South Carolinians want public schools to provide early childhood education, incentives to make teaching a more attractive career, and more focused after-school and summer-school instruction, according to a survey by Furman University researchers.

Those are among findings a team from Furman’s Riley Institute compiled from an exhaustive study that included more than 3,000 hours of interviews with 800 people between 2005 and 2006.

The institute used a $600,000 grant from the Hewlett Foundation to conduct in-depth interviews and gather answers from a 160-question survey.

The survey drew on opinions from businesspeople, parents, students, school trustees and educators from classroom teachers to superintendents.

Researchers insist their work is nonpartisan and the report takes no position on actions policymakers should take or how to spend money that goes to public schools.

The report says participants also mentioned deep concerns about the state’s high school dropout rate (just below 50 percent), a desire to see schools assign fewer students to each teacher, and an emphasis on promoting family literacy and getting parents more involved in their children’s schools.

Riley Institute director Donald Gordon said the report’s findings provide a clear picture of what South Carolinians think public schools do well, could do better and what long-term expectations to meet children’s needs are.