

LEARNING **FIRST** ALLIANCE  
Strengthening public schools for every child

# Values, Vision And Performance

Americans' Hopes for their Public Schools

February 2008

# **Values, Vision And Performance**

is a project of the Learning First Alliance

[www.learningfirst.org](http://www.learningfirst.org)

[www.publicschoolinsights.org](http://www.publicschoolinsights.org)

# Purpose of this Study

- Understand voters' views on public schools
- Consider how public schools can better serve public interest
- Consider actions public schools can take to foster public support

# The Study's Methods

- Two-year research initiative conducted in partnership with The Mellman Group
- 2004:
  - Focus groups and national poll of 1,300 voters
- 2005:
  - Focus groups and national poll of 1,000 voters
- Cross-checked data with other opinion polls, reports and studies

# 6 Categories of Major Findings

I. *School Quality*

II. *Values* and Public Schools

III. The *Mission* Of Public Schools

IV. The *Vision* Of Quality Public Schools

V. School *Funding*

VI. *Accountability And Progress Reports*

# **I. School Quality**

Voters' perceptions of public school quality

# School Quality

- Voters are most confident in the schools with which they have personal experience
- Lack of parent involvement and discipline drive perceptions of poor school quality
- African American and Latino voters cite lack of teacher attention as the most important problem

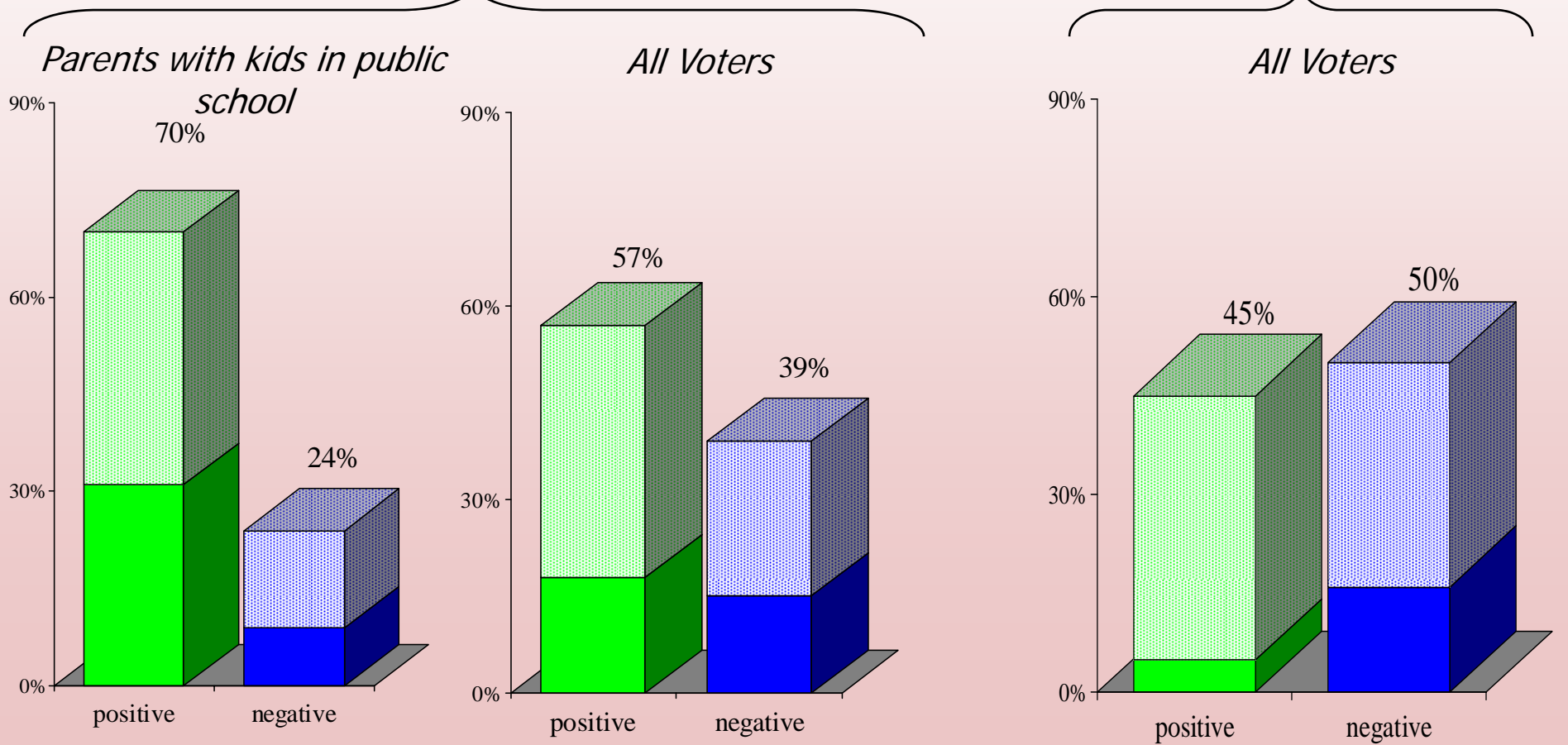
# Voters are Confident in the Public Schools they Know

## Less Confident about Other Public Schools

*How would you rate the quality of education in public schools in \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Your Neighborhood*

