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Wisconsin K-12 Education Poll and Memo

About the poll: Under Governor Tony Evers, K-12 education is at the forefront of the policy debate in state government. In order to assess the field of play in Wisconsin for a variety of education policies, WILL commissioned Dynata to conduct a statewide poll of registered voters on a wide variety of education-related topics.

From March 21-28, Dynata polled 1,400 Wisconsin voters. For the topline results, this results in a $\pm 3\%$ margin of error. The cooperation rate for the survey was 39% using the standard calculations of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR 2017). The sample WILL worked with is 29.36% Republican and 28.29% Democrat, and 42.35% independent. These figures are similar to the Marquette Law School Poll which has found 27% Republican, 30% Democrats and 41% independents on average.

Summary:

Gov. Evers struggles to garner support for key elements of his education budget including significant voting blocs of his own political party.

Evers' school spending plans poll well but when respondents are given certain information about it, support is driven down and the spending plan is under-water.

According to the poll, public charter schools and a (hypothetical) Education Savings Account plan receive majority support, while a plurality support the school voucher programs, and only one third of respondents support Evers' freeze on private school vouchers and independent public charter schools.

This poll also found public-school transparency and equal funding for students (public, charter, voucher) to be overwhelmingly popular. Key elements of Act 10 still garner majority support and significant portions of parents are concerned about politics in the classroom.

Highlights:

Governor's Budget

- **Support for more public school spending declines with information.** For example, informing people that Evers' budget includes no accountability measures flips support from positive (59% approval) to negative (39% approval).
- **More oppose freezing vouchers and charters than support it.** Only 27% of respondents support Evers' plan to freeze independent public charter schools (40% oppose it and 29% are undecided). Republicans strongly oppose Evers' freeze for



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charters and even 42% of Democrats also oppose it. For Evers' plan to freeze vouchers, only 33% of all respondents support it (36% oppose it and 27% are undecided).

School Choice

- **More support school vouchers than oppose.** 45% of respondents supported the state's voucher programs while only 38% oppose.
 - Majority support (59%) in Metro Milwaukee counties.
 - Plurality support (42%) out-state.
 - High support (66%) among African Americans.
 - High support (60%) among Hispanics.
 - Majority support (53%) among Millennials/Gen Z (ages 18 to 37).
 - Vouchers remain far more popular among Republicans (66%) than Democrats (27%).
- **Charters, Education Savings Accounts (ESA) receive majority support.** Charters were supported by 54% of respondents, ESAs by 52%.
 - High support for charters (62%) among African American respondents.
 - High support for charters (68%) among Hispanic respondents.

K-12 Public Schools

- **Concern about politics in public schools.** Nearly half of all respondents (49%) express concern about politics in the classroom. This includes 69% of Republicans and 25% of Democrats. When asked specifically about concern of a "liberal ideology," 41% of all respondents express concern including 66% of Republicans.
- **People want more transparency for public school spending.** More than 80% of respondents agreed that more information should be available about how public schools spend taxpayer money.
- **Equal funding for students--even for those at private choice schools--is very popular.** Strong majorities agreed that all public school students should receive equal funding (78%) and that choice and charter kids should also receive equal funding (56%).

Act 10

- **Bipartisan support for Act 10's fiscal provisions.** 63% of respondents agree that teachers should contribute about 6% to their pension and 61% agree that teachers should contribute 12% to their healthcare costs. A little less than half of all Democrats agreed with this.



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More polling data on K-12 education as it relates to funding, school choice, politics in the classroom, vacant schools, Act 10, federalism, and satisfaction with schools is in the full memo, starting on the following page.

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General Information

We asked respondents what their main source of news was. For all groups of respondents, “A major television network” remained the most common information source.

Overall

A major television network	17.64%
A print newspaper	8.43%
Social media	8.93%
Websites	13.50%
Radio talk shows	9.36%
Cable news	13.00%
Local news	22.50%
Other	4.29%
Don't know	2.36%

For Republicans

A major television network	15.33%
A print newspaper	5.11%
Social media	9.98%
Websites	12.90%
Radio talk shows	13.38%
Cable news	16.06%
Local news	22.14%
Other	3.89%
Don't know	1.22%

For Democrats

A major television network	20.71%
A print newspaper	11.62%
Social media	7.58%
Websites	11.87%
Radio talk shows	9.09%
Cable news	12.37%
Local news	21.21%
Other	4.55%



Don't know 1.01%

The predictors of media source were generally what political commentators would expect. The table below includes a regression of several of the media sources with several political and demographic variables. Republicans are significantly more likely to use talk radio and cable news as a source than Democrats. Younger voters are significantly more likely to use social media as a major source of news, and significantly less likely to rely on a major network. Female respondents are significantly less likely to rely on cable news and talk radio, and significantly more likely to rely on major networks.

