SCHOOL CHOICE

SURVEY

IN THE STATE

EXHIBIT 1
DATE 3/28/11
HB 397

Montana's Opinion on K-12 Education and School Choice

School Choice for Montana: Many agree with the concept. Some disagree. And some simply want more information. As the public debate continues to grow louder about how best to provide a quality education to all Montana children, it is critical to know the facts and to have a good understanding of public opinion.

This statistically representative poll of 1,200 likely Montana voters measures public opinion on a range of K-12 education issues including school choice.

Prepared by:

Paul DiPerna

The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice

October 2008

This poll released jointly by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, Montana Family Foundation, American Legislative Exchange Council, Black Alliance for Educational Options, Central Montana Homeschool Association, Diocese of Great Falls-Billings Catholic Schools, Diocese of Helena Catholic Schools, Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options, Montana Federation of Independent Schools, and National Catholic Educational Association

A MESSAGE FROM THE FRIEDMAN FOUNDATION:

COMMITMENT TO METHODS & TRANSPARENCY

The Friedman Foundation is committed to research that adheres to high scientific standards. Matters of methodology and transparency are taken seriously.

All individuals have opinions, and many organizations (like our own) have philosophical or mission orientations. Scientific methods, if designed well and followed closely, should neutralize these opinions and orientations. Research rules and methods minimize bias. We believe rigorous procedural rules of science prevent a researcher's motives, and an organization's particular orientation, from pre-determining results.

If research adheres to scientific standards, its findings can be relied upon no matter who has conducted it. If rules and methods are neither specified nor followed, then the biases of the researcher or an organization may become relevant, because a lack of rigor opens the door for those biases to affect the results.

We are committed to sound research and to provide quality information in a transparent and efficient manner. We welcome any and all questions related to our methodology and work.

Montana's Opinion on K-12 Education and School Choice

Prepared by:
Paul DiPerna
The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice

Poll conducted by:
Strategic Vision

October 2008

About the Author

Paul DiPerna (paul@friedmanfoundation.org) is director of partner services for the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, an organization dedicated to educating the public on the issue of school choice. He joined the Friedman Foundation in September 2006. DiPerna directs the organization's state polling series and leads grantmaking and direct service activities in more than a dozen states. He previously served as assistant director for the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution, working there for more than six years. DiPerna was a research analyst for the first five issues of the Brown Center Report on American Education (2000-2004), and managed the activities of the National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education (2001-2005).

DiPerna takes a special interest in Internet activity, particularly in terms of discovering and coordinating information, mobilizing people, building social networks, improving organization and management, and amplifying fundraising activities. He has presented research at the American Sociological Association annual conference, and has published articles in *Education Next*, *First Monday*, the *Washington Examiner*, and the *Journal of Information Technology Impact*. DiPerna recently authored a chapter in the *Handbook of Research on Web Log Analysis*, published by Idea Group Publishing.

About Strategic Vision

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Strategic Vision is an Atlanta-headquartered public relations and public affairs agency with a division that specializes in polling. The public affairs team is knowledgeable about politics, issues, and current events throughout the nation. Strategic Vision operates nationally, and its polls have been used by MSNBC, FOX News Channel, *Newsweek*, Bloomberg News, *Time Magazine*, BBC, ABC News, Scripps Howard, the *Washington Times*, and *USA Today*. The company's polls have been cited as some of the most accurate by National Journal's Hotline and Survey USA.

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Executive Summary

This scientifically representative poll of 1,200 likely Montana voters measures public opinion on a wide range of K-12 education issues. The purpose of the Friedman Foundation's *Survey in the State* series is to measure voter attitudes toward public institutions, leaders, innovative ideas, and the current K-12 power and priority structure. Engaged citizens have shared with us their views about "school choice" in the form of tax-credit scholarships, school vouchers, charter schools and virtual schools. Montana is the seventh state to be surveyed in the last twelve months.

Two findings stand out in this polling project. First, considerable popular support exists for school choice policies and particularly creating a tax-credit scholarship system. Generally speaking, more than three of out five respondents support tax-credit scholarships—this level sustains across such demographics as geographic location, race/ethnicity, political ideology, religion, household income level, among others. There is also majority support for policies creating school vouchers and charter schools.

Second, there is a glaring disconnect between schooling preferences and enrollments. Ninety percent of Montana parents told us they prefer sending their child to a private school, charter school, virtual school, or provide homeschooling. In reality, approximately 7 percent of Montana's K-12 students attend private schools. Charter schools do not exist. In our poll, 37 percent of K-12 parents said they prefer private schools. Ten percent of Montana parents said they prefer a regular public school. In reality, approximately 93 percent of Montana's students attend regular public schools.[1] This disconnect is consistent with what we have seen in other states. States do not have sufficient school choice systems in place to match parents' schooling preferences.

A total of 1,200 phone interviews were conducted by Strategic Vision on September 5 and 6, 2008. The margin of error for the full sample of likely voters is ± 3 percentage points; the margin of error is higher when considering the number of respondents for a given demographic subgroup.

Key findings include:

- **School choice is not a partisan issue among Montana's likely voters.** Responses to several questions highlight the potential for Democrats (D), Republicans (R), and Independents (I) to work together on systemic reforms. Voters who identify themselves differently in terms of political affiliation are likely to share common views on school choice policies. High levels of support exist for **tax-credit scholarships** (D: 64 percent | R: 65 percent | I: 64 percent), **school vouchers** (D: 55 percent | R: 53 percent | I: 53 percent), **charter schools** (D: 51 percent | R: 54 percent | I: 65 percent), and **personal-use tax credits and deductions for education expenses** (D: 56 percent | R: 53 percent | I: 50 percent).

- **About two out of five Montana voters (42 percent) rate Montana's public school system as "good" or "excellent."** This figure is indicative of a state-level trend that is becoming more clear as the Friedman state polling series moves forward. Satisfaction levels with state public school systems tend to be mediocre throughout the nation.

- **Montanans are content with current levels of public school funding.** More than two-thirds of voters **(68 percent)** say Montana's level of public school funding is either "about right" or "too high." A third of the respondents **(32 percent)** said funding is "too low." At least **72 percent** of the poll's respondents underestimate the actual per-pupil funding in Montana public schools **($9,464)**, which suggests that the previously stated 68 percent statistic is probably a conservative figure.

- **Three out of five voters support a merit pay system for teachers, one that is based on "measurable outcomes." Sixty-two percent** of respondents said they would favor "financially rewarding teachers whose students make more academic progress... when compared to similar students taught by other teachers." This feeling is shared across political ideologies (D: 64 percent | R: 62 percent | I: 60 percent).

- **Thirty-four percent of voters say poor student discipline and school safety represent major challenges for Montana's public school system.** Nearly one-third of the respondents (32 percent) also say "lack of accountability" is a significant issue.

- **Nine out of ten Montanans (90 percent) would choose a school for their child among options that include private schools, charter schools, virtual schools, and homeschooling.** Alternatives to regular public schools appear very desirable. This high figure is consistent in previous state polls, most recently in Maryland (82 percent), Oklahoma (83 percent), Idaho (88 percent), Tennessee (85 percent), and Nevada (89 percent).

- **Montana voters recognize the value of private schools.** When asked "what type of school would you select in order to obtain the best education for your child," **38 percent** of respondents selected private schools. This finding is consistent with other recent state polls: Maryland (45 percent), Oklahoma (41 percent), Idaho (39 percent), Tennessee (37 percent), and Nevada (48 percent).

- **Voters show diverse preferences when it comes to schooling options.** Along with regular public schools and private schools, Montanans are open to different kinds of schooling models, such as charter schools **(28 percent)**; homeschooling **(18 percent)**; and virtual schools **(5 percent)**. Despite low public visibility, many respondents are favorable to charter schools **(55 percent)** and virtual schools **(28 percent)**.

- **Sixty-four percent of Montanans are favorable to a tax-credit scholarship system.** When asked if they would support a proposal to create a tax-credit scholarship system, more than three out of five voters said they favor a scholarship system funded by individual and business charitable donations. Comparable strong levels of support were observed across demographic groups spanning state regions, race/ethnicity, religious identity, age, and family income.

- **Voters show more support (63 percent) for universal eligibility of tax-credit scholarships.** This is true regardless of respondents' income levels. For example, Montanans with household incomes under $25,000 preferred universal eligibility over financial need-based eligibility, **65 percent to 40 percent.**

- **Montana voters exhibited relatively higher levels of awareness for school choice reforms when compared to other states, however, all these levels are moderate.** We asked three "awareness" questions about charter schools, virtual schools, and school vouchers. A slight majority of Montanans are familiar with charter schools **(52 percent)**, and so there is potential for growth. Montana registered the highest statewide awareness for school vouchers **(65 percent)** so far in our polling series. By comparison, lower levels of awareness exist in other states such as Maryland (57 percent), Oklahoma (55 percent), Idaho (59 percent), Tennessee (45 percent), Nevada (55 percent), and Illinois (51 percent). As in other states, the concept of virtual schooling is still largely unknown in Montana **(25 percent)**.

[1] *Montana public school and private school enrollments obtained using the Common Core of Data (CCD) and Private School Universe Survey (PSS) table-building tools found on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) web site: http://nces.ed.gov.*

Methodology

This survey provides a valid representation of the views of likely voters in Montana. A total of 1,200 completed interviews were obtained. This provides statistical significance and probability that is sufficient for decision-making purposes. The statistical margin of error at the conventional 95 percent confidence level is ± 3 percentage points.