*The United States generally*

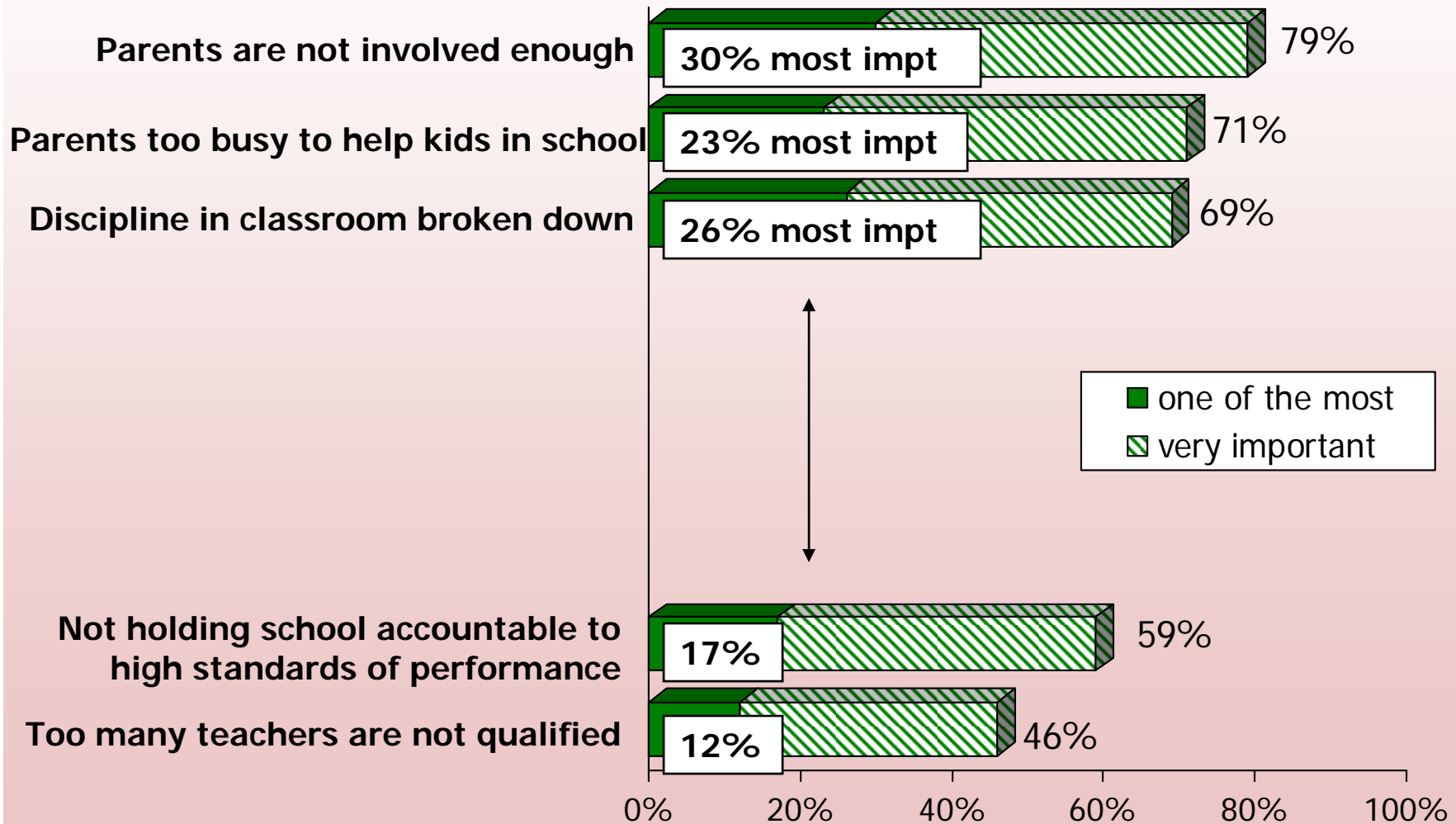




# Parent Involvement, Discipline, and Unequal Access Drive Perceptions of Poor School Quality

## Less Concern about Lack of Accountability and Teacher Quality

*(% most important problems facing public schools)*



*(darker shading = stronger intensity)*



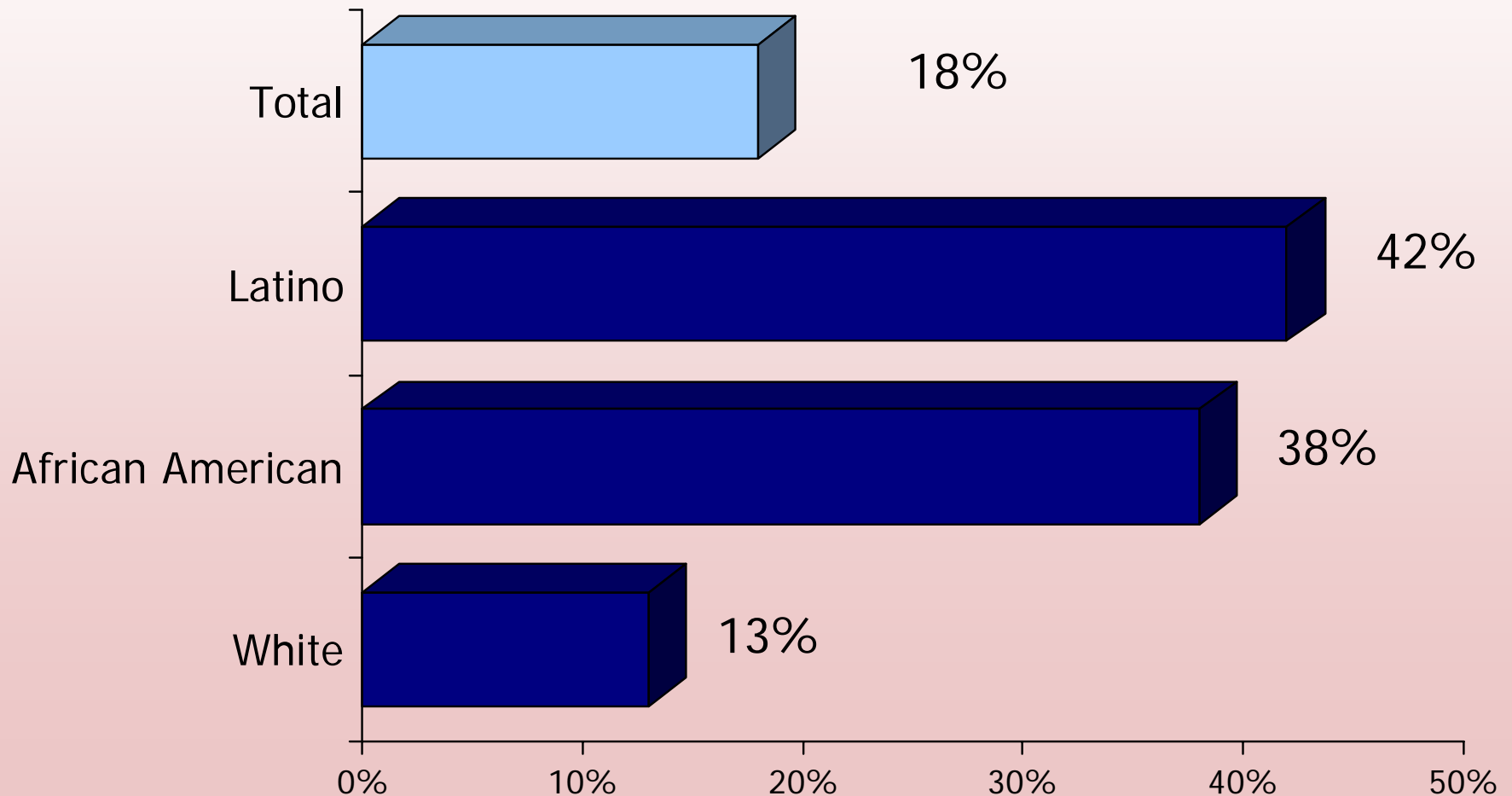
*“I think there’s a lot of parents who are not that involved. A lot of parents use school as a daycare basically.”*

*-Latino Male Parent, Portland*

# For African Americans and Latinos: Lack of Teacher Attention is Most Important Problem

African American and Latino voters saw this as the biggest problem whereas white voters placed it near the bottom of their list of concerns

*Students not getting individual attention from the teachers (% one of the most important)*





*"A lot of time, depending on what area you are in, I think your kids get a substandard education."*

*-African American Female  
Parent, Birmingham*

## **II. Values**

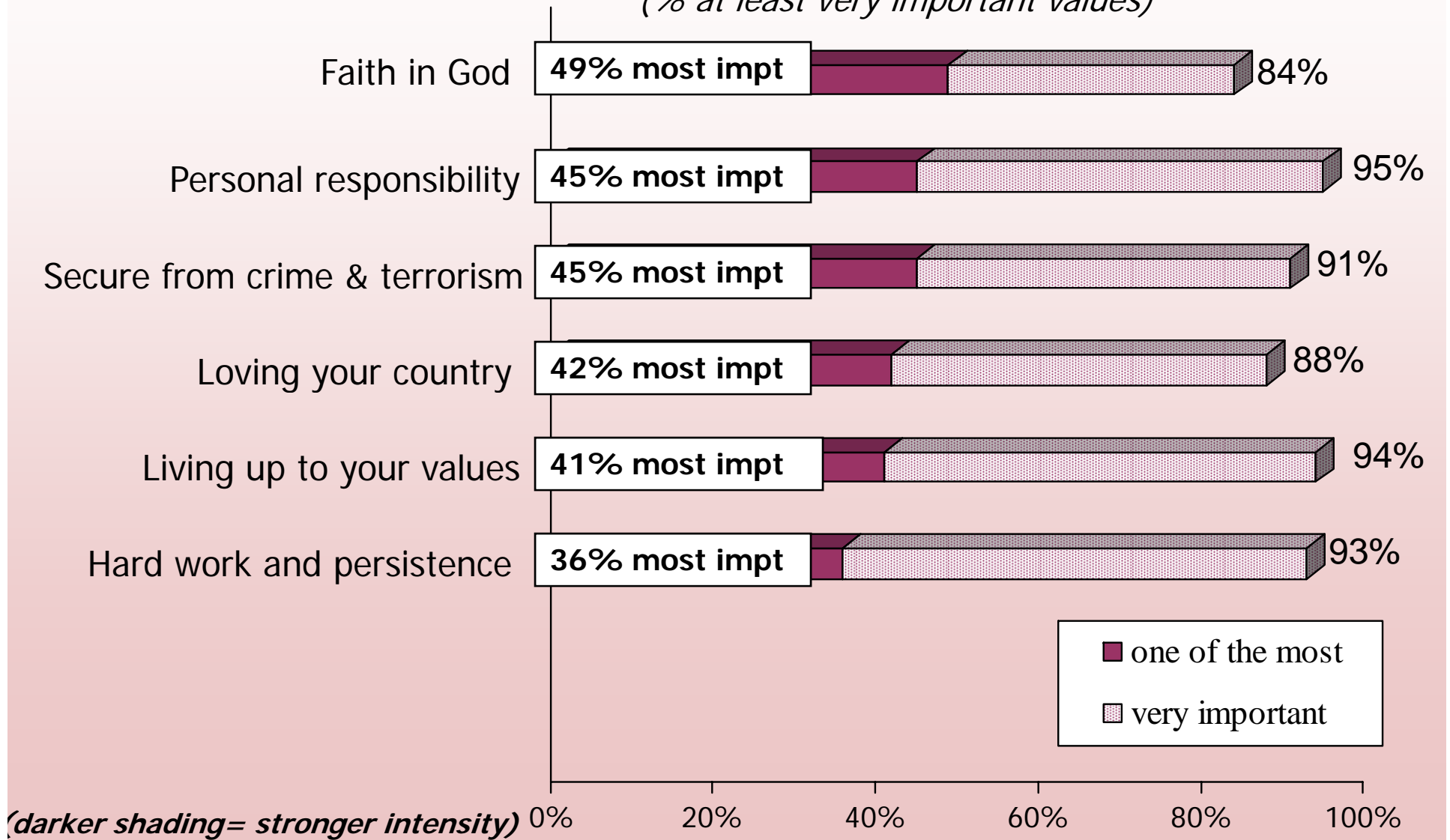
Voters' perception of values that public schools should promote

# Values

- Voters say faith, security, personal responsibility, patriotism and personal values are most important
- Voters emphasize individual responsibility and effort
- Voters want public schools to demonstrate that they share voters' core values
- Voters want students to work hard, but they also want a level playing field

# Voters Rank Faith, Security, Personal Responsibility, Patriotism and Personal Values as Most Important in their daily lives