Table 1. Predictors of News Source

VARIABLES	Talk Radio	Cable News	Social Media	Major Network
Democrat	0.0268 (0.0207)	0.0192 (0.0241)	-0.0349 (0.0288)	0.000260 (0.0272)
Republican	0.0513** (0.0202)	0.0422* (0.0236)	0.00768 (0.0281)	-0.0235 (0.0266)
Age	-0.000625 (0.000535)	0.00178*** (0.000624)	-0.00557*** (0.000743)	0.00302*** (0.000703)
Female	-0.0425** (0.0172)	-0.0648*** (0.0201)	0.0148 (0.0239)	0.0799*** (0.0226)
Constant	0.106*** (0.0396)	-0.00457 (0.0463)	0.561*** (0.0551)	-0.0618 (0.0521)
Observations	1,209	1,209	1,209	1,209
R-squared	0.015	0.021	0.050	0.031

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Race/Ethnicity

White	84.57%
Black	3.64%
Hispanic	3.36%
Asian	1.21%
Native American	1.07%
More than One Race	4.71%



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Other	2.50%
Refused	2.29%

Annual Household Income

Less than \$10,000	2.37%
10 to under \$20,000	6.04%
20 to under \$30,000	9.62%
30 to under \$40,000	10.03%
40 to under \$50,000	23.98%
50 to under \$75,000	19.66%
75 to under \$100,000	14.27%
100 to under \$150,000	4.40%
150 to under \$200,000	4.08%
Don't know/Refused	5.55%

