

OPINION

An analysis of jury composition by educational level

By Dennis J. Curran



Cast against the backdrop of the vanishing jury trial, the cases which do go to trial reveal an important message.

The most common complaint I hear from jurors when thanking them for their service is that they feel many trial lawyers treat them like dolts. They resent repeated questioning and attorneys who waste their time.

Having presided over nearly 300 jury trials (in Superior and District Court, with approximately 80 percent at the Superior Court level), many in

Dennis J. Curran is a Superior Court judge. Assisting him on the above article was Morgan J. Peterson, who served as an intern to the judge. The views expressed reflect the opinions of the co-authors and do not represent the position or policy of the court.

Middlesex County, I am continually impressed by the jurors' sophistication, intelligence, dedication, ability to cut through to the heart of the issues, and deep commitment to justice under the law.

I also have been profoundly impressed by how well-educated our jurors tend to be, as well as by their professions: engineers, physicians, attorneys, microbiologists and many other notable vocations.

Moreover, I am inspired by those jurors who have not had the financial opportunity to attend higher educational institutions, but whose life experience has been rich, varied, commonsensical, direct and practical.

These two groups of jurors inevitably combine to create powerful and focused truth-seeking missionaries.

Recently, I reviewed my trial notes from 66 jury trials to determine exactly how well-educated jurors are in Middlesex County. The results are striking. Among 850 jurors, their education levels ranged as follows:

- 81.4 percent have attended some college or hold an associate's degree
- 67.1 percent hold bachelor's degrees
- 20.6 percent also hold master's degrees
- 2.2 percent hold MBAs
- 6.6 percent hold M.D.s, J.D.s or Ph.D.'s

More than 81 percent of Middlesex County jurors who have sat in Civil Session "F" have either attended college, have a college degree or higher. Granted, these results are from only from one county, and surely the results will vary from county to county, but I believe that other counties in the state may show either the same or close to the same level of educational and professional attainment.

The takeaway: The next time that trial lawyers think that their jurors "didn't get it," or, correspondingly, trial or appellate judges are only too willing to reverse a jury verdict, we should simply pause and reflect. After all, the jurors may well have understood the real issues far better than we.

Number of Jury Trials Examined: 66

Educational Level	Total Number of Jurors	Percentage of Total
Ph.D.	32	3.8%
M.D.	7	0.8%
J.D.	17	2%
M.B.A.	19	2.2%
Master's	175	20.6%
Bachelor's	320	37.6%
Associate's	32	3.8%
Some college	90	10.6%
G.E.D.	3	0.35%
High school	152	17.9%
Some high school or less	3	0.35%
TOTAL	850	100%

In this vein, Atticus Finch best captures the power of the jury in his closing argument: "[T]he integrity of our courts and our jury system is not just an ideal to me. It is a living and breathing reality. A court is no better than each of you sitting before me on this jury. A court

is only as sound as the men and women who make it up." Consequently, our judicial system succeeds when judges and the trial bar respect the vitality and dynamism afforded by our jury system. To do so, we must cherish the wisdom of our jurors. 