*(% at least very important values)*





*"I am responsible for myself and my happiness  
and what I do."*

*-White Male Parent, Phoenix*

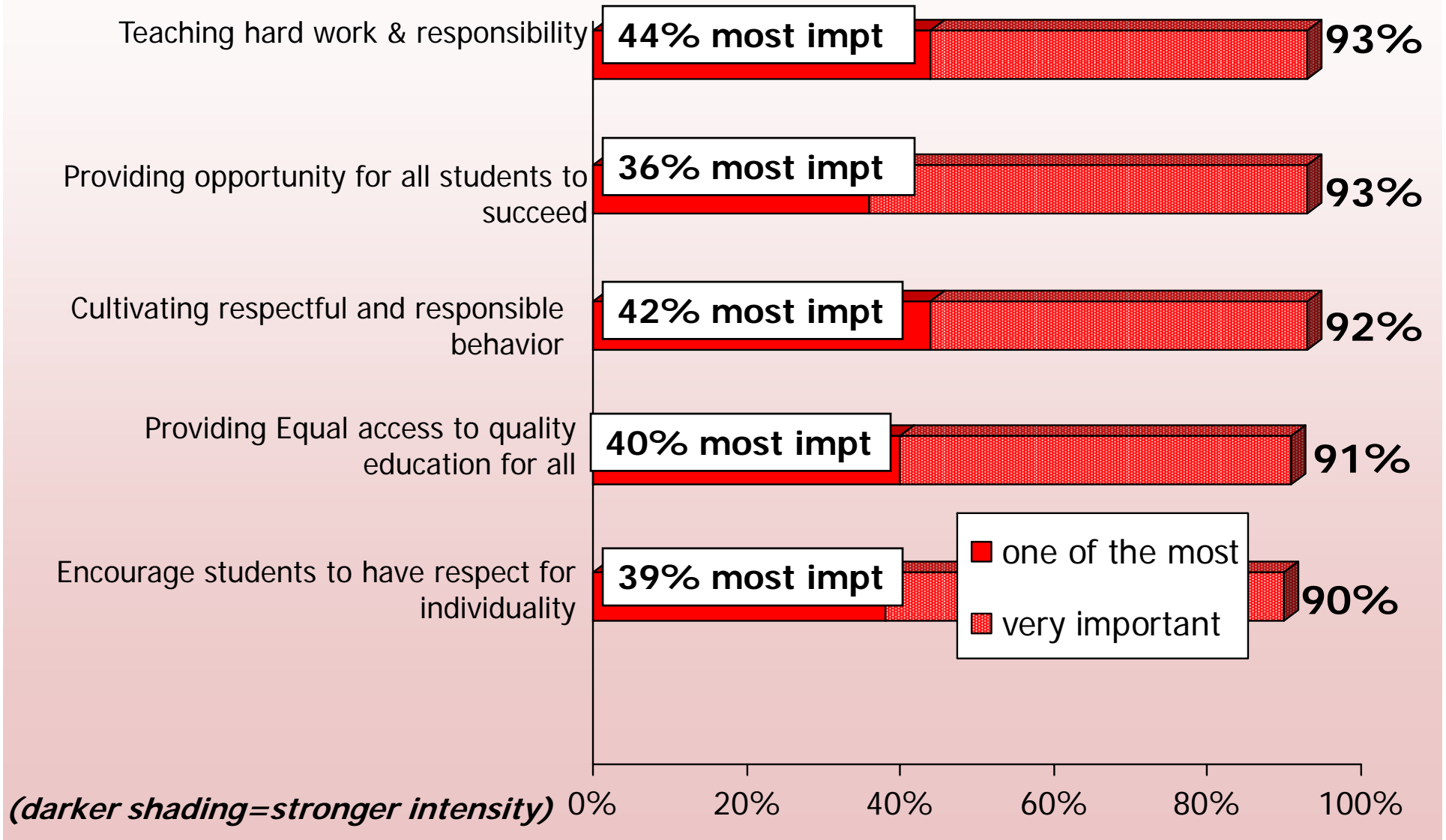
*"That is the key to it, to get (our) kids to  
understand that you have to be responsible for  
your own action."*

*- African-American Male Parent, Birmingham*



# Voters Want Public Schools to Demonstrate that they Share Voters' Core Values

*(% most important goals for public schools)*





*"[A good school] starts with good, solid, basic values."*

*-Latina Female Parent, Portland*



# III. Mission

Voters' perceptions of the purpose—or mission—of public schools.

# Mission

Voters see a mission for public schools that builds on shared values.

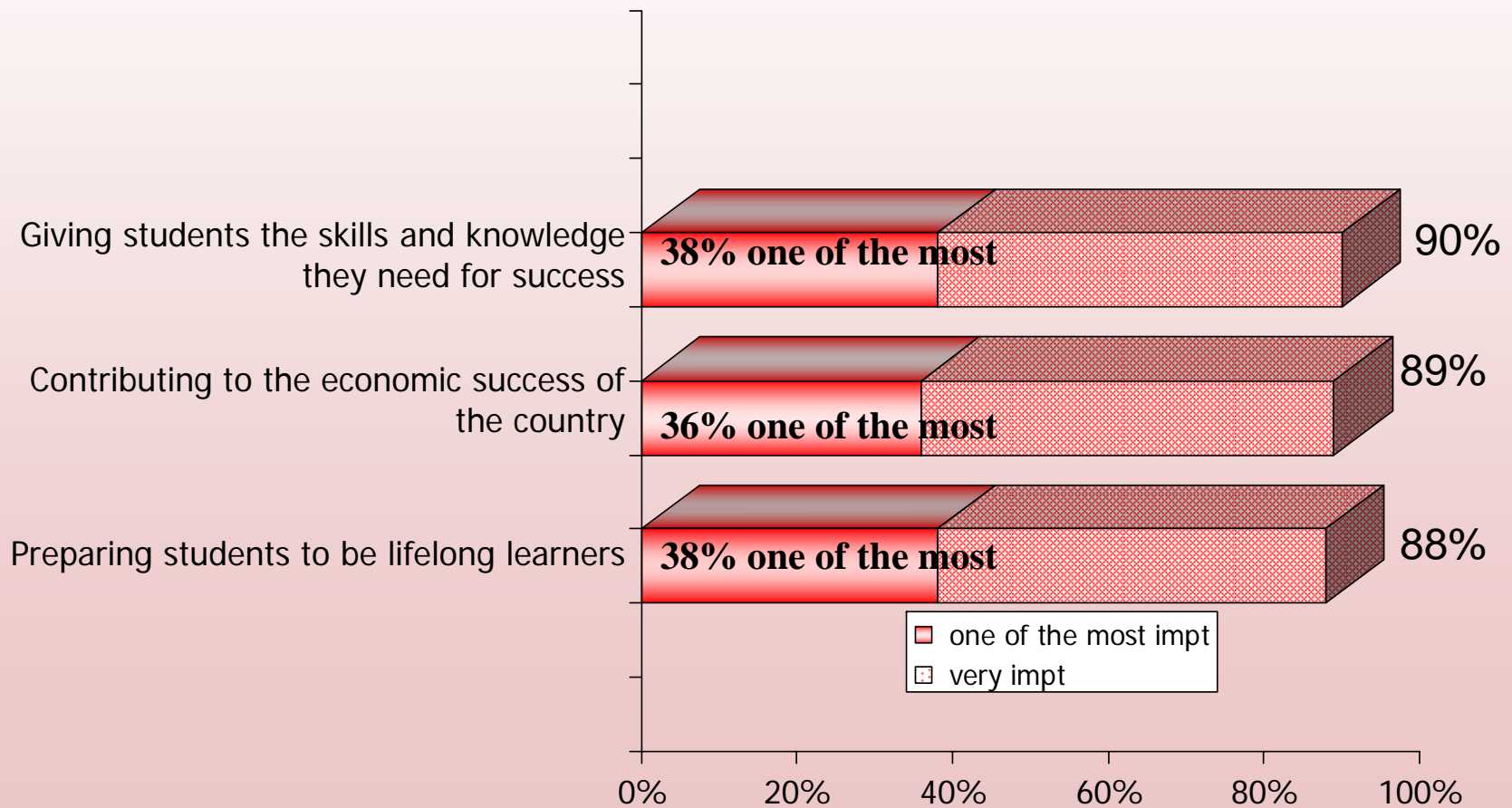
Voters want public schools to offer concrete skills and economic benefits

Voters are somewhat less supportive of abstract goals

Voters also see public schools as an antidote to poverty and crime

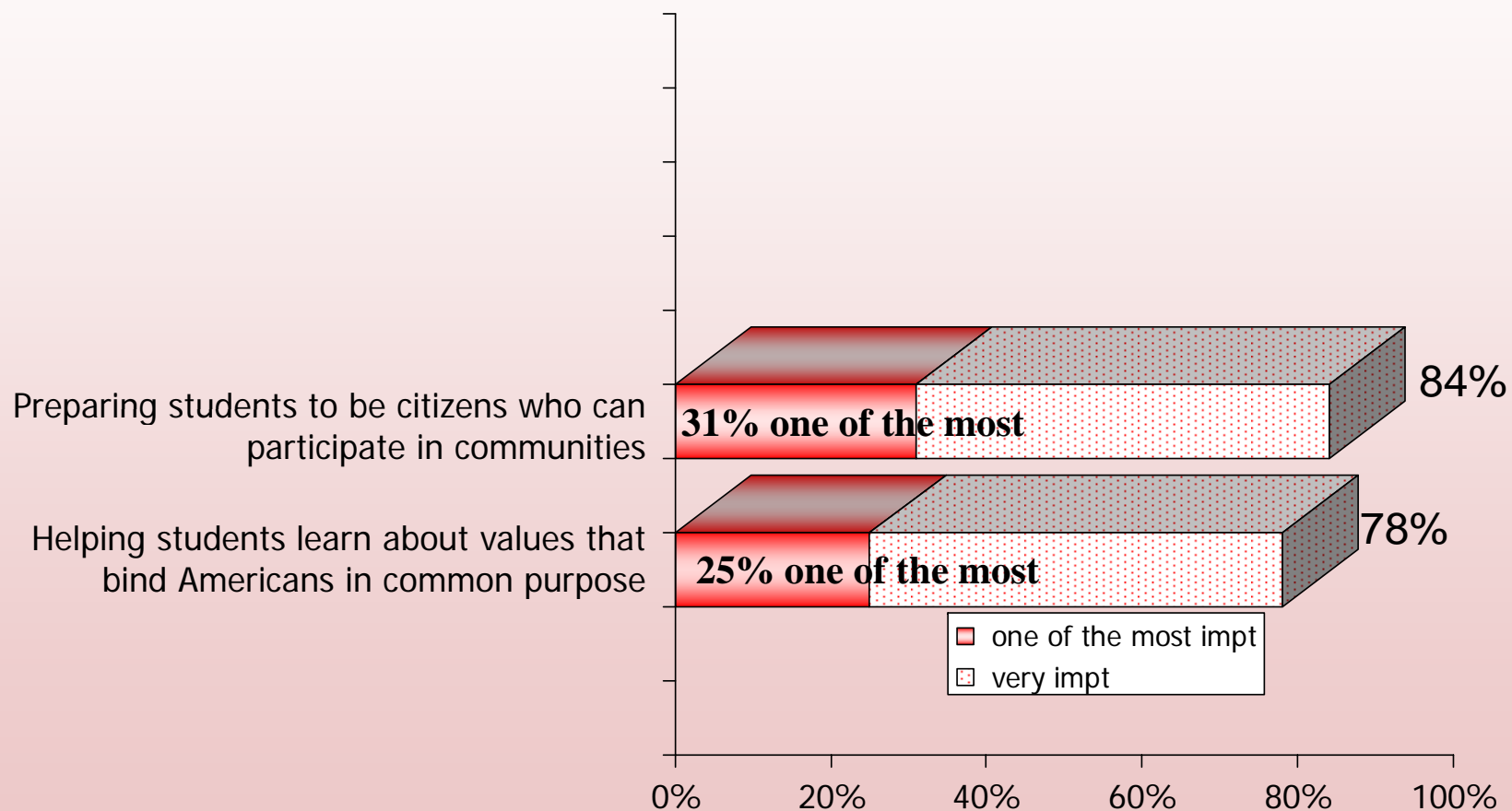
# Voters Want Public Schools to Provide Needed Skills and Contribute to Economic Benefits