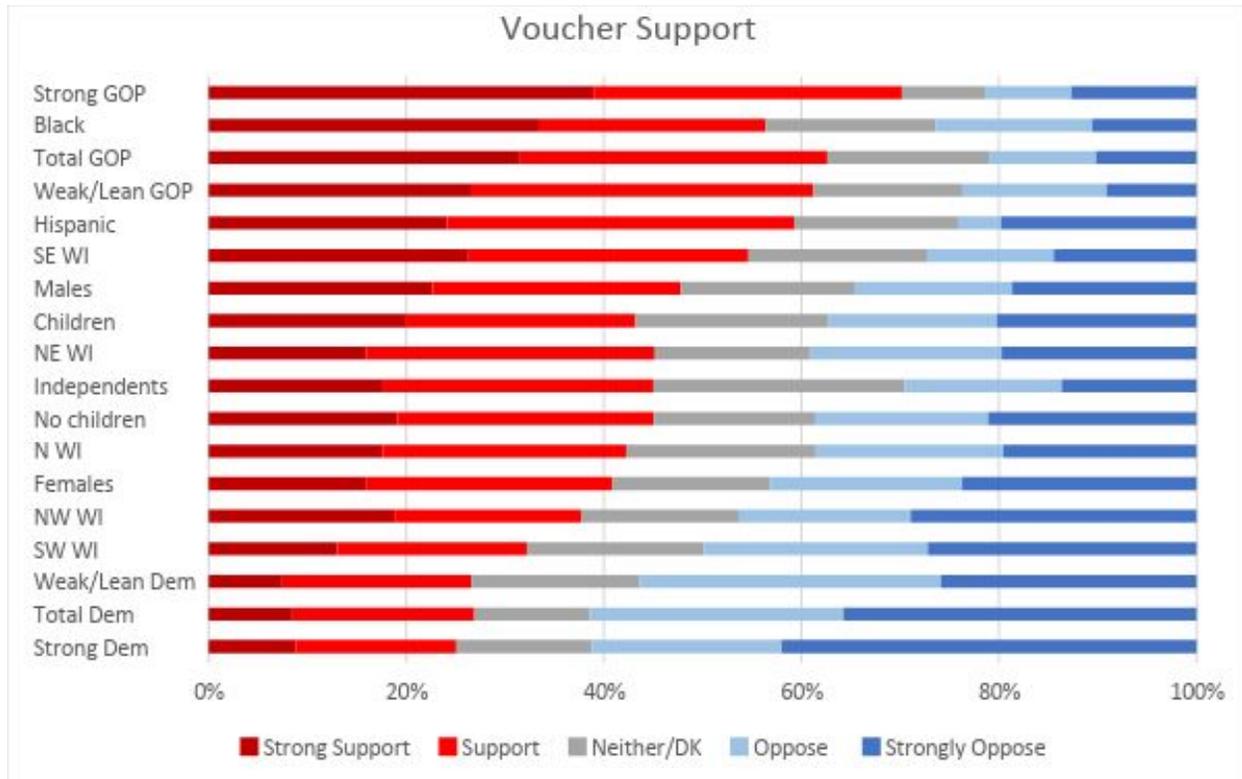
School Choice Support

The next section of our poll asked about support for Wisconsin's parental choice programs. First, we asked respondents, "*School voucher programs provide a state-funded payment to families for their children to attend a private school. Generally speaking, do you support or oppose the concept of school voucher programs?*" In the aggregate, a plurality of registered voters support the state's voucher programs. Approximately 45% expressed support compared with about 38% who expressed opposition.

Topline Voucher Support

Strongly Support	19.71%
Support	25.00% (Sum Support: 44.72%)
Neither	12.07%
Oppose	17.50%
Strongly Oppose	20.93% (Sum Oppose: 38.43%)

Looking at the cross tabs below, support is highest among strong Republicans (henceforth in charts "GOP"). Also crossing the 50% support threshold are African American respondents, Republican respondents overall and leaners, Hispanic respondents, and those living in southeast Wisconsin.

