack of consensus among the public for how that money should be utilized. Social construction theory would argue that these people have low power, but are socially constructed in a positive way. Their opinions are seldom heard or listened to, however they provide the primary funding stream for education. Under the U.S. Constitution, the responsibility for public K-12 education

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1 See appendix 1 for a complete list of the differences in attitudes toward K-12 and higher education
resides with the states. Also, states and localities are the primary source of K-12 education funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). With local control governing the responsibility and funding for education, there is more room for interpretation and variation in the uses of education revenues.

The public’s primary concerns regarding education funding are that there is not enough money being allocated for education, and that schools are unable to provide the desired quality of education. This is represented in polling data that identifies public opinion that government allocates insufficient resources to schools. A poll conducted annually from 2004 through 2007 found American adults list insufficient funding and resources as a top problem facing public schools in their communities (Lips, Watkins, and Fleming, 2008).

Although the public commonly reports that the government allocates insufficient resources to schools, it is important to note that the amount of funding has in fact increased significantly after controlling for inflation. According to The Heartland Institute, average per-pupil spending in U.S. public schools rose 212 percent from 1960 to 1995 in real dollars (Bennett, 1999). Social construction theory suggests that target populations are often subdivided in policy design so that direct benefits typically filter to the more powerful and positively constructed of the subgroups. Public opinion reporting of insufficient funding might be representative of those that are less powerful and more negatively constructed in the subgroup of dependents. Since education funding is partially tied to property taxes, a poorer neighborhood would receive less funding. Without new property and housing
developments, that district would most likely have an average spending per student that has risen more gradually than the national average from 1960 to 1995.

**Higher Education Funding:**

Over the past two decades, public support of higher education has been dropping. There is erosion in the perception of education as a public good deserving of strong societal support, and is viewed as a lower priority than it was in the past (Duderstandt, 2005). There is a decline in taxpayer support with lawmakers increasingly viewing higher education as a private good that should be supported more by students and donors, rather than as a public good that deserves state support (Selingo, 2003).

Compared to K-12 education funding, which relies heavily upon state tax and property tax revenues, higher education is funded through transfers (i.e., block recurrent grants, capital grants, tax expenditures), current earnings (i.e., tuition fees, research contracts, commercial activities), and loans (i.e., commercial, subsidized) (Barr, 1993). There is a heavy reliance on private funding and as a result the general public views higher education funding more favorably than K-12 funding. Failures in higher education are not at their expense, but at the expense of those providing the funding. In 2009, local taxes accounted for only 6.1% of the total revenue for general operating expenses of higher education in the United States. Net tuition constituted roughly 32% and all state sources constituted 62% (State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2009).

Since funding for higher education is not tied to a continuous level of funding, such as a set percent of state taxes, it is more susceptible to inconsistency and
fluctuation. McPherson and Schapiro write, “Public colleges and universities in the United States have been on a financial roller coaster in recent years because of dramatic changes in the fiscal environment of the states” (2003: 1157).

State revenues have failed to keep up with budget projections for higher education. As deficits grow, “the burden of financing higher education has increasingly fallen on students and their families. From FY 1983 to 1992, the total average cost for an undergraduate student to attend a public university rose 22.8% (in constant dollars)” (Hossler, Lund, Ramin, Westfall, Irish, 1997: 163-164). States’ fiscal situations heavily influence state funding for higher education. Due to the relative discretionary nature of education funding, appropriations can swing both ways. Hovey argues that, “changes in state fiscal conditions are often multiplied in their impacts on higher education. When finances are tight, higher education budgets are often cut disproportionately. When financial conditions are good, higher education often receives larger increases in funding than most other programs” (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 1999: 11). It is widely known that in recessions, public higher education typically experiences higher enrollments, and revenue from the states decreases. Consequently, this often results in increases to tuition and fees, enrollment caps, and cuts in student services. Raising the cost of tuition is often used to balance out inadequacies in state revenues designated for higher education funding. This has resulted in net tuition revenue growing most rapidly as a percentage of total educational revenue in public institutions (State Higher Education Finance, 2009). As tuition inflates, access for many individuals to higher education becomes more challenging. With access
becoming more limited, social construction theory suggests that higher education would be viewed more negatively.

According to the *State Higher Education Finance* report from FY2009, the pattern during the past three decades includes cyclical downturns in per student spending from economic recessions, followed by recovery and growth. Increases in state and local support for higher education were found for 2006-08, following a period of declining public investment in higher education between 2001 and 2005. The recovery ended in 2008 when the nation suffered the worst recession since the Great Depression. In response, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) successfully worked to cushion the recession’s impact, however a continued financial crisis in 2009 poses a severe threat to the strength of higher education in the United States (State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2009). Fluctuating budget cycles can be discouraging and challenging, though history tells us that effects are temporary and support for higher education is resilient. Transitory hikes in tuition will most likely decline as stabilization programs are employed. This would result in state revenue recovery for higher education and public approval of the funding situation to reflect higher approval.

**Perceptions of Education Quality in Oregon:**

Recently there has been a call among elected officials, state board of higher education members, teachers, and parents for more information concerning public perceptions of education in Oregon. Focus group research in Portland and Medford indicated that some members of the public may view education as an individual
benefit and therefore are not supportive of public revenues to support education. Without a clear understanding of how widespread this belief is and where it comes from, the state system of public education cannot adequately address these views (Steel, 2005). Exploring how the public perceives education quality and funding can be beneficial to state officials when developing education policies in Oregon.

**K-12 Education Quality in Oregon:**

Studies in Oregon on perceptions of education quality have shown varying results. Findings from these studies have identified similar results to other states and national polls (Chalkboard Project, 2009), and a more positive perception of education quality for Oregon than other state polls and national polls (Opinion Research Corporation, 2009). It may be a safe assumption that perceived education quality in Oregon lies somewhere between the two.

The Chalkboard Project conducted a statewide poll in 2004 looking at public perceptions of K-12 education in Oregon. They found that 36% of Oregonians characterized Oregon’s K-12 education as somewhat good and only 9% reported very good (ECOnorthwest, 2005). This finding was similar to a more recent Gallup poll conducted in 2009 that identified 45% of the population reporting satisfaction with the quality of K-12 education provided (Newport, 2009). These results contrast with the findings by the Oregon Progress Board, which had looked specifically at perceptions of education quality in Oregon. A question about perceived education quality was included in the Oregon Population Survey where attitudes and perceptions of Oregonians towards various programs, departments, funding, and
quality issues within the state were surveyed every two years. Findings from the 2008 survey were that 70% of respondents reported Oregon primary / secondary education was either very good or somewhat good (Opinion Research Corporation, 2009). This was up 10% from the last survey in 2006 but slightly down from the 2000 findings. These findings indicate an overall better perception from Oregonians for the quality of K-12 education in Oregon than the findings from The Chalkboard Project.

Survey data regarding perceptions of education quality in Oregon focuses on the general public’s perception and not specifically upon the opinions of parents with children in the K-12 system. Nationally, there was a 30 to 40% higher approval rating for the quality of education provided when parents of children in public K-12 were asked versus non-parents of public K-12 children (Newport, 2009).