*(% important goals for local public schools)*



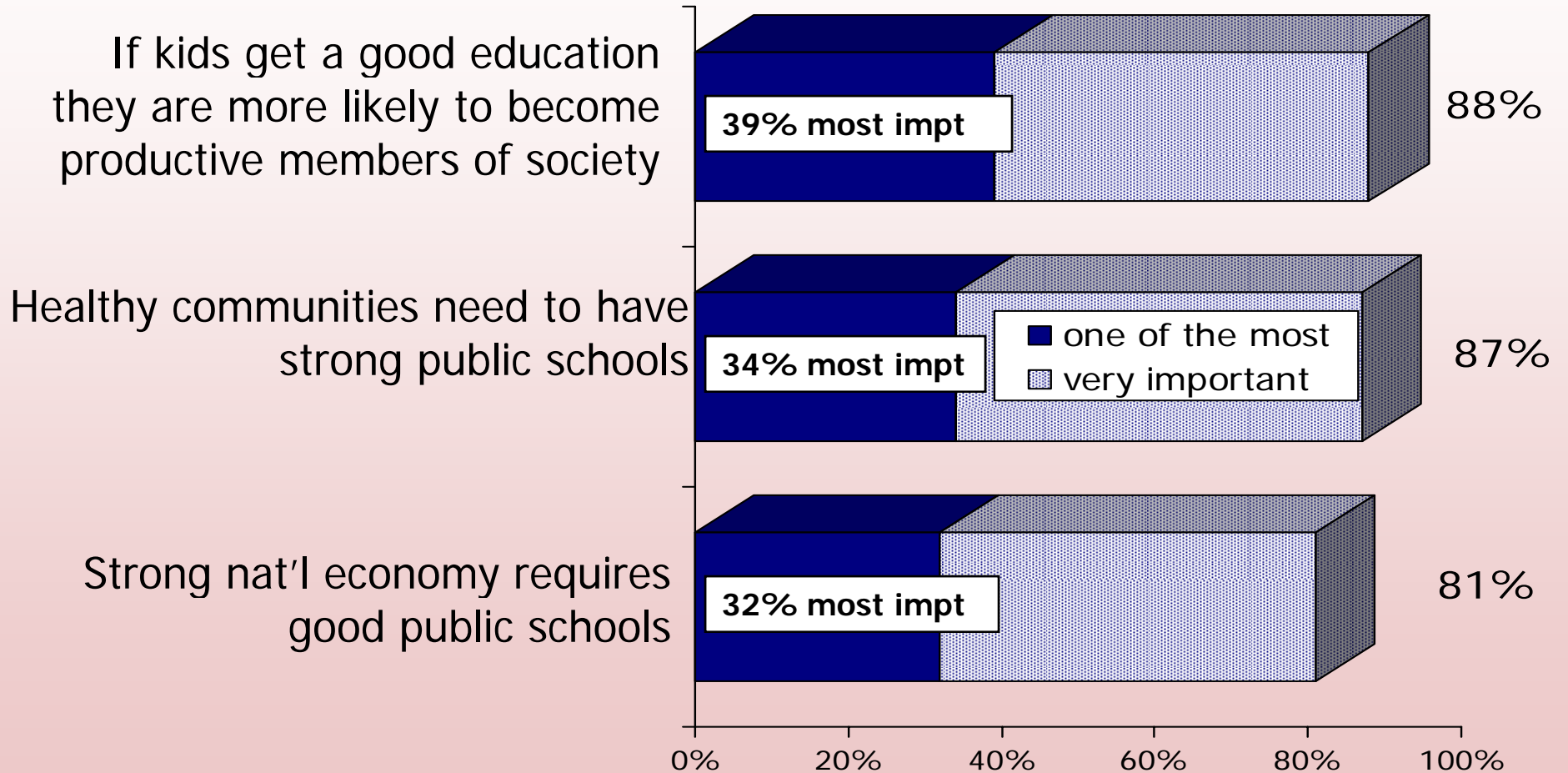
# Voters Somewhat Less Supportive of Abstract Goals

*(% important goals for local public schools)*



# Voters Want Public Schools to Offer Clear Benefits to their Kids, Communities and Country

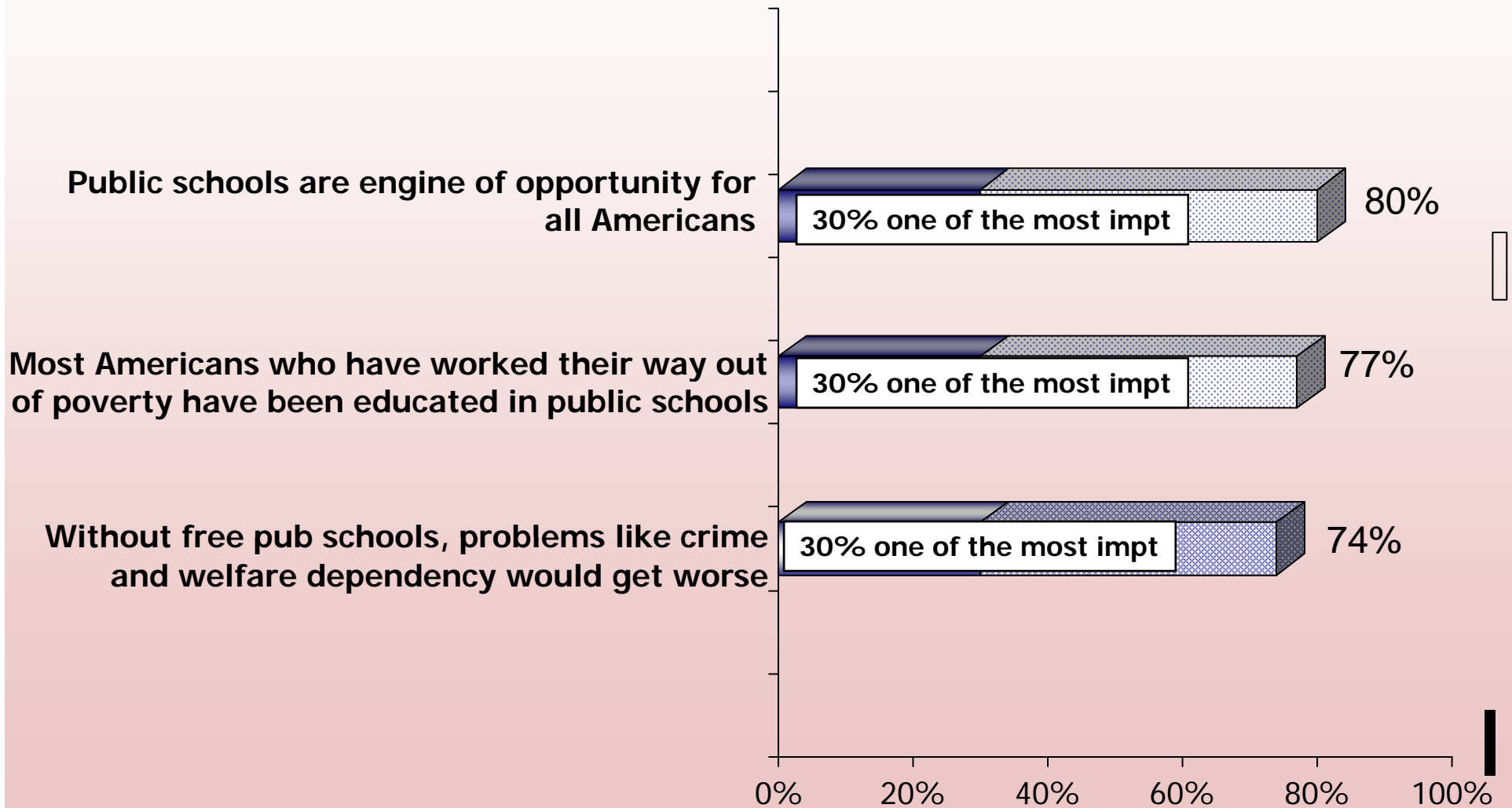
*(% very important reasons to keep schools well funded)*



*(darker shading= stronger intensity)*

# Voters also Say Public Schools are Key to Opportunity and an Antidote to Poverty and Crime

*(% important reasons to keep schools well funded)*

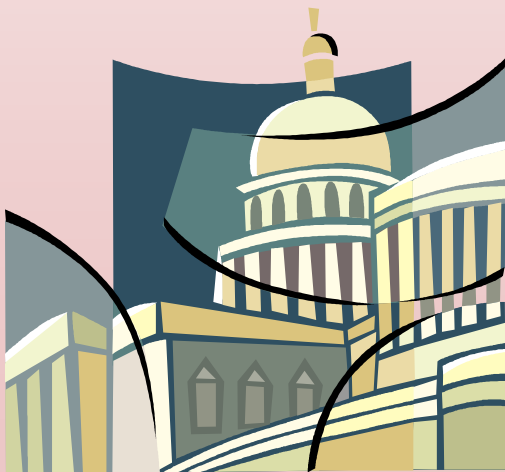






*"To me, the public school is the backbone of the future of the country... The tone of the public schools to me will be the tone of society in future years."*