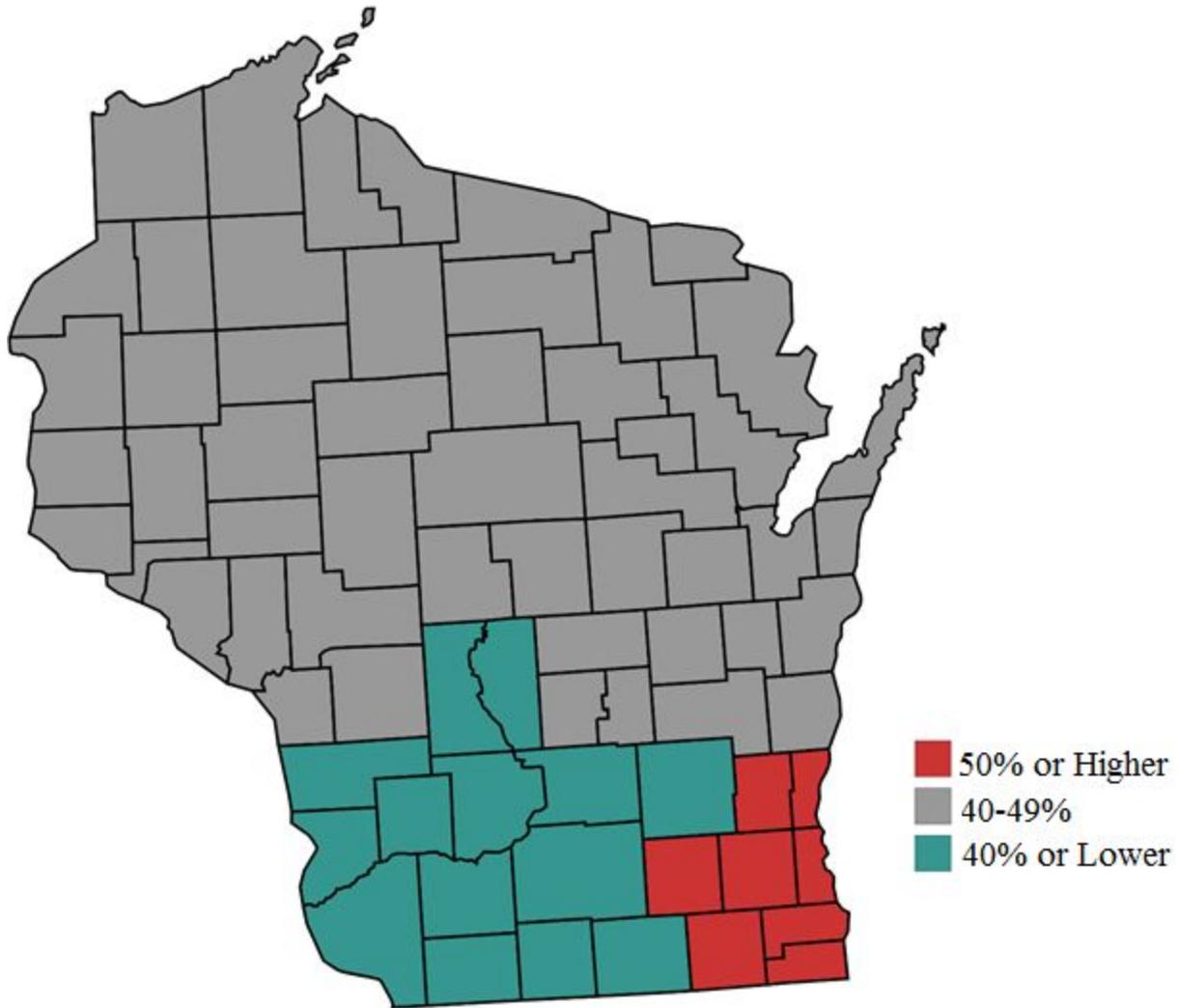


Voucher Support by Region

Support for Wisconsin’s parental choice programs varies extensively by region. The map below depicts support with the state divided into five regions (north, northeast, and northwest are in the same range of support and thus appear as the same color here). Support is highest in the region of the state with the largest number of students enrolled in voucher schools—Milwaukee and Racine. It is lowest in the southwestern part of the state that includes Dane County, though support remains below 40% even outside of Dane.



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Regions Depicted: Northwest, Southwest, Southeast, Northeast and North

Core Metro Milwaukee (Milwaukee, Waukesha, Washington, Ozaukee)

Strongly Support	19.31%
Support	29.70% (Sum Support: 49.01%)
Neither	18.91%
Oppose	17.33%
Strongly Oppose	14.85% (Sum Oppose: 32.18%)



Voucher Support, Millennials vs. Older

Vouchers are significantly more popular with Millennials/Gen Z voters than older voters. Millennial/Gen Z voters, here, are those under the age of 37. Voters outside of this age group are significantly less likely to support vouchers.

Respondents under age 37

Strongly Support	21.51%
Support	32.26% (Sum Support: 53.76%)
Neither	20.43%
Oppose	8.60%
Strongly Oppose	17.20% (Sum Oppose: 25.80%)

Respondents over 37

Strongly Support	20.80%
Support	25.72% (Sum Support: 46.52%)
Neither	12.04%
Oppose	19.25%
Strongly Oppose	22.19% (Sum Oppose: 41.44%)