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of how Oregon is perceived in its quality of education, reports from both inside and outside of Oregon are important to address. Education Week released their latest version of Quality Counts for 2010 that ranks and grades states on education performance. Overall, Oregon received a grade of C- and was ranked 43rd for the nation. Oregon received a D for K-12 achievement and an F, ranking them dead last, for the teaching profession (Education Week, 2010). Although Oregon ranked fairly low in overall quality, the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators released the following statement: “In Oregon, there is a “good news-bad news” gap between the actual performance of schools and students, and the public’s perception of school and student performance” (Confederation of Oregon School Administrators, 2009: 1).
According to the statement from COSA, Oregon has a lower perception about education in Oregon than the actual performance of schools and students.

**Higher Education Quality in Oregon:**

The perceived quality of higher education in Oregon is much higher than nationally. In 2000, Immerwahr reported that 55% of the population surveyed identified four-year colleges as excellent or good and 50% identified two-year community colleges as excellent or good (Public Agenda Foundation, 2000). Compared to the national findings on perceived higher education quality, roughly 30% more Oregonians reported higher education quality as excellent for both four-year and community colleges.

The Oregon Progress Board surveyed Oregon residents concerning the quality of colleges and universities in Oregon. Community colleges received a response of very good or somewhat good at 86%, which is 2% less than in 2006 and 5% less than in 2000 (Opinion Research Corporation, 2009). Four-year colleges and universities received a response of very good or somewhat good at 80%, which is the same as in 2006 and 5% less than in 2000. The Oregon Progress Board reported that, “Oregonians are most positive toward community college education (37% Very Good), followed by 4-year higher education (28% Very Good)” (Opinion Research Corporation, 2009: 18).

The results from the Oregon Progress Board survey indicate a perception of high quality for the colleges and universities in Oregon. The results also identify a pattern of decline for survey respondents reporting on the quality over time for higher education in Oregon.
Perceptions of Education Funding in Oregon:

Oregon is slightly below the national average for spending on instruction per student, and Oregonians have expressed doubts about the adequacy of funding provided to K-12 public schools. Although there is a negative perception of funding, Oregon is outspending its closest states on education financing. In 2002, Oregon was in fact spending more on instruction per student than any of the neighboring states (ECONorthwest, 2002; The Chalkboard Project, 2009). Many of the concerns surrounding education revenues are a product of fluctuating financing streams and a state budget that has recently required many cut backs due to deficits. The Chalkboard Project reported in 2009 that spending per student has been highly unstable in recent school years.

Variability and instability in education funding are causes for concern among Oregonians. Polling data in Oregon over the past 5 years has portrayed this concern, and addressed perceptions regarding the adequacy of education funding. Addressing findings on finance, The Chalkboard Project reports, “given Oregon’s centralized and highly charged debates about K-12 funding, it should come as no surprise that a recent statewide poll found funding issues topped Oregonians’ concerns about the K-12 system” (ECONorthwest 2005: 8). Also addressing concerns of education funding, the Chalkboard Project conducted a statewide poll and found that the majority reported, “public schools just do not have enough money” (ECONorthwest, 2005: 8). Most recently, The Chalkboard Project reported that 82% of Oregonians view lack of stable and adequate funding as a large obstacle to the success of K-12 public schools (2009).
National rankings do not tell the entire story when looking at spending per student. There is a great deal of variability in the measures used for analysis and Oregon’s national ranking varies with the types of measurements utilized. Other limitations of these studies include the failure to capture the specific and complex nature of Oregon’s K-12 financing. Statewide trends in spending per student do not accurately portray the experiences of any particular district during a period of radical changes in the financing method. There is, however, reason to believe that concerns over education revenues are legitimate. A comprehensive analysis of K-12 education finance done in 2002 found that Oregon’s K-12 spending, as a percent of total personal income, fell during the 1990’s (ECONorthwest, 2002).

Addressing the concern that many Oregonian’s have about education financing, some of the major education policy issues were brought to fruition in the paper, *Financing K-12 Education in Oregon* (Weber 1995: 168). Financing education is both an expensive and critical aspect of Oregon’s fiscal budget. Oregon taxpayers share the bulk of responsibility for funding public education. They also share the responsibility to vote and decide how that money should be spent. Specifically, education policy issues include: how much should be spent; how much equality should there be in school funding; what is the optimal curriculum; and what level of taxes is required to support the schools? (Weber, 1995) These policy issues represent some of the concerns that Oregonians have about the adequacy of education funding. Using social construction theory to look at these policy issues, it can be determined that there are socially constructed groups that will have different investments in the policy decisions, bonding them as a population. Levels of control,
influence, and voice solidify socially constructed groups that have an impact on policy decisions (Schneider and Ingram, 1993).

Overall, the education funding distribution for state and federal contributions is similar to 20 years ago, prior to the passage of Ballot Measure 5. Ninety-five percent of the total school revenue depends primarily on local property taxes and a state aid program funded mostly through an income tax. The Federal Government provides the remaining 5% of Oregon school revenues (Weber, 2005). Inequalities in districts’ funding, lead to many criticisms. People believed it to be unfair to students; unfair to taxpayers; unstable and inadequate for many districts; and it generated high property taxes. Issues of varying per-student expenditures were addressed in 1989 and Ballot Measure 5 was passed in 1990 to limit property tax spending on education (Weber 2005; Bailey 2005; OEA 2010). Funding shifted from roughly 60% local, 30% state, and 10% federal to 30% local, 60% state, and 10% federal. The shift from primarily local education funding to more state centered funding created more equality across districts and stability in revenues. Today, school districts receive most of their financial support from the general fund, which covers salaries, benefits, supplies, etc. The general fund comes from two main places: the State School Fund, drawing primarily from Oregon income tax, and local property taxes (Oregon Department of Education, 2010).

As public concerns are made evident for education financing in Oregon, it is important to understand how funding has changed in recent years, and how it is financed today. In The Long Journey to Adequacy: School Funding and the Oregon Tax System, The Oregon Education Association (OEA) offers an analysis of the funding
changes for education in Oregon. They write, “Today, Oregon’s economy has cycled back to bust. Public education’s increasing reliance on the state income tax – which is more volatile than the property tax – has increased schools’ vulnerability to cyclical downturns” (2010: 6). Funding inadequacies are, in part, due to two decades of disinvestment in public education and are beginning to materialize in Oregon’s education system. Efforts to reform a broken tax system have failed to reverse the funding inadequacies, and Oregonians are becoming more concerned with education funding issues (Oregon Education Association, 2010).

Addressing some of these inadequacies, various groups have recently come together to increase the capacity and build equity in the Oregon education system. “Oregon has one of the most unstable school funding systems in the country” (Chalkboard Project, 2008-09: 16). In 2004, the Chalkboard Project was formed with a mission to make Oregon’s K-12 schools among the nation’s top 10 in student achievement. According to Bailey, “the Chalkboard Project attempts to shed light on education spending data...” (2005: 20). The Sustainable Oregon Schools Initiative is also working towards education issues in Oregon. In their summary page, they identify the economy as one of their focuses in the initiative. As a result of disinvestment, schools are required to be more efficient with resources and reduce waste (Sustainable Oregon Schools Initiative, 2010).