*-White Male Parent, Phoenix*



# **IV. Vision**

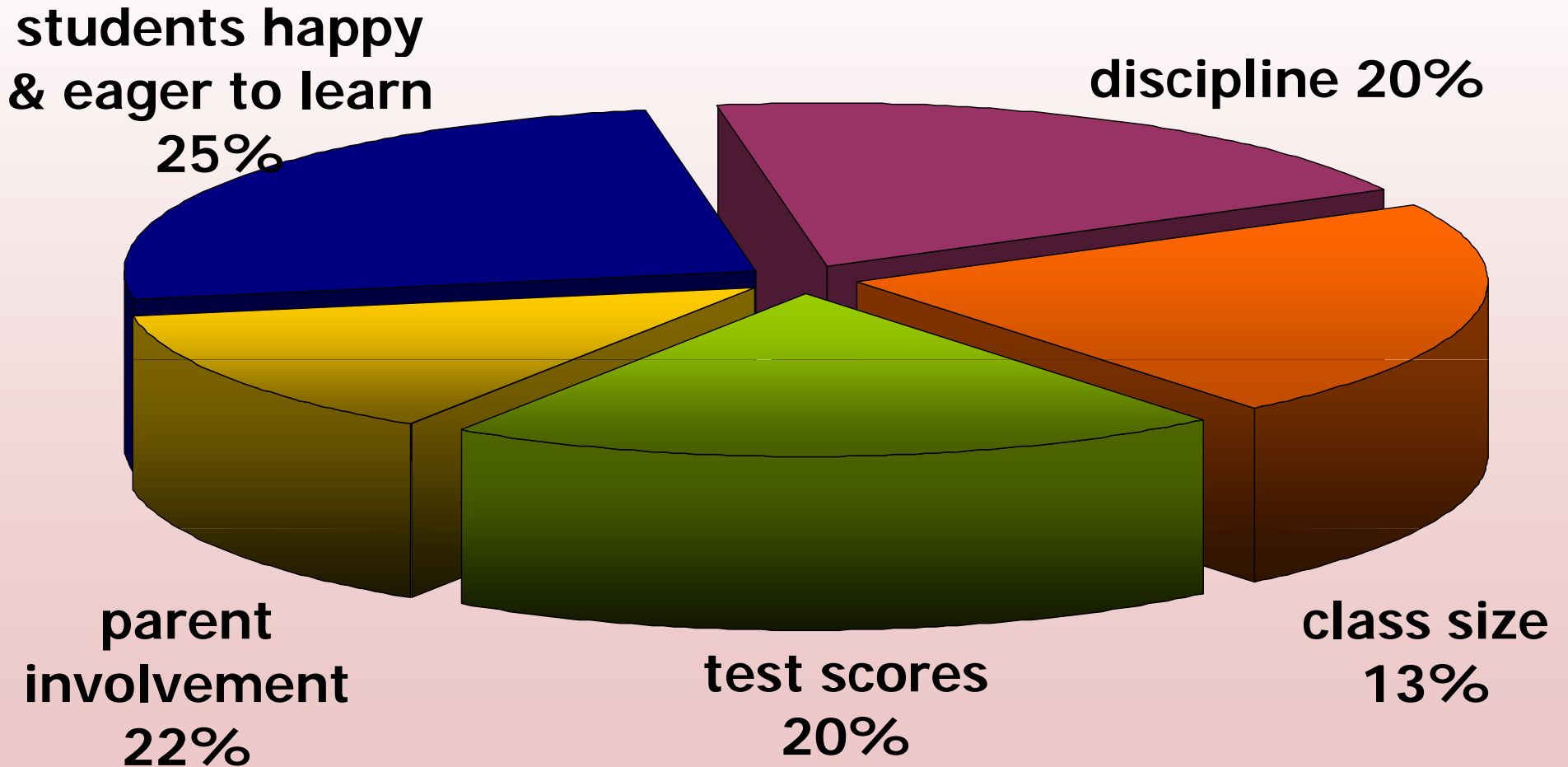
Voters' vision of a good public school

# Vision

- Voters have a vision of a good public school
- Voters' vision includes both inputs and results.
- Voters want students to learn a wide array of knowledge skills and habits, leading to success in the "real world."

# Voters Have a Vision of a Good Public School

*Analysis weighs the relative importance of each attribute in a good public school*

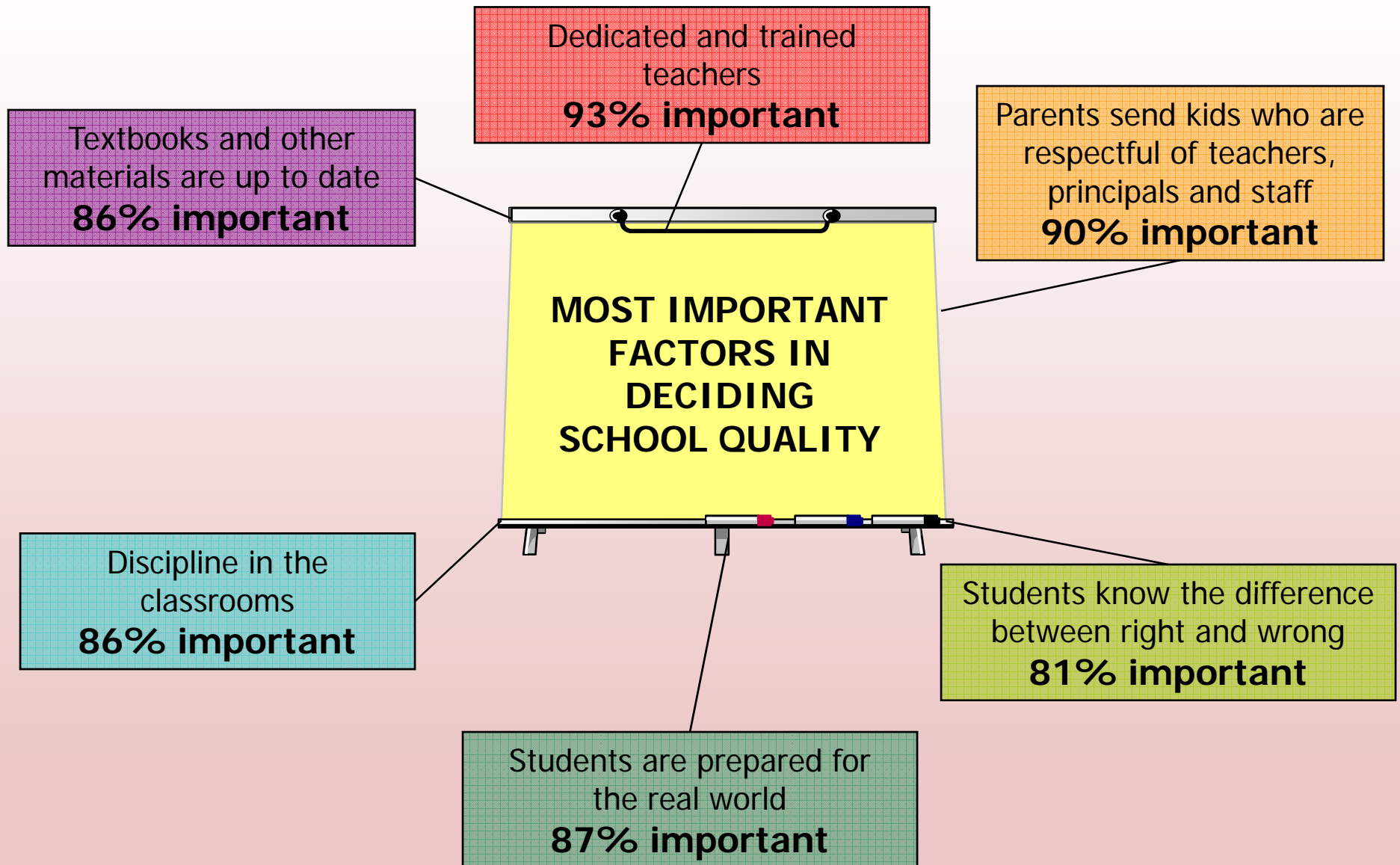




*“You have happy students, you have happy teachers, and you don’t see anyone just wandering around. Everyone has a purpose when they are there.”*

