

## Poll: Education Funding Dominates Problems Facing Granite State

**EDITORS and NEWS DIRECTORS: For more information or a specific breakdown of polling results and questions, contact Andrew Smith, UNH Survey Center, at (603) 862-4367.**

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DURHAM, N.H. -- The continuing problem of how to fund public education remains the most important problem facing the Granite State. Gov. Jeanne Shaheen remains a popular governor, apparently untouched by the education funding debate. These findings are based on the latest **WMUR / CNN Poll**, conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center. The WMUR / CNN Poll is sponsored by WMUR-TV, Channel 9 in Manchester and CNN.

### Education Funding Debate Won't Go Away

The State of New Hampshire Supreme Court's decision in the Claremont lawsuit has dominated the political landscape in New Hampshire for almost two years. The decision, which found that New Hampshire's reliance on local property taxes to fund public education to be unconstitutional, has forced lawmakers to find a way of raising hundreds of millions of dollars to equalize education funding in the state. While legislation was passed "solving" the education funding crisis in May, the lingering problem of how to close the resulting budget gap continues to be on the minds of New Hampshire voters.

Among New Hampshire voters, 41 percent specifically mentioned education funding as the most important problem facing New Hampshire, while another 21 percent mentioned related issues such as "education," "schools" or "Claremont." In the May 1999 WMUR / CNN Poll, school funding was named as the most important problem facing the state by 45 percent of voters and 27 percent cited "education," "schools" or "Claremont."

The major stumbling block solving the education funding crisis is to find a politically acceptable way of increasing taxes. This has proven a tough nut to crack,

with many New Hampshire voters believing their taxes are too high already. In the latest poll, 16 percent of New Hampshire voters already say that taxes are the most important problem facing the state. The same percentage cited taxes in the May, 1999 WMUR / CNN Poll.

The only other issues mentioned by more than 1 percent of those surveyed was the economy (3 percent) and health care problems (3 percent), while 12 percent cited some other problem; 4 percent said there were no problems, or that they could not think of one.

### **Political Impact**

Although she is the most visible politician in the State, Governor Jeanne Shaheen has not been hurt by the education funding battle. A substantial 66 percent of New Hampshire voters say they approve of the way Governor Shaheen is handling her job as governor, 27 percent disapprove, and 7 percent are neutral. Shaheen's approval ratings have actually increased since May when 64 percent of Granite State voters said they approved of her job performance.

### **Sub-Group Analysis**

Education funding is thought to be the most important problem facing the state across all demographic groups. Governor Shaheen's approval rating is highest among her traditional supporters, Democrats and liberals. It is lower, but still favorable, among Republicans and conservatives.

**\* These findings are based on the most recent WMUR/CNN Poll conducted by the UNH Survey Center Sept. 5 through 11. A random sample of 702 likely New Hampshire voters was interviewed by telephone. In 95 of 100 cases, statewide estimates will be accurate plus or minus 3.7 percent. Results reported for subgroups have potential for somewhat larger variation than those for the entire population.**

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