Based upon the literature, it can be speculated that instability in funding, and budget cutbacks leading to disinvestment in the Oregon education system, has left Oregonians with a more negative outlook on public school funding. Responses from Oregonians concerning education finance adequacy are similar to the rest of the
nation’s responses. This identifies that efforts to reform education revenue over the past 20 years has failed to create a more positive outlook and opinion for education finance.

**Literature Review Summary:**

Social construction theory defines target populations that are the recipients of benefits and burdens through policy design. Through this literature review, the quality and funding of education was reviewed. The quality of education provided serves as a primary benefit, and funding education a primary burden. As education quality increases, the perceived benefit and outlook on education increases. Similarly, as education funding increases in costs to the individual, the perceived burden of financing education is elevated along with a more negative perception.

Parents with children in K-12 or higher education are considered to possess low political power, though they are constructed as a positive group. Specifically looking at how having a child in the education system influences a person’s perception of education will help to better define trends and beliefs concerning education by those most directly involved. This sub-group of the population carries the burden of financing education, while also receiving a direct benefit from education. Defining characteristics of the population that report quality or funding of education to be a big problem in Oregon, helps to tailor the education policy process and decisions to better meet the collective views of Oregonians.

Following the findings from the literature, it can be predicted that survey respondents will more frequently indicate a bigger problem for K-12 education quality today than higher education quality today. It is also hypothesized that having
a child currently enrolled in K-12 or higher education will decrease the frequency for responses indicating that education has a big problem in quality today or that education quality has gotten worse over the last 5 years.

Methods:

Findings from this study are derived from a 2007 public survey of 1,300 households randomly selected in Oregon. All respondents were 18 years of age and older with 711 surveys that were returned, for a response rate of 55%. Three waves of mail surveys were distributed, following Dillman’s Total Design Method (Dillman, 1978), including an introductory postcard announcing the survey and then two subsequent waves of the questionnaire with a cover letter.

Public perceptions for the quality of Oregon’s K-12 and higher education public schools were examined. Perceptions concerning state funding levels for K-12 and higher education and use of state funds were also examined. These dependent variables were correlated with independent variables including: socio-demographic characteristics, information about education, ideology, partisanship, and situational variables. In the analysis of quality today and change in quality over the last 5 years, responses were coded dichotomously. All respondents that reported “Don’t know” to the questions about education quality today, and change in education quality over the last 5 years were not included in the analysis. In the analysis of funding levels and use of state funds, responses were collected and analyzed using a Likert response format.

All findings reported in this paper were generated through the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). For the purpose of defining the
unique contribution of different variables and predictability for occurrence of the dependent variables when examining education quality, logistic regression was used. This included tests of chi-square, percent correctly classified, and probability levels for the analysis. In the analysis of funding questions, multiple regression estimates were generated using standardized regression coefficients. Tests of Adjusted R squared, F-Test, and probability levels were used to measure significance for the analysis. A probability value of less than or equal to .05 was deemed to indicate statistical significant difference in this study.

**Results:**

This section will include information gathered on respondents and the results from the dependent variable questions. Means and standard deviations are presented for each independent variable analyzed and regression estimates are displayed to show variable significance. Results will be discussed by: education quality, then education funding, through: dependent variable distributions, regression estimates, and Crosstabulations.

**Participant Demographics:**

The results displayed in Table 8, identify the survey participants demographics. Respondents had an average age of 51 and 53% were female. Just over three-quarter of the respondents reported having a child, with 21% having a child currently enrolled in public K-12 and 12% having a child currently enrolled in public higher education. Respondents reported being slightly more informed about K-12 issues when compared to higher education issues. There was an even
Perceptions of Oregon’s Public K-12 and Higher Education Quality:

The results for perceptions of education quality today are presented in Table 1. When asked how much of a problem the quality of education in Oregon’s K-12 public schools is today, the majority of respondents reported a “big problem” (44%) with “somewhat of a problem” receiving the next most responses (38%). “Don’t know” accounted for 12% of the responses and “not much of a problem” 7% of the responses. After removing the “don’t know” responses, the remaining three variables were recoded. In order to analyze those respondents reporting K-12 education was a “big problem”, the dependent variable responses were dichotomized for analysis as “big problem” (50%) and “somewhat of a problem / not much of a problem” (50%).

The same question was asked concerning the quality of education in Oregon’s public colleges and universities today. “Somewhat of a problem” (36%) was the leading response, followed by “don’t know” (28%), “big problem” (21%), and “not much of a problem” (15%). The “don’t know” responses were removed and the remaining three variables were dichotomized as “big problem” (29%) and “somewhat of a problem / not much of a problem” (71%). Respondents were asked about the change in quality of K-12 education over the past 5 years. Due to the small number of respondents reporting “improved” (7%), responses were coded

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2 See appendix 2 for means and standard deviations for all control variables
Table 1: Distribution of Responses and Dichotomous Recode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>How much of a problem is the quality of education in Oregon’s K-12 public schools today?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=707</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>In the Past 5 years, do you think the quality of education in Oregon's K-12 public schools has improved, stayed the same, slightly worse, don't know?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N=707</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>How much of a problem is the quality of education in Oregon's public colleges and universities today?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=707</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>In the Past 5 years, do you think the quality of education in Oregon's public colleges and universities has improved, stayed the same, slightly worse, don't know?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=707</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
dichotomously for analysis as “improved / stayed the same” (47%) and “slightly worse” (53%). The “don’t know” responses were removed for analysis.

The same question was asked regarding the change in quality of higher education over the past 5 years. Again, due to the small number of respondents reporting “improved” (6%), responses were coded dichotomously as “improved / stayed the same” (63%) and “slightly worse” (37%). The “don’t know” responses were removed for analysis.

The low number of respondents indicating improvement for the quality of education in Oregon over the past 5 years for K-12 and higher education reflects a perceived lack of positive change for Oregon’s education system. The remainder of responses were distributed somewhat evenly across “stayed the same”, “slightly worse”, and “don’t know” for both K-12 and higher education change in quality.

**Bivariate Analysis:**

Crosstabulations for the reported quality of K-12 and higher education and child-situational variables were conducted. Results are presented in Table 2. It was found that respondents who had children, reported the quality of K-12 and higher education to be a “big problem,” more often than respondents without children. Similarly, respondents with children in Public K-12 and respondents with children in public higher education were the most likely to report that the quality of K-12 was a “big problem.” The highest percentage of respondents reporting the quality of higher education to be a “big problem” were those who had children in public higher education (49%).
Crosstabulations for the change in quality over the last 5 years and child-situational variables were conducted. Findings are presented in Table 3. The highest percentage of respondents who reported that the change in quality of K-12 was “slightly worse” were parents with children in public K-12. Similarly, for the change in quality of higher education, the highest percentage of respondents who reported “slightly worse” were parents with children in public higher education. Respondents that had children were also more likely than non-parents to report that K-12 and higher education quality over the last 5 years was “slightly worse.”