*-White Female Parent, Baltimore*

# Voters' Vision of a Good School Includes Inputs and Results

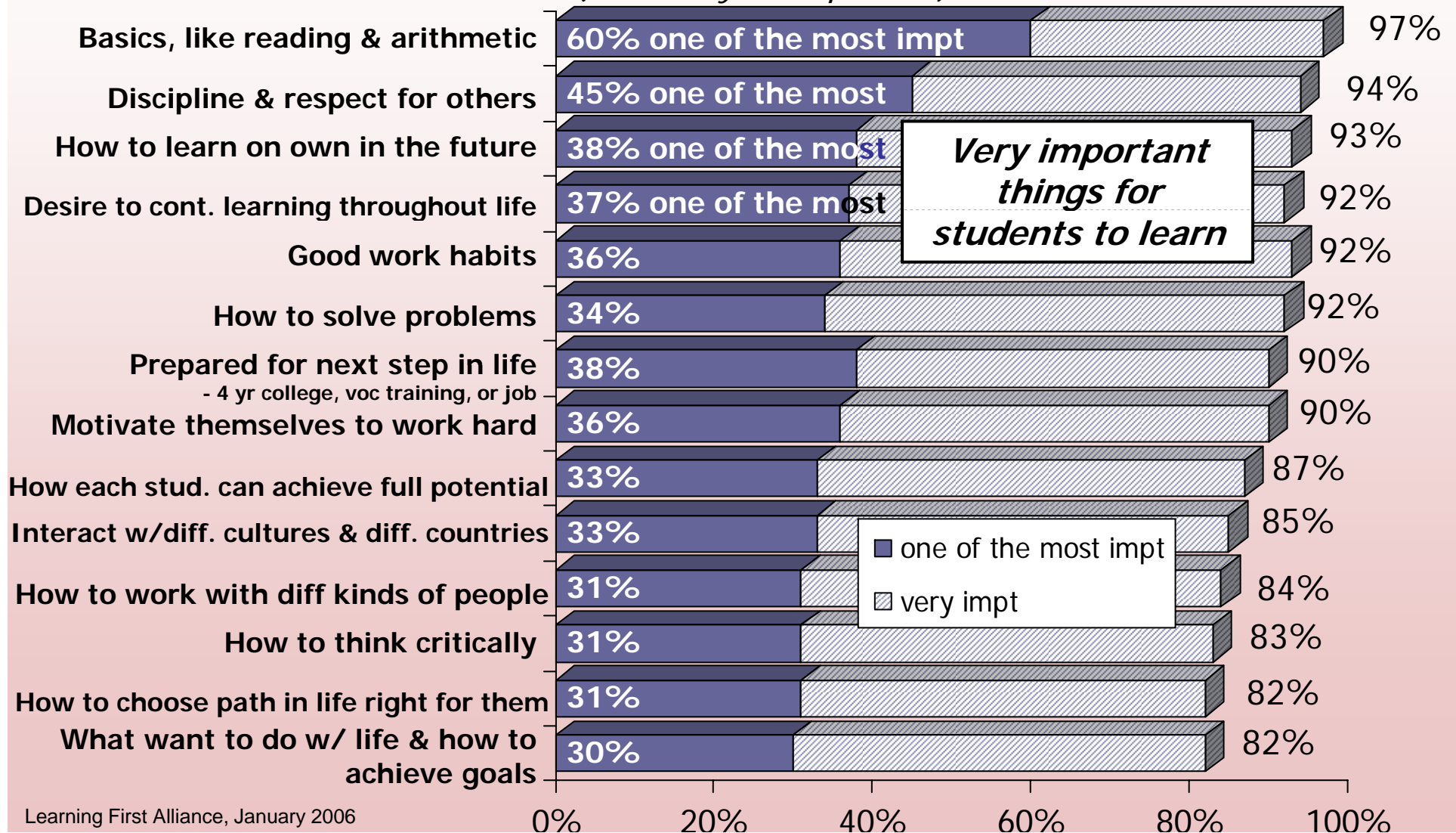


# Voters Want Substantial Learning, Leading to Success in the “Real World”

- Learning the basics is non-negotiable
- Discipline and respect for others are almost as important.
- But voters recognize the real demands of life and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—voters stress the importance of many different skills

# Voters Want Students to Learn Wide Array of Knowledge Skills and Habits, Leading to Success in the "Real World"

(ranked by % important)





# **V. Funding**

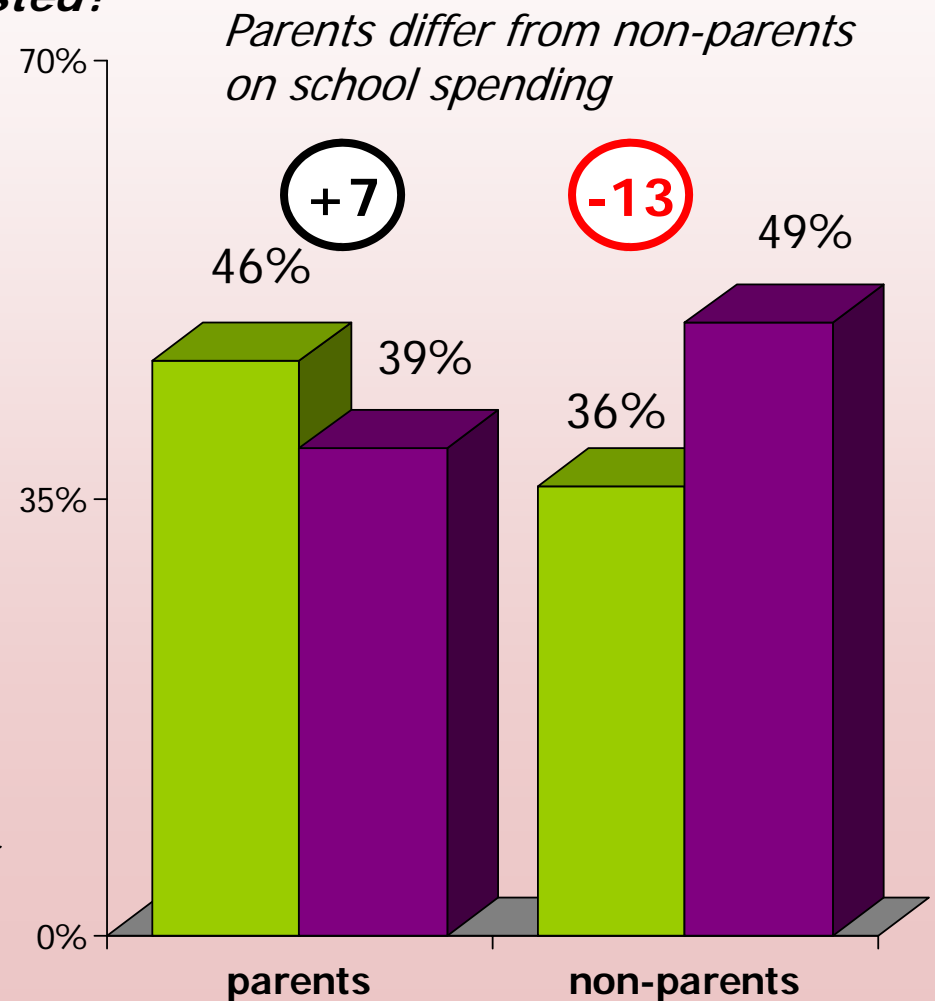
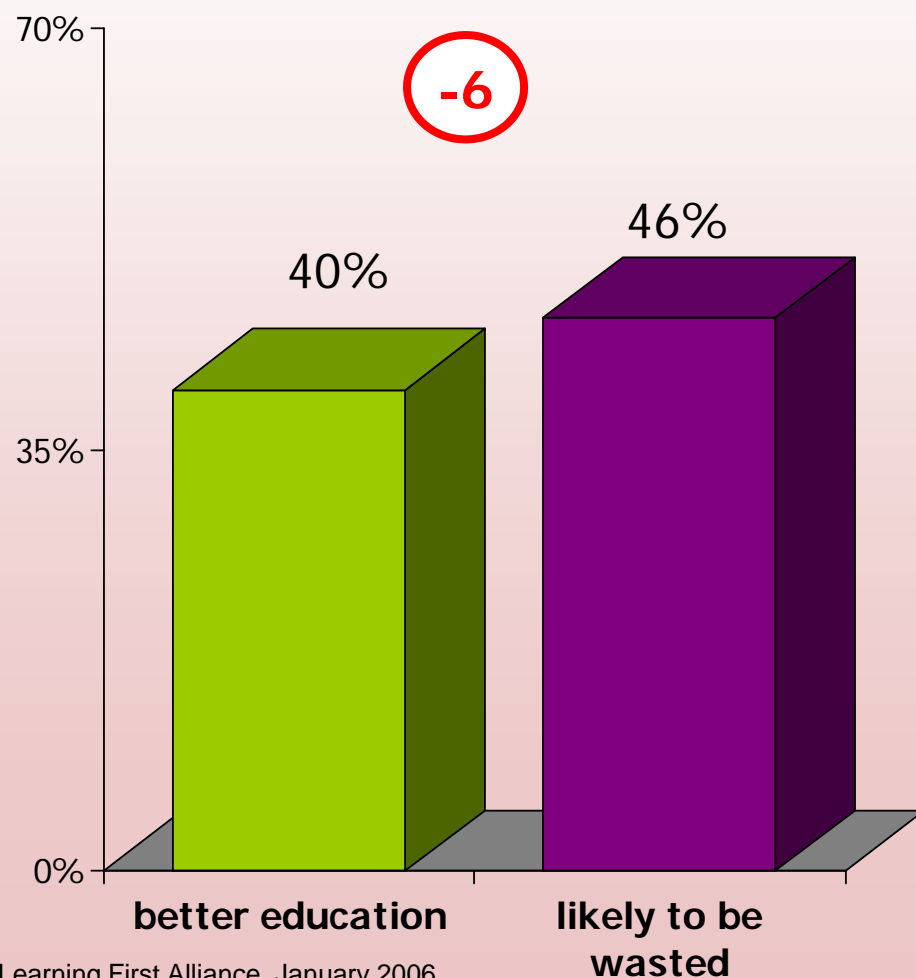
Voters' opinions on school funding

# Funding

- Voters support equitable and adequate funding but worry money will be wasted
- Voters cite fiscal transparency and accountability as effective ways to gain their support for increased funding

# Voters Support Equitable, Adequate Funding but Worry Whether Funds will be Well Spent

*If additional money is spent on education, do you think it is more likely to result in better education in your state, or is the additional money more likely to be wasted?*



