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**THE UNHEARD THIRD 2011: New Yorkers Grade Public School System Before
and After Mayoral Control**

New York, NY, September 14, 2011 — New Yorkers give city public schools higher grades now than ten years ago, according to findings from *The Unheard Third 2011*. The poll also found that New Yorkers favor expanding programs to improve high school graduation rates and opportunities for dropouts to earn a diploma or GED, even if it means paying more in taxes themselves to increase spending on such efforts.

According to the survey, 37percent of New Yorkers gave the public schools good grades of A or B, compared to 22 percent in 2002, a jump of 15 percentage points. Nineteen percent handed out D's and F's today, compared to 31 percent giving the schools failing grades in 2002. The most frequent grade given—both now and in 2002—remains a C, with about a third of respondents rating the schools as just fair. (The 2011 poll was conducted by the national polling firm Lake Research Partners for the Community Service Society (CSS), from July 5 to July 31, 2011. It surveyed 1,419 New York City residents and had a margin of error of plus or minus 2.6 percentage points.)

“Public opinion of the city’s schools has improved in the last decade, however New Yorkers still see a lot of room for improvement,” said David R. Jones, President and CEO of the Community Service Society. “Most telling, New Yorkers support greater investment in education and programs that give people a second chance to earn their diploma or GED. This is clear recognition that, despite the dire economic climate and high unemployment, education is still considered the most viable ticket to a better job and more prosperous future.”

The state legislature gave Mayor Michael Bloomberg control of the nation’s largest school system in July 2002. Before the Bloomberg administration introduced reforms to the system, New Yorkers were asked to grade the schools for the first *Unheard Third* poll. (The 2002 poll was conducted through a telephone survey of 800 New York City residents from August 21 through September 3, 2002. It had a margin of error of plus or minus 4.1 percentage points for the low-income sample and plus or minus 6.9 percentage points for the moderate and higher income sample.)

Few respondents said the schools were excellent, then or now. Just nine percent think the schools deserve an A, a slight improvement over the five percent who handed out A's in 2002. The biggest

change was an increase in B ratings, which went from 17 percent in 2002 to 28 percent in 2011, an 11 point gain.

After job creation (47 percent), “investing in education” was the issue respondents mentioned most frequently (35 percent) when asked to identify the two most important issues for the next mayor. When asked how willing they would be to personally pay more in taxes to spend more on programs to improve high school graduation rates, 67percent said they were willing. Over a third (36 percent) indicated they were very willing to pay more in taxes.

Support was nearly as strong for programs to give young people a second chance at a diploma or GED. Sixty-three percent of New Yorkers said they would personally be willing to pay more taxes to increase spending on such programs, including 32 percent who would be very willing to do so. New Yorkers, across income and racial lines, are willing to pay higher taxes to help more young people earn diplomas or GEDs. Blacks voiced the greatest support, with about 8 out of 10 willing to pay more taxes to increase spending to improve graduation rates and provide second chance programs.

“New Yorkers across income levels recognize that jobs are disappearing for those without a high school diploma,” said Nancy Rankin, founder of the Unheard Third and CSS Vice President for Policy, Research and Advocacy. “The message for policy makers in these hard times is that both jobs and education are the priorities for New Yorkers.”

To read “Not Many A’s, but a Lot of More B’s – and Still Mostly C’s – How New Yorkers Grade the Public Schools Before and After Mayoral Control,” go to www.cssny.org. Further findings on hardships and views of low-income New Yorkers from *The Unheard Third 2011* will be released later this fall.

The Unheard Third is the only annual survey of low-income opinion in the nation. The poll is partially-funded through the support of The New York Community Trust. CSS has used the survey to inform and guide its research, direct service programs and policy recommendations. It has served to narrow the focus of the agency’s agenda on the working poor and reinforce its belief that public policy aimed at this population must, in part, be guided by the life experiences and ideas of New Yorkers living in poverty.

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“The Unheard Third,” conducted by CSS and fielded by the national polling firm Lake Research Partners, is a unique snapshot of the policy preferences and experiences of low-income New Yorkers. The survey is partially funded through the support of The New York Community Trust. CSS has used the survey to inform and guide its research, direct service programs, and policy recommendations. It has served to narrow the focus of the agency’s agenda on the working poor and reinforce its belief that public policy aimed at this population must, in part, be guided by the life experiences and ideas of New Yorkers living in poverty.

For 168 years, the [Community Service Society of New York](http://www.cssny.org) has been the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers and continues to advocate for the economic security of the working poor in the nation’s largest city.