**Table 2: Crosstabulation for Quality of Education and Child-Situational**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has Child</th>
<th>Quality K-12 Today</th>
<th>Quality Higher Ed. Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Big Problem</td>
<td>Somewhat / Not Much a Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Child</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has Child in Public K-12</th>
<th>Quality K-12 Today</th>
<th>Quality Higher Ed. Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big Problem</td>
<td>Somewhat / Not Much a Problem</td>
<td>Big Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child in Public K-12</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in Public K-12</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big Problem</td>
<td>Somewhat / Not Much a Problem</td>
<td>Big Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child in Public Higher Ed.</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in Public Higher Ed.</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N=             | 314    | 313    | 627 | 149 | 357 | 506 |

Consistent with the results in Table 2, having a child in public K-12 or higher education reduced respondents’ likelihood of saying that quality had “improved /
stayed the same” over the last 5 years. This was found for both K-12 and higher education, and all 3 child-situational variables.

If the responses for quality of K-12 and higher education today are recoded so that “big problem / somewhat of a problem” are one response, and “not much of a problem / don’t know” are another response, an interesting finding emerges. Respondents with children in K-12 report at a much higher rate that there is a “big problem” or “somewhat of a problem” with K-12 education than any of the other child-situational categories. This is also true for higher education, where

Table 3: Crosstabulation for Quality of Education Last 5 Years and Child-Situational

|                     | K-12 Change in Quality |  | Higher Ed. Change in Quality |  |
|---------------------|-------------------------|  |                             |  |
|                     | Improved / Stayed Same | Slightly Worse | Improved / Stayed Same | Slightly Worse |
| No Child            | 73%                     | 27%         | N=115                       | 79% | 21% | N=107 |
| Has Child           | 41%                     | 59%         | N=458                       | 58% | 42% | N=355 |

|                     |                          |  |                             |  |
| No Child in Public K-12 | 52%                   | 48%         | N=428                       | 70% | 30% | N=357 |
| Child in Public K-12   | 32%                     | 68%         | N=145                       | 62% | 38% | N=105 |

|                     |                          |  |                             |  |
| No Child in Public Higher Ed. | 48%               | 52%         | N=506                       | 66% | 34% | N=405 |
| Child in Public Higher Ed.   | 37%                     | 63%         | N=67                        | 37% | 63% | N=57  |

N= 270 303 707 290 172 462
respondents with children in higher education reported a “big problem / somewhat of a problem” more frequently than any of the other child-situational categories. See Figure 1 for K-12 Education Quality Today recode and Figure 2 for Higher Education Quality Today recode.

**Figure 1: K-12 Education Quality Today Recode**

Parent - Student Status and K-12 Education Quality Today

![Bar chart showing percent indicating a big problem or somewhat of a problem in K-12 Quality Today](chart1.png)

**Figure 2: Higher Education Quality Today Recode**

Parent - Student Status and Higher Education Quality Today

![Bar chart showing percent indicating a big problem or somewhat of a problem in High Ed. Quality Today](chart2.png)
The subsequent analyses use the original dichotomous variables defined as “big problem” and “somewhat of a problem / not much of a problem.”

Crosstabulations were done to identify the distribution of responses for each independent variable. Table 4 looks at K-12 and higher education quality today and

**Table 4: Crosstabulation for Education Quality Today and Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Quality K-12 Today</th>
<th>Quality Higher Ed. Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Big Problem</td>
<td>Somewhat / Not Much a Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informed K-12 Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Informed</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Informed</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Well Informed</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informed Higher Ed. Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Informed</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Informed</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Well Informed</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Talk About Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardly Ever</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N=                  | 314               | 313                      | 627          | 149                           | 357                  | 506   |
how the responses for the information variables were distributed across the dependent variables. The largest difference noticed was for respondents that reported being very well informed about higher education issues. Seventy-one percent reported a “big problem” with K-12 and higher education quality today. Similarly, respondents that reported talking about education often frequently indicated that K-12 and higher education quality were a “big problem.”

Crosstabulations were conducted for the change in education quality over the last 5 years for K-12 and higher education and information variables (See Table 5). Respondents who identified being very well informed reported that K-12 quality over the last 5 years had “improved / stayed the same” more than the respondents that were not informed, somewhat informed, or informed about K-12 issues. The opposite was found true for higher education quality over the last 5 years, with the respondents who reported being very well informed about higher education issues being the least likely to report that higher education quality had “improved / stayed the same” over the last 5 years. People who reported hardly ever talking about education, most frequently reported that K-12 and higher education quality over the last 5 years had “improved / stayed the same.”

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3 See appendix 3 for crosstabs on K-12 and higher education quality today and ideology / partisanship variables
4 See appendix 4 for crosstabs on K-12 and higher education change in quality over last 5 years and ideology / partisanship variables
Table 5: Crosstabulation for Education Quality Last 5 Years and Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>K-12 Change in Quality</th>
<th>Higher Ed. Change in Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved / Stayed Same</td>
<td>Slightly Worse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed K-12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Informed</td>
<td>57% 43% N=56</td>
<td>73% 27% N=33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>49% 51% N=279</td>
<td>76% 24% N=236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed</td>
<td>36% 64% N=163</td>
<td>31% 69% N=134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Well</td>
<td>58% 42% N=74</td>
<td>76% 24% N=58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed Higher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed. Issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Informed</td>
<td>70% 30% N=89</td>
<td>63% 37% N=35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>42% 58% N=293</td>
<td>70% 30% N=236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed</td>
<td>47% 53% N=138</td>
<td>60% 40% N=134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Well</td>
<td>40% 60% N=52</td>
<td>39% 61% N=56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk About</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>71% 29% N=28</td>
<td>60% 40% N=20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardly Ever</td>
<td>86% 14% N=79</td>
<td>87% 13% N=70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>41% 59% N=279</td>
<td>62% 38% N=205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>37% 63% N=187</td>
<td>54% 46% N=167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>270 303 573 290 172</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multivariate Analysis:

Logistic regression estimates were calculated for the dichotomized dependent variables concerning education quality today. Descriptive statistics are provided in Appendix 2 for the control variables. Logistic regression estimates are
provided in Table 6 for the reported education quality of Oregon’s public K-12 and higher education schools today.

For the socio-demographic variables, it was found that age, gender, years living in Oregon, and having a child were statistically significant. Gender was found to be statistically significant for K-12 education quality. Interpreting the Exp(B), or odds, if a respondent was female, they were 80% more likely than men to report K-12 quality today as a “big problem.” Unexpectedly, having a child significantly increased the probability of a respondent reporting K-12 and higher education quality as a “big problem.” The probability of people with a child reporting the quality of K-12 education having a “big problem” was found to be 2.3 times more likely than people without a child. Similarly, reporting by respondents with a child for higher education quality having a “big problem” was 2.2 times more likely.