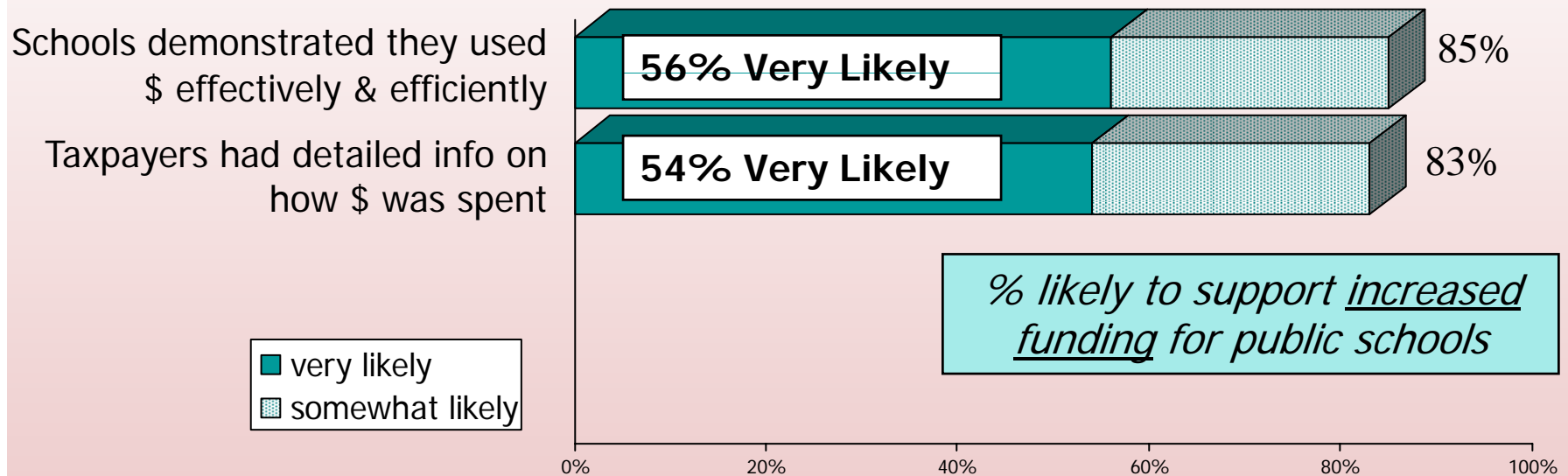


*"I'm not going to vote for [money] to fix their problems when they don't know how to spend their money right."*

*-Latino Male Parent, Portland*



# Voters Cite Financial Transparency and Accountability Among Most Effective Ways of Ensuring their Support for More Funding



# **VI. Accountability And Progress Reports**

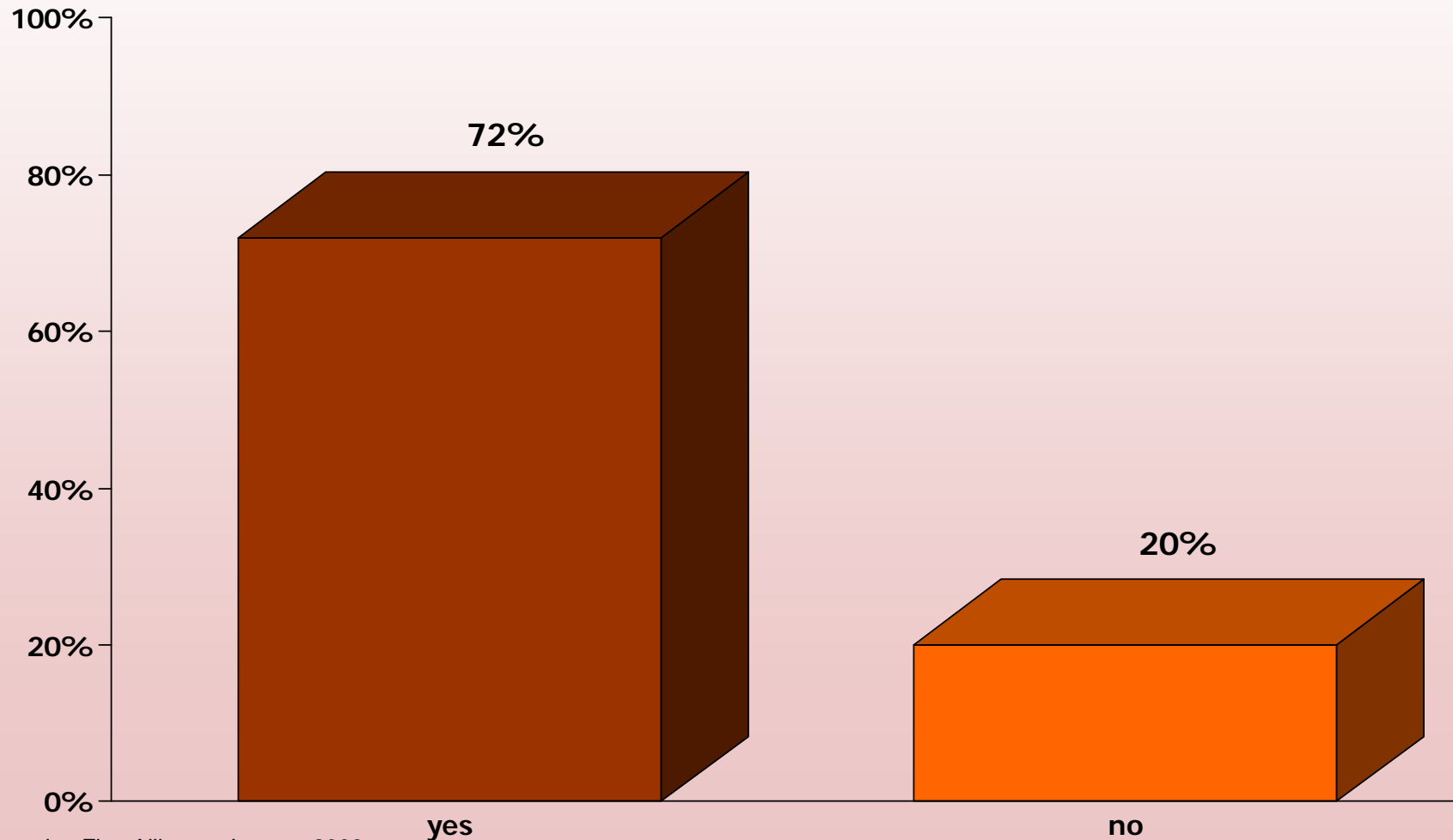
Voters' views on information about school performance

# Accountability and Progress Reports

- Information is key to building voter confidence in public schools
- Information is key to building support for increased funding
- Voters want information on a variety of areas, not just test scores
- Voters do not see test scores as an end, but as a means to help children succeed

# Voters Say More Information Would Increase their Confidence in Public Schools

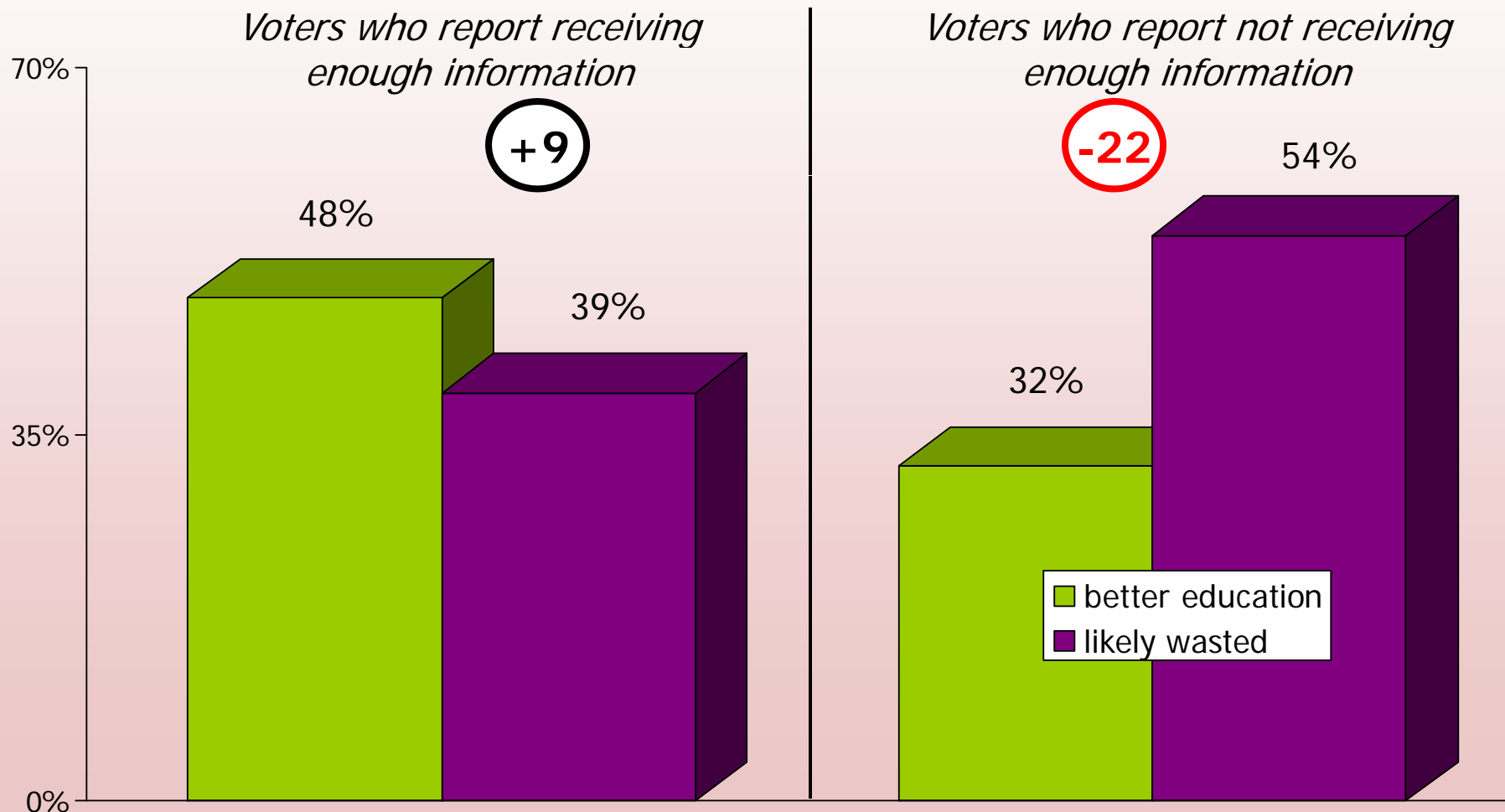
*If you were to receive regular progress reports about the local public schools, do you think it would increase your confidence in the schools and their ability to do quality work?*