Topline Charter Support

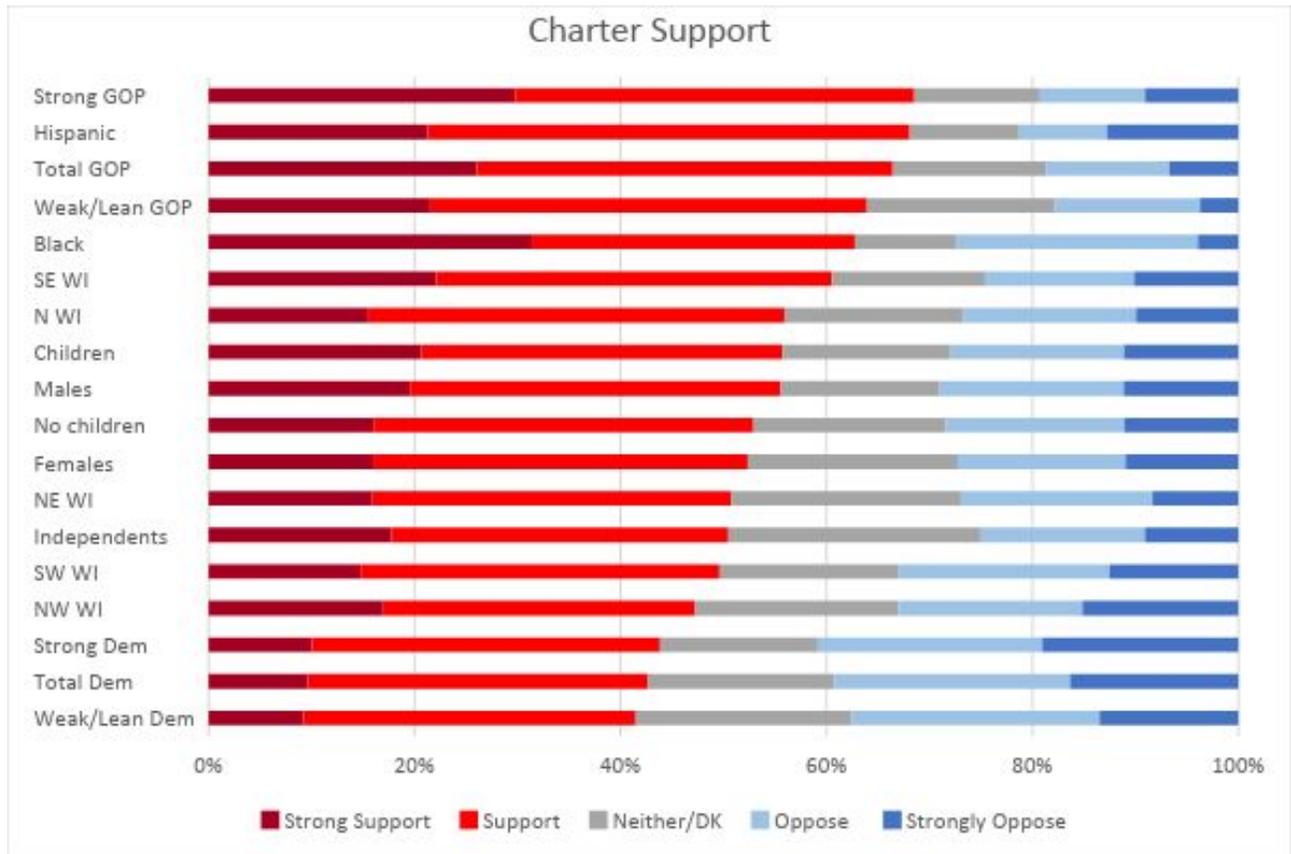
Our charter support question specifically asked: *“Public charter schools are schools that have freedom from some school district rules. Generally speaking do you support or oppose the concept of public charter schools?”* Charter support is substantially higher across the board; crossing the 50% among all respondents. Only 28% of respondents voiced opposition to charters.

Strongly Support	17.93%
Support	36.14% (Sum Support: 54.07%)
Neither	13.64%
Oppose	17.14%
Strongly Oppose	11.07% (Sum Oppose: 28.21%)

Looking at the crosstabs, strong Republicans remain the highest supporting group overall, with nearly 70% of respondents supporting or strongly supporting charters. Other groups crossing the 50% threshold include Hispanics, all Republicans, weak/lean Republicans, African Americans, those living in southeastern Wisconsin, those with children, males, those with no children, females, and those living in northeastern Wisconsin.



Despite increasingly negative rhetoric from elected Democrats towards charter schools, it is worth noting that more than 40% of Democrats still support charters, and that support is a plurality position (albeit within the margin of error).



Topline ESA Support

The Education Savings Account (ESA) question specifically asked: *“Education savings accounts allow parents to receive a portion of the money that would have been spent on their children in a public school. The money can be used to fund tuition at a private school. Generally speaking, do you support or oppose the concept of an Education Savings Account?”* Support for ESAs among registered voters was quite similar to support for charters—crossing the 50% threshold to approximately 52% support.