For the second set of variables, being informed about public K-12 issues did not significantly affect the probability of a respondent to report a “big problem” with education quality today. Being informed about higher education did, however, significantly affect the probability of a respondent reporting a “big problem’ with higher education quality. As the reported level of information about public higher education increased by one unit, the probability that they reported a “big problem” with higher education increased by more than 250%. Being informed about higher education also increased the probability that respondents viewed K-12 education quality to have a “big problem”, though to a lesser affect of 140%. Talking about education was significantly and positively associated with respondents reporting a “big problem” for K-12 quality, but not for higher education. It was found that as the
Table 6: Logistic Regression Estimates for Public Perceptions of Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>K-12 Quality Today</th>
<th></th>
<th>Higher Education Quality Today</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient (Std. Error)</td>
<td>Exp(B)</td>
<td>Coefficient (Std. Error)</td>
<td>Exp(B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociodemographic:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.004 (.007)</td>
<td>.996</td>
<td>.021* (.009)</td>
<td>1.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.591** (.192)</td>
<td>1.806</td>
<td>-.117 (.256)</td>
<td>.890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.190 (.124)</td>
<td>1.210</td>
<td>.024 (.180)</td>
<td>1.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years</td>
<td>-.010 (.005)</td>
<td>.990</td>
<td>-.020** (.007)</td>
<td>.980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>.848** (.270)</td>
<td>2.335</td>
<td>.809* (.378)</td>
<td>2.245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informed:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed-public K-12</td>
<td>-.134 (.152)</td>
<td>.874</td>
<td>-.156 (.204)</td>
<td>.855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed-public high ed.</td>
<td>.337* (.148)</td>
<td>1.401</td>
<td>.945*** (.222)</td>
<td>2.572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk</td>
<td>.701*** (.142)</td>
<td>2.016</td>
<td>.089 (1.75)</td>
<td>1.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideology/Partisanship:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>.286* (.120)</td>
<td>1.331</td>
<td>.311* (.146)</td>
<td>1.365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>.122 (.229)</td>
<td>1.130</td>
<td>.823** (.307)</td>
<td>2.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>-.346 (.285)</td>
<td>.707</td>
<td>-.670 (.361)</td>
<td>.512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situational:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-public K-12</td>
<td>-.627* (.261)</td>
<td>.534</td>
<td>.135 (.335)</td>
<td>1.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-public high ed.</td>
<td>.763* (.326)</td>
<td>2.144</td>
<td>1.335*** (.366)</td>
<td>3.799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt</td>
<td>-1.137*** (.307)</td>
<td>.321</td>
<td>-2.338*** (.492)</td>
<td>.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>-.678* (.308)</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>-.103 (.402)</td>
<td>.902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chi-square=</strong></td>
<td>103.452***</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.267***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Correctly classified=</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>594</td>
<td></td>
<td>477</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1The dependent variables are displayed in Table 1. The dependent variables for Quality Today were dichotomized with 1 = "big problem" and 0 = "somewhat of a problem" and "not much of a problem".

Significance levels:  * p ≤ .05;  ** p ≤ .01;  *** p ≤ .001
level of respondents who reported talking about education increased, the probability of reporting K-12 quality today having a “big problem” increased by 100%.

The variables for ideology and partisanship indicated that being more conservative is positively associated with reporting a “big problem” for both K-12 and higher education quality. As reported ideology moved from very liberal to very conservative, the odds for reporting a “big problem” increased 30%. Those reporting to be either a weak or strong democrat had a significantly higher probability, as compared to independents, weak republicans, or strong republicans, of reporting a “big problem” with higher education quality (228%).

The situational variables offered some surprising results. Having a child in public K-12 significantly decreased the probability of that person indicating K-12 quality was a “big problem.” Those respondents were 50% less likely to report a “big problem” with K-12 education. This was most likely a result of a much higher number of respondents not having children in K-12 and those respondents reporting a big problem in the quality of K-12 education. In fact, a higher percent of respondents with a child in K-12 versus no child in K-12 reported a “big problem”. This is better represented in Table 2, which looks at crosstabulations of the child-situational variables and quality.

It was found that having a child currently enrolled in higher education led to a significant probability of respondents indicating a “big problem” in quality for both K-12 and higher education. Respondents with a child in public higher education

5 See appendix 5 for distribution of responses
were more than 2 times more likely to report a “big problem” with the quality of K-12 education today, and 3.8 times more likely to report higher education quality today to have a “big problem.” The third situational variable – a dummy variable for work type – indicated a significant probability for government workers to report the quality of K-12 and higher education today is “somewhat of a problem / not much of a problem.” If a respondent identified as a government worker, the odds decreased by almost 70% that they would report a “big problem” with the quality of K-12 education and decreased nearly 90% that they would report a “big problem” with the quality of higher education. The last situational variable, college graduate, was significant for respondents who had graduated from college to report K-12 education was “somewhat of a problem / not much of a problem.” College graduates were 50% less likely to report a “big problem” with K-12 education quality than non-college graduates.

Logistic regression estimates were calculated using the same control variables used in the regression on quality today for the change in quality over the last 5 years. Estimates are provided in Table 7 for regressions on K-12 and higher education quality over the last 5 years.

For the regression on change in K-12 quality and higher education quality over the last 5 years, there were three strong predictors out of the socio-demographic variables. Age was found to be significant and for every one-unit increase in a respondent’s age, they were 4% more likely to report that the quality of K-12 education had “improved / stayed the same.” Females were found to have a significant probability of reporting that K-12 and higher education quality were
Table 7:
Logistic Regression Estimates for Public Perceptions of Quality Last 5 Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>K-12 Change in Quality</th>
<th>Higher Education Change in Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient (Std. Error)</td>
<td>Exp(B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociodemographic:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.040*** (.009)</td>
<td>1.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-1.032*** (.221)</td>
<td>.356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.001 (.141)</td>
<td>.996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years</td>
<td>.002 (.006)</td>
<td>1.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>-1.584*** (.334)</td>
<td>.205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed-public K-12</td>
<td>.546*** (.168)</td>
<td>1.727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed-public high ed.</td>
<td>-.661*** (.172)</td>
<td>.516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk</td>
<td>-.800*** (.161)</td>
<td>.449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology/Partisanship:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.606*** (.139)</td>
<td>.546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>.168 (.269)</td>
<td>1.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>.554 (.324)</td>
<td>1.740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-public K-12</td>
<td>-.333 (.312)</td>
<td>.717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-public high ed.</td>
<td>.013 (.380)</td>
<td>1.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt</td>
<td>1.309*** (.321)</td>
<td>3.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>.079 (.352)</td>
<td>1.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chi-square= 181.979***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Correctly classified= 74.7</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 541</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1The dependent variables are displayed in Table 1. The dependent variables for Quality Last 5 Years were dichotomized with 1 = “improved” and “stayed the same” and 0 = “slightly worse”. Significance levels: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001
“slightly worse.” Unexpectedly, having a child lead to a significant probability that respondents would report K-12 and higher education quality over the last 5 years was “slightly worse.”

Responses to the questions about being informed were not as expected. Interestingly, respondents who reported being more informed about K-12 were almost 75% more likely to report that K-12 quality over the last 5 years had “improved / stayed the same,” yet reported that higher education quality over the last 5 years was “slightly worse.” Respondents who indicated being more informed about public higher education were significantly more likely to answer that K-12 and higher education were “slightly worse” over the last 5 years. The more a respondent talked about education, the less likely they were to answer that K-12 education had “improved / stayed the same.”

Ideology was found to be statistically significant, so that as a respondent reported being more conservative, they were less likely to indicate that K-12 education quality had “improved / stayed the same” and more likely to report that higher education quality had “improved / stayed the same” over the last 5 years.

Having a child in K-12 education was not found to be significant for the probability of a respondent to report on the change in quality of K-12 over the last 5 years. However, it was found statistically significant that having a child in K-12 increases the probability that they will report higher education quality to be “slightly worse” over the last 5 years. Having a child in higher education did not offer a significant prediction for how respondents would report the change in quality for either K-12 or higher education.
Respondents who reported being a government worker were found to have a significant probability of reporting that K-12 quality over the last 5 year was “improved / stayed the same.” The probability for government workers to report this was 3.7 times greater than non-government workers.