Strategic Vision conducted phone interviews using a random sample of registered Montana voters from its call center. Random Digit Dial samples were produced by Survey Sampling International (SSI) using a sampling frame that includes all active telephone area codes and exchanges in the United States.

SSI starts with a database of all listed telephone numbers, updated on a four- to six-week rolling basis, 25 percent of listings at a time. All active blocks—contiguous groups of 100 phone numbers for which more than one residential number is listed—are added to this database. Blocks and exchanges that include only listed business numbers are excluded.

Strategic Vision's live callers conducted all phone interviews on September 5 and 6, 2008. A total of 4,967 calls were made in Montana. Of these calls 755 were disconnected, non-residential, or inactive numbers; 2,389 were refusals; 623 did not qualify as likely voters; 288 did not complete the survey.

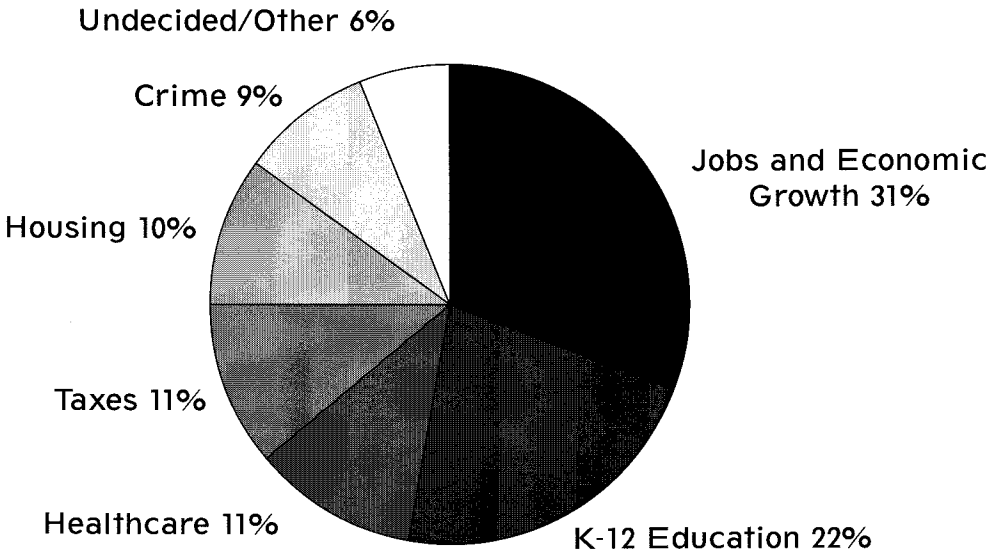
A set of screening questions were used to determine past voting behavior and likely voting in 2008. Respondents were asked whether they had voted in the 2006 election and were planning to vote in the next election in 2008. Respondents who satisfied both these criteria were classified as "likely voters" and were included in the survey. Respondents who either did not vote in 2006 or were not likely to vote in the next election were not included.

The author of this report takes sole responsibility for any errors or misrepresentations.

Findings

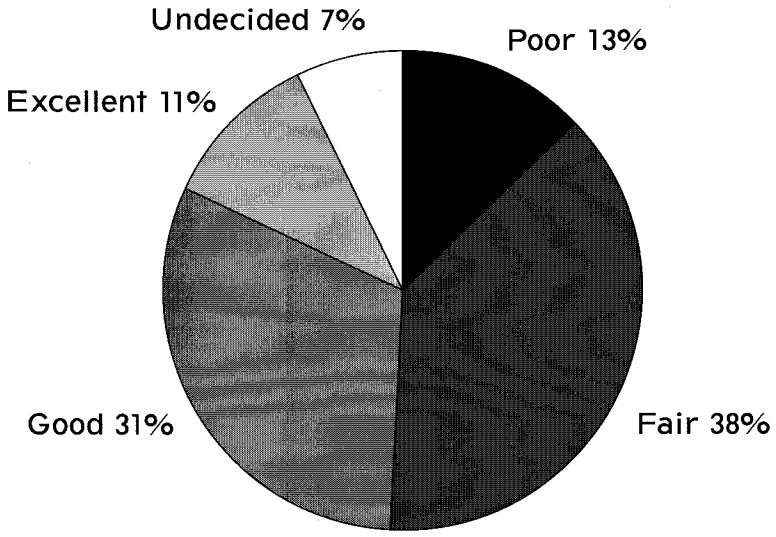
The following are the results of the survey.

1. I am going to name several issues facing the State of Montana, and I would like you to select the one that is most important to you?



The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

2. How would you rate Montana's public school system?



Demographic Perspectives

K-12 PARENTS (n=1,032)

37% prefer private schools

10% prefer regular public schools

18% prefer homeschooling

52% are familiar with charter schools; 55% favor charter schools

25% are familiar with virtual schools; 28% favor virtual schools

54% favor tax credits and deductions for parents to offset their child's schooling expenses

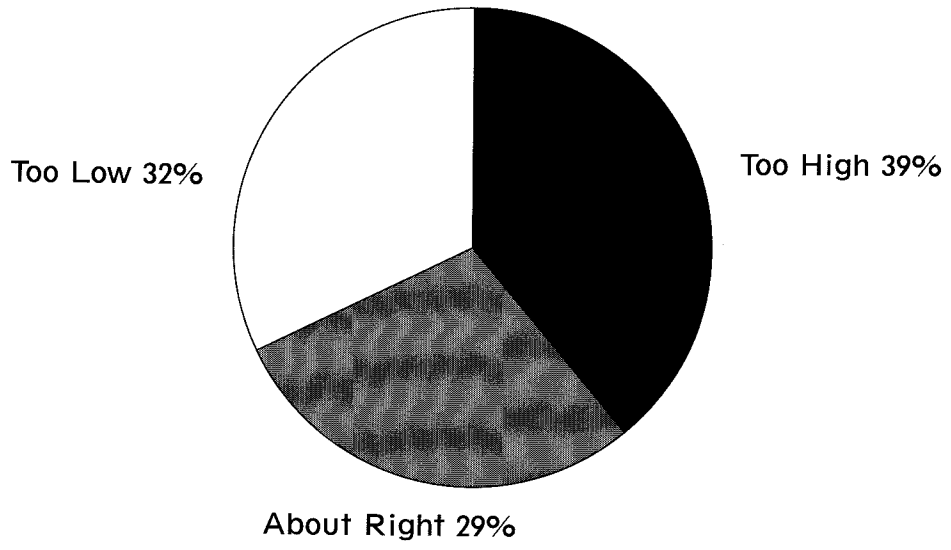
64% favor tax credits for individuals and businesses funding private school scholarships

63% agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships

45% agree in principle with financial need-based eligibility of scholarships

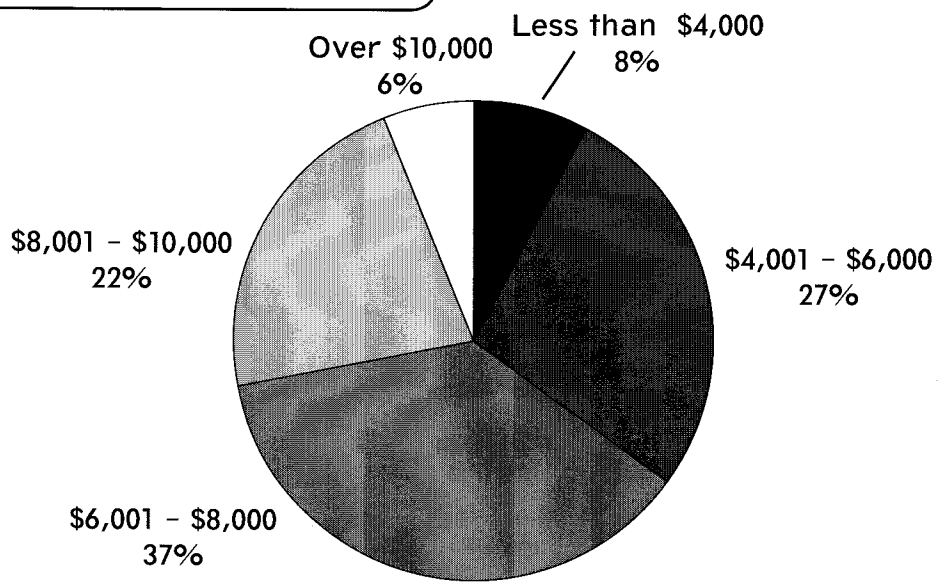
65% are familiar with school vouchers; 54% favor school vouchers

3. Do you believe that public school funding in Montana is at a level that is:



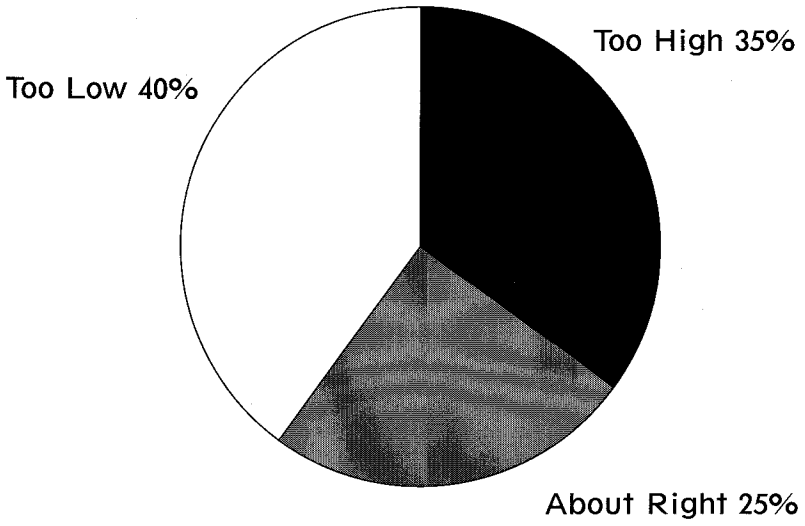
4. Approximately how much do you think is currently spent on each student in Montana's public schools? Your estimate will represent the combined expenditures of local, state, and federal governments.