# Information is Key to Building Support for Increased Funding

*If additional money is spent on education, do you think it is more likely to result in better education in your state, or is the additional money more likely to be wasted?*

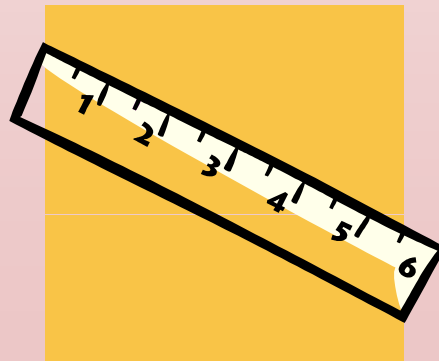




*“You have to measure it, otherwise you are not going to truly know.”*

*-White Male Parent, Portland*

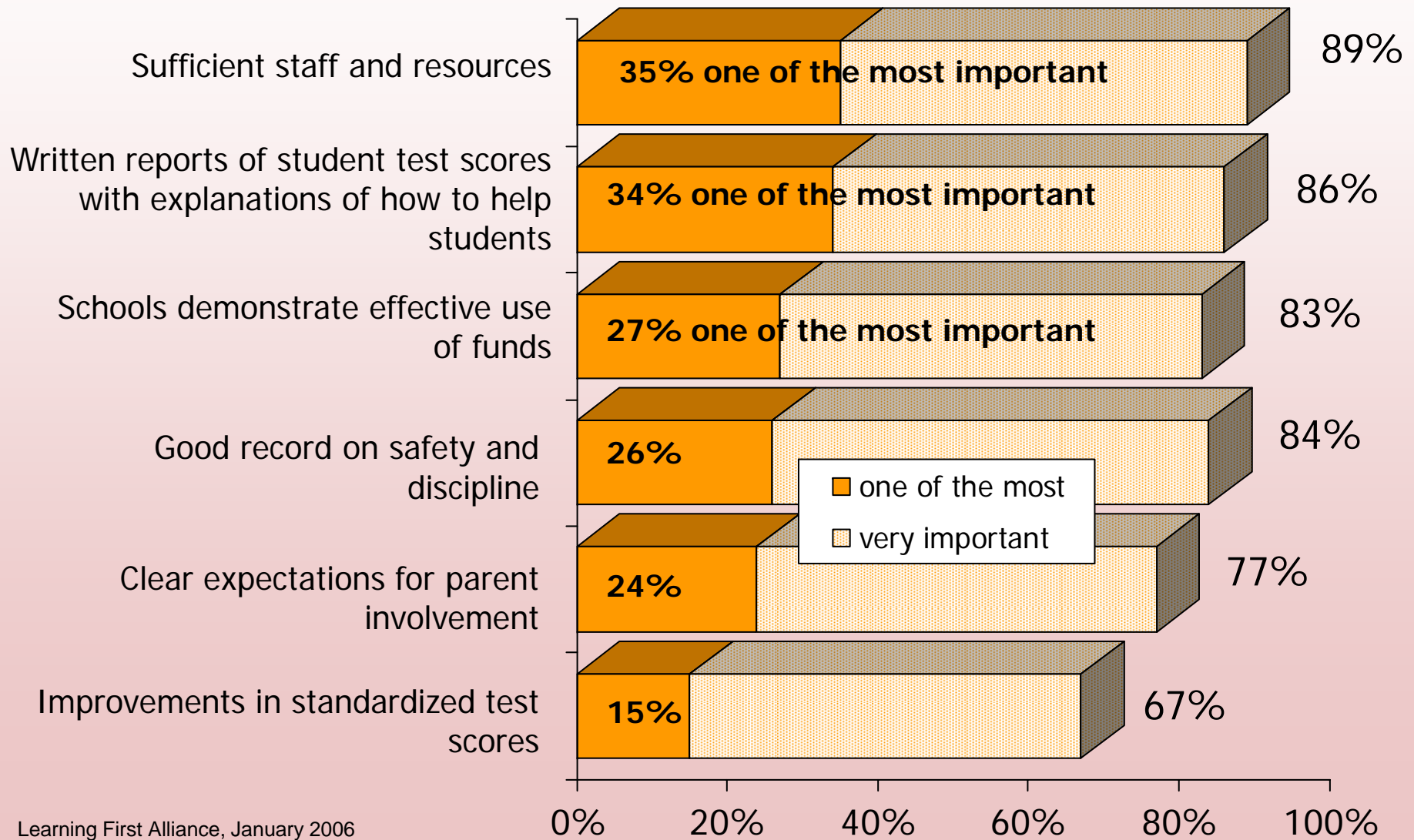
*“It’s not all about test scores.”*



*-White Male, Baltimore*

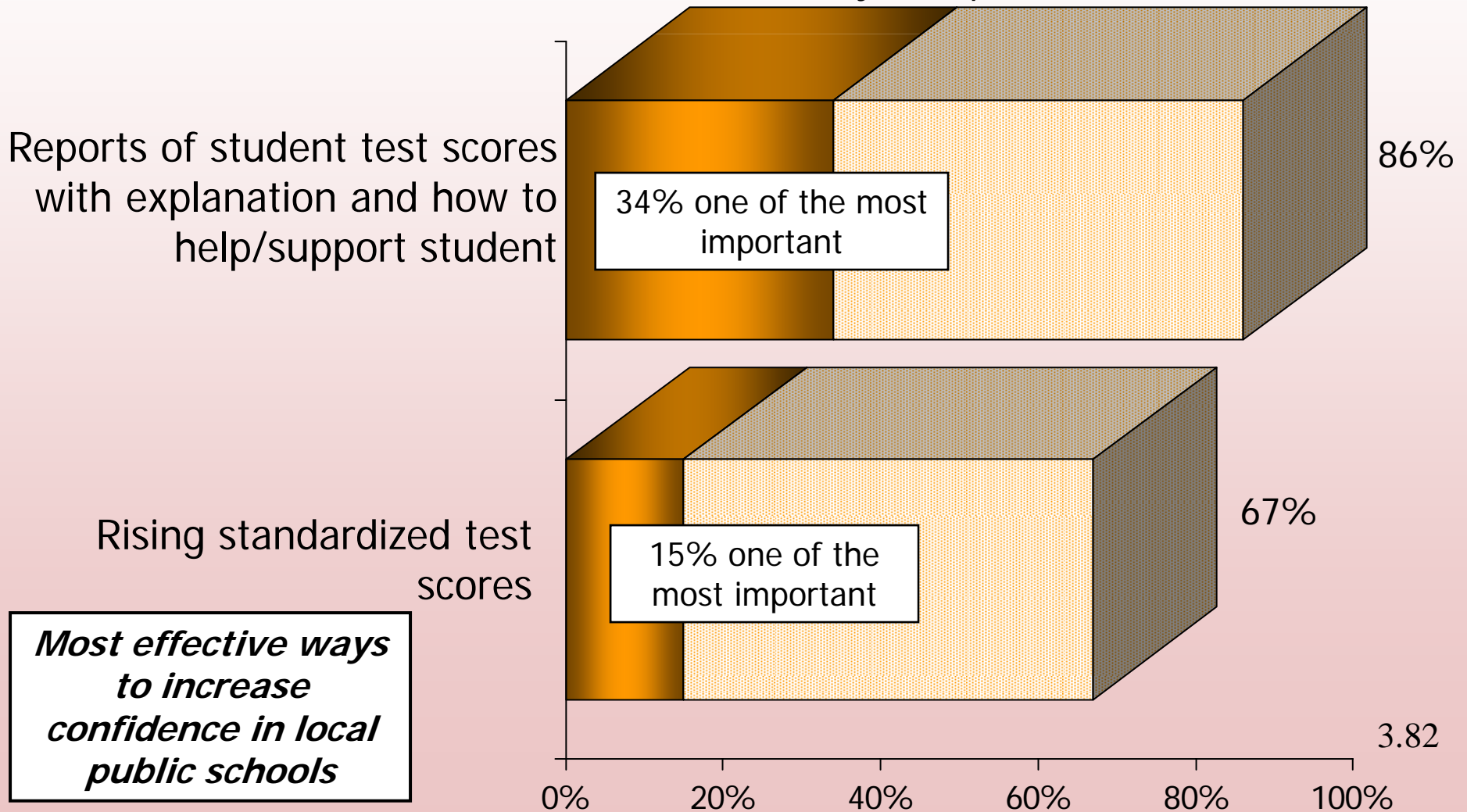
# Voters Want Information on a Variety of Areas, Not Just Test Scores

*(% likely to increase confidence in public schools)*



# Voters Do Not See Test Scores as an End, but as a Means to Help Students Succeed

*(ranked by % important)*



# Summing Up

- Voters want schools to support core values
- Voters want schools to provide concrete benefits to individuals and the country
- Voters' vision of good schools includes both inputs—such as good teachers, involved parents, and new textbooks—and results—such as test scores and students prepared for the real world.
- Transparency inspires public confidence and support for more funding

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For more information on public opinion on school  
success, see:

[www.publicschoolinsights.org](http://www.publicschoolinsights.org)