Perceptions of Oregon’s Public K-12 and Higher Education Financial Situation:

Respondents were asked to indicate how much they agree with four statements concerning education funding. Response distributions for K-12 are shown in Table 8. Response distributions for higher education are shown in Table 9.

### Table 8: Response Distribution for K-12 Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Additional state funding would lead to higher quality K-12 education in Oregon.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=706</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: Better use of state funds would lead to higher quality K-12 education in Oregon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Better use of state funds would lead to higher quality K-12 education in Oregon.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=706</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 9: Response Distribution for Higher Education Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Additional state funding would lead to higher quality college and university education in Oregon.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=706</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: Better use of state funds would lead to higher quality college and university education in Oregon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Better use of state funds would lead to higher quality college and university education in Oregon.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=706</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It was found for both K-12 and higher education that respondents agreed or strongly agreed more frequently with better use of state funds over additional state funds leading to higher quality education. Respondents reported agree or strongly agree 76% of the time that better use of state funds would lead to higher quality K-12 education in Oregon. Fifty-one percent of respondents indicated agree or strongly agree that additional state funding would lead to higher quality K-12 education. Responses for higher education were similar, with agree or strongly agree being reported 19% more of the time for better use of state funds leading to higher quality education than additional state funds.

**Bivariate Analysis:**

Crosstabulations were used to identify trends by comparing the dichotomized child-situational variables with responses for education funding. The results for perceptions of K-12 funding indicated that having a child in public K-12 was associated with respondents more frequently agreeing that better use of state funds and additional state funds would lead to higher quality education in Oregon. Parents with children in public colleges or universities reported more often that better use of state funds would lead to higher quality education than the total survey population. Surprisingly, it was found that 12% of parents with children in public higher education reported strongly disagree to additional state funding for higher education would lead to higher quality. This was higher than the 8% of respondents
that did not have a child in public higher education that reported strongly disagree to this question.⁶

**Multivariate Analysis:**

Regression estimates were calculated for K-12 and higher education, with the responses for additional funding needed and better use of state funds as the dependent variables. Socio-demographic, reported level of information, ideology and partisanship and situational variables constituted the control variables for the regression. Regression estimates for K-12 public schools funding situation are presented in Table 10. Independent variables that were positively correlated and statistically significant for additional funding needed, were education and being a democrat. Political ideology was the only negatively correlated and statistically significant variable for additional funding needed. This meant that the more conservative a person reported being, the less likely they were to indicate that additional funding or better use of state funds would lead to higher quality K-12 education in Oregon. Independent variables that were positively correlated and statistically significant for better use of state funds leading to higher quality K-12 education included: education, having a child, being informed about K-12, and being a Republican. Variables that were negatively correlated and statistically significant for better use of state funds were years living in Oregon, political ideology, and being a college graduate.

⁶ See appendices 6-9 for bivariate analyses on funding questions and child-situational variables
Table 10:  
Regression Estimates for Public Perceptions of Oregon’s K-12 Public School’s Funding Situation\(^1\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Additional Funding Needed</th>
<th>Better Use of State Funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Std. Error)</td>
<td>(Std. Error)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociodemographic:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.06 (:.004)</td>
<td>-.01 (.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.02 (.09)</td>
<td>-.01 (.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.15** (.06)</td>
<td>.19** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years</td>
<td>-.07 (.003)</td>
<td>-.13** (.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>.04 (.13)</td>
<td>.16*** (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informed:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed (K-12)</td>
<td>.04 (.07)</td>
<td>.15** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk</td>
<td>-.05 (.06)</td>
<td>-.02 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideology/Partisanship:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.36*** (.06)</td>
<td>-.10* (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>.11** (.11)</td>
<td>.05 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>.09 (.13)</td>
<td>.10* (.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situational:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-K-12</td>
<td>.03 (.12)</td>
<td>-.01 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt</td>
<td>.07 (.14)</td>
<td>-.03 (.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>-.01 (.15)</td>
<td>-.16* (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Test=</td>
<td>15.83***</td>
<td>4.56***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R Square=</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N =</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\)The dependent variables are displayed in Table 8.  
Significance levels:  * \(p \leq .05\); ** \(p \leq .01\); *** \(p \leq .001\)  
Standardized coefficients are used in this regression.
Regression estimates for additional funding needed and better use of state funds in respect to the higher education funding situation are presented in Table 11. Similar to the regression estimate for education level on K-12, education level was found to be statistically significant and positively correlated for both additional funding needed and better use of state funds leading to better quality higher education in Oregon. Ideology was statistically significant and negatively correlated with additional funding needed for higher education. Respondents who reported to be Democrats or Republicans were positively correlated and found to be significant with both additional funding needed and better use of state funds for higher education. Respondents who identified themselves as being government workers were positively correlated and statistically significant in their agreement with additional funding needed for Oregon’s higher education.

**Discussion:**

The purpose of this study is to explore public perceptions of education quality and funding in Oregon. Through regression analyses, predictive variables were identified for respondents’ beliefs concerning education. By collecting data on both K-12 and higher education, comparisons can be made between how people view each institution and what personal characteristics are associated with opinions. Previous research has identified how the public perceives education. There is, however, a lack of information pertaining to the specific characteristics that are common among individuals with similar opinions about education. Patterns among respondents who have been identified through this study are explained within the context of assumptions from Social Construction Theory.
Table 11:
Regression Estimates for Public Perceptions of Oregon’s Public Colleges and Universities Funding Situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Additional Funding Needed</th>
<th>Better Use of State Funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Std. Error)</td>
<td>(Std. Error)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociodemographic:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.003)</td>
<td>(.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.09)</td>
<td>(.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.16**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.002)</td>
<td>(.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informed:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed (Higher Ed.)</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideology/Partisanship:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.38***</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>.14**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.15**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.13)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situational:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-college</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.14)</td>
<td>(.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt</td>
<td>.10**</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.13)</td>
<td>(.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.14)</td>
<td>(.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Test</td>
<td>14.82***</td>
<td>5.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R Square</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1The dependent variables are displayed in Table 9.
Significance levels:  * p ≤ .05;  ** p ≤ .01;  *** p ≤ .001
Standardized coefficients are used in this regression.
Social construction theory suggests that parents are viewed as a dependent target population. They are low in political power and lack the social power to make policy changes in education. Parents are viewed as being constructed positively as a group and do not pose to be a negative group toward public education.

**Quality in Oregon:**

From reviewing previous studies, it is evident that proximity influences a respondent’s view on education quality. Education at a more local level tends to be viewed as being better quality. There is also a declining perception of higher education, which may be caused by increased costs. Although higher education is receiving lower public approval than before, it is still viewed as being better quality than K-12.
Contrary to the literature, this study identifies that having a child in either K-12 or higher education leads individuals to view that institution of education as being more problematic. Consistent with that observation, it was found that having a child in K-12 or higher education meant that respondents were less likely to indicate that the quality had improved or remained constant over the last 5 years. A likely possibility for the discrepancy in findings is that perceptions were influenced by the negative images about education quality in Oregon flooding the media. There was a collective sense of being stuck in Doonesbury, following Gary Trudeau’s portrayal of Oregon’s budge cuts in his cartoon strip.