Actual 2006 school year figure: $9,464*



National Center for Education Statistics, "Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education: School Year 2005-06," published April 2008. Calculated by dividing Montana's total expenditures (Table 8) by Montana's fall 2005 student membership (Table 3).

5. Do you believe that the average salary for Montana public school teachers is:



Demographic Perspectives

WESTERN MONTANA (n=549)

37% prefer private schools

10% prefer regular public schools

20% prefer homeschooling

52% are familiar with charter schools; 53% favor charter schools

27% are familiar with virtual schools; 28% favor virtual schools

56% favor tax credits and deductions for parents to offset their child's schooling expenses

63% favor tax credits for individuals and businesses funding private school scholarships

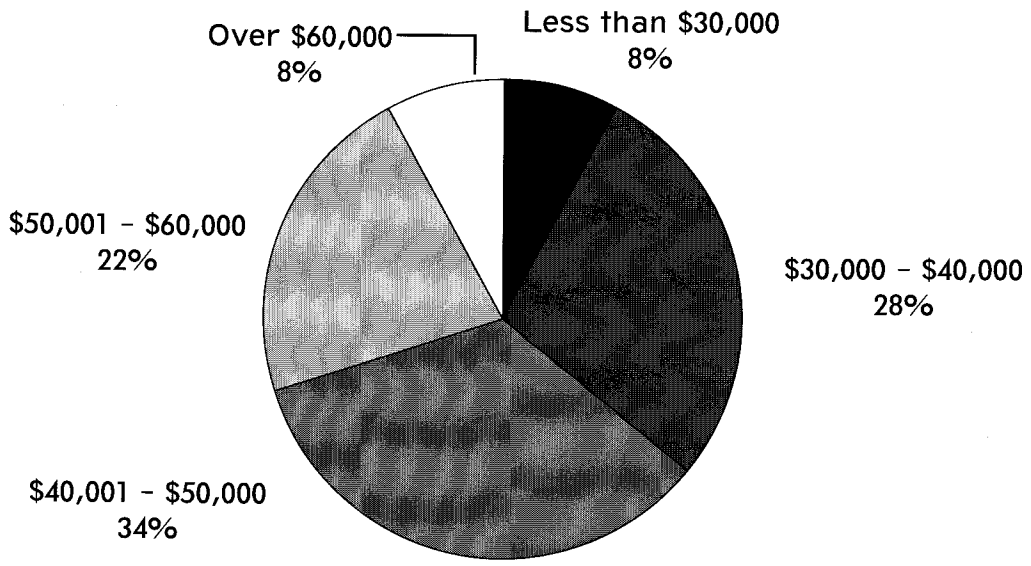
63% agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships

50% agree in principle with financial need-based eligibility of scholarships

65% are familiar with school vouchers; 53% favor school vouchers

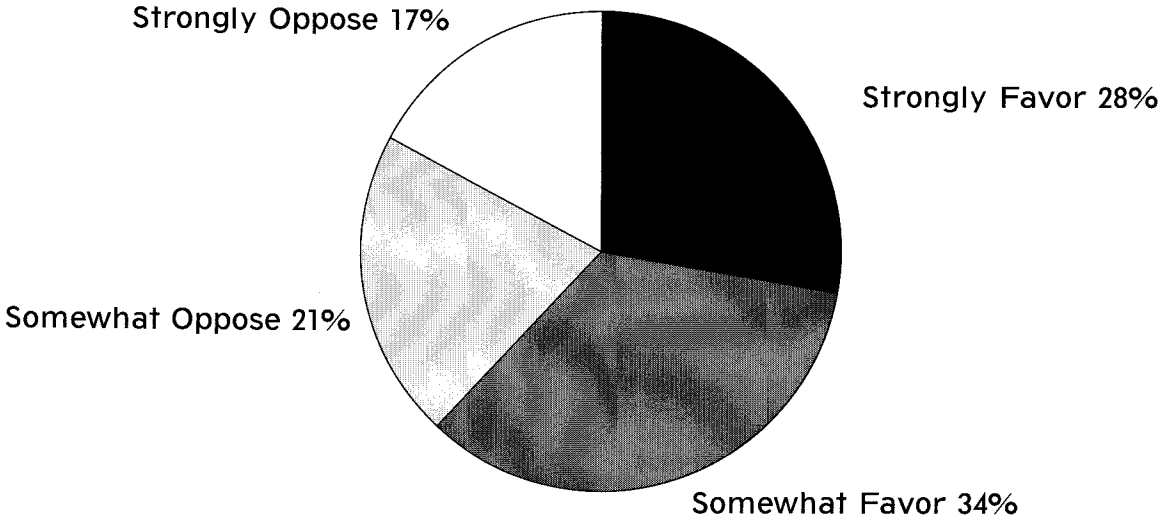
6. Approximately how much do you think is the average salary for Montana's public school teachers?

Actual 2006 school year figure: $39,832*

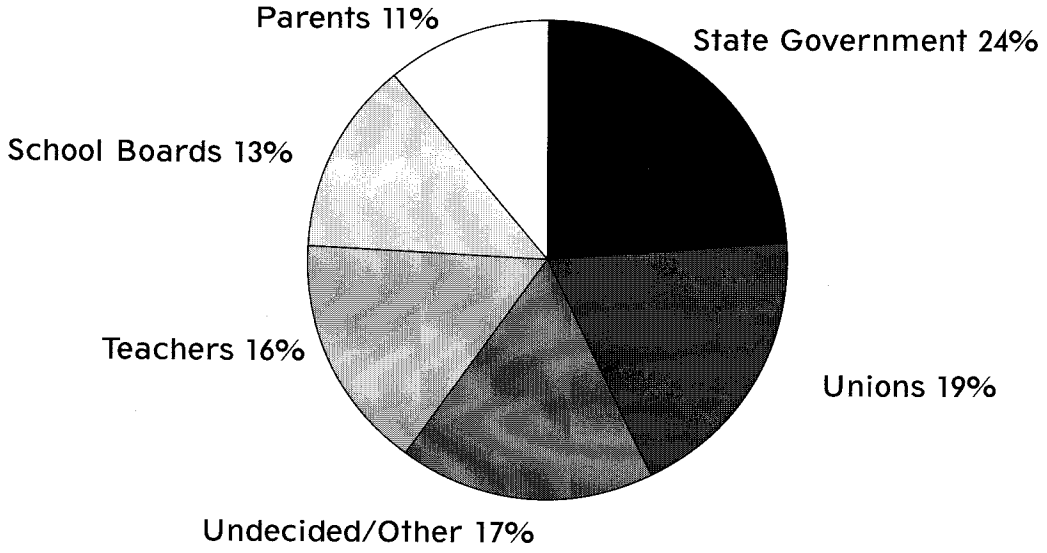


*National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2007, published March 2008.

7. How much would you favor or oppose financially rewarding teachers whose students make more academic progress—in terms of measurable outcomes—when compared to similar students taught by other teachers?



8. Who has the greatest influence on Montana's public school system?



The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

Demographic Perspectives

CENTRAL MONTANA (n=380)

40% prefer private schools

9% prefer regular public schools

17% prefer homeschooling

53% are familiar with charter schools; 55% favor charter schools

22% are familiar with virtual schools; 30% favor virtual schools

53% favor tax credits and deductions for parents to offset their child's schooling expenses

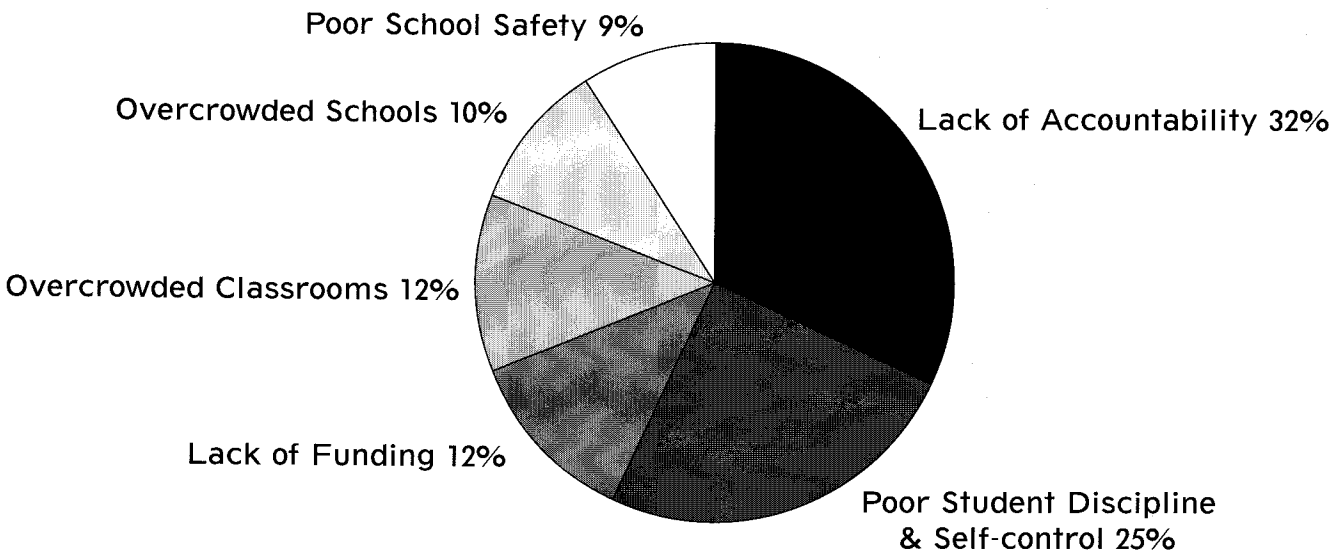
66% favor tax credits for individuals and businesses funding private school scholarships

62% agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships

42% agree in principle with financial need-based eligibility of scholarships

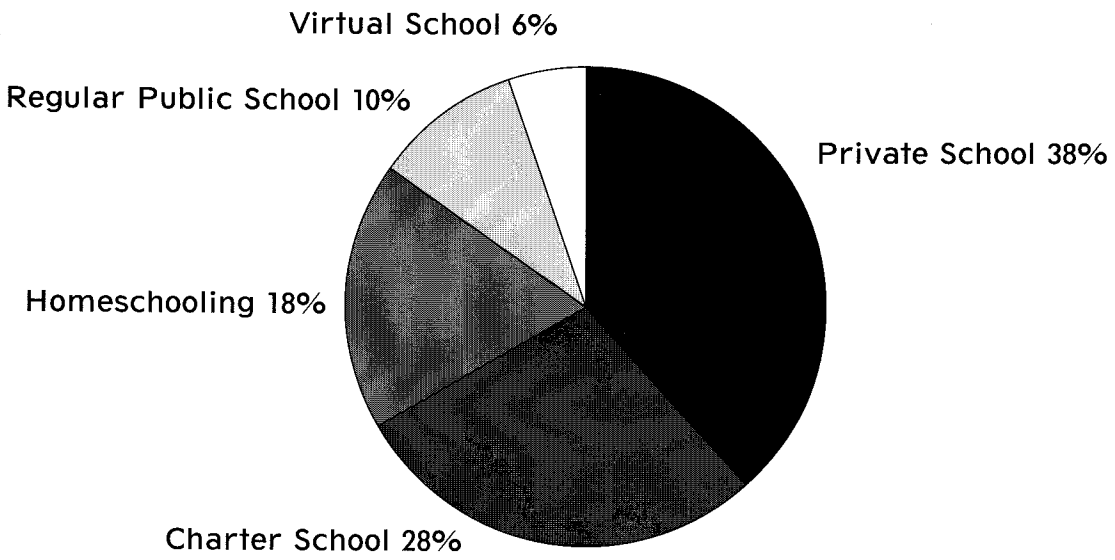
65% are familiar with school vouchers; 52% favor school vouchers

9. What do you see as the biggest challenge confronting Montana's public school system?



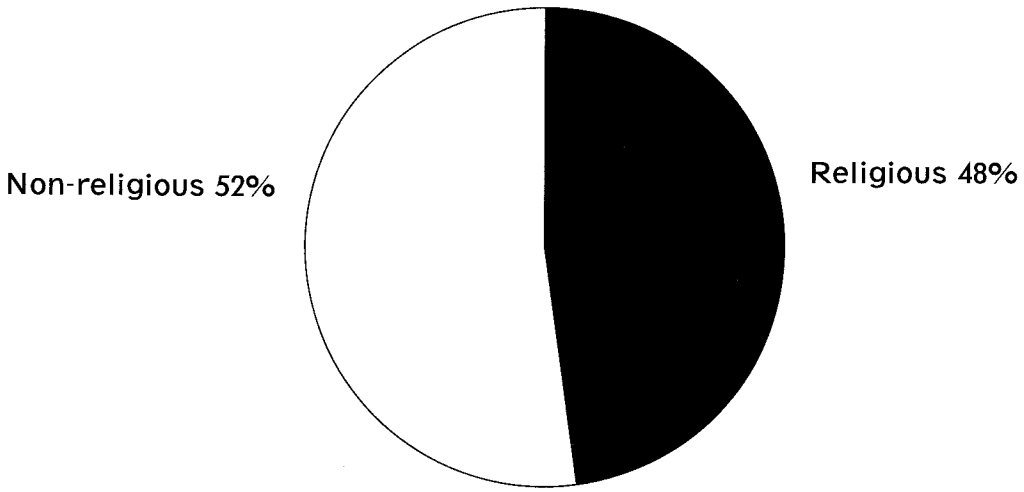
The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

10. If it were your decision and you could select any type of school, what type of school would you select in order to obtain the best education for your child?



The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

11. [If "Private School" to Question 10] Please specify the type of Private School.



Demographic Perspectives

EASTERN MONTANA (n=271)

38% prefer private schools

11% prefer regular public schools

15% prefer homeschooling

51% are familiar with charter schools; 59% favor charter schools

24% are familiar with virtual schools; 26% favor virtual schools

52% favor tax credits and deductions for parents to offset their child's schooling expenses

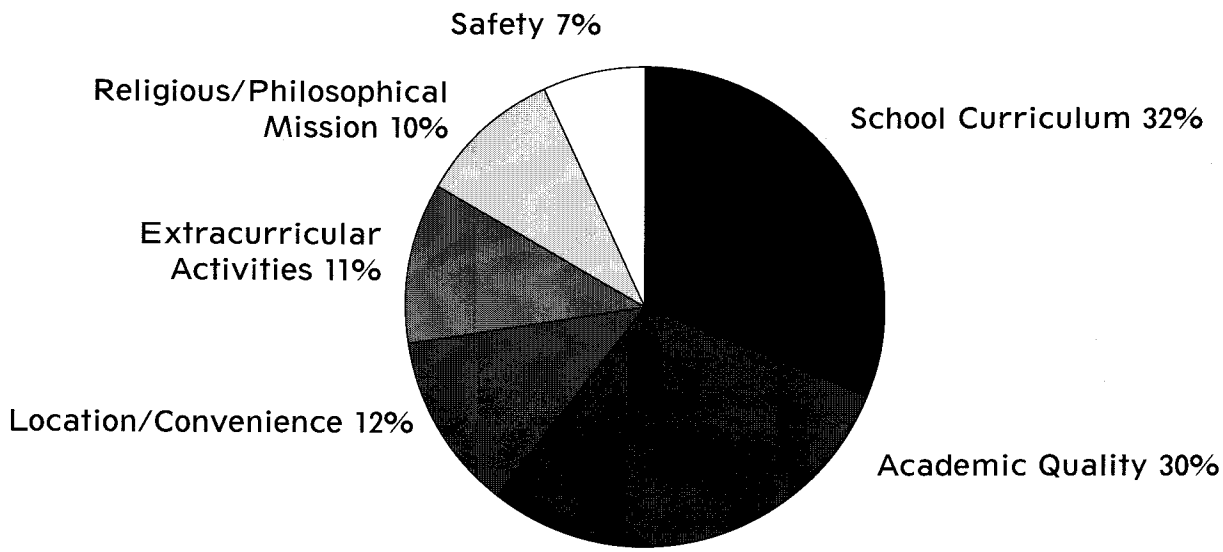
64% favor tax credits for individuals and businesses funding private school scholarships

65% agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships

40% agree in principle with financial need-based eligibility of scholarships

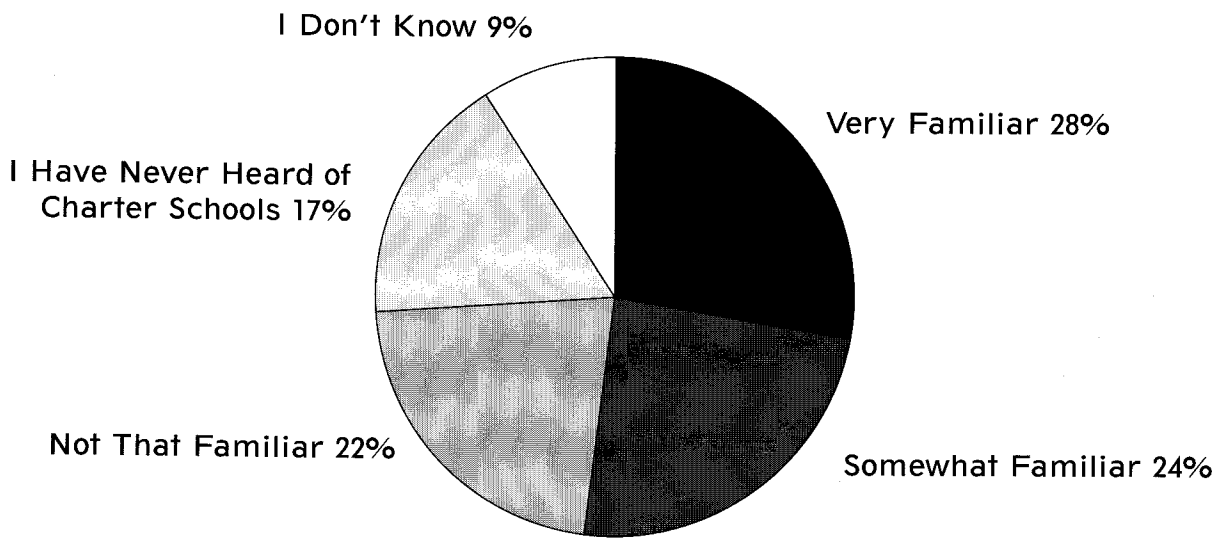
66% are familiar with school vouchers; 58% favor school vouchers

