One of the major tasks facing New Jersey's newly elected Governor and Legislature is to respond to a decision of the New Jersey Supreme Court which declared unconstitutional the current method of funding public schools. According to results of the latest New Jersey Poll, conducted before last week's election by the Eagleton Institute of Rutgers University, a majority of New Jersey citizens endorsed key aspects of the court's decision.

Over half of those polled—55%—agreed with the statement that the local "tax rate for schools should be equal in different communities across the state." Disagreeing with this statement were 34% and another 11% had no opinion. The court decision had specifically objected to the fact that there are large differences in the local property tax rate among New Jersey's 567 municipalities.

A much larger majority—78%—agreed with the statement that "the amount spent per pupil should be equal for all children throughout the state." Only 18% disagreed with this statement and 5% expressed no opinion. The wide differences in the local property tax rates that the court criticized have resulted in wide disparities in the amount of money spent for each public school student in different municipalities.

Since the present system of financing public schools relies heavily on the local property tax, one alternative would be to shift much of the tax burden to the state. Three quarters of those questioned supported increased state financing of public schools, with only 17% opposed and 8% with no opinion. Increased state support of education is favored by people who support both political parties, although it is more
strongly favored by Democrats than Republicans. Among Democrats, 81% favor such an arrangement and 12% oppose it. Among Republicans the figures are 67% in favor and 22% against.

Although a large majority favor increased state help in paying for local schools, respondents to the poll divided more evenly on the question of whether or not more state money would lead to "increased state involvement with the running of local public schools." Of the respondents 52% said they were not worried out the possibility of increased state involvement. Taking the opposite position were 37% who were "worried" over possible increased state control of local education. The remaining 11% had no opinion on this issue.

The New Jersey Poll is conducted by the Eagleton Institute of Rutgers University. A random sample of 235 New Jersey residents were interviewed by telephone during the period from October 5 to October 13.

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Although a large majority favor increased access both to reading for fact

and for leisure, there is a need to find more ways to present the data or inform

reader of the importance of these activities. The importance of

reading for leisure is often overlooked. It is this type of reading that

ultimately contributes to the growth and development of the individual.

The need for increased access to reading materials is clear, but the

methods of providing these materials must be carefully planned and

implemented. The following suggestions are offered as a starting point:

1. Increase funding for public libraries to provide more books and

   other reading materials.

2. Develop computer-based reading programs that can be accessed

   from home or school.

3. Encourage local businesses to create reading rooms where

   employees can enjoy reading during their breaks.

4. Establish reading clubs in schools and communities to

   promote a love of reading.

5. Provide incentives for students who read regularly, such as

   free books or discounts on library fines.

By addressing these issues, we can work towards creating a

society that values reading and places a higher priority on this

important activity.
TO: POLITICAL REPORTERS
FROM: STEPHEN SALMORE
SUBJECT: THE NEW JERSEY POLL, RELEASE #9, WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON
NOVEMBER 14, 1973

The following questions were used in this release:

Money for public schools comes primarily from local property taxes. The tax rate a homeowner pays on the assessed value of his home, varies widely from community to community. Do you feel the tax rate for schools should be equal in different communities across the state?

Yes 55%
No 34%
Don't Know/No Opinion 11%

At present, more money is spent for each pupil in some communities than in others. Do you feel the amount spent per pupil should be equal for all children throughout the state?

Yes 78%
No 18%
Don't Know/No Opinion 5%

Overall, do you feel the state should pay a larger part of financing local public schools?

Yes 75%
No 17%
Don't Know/No Opinion 8%

If the state were to increase its part in financing public education, would you be worried over increased state involvement with the running of local public schools?

Yes 37%
No 52%
Don't Know 11%