The quality of K-12 education in Oregon was viewed more often to be a “big problem” than Oregon’s higher education system. K-12 education was reported to be a “big problem” by 23% more people than was higher education. These results agree with the literature reviewed, which identifies that people are more critical of K-12 than higher education. Nearly 20% more respondents also indicated that the quality of K-12 over the last 5 years was slightly worse compared to reporting on the quality of higher education over the last 5 years.

There were many significant predictive variables for education quality. It was hypothesized that parents with children in K-12 would be less critical of K-12 quality, and parents with children in higher education would be less critical of higher education quality. This study found that having a child increased the probability of respondents to identify both K-12 and higher education to have a “big problem.” Although logistic regression analysis indicated that having a child in public K-12 meant respondents were less likely to view K-12 education as having a
“big problem,” the majority (54%) of people with a child in K-12 reported a “big problem” for K-12 education. More than 20% of respondents that had a child in public higher education reported a “big problem” with the quality of higher education than people without a child in public higher education.

Interestingly, the degree to which having a child in either K-12 or higher education affected public opinions was more significant for parents of public higher education students. When the “don’t know” responses were removed and the remaining response choices were recoded as dichotomous variables, there was a greater increase in the percent reporting that education quality was a “big problem” for parents of higher education students than parents of K-12 students. Reporting a “big problem” for K-12 quality by parents of K-12 students was 5% higher than non-parents of K-12 students. Reporting a “big problem” for higher education quality was 21% higher by parents of higher education students than non-parents of higher education students. Similarly, reporting that K-12 quality was “slightly worse” over the last 5 years was 20% higher for parents with children in K-12 than non-parents of K-12 students. Reporting that higher education quality was “slightly worse” over the last 5 years was almost 30% higher for parents than non-parents of higher education students.

An interesting contradiction emerges from these findings. The general public tends to view education as being better quality the more local it is: community better than state education, and state education better than national education. However, respondents who have children currently enrolled in public education are much more likely to report that there is a “big problem” with education and less
likely to report that it has “improved / stayed the same.” Local education is viewed as being the best provided, unless the respondent is a parent with a child currently enrolled in public education. Parents with children currently enrolled in public education are not well represented in the general public and findings from earlier studies may have been skewed in favor of more positive responses from those without a child in public education. Social construction theory would argue that this is caused by a construction of parents with children in public education that share more critical opinions about public education. They would likely be more informed and better assess the quality of education provided than people without children currently enrolled in public schools.

**Funding in Oregon:**

Looking at the differences in attitudes for funding K-12 and higher education, the literature illustrates a more negative opinion for K-12. This was not found to be true for additional state funding leading to higher quality education in Oregon. Respondents had a very similar distribution of responses for this question for K-12 and higher education. Oregonians reported more frequently (10% more) that better use of state funds for K-12 would lead to higher quality education than for higher education. The highest response category for uncertain (32%) was for additional state funding leading to higher quality college and university education in Oregon. People may be less certain about higher education funding, because the revenue stream is more variable and is seen to depend less upon individual’s taxes.

Education level was found to have a significant relationship for additional funding needed and better use of state funds leading to higher quality. This was a
surprising finding, which indicated as education level increased among respondents, the more people agreed with additional funding and better use needed. Education was not predicted to be significant in respondent’s views toward education funding, however was significant for both K-12 and higher education.

The reported level of respondent’s political ideology had an interesting correlation with additional funding needed for Oregon’s public K-12 and higher education. In both regressions, it was found that the more conservative a person is, the less they will agree that additional funding is needed. Perceptions about funding were also correlated with respondents that were government workers. Although government workers were much less likely to report there was a big problem with the quality of higher education, they did report at a statistically significant level that additional funding was needed for higher education.

Questions about additional funding or better use of state funds leading to higher quality education can be expressed in more general terms as looking at how resources should be distributed. Policy designs shape the institution of education and effect target populations. Since the target population is students in education, it can be assumed that their parents would have different opinions concerning funding due to their investment in the success of education.

The literature supports assumptions that having a child in public K-12 would cause parents to be less critical of K-12 funding. The data from this study fails to prove this assumption to be true. Findings from the analyses on funding questions, supports the current findings for parent’s evaluations of K-12 and higher education quality. It was also found that parents with children in K-12 education reported
much more frequently that they strongly agreed additional funding and better use of funding would lead to higher quality education. The change in percentage of reporting for parents with children in higher education was much less significant and reflected less of an association between these two variables. Interestingly, parents of public higher education students reported that they strongly disagreed more frequently than non-parents of public higher education students that additional state funding for higher education would lead to higher quality.

Target populations are socially constructed in their reception of benefits and burdens. In this case, having a child in education leads people to agree or strongly agree more frequently that funding can be better used, leading to higher quality education. Social construction theory would support that failures in K-12 education has caused closely constructed populations (parents) that have direct investments in education to be more critical of the funding for education. As expected, parents of K-12 students were the most likely group (82%) to report agree or strongly agree to better use of state funding leading to higher quality K-12 education. The percent reporting agree or strongly agree for respondents without a child was only 60% for the same question. Concerns over funding appear to be more focused around better use of state funds, as opposed to additional funding needed.

Limitations & Recommend Future Research:

Utilizing a quantitative approach, this survey was able to gather information about public opinions and values about education in Oregon. There is very little information available about the characteristics of individuals that share opinions concerning education. Analyzing data from 2007 might not reflect current attitudes
toward quality or funding. The recession in 2008 could have caused opinions of education funding to change as state cutbacks restricted education funding. For the first time in 5 years, the 2008-09 state report card for K-12 education in Oregon reported a reduction in the number enrolled in Oregon public schools. Along with the reduction in enrollment for public schools, there has been a steady increase in charter school enrollment in Oregon, with the largest increase in enrollment happening between the 2007-08 school year and 2008-09 (Statewide Report Card 2009). Future research is recommended to analyze the change in public perceptions for education in Oregon and this study can be used as a baseline to measure against.

Question wording would also be interesting to address to see if the results found were a product of how the questions were asked. Matching questions to previous studies done will allow for a better comparison of Oregonians perceptions and non-Oregonians. Questions that specifically address how Oregon’s education quality compares to the nation’s education quality could be useful to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Oregonians perceptions of education.

Further exploration of public perceptions should be done to see if people switching to charter schools are doing so because of their perceptions of Oregon’s public K-12 quality. Research can also be done to further analyze this data, looking at how parents of students in private schools responded to all of the control variables and how those responses varied from parents with children in Oregon’s public schools.

Observing patterns in respondents through social construction theory offered a perspective on how and why individuals are constructed as a group. Social
constructions can occur prior to a policy being implemented, or as a result of some policy change that causes individuals to be constructed. Identifying parents with children currently enrolled in public schools as a collective group, and comparing them to non-parents, allows for identification of specific shared opinions that might be in response to the burdens or benefits that they have received.