12. Why would you select [answer from question 10] for your child?

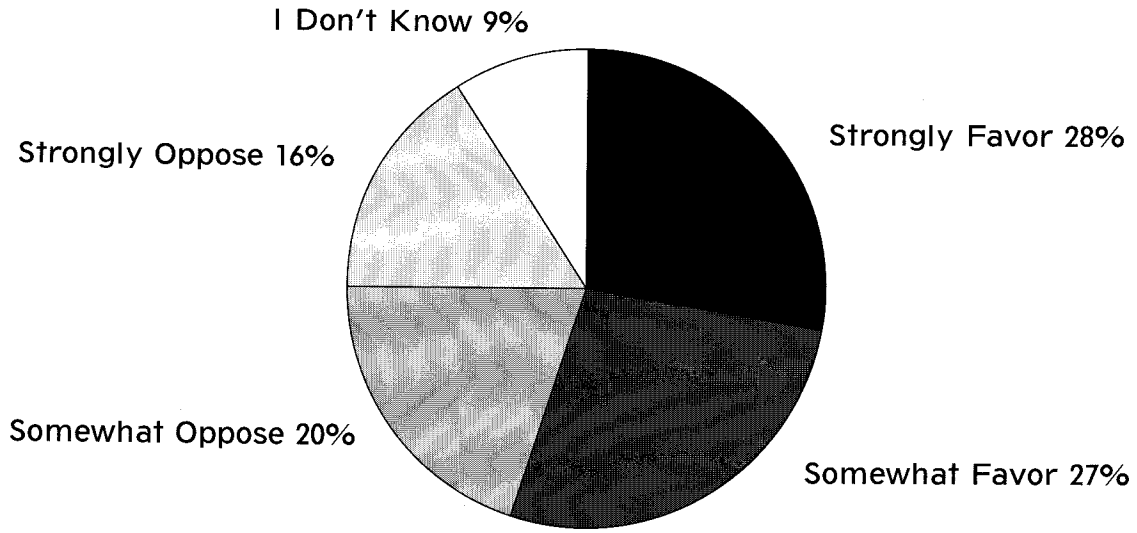


The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.
Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

13. How familiar are you with charter schools in K-12 education?



14. Charter schools are public schools that have more control over their own budget, staff, and curriculum, and are free from many existing public school regulations. In general, do you favor or oppose this idea?



Demographic Perspectives

DEMOCRATS (n=420)

40% prefer private schools

12% prefer regular public schools

18% prefer homeschooling

50% are familiar with charter schools; 51% favor charter schools

25% are familiar with virtual schools; 27% favor virtual schools

56% favor tax credits and deductions for parents to offset their child's schooling expenses

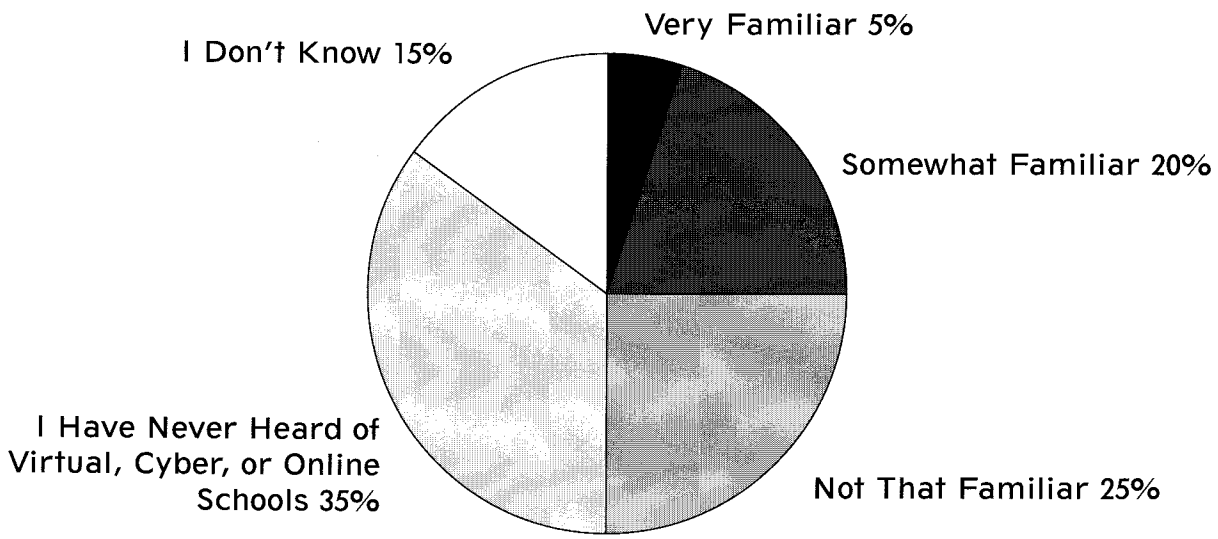
64% favor tax credits for individuals and businesses funding private school scholarships

61% agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships

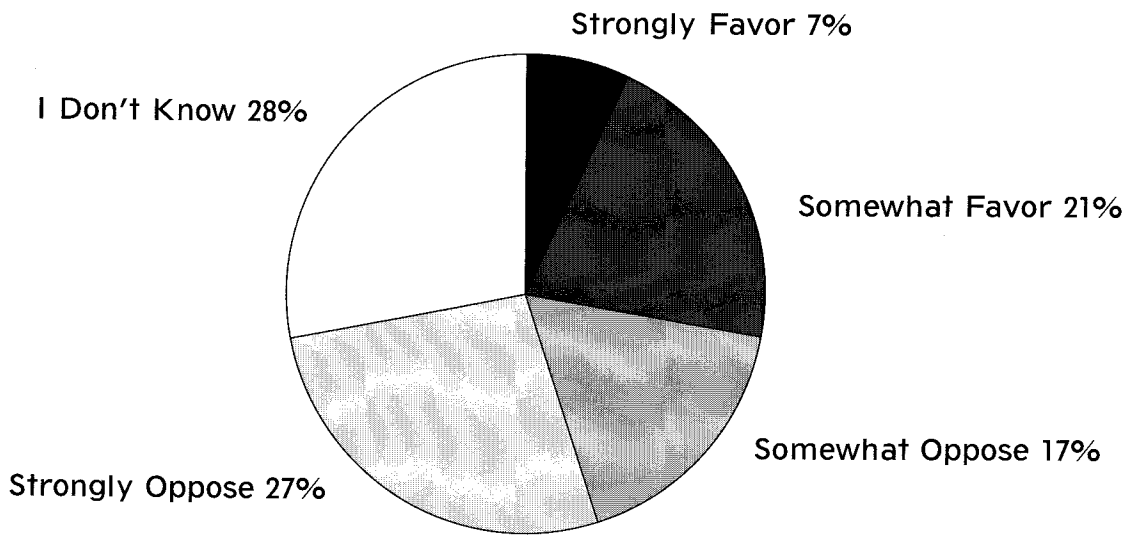
45% agree in principle with financial need-based eligibility of scholarships

63% are familiar with school vouchers; 55% favor school vouchers

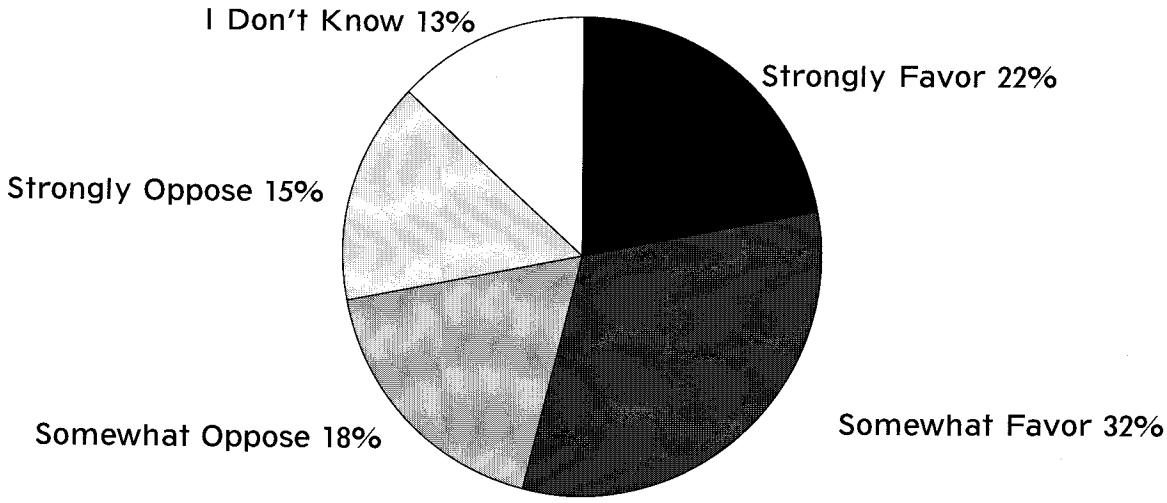
15. How familiar are you with "virtual schools" in K-12 education? These schools are sometimes called "cyber schools" and "online schools"?