Kingdon’s multiple-streams model may provide another perspective on understanding how policies have influenced public perceptions. This model identifies why some ideas or policies come to fruition and why others fail. Looking at the processes that have fostered change or reform in education and the current policies that are in place, may better allow for understanding why perceptions are at there current levels. Analyses can be done looking at how public opinion has changed over time, pairing those changes with the policy changes that have occurred through policy windows. Specifically looking at policy outputs that have led to changes in the quality of education or revenue streams would be interesting to compare with changes in attitudes of education from similar timeframes.

**Policy Implications:**

Public perceptions of education quality and funding in Oregon are a concern and reflect the views of individuals that receive both the benefits of education and the burdens of funding education. As funding roller coasters in response to economic conditions, and quality fails to meet public expectations, perceptions of education will reflect those conditions.

Through the application of social construction theory, target populations can be defined in their ability to influence education policy. Parents with children in
public education lack the political power to influence education policy and as a result have limited options. Unsatisfied parents may choose to leave public education and enroll their children in private or charter schools, joining the contender group, or rally alongside the parent teacher association, comprising the deviant group in social construction theory. Addressing the possible avenues for target populations to create change provides a more complete description of the education system and how the various groups of people influence policies.

Policy makers can use this assessment to continue the refinement of policy designs that shape the institution of education, the resources provided, and the support needed to produce a high quality product in Oregon. Opinions from this survey identify that efforts should be spent better using state funds, as opposed to directing additional funding to education. Oregonians reported much more frequently that K-12 quality today was a big problem and that the quality over the last 5 years had gotten worse compared to responses for higher education in Oregon. Policy efforts should be directed at reversing the perceived decline in quality for K-12 education in Oregon. Since parents of K-12 students were found to be the most likely to identify a big problem with K-12 education and that quality had gotten worse over the last 5 years, efforts should begin to address this population’s concerns. Too much attention has been given recently to achieving national standards and procuring additional funding. The quality of education provided must be the focus of change, and less attention directed at meeting national standards in order to be viewed comparatively well across the nation. Similarly, how state funding is used represents a greater concern among Oregonians than the
amount allocated to education. Responses indicate that obtaining greater quality in education would be more easily achieved through better use of current funding, opposed to generating increased revenues for education.
Works Cited:


National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. (1999). *State spending for higher education in the next decade: The battle to sustain current support.* San Jose, CA: Hovey, H.A.


Appendices:

Appendix 1: Differences Between Attitudes in Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>K-12</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High. People know, or think they know, a lot about K-12.</td>
<td>Highest measured “knowledge gap” (defined as difference between how concerned people are and how much they know about a subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Public schools get low marks from the public, especially on specific items.</td>
<td>Generally perceived as a world-class product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>People see individual motivation as important in K-12 education, but the public also sees problems with K-12 students as, at least partially, the responsibility of the school.</td>
<td>Individual students (rather than colleges) are seen as being responsible for student problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who pays?</td>
<td>Perceived as paid for by local community.</td>
<td>Perceived as paid for by individual consumers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety, discipline, the basics</td>
<td>Top public concerns. Large gaps between how important these items are to the public and how effective people think the schools are in delivering them.</td>
<td>Colleges are seen as safe, with the major physical threats coming from outside higher education. Colleges’ problems with the basics are blamed on poor preparation in K-12.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Taken for granted by the public.</td>
<td>Tremendous concern to public: the worry is that many qualified students can’t attend. Leaders are much less concerned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternatives</td>
<td>Low public interest in privatization, growing interest in vouchers, charter schools.</td>
<td>Lack of clear distinction between public and private, comfort with state support for private colleges, and, among leaders, a growing interest in for-profit alternatives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: “Doing Comparatively Well” 1999
Appendix 2: Control Variables for Orientations Toward Oregon Education System and Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociodemographic variables:</th>
<th>Mean (s.d.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Respondent Age in Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>(17.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Dummy variable for respondent gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Dummy variable for educational attainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>(1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years</td>
<td>Years lived in Oregon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>(22.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Does the respondent have any children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informed variables:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informed (K-12)</td>
<td>Self-assessed informedness concerning public K-12 education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>(.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed (Higher Ed.)</td>
<td>Self-assessed informedness concerning public higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about Ed.</td>
<td>Does the respondent talk about the Oregon Public Education System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideology/Partisanship variables:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>Self-assessed political orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>(1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>Dummy variable for identification with Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Dummy variable for identification with Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independ</td>
<td>Dummy variable for identification with Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situational variables:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child-</td>
<td>Dummy variable for children currently in Oregon public K-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public K-12</td>
<td>1=children currently in Oregon public K-12; 0=else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=711</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-</td>
<td>Dummy variable for children currently in Oregon public college/university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public higher ed.</td>
<td>1=children currently in Oregon public higher education; 0=else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=711</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt</td>
<td>Dummy variable for public sector employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Dummy variable for if the respondent is a college graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=710</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 3: Education Quality Today and Ideology / Partisanship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Ideology</th>
<th>Quality K-12 Today</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Quality Higher Ed. Today</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Big Problem</td>
<td>Somewhat / Not Much a Problem</td>
<td>Big Problem</td>
<td>Somewhat / Not Much a Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Conservative</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Identification</th>
<th>Quality K-12 Today</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Quality Higher Ed. Today</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Big Problem</td>
<td>Somewhat / Not Much a Problem</td>
<td>Big Problem</td>
<td>Somewhat / Not Much a Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Republican</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Republican</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Democrat</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Democrat</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A comparison was done with K-12 and higher education quality today, looking at the distribution of responses for political ideology and party identification. There was no clear pattern for the distribution of responses in this Crosstabulation.
The change in quality over the last 5 years was also compared to responses for political ideology and party identification. An interesting finding emerged from the analysis. Respondents that reported being very liberal were less likely to identify K-12 quality being “slightly worse” than respondents identified as very conservative. An inverse relationship was found for higher education quality over the last 5 years, with very liberal respondents more likely to report higher education quality being “slightly worse” compared to very conservative respondents.
Appendix 5: Distribution of Responses for Having a Child in K-12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Much / Somewhat of a Problem</th>
<th>Big Problem</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Child Currently Enrolled in Public K-12</td>
<td>244 (51%)</td>
<td>234 (49%)</td>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a Child Currently Enrolled in Public K-12</td>
<td>69 (46%)</td>
<td>80 (54%)</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>627</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 6: Additional State Funding K-12 Distribution and Child-Situational

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Child</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Child</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child in Public K-12</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in Public K-12</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child in Public Higher Ed.</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in Public Higher Ed.</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>706</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 7: Additional State Funding Higher Education Distribution and Child-Situational

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Additional State Funding Higher Education</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Child</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child in Public K-12</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in Public K-12</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child in Public Higher Ed.</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in Public Higher Ed.</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>62</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8: Better Use State Funding K-12 Distribution and Child-Situational

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Child</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Child</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child in Public K-12</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in Public K-12</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child in Public Higher Ed.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in Public Higher Ed.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>129</strong></td>
<td><strong>278</strong></td>
<td><strong>264</strong></td>
<td><strong>706</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 9: Better Use State Funding Higher Education and Child-Situational

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Better Use State Funding Higher Education</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Child</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child in Public K-12</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in Public K-12</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child in Public Higher Ed.</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in Public Higher Ed.</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>