16. Virtual schools can be public or private schools that allow elementary, middle, and high school students to work with their curriculum and teachers over the Internet, rather than a traditional classroom. In general, do you favor or oppose this kind of idea?



17. In some states, parents receive a tax credit or tax deduction from state income taxes for approved educational expenses. This may include private school tuition as well as books, supplies, computers, tutors and transportation. Would you favor or oppose this plan to be a part of the Montana tax code?



Demographic Perspectives

INDEPENDENTS (n=204)

29% prefer private schools

9% prefer regular public schools

20% prefer homeschooling

60% are familiar with charter schools; 65% favor charter schools

26% are familiar with virtual schools; 25% favor virtual schools

50% favor tax credits and deductions for parents to offset their child's schooling expenses

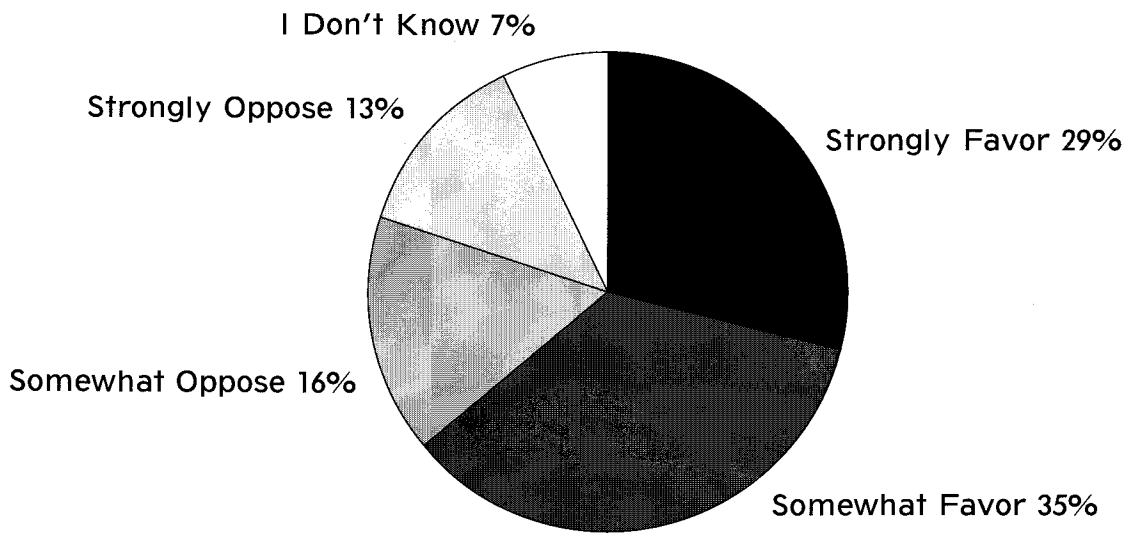
64% favor tax credits for individuals and businesses funding private school scholarships

65% agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships

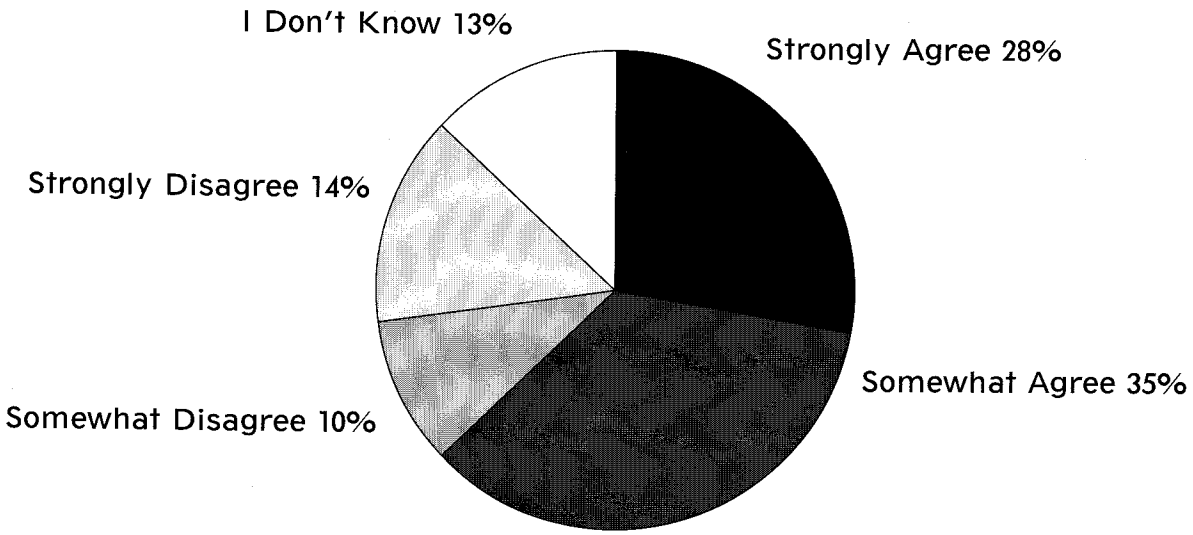
49% agree in principle with financial need-based eligibility of scholarships

65% are familiar with school vouchers; 53% favor school vouchers

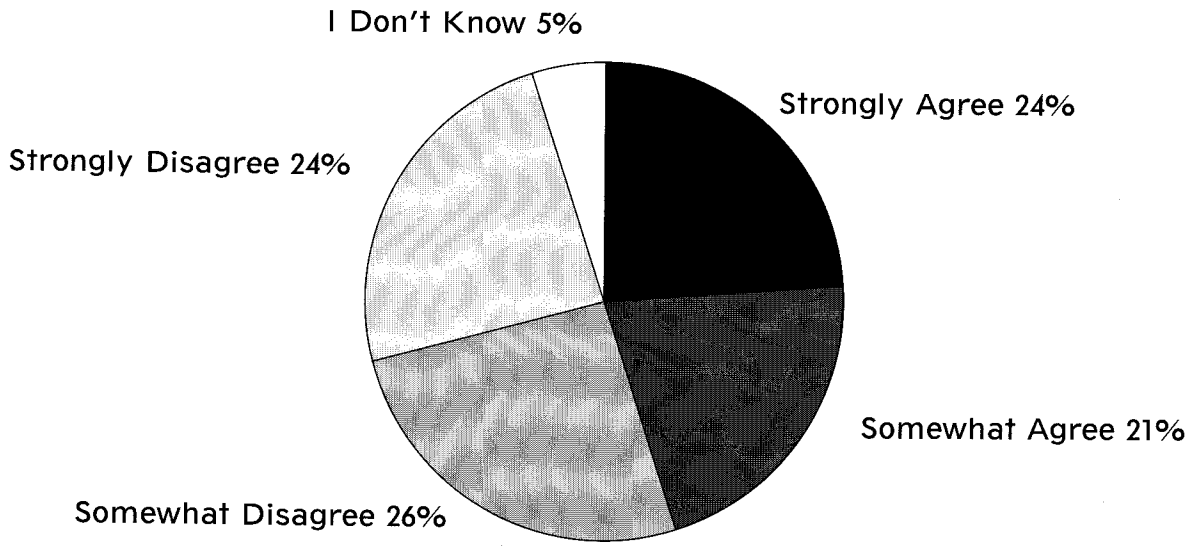
18. Some states give tax credits to individuals and businesses if they contribute money to nonprofit organizations that distribute private school scholarships. This policy supports a "tax-credit scholarship system." If a proposal were made in Montana to create such a system, would you favor or oppose such a plan?



19. Some people believe that tax-credit scholarships should be available to all families, regardless of incomes and special needs. Do you agree or disagree with that statement?



20. Some people believe that tax-credit scholarships should only be available to students based on financial need. Do you agree or disagree with that statement?



Demographic Perspectives

REPUBLICANS (n=504)

40% prefer private schools

9% prefer regular public schools

18% prefer homeschooling

51% are familiar with charter schools; 54% favor charter schools

26% are familiar with virtual schools; 30% favor virtual schools

53% favor tax credits and deductions for parents to offset their child's schooling expenses

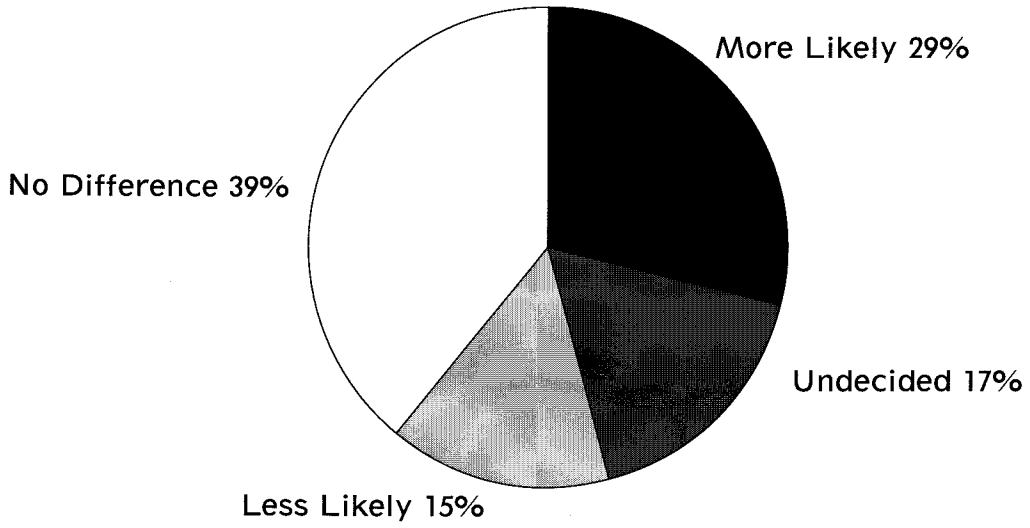
65% favor tax credits for individuals and businesses funding private school scholarships

63% agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships

46% agree in principle with financial need-based eligibility of scholarships

66% are familiar with school vouchers; 53% favor school vouchers

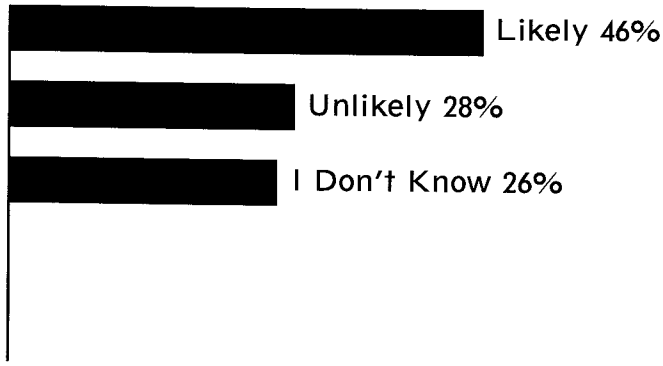
21. Thinking ahead to the next election, when a candidate for Governor, State Senator or Representative supports tax-credit scholarships, would that make you more likely to vote for them, less likely to vote for them, or make no difference whatsoever in your selection of candidates?



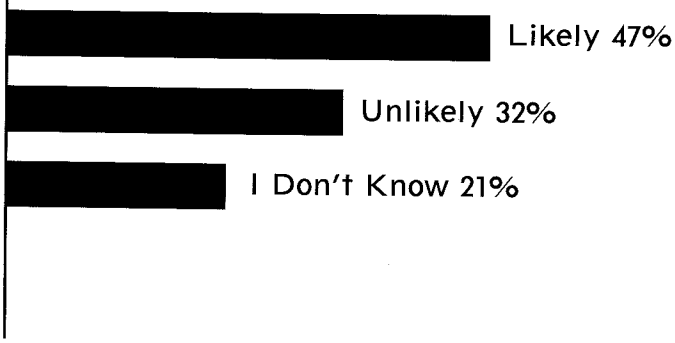
Forecasting Questions

In this section, I would like to know if you think the following statements are "likely" or "unlikely" to happen if a tax-credit scholarship system is implemented in Montana. If you are unsure, feel free to say "I don't know." *(The order of questions 22-30 were rotated to avoid bias.)*

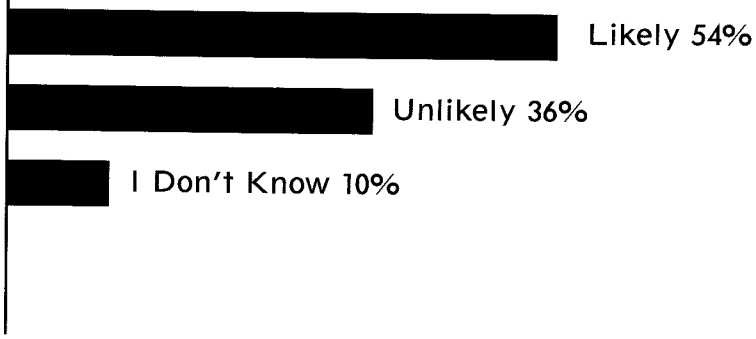
22. Parents will have more options.



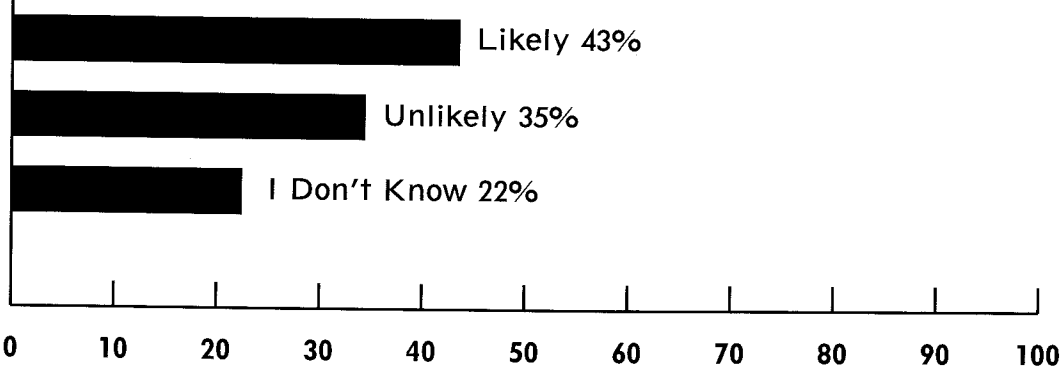
23. Parents will need better information for decisions.



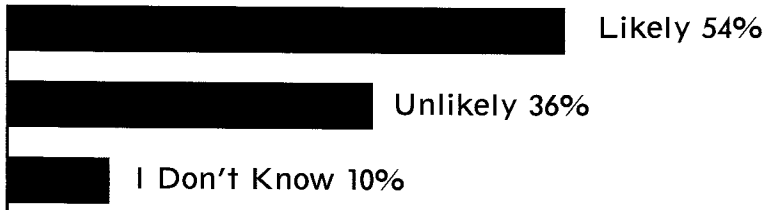
24. Public schools and private schools will compete for students.



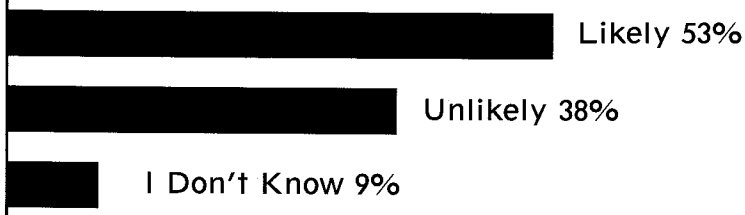
25. Private schools will not be accountable.



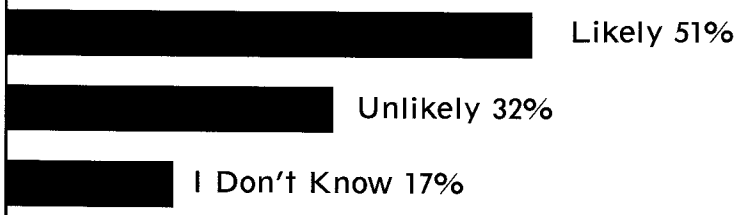
26. Students will leave failing schools.



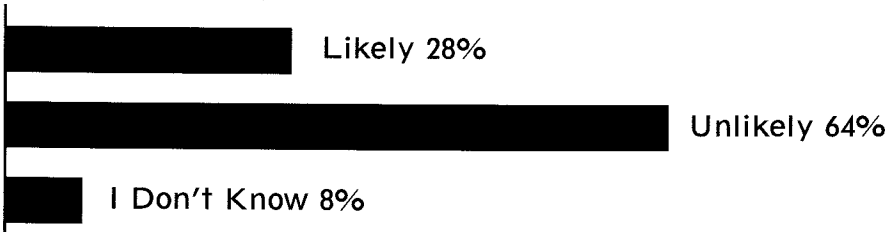
27. Parents will have more power.



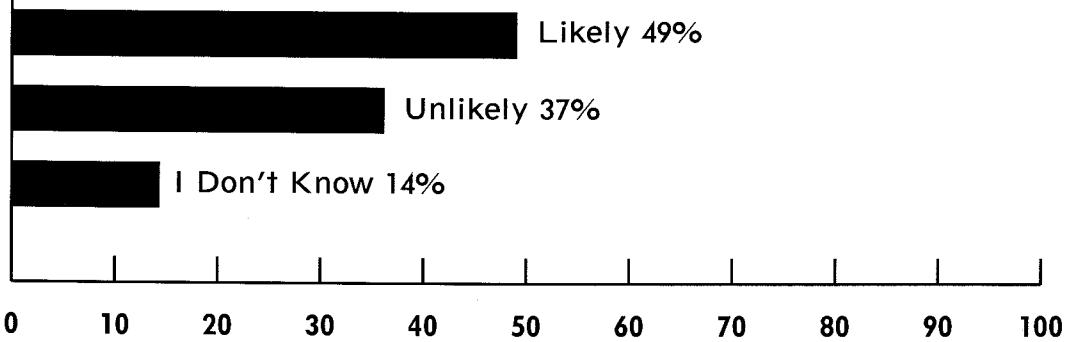
28. There will be less overcrowding in public schools.



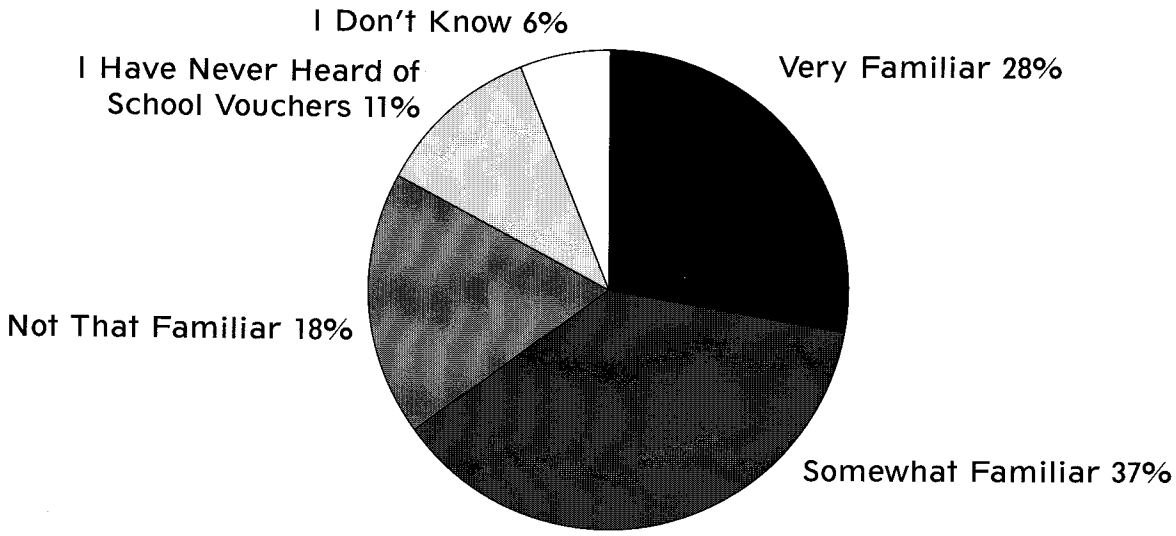
29. Public schools will close.



30. Public schools and private schools will have incentives to improve.

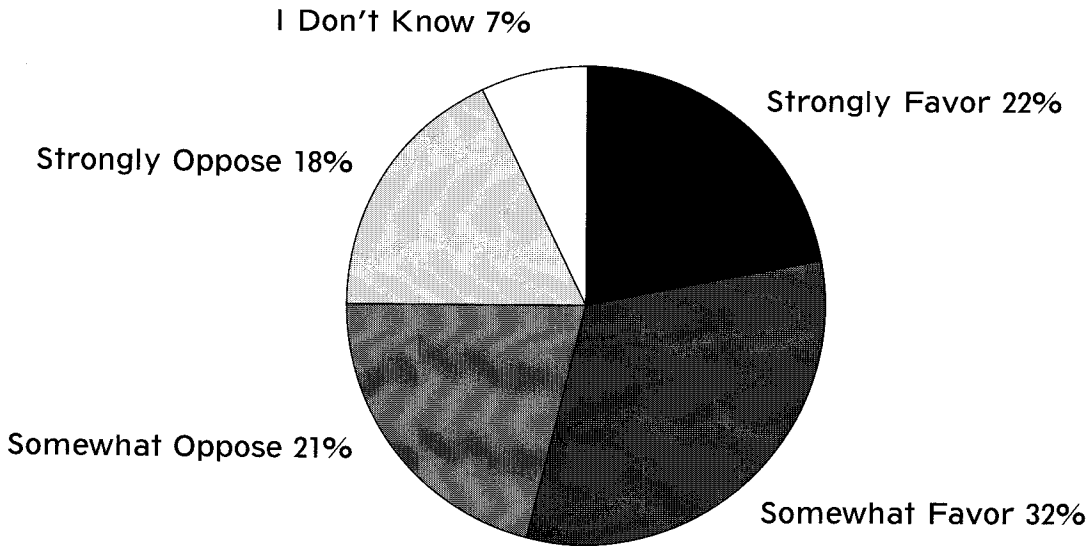


31. How familiar are you with "school vouchers" in K-12 education?



32. School vouchers allow parents the option of sending their children to the school of their choice, whether that school is public or private, including both religious and non-religious schools.

If this approach were adopted, tax dollars currently allocated to a school district would be allocated to parents in the form of a "school voucher" to help pay tuition for the school where they choose to send their children. In general, do favor or oppose this idea?



Race/Ethnicity Identification

(expressed by percentage of respondents)

	African American (n=12)	Asian (n=12)	Hispanic (n=36)	Native American (n=24)	White (n=1,092)
Prefer private schools	42	50	61	33	37
Prefer regular public schools	8	25	17	4	10
Prefer homeschooling	17	0	8	29	18
Familiar with charter schools	50	75	44	46	52
Favor charter schools	50	50	44	50	56
Familiar with virtual schools	33	25	28	38	25
Favor virtual schools	33	25	28	38	28
Favor tax credits and deductions for parents to offset their child's schooling expenses	50	67	50	58	54
Favor tax credits for individuals and businesses funding private school scholarships	67	50	61	63	64
Agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships	58	67	61	54	63
Agree in principle with financial need-based eligibility of scholarships	50	33	36	50	45
Familiar with school vouchers	84	75	61	67	65
Favor school vouchers	58	42	44	62	54

Religious Identification

(expressed by percentage of respondents)

	Protestant (n = 552)	Catholic (n = 288)	Jewish (n = 48)	None (n = 180)
Prefer private schools	38	35	38	45
Prefer regular public schools	9	9	21	11
Prefer homeschooling	17	21	10	17
Familiar with charter schools	53	50	54	52
Favor charter schools	55	58	42	55
Familiar with virtual schools	24	27	25	24
Favor virtual schools	29	23	27	30
Favor tax credits and deductions for parents to offset their child's schooling expenses	53	53	46	56
Favor tax credits for individuals and businesses funding private school scholarships	64	64	65	64
Agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships	64	62	67	64
Agree in principle with financial need-based eligibility of scholarships	46	44	50	41
Familiar with school vouchers	67	60	60	68
Favor school vouchers	53	55	60	54

Age Groups

(expressed by percentage of respondents)

	18-25 (n=120)	26-35 (n=168)	36-45 (n=348)	46-55 (n=384)	56-65 (n=108)	Over 65 (n=72)
Prefer private schools	41	36	43	35	32	39
Prefer regular public schools	11	11	14	8	6	6
Prefer homeschooling	16	20	17	19	21	10
Familiar with charter schools	50	54	47	52	56	65
Favor charter schools	49	51	47	60	69	68
Familiar with virtual schools	24	27	24	25	25	26
Favor virtual schools	28	30	27	27	28	25
Favor tax credits and deductions for parents to offset their child's schooling expenses	53	58	55	51	58	55
Favor tax credits for individuals and businesses funding private school scholarships	68	65	64	61	66	65
Agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships	61	58	62	65	69	65
Agree in principle with financial need-based eligibility of scholarships	44	45	45	47	44	40
Familiar with school vouchers	68	64	66	63	68	68
Favor school vouchers	54	55	55	53	47	63

Family Income Groups

(expressed by percentage of respondents)

	Under $25,000 (n=96)	$25,000-$49,999 (n=336)	$50,000-$74,999 (n=480)	$75,000-$150,000 (n=240)	Over $150,000 (n=48)
Prefer private schools	43	41	35	39	33
Prefer regular public schools	17	9	11	7	15
Prefer homeschooling	10	15	21	18	23
Familiar with charter schools	50	51	53	50	54
Favor charter schools	57	53	55	55	58
Familiar with virtual schools	25	27	23	27	21
Favor virtual schools	31	29	25	29	35
Favor tax credits and deductions for parents to offset their child's schooling expenses	59	53	55	52	56
Favor tax credits for individuals and businesses funding private school scholarships	61	65	62	68	62
Agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships	65	61	62	68	50
Agree in principle with financial need-based eligibility of scholarships	40	49	44	44	40
Familiar with school vouchers	69	65	64	66	62
Favor school vouchers	48	55	54	55	60

Demographics

ARE YOU CURRENTLY THE PARENT OR GUARDIAN OF ANY SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IN GRADES K-12?	
Yes	86%
No	14%

WHAT IS YOUR RELIGION, IF ANY?	
Catholic	24%
Jewish	4%
Baptist	6%
Lutheran	15%
Methodist	8%
Other Protestant	17%
Other Religion	11%
None	15%

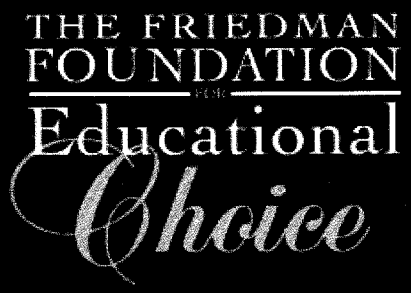
DO YOUR POLITICAL VIEWS MOST CLOSELY REFLECT THOSE OF A:	
Democrat	35%
Libertarian	3%
Republican	42%
Other Party Affiliation	3%
Independent/No Party Affiliation	17%

IN WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING AGE CATEGORIES DO YOU FALL?	
18 - 25	10%
26 - 35	14%
36 - 45	29%
46 - 55	32%
56 - 65	9%
Over 65	6%

IN WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES DOES YOUR TOTAL FAMILY INCOME FALL?	
Under $25,000	8%
$25,000-$49,999	28%
$50,000 - $74,999	40%
$75,000 - $150,000	20%
Over $150,000	4%

ARE YOU:	
African American	1%
Asian	1%
Hispanic	3%
Native American	2%
White	91%
Other	2%

ARE YOU:	
Male	51%
Female	49%



Milton and Rose D. Friedman established the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice in 1996. The origins of the nonprofit organization lie in the Friedmans' long-standing concern about the urgent challenges facing America's elementary and secondary education systems. The foundation's philosophy asserts that the best way to improve the quality of education is to enable all parents to have unfettered free choice of the schools that their children attend. The Friedman Foundation conducts research and outreach projects to educate the general public and to amplify the call for systemic reform through school choice.

Dr. Milton Friedman, Founder
Nobel Laureate and Founder of the Friedman Foundation

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