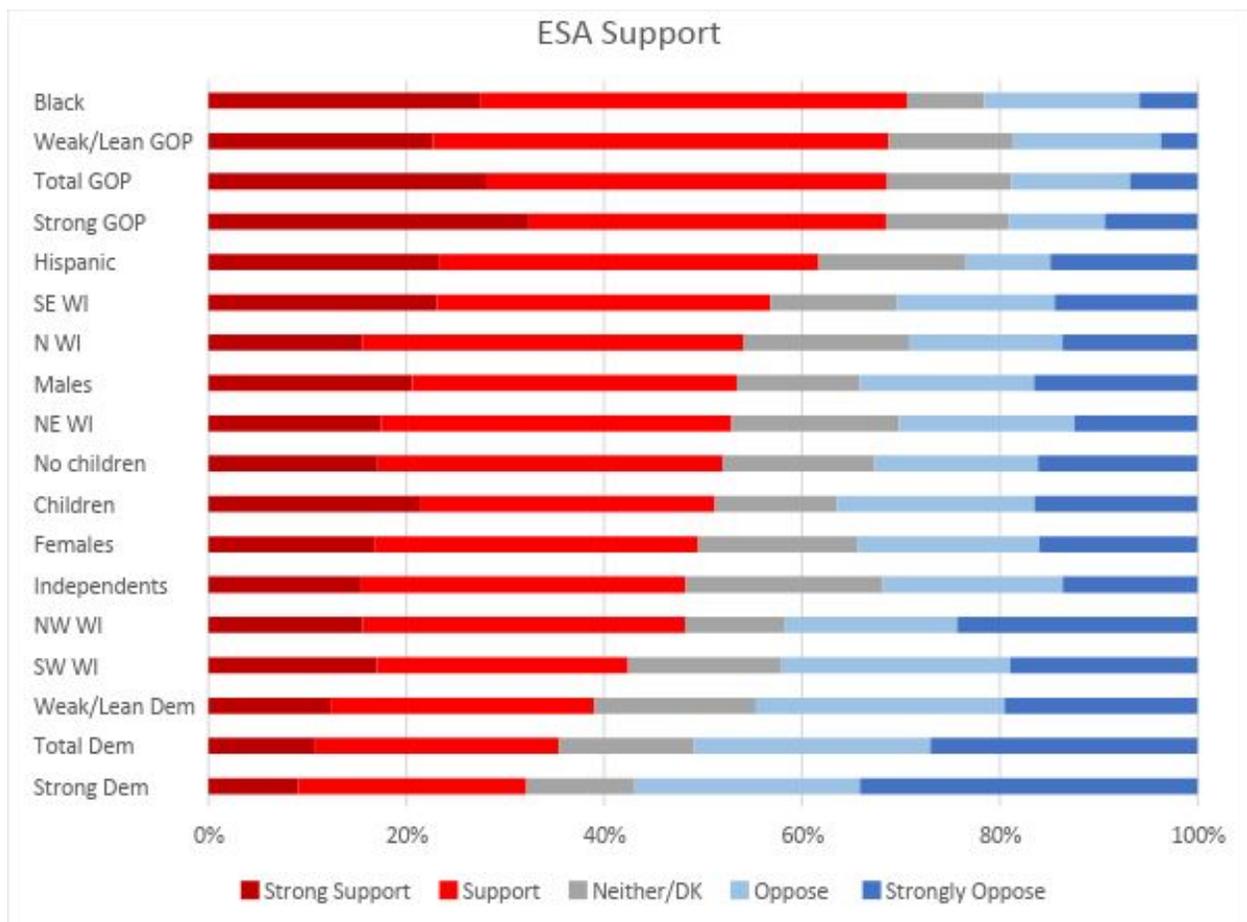
Strongly Support	18.86%
Support	32.79% (Sum Support: 51.65%)
Neither	11.07%



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Oppose 17.93%
Strongly Oppose 16.29% (Sum Oppose: 34.22%)

Looking at the cross tabs, the highest level of support for ESAs came from African American respondents. Like the other education reforms that were included in the poll, Republicans of all strengths make up the next three subgroups in terms of support. Hispanics, those in southeast Wisconsin, those in northern Wisconsin, males, those in northeast Wisconsin, and those with and without children both cross the 50% support threshold.





Other School Choice Topics

Topline Support for Freezing Vouchers

Voters were asked the following question on vouchers: *“How much would you support or oppose freezing enrollment in Wisconsin’s parental choice programs, which allow more than 35,000 low-income students to attend private school?”* 36% of respondents were opposed to this plan. Republicans had the highest level of opposition, with 42% opposing the concept and 33% supporting. Independents were also opposed, with 35% opposing the idea compared to 30% supporting. Democrats were approximately evenly split, at 34% opposing and 33% supporting. Perhaps the biggest takeaway from these numbers is the share of respondents who said “neither” or “don’t know.” In almost all of our subgroupings, this approached 1/3 of respondents.

Strongly Support	10.90%
Support	22.39% (Sum Support: 33.28%)
Neither	27.93%
Oppose	18.07%
Strongly Oppose	18.29% (Sum Oppose: 36.36%)

Republicans

Strongly Support	9.48%
Support	25.17% (Sum Support: 34.66%)
Neither	23.79%
Oppose	18.79%
Strongly Oppose	22.76% (Sum Oppose: 41.55%)

Democrats

Strongly Support	13.08%
Support	20.07% (Sum Support: 33.15%)
Neither	32.08%
Oppose	19.00%
Strongly Oppose	15.77% (Sum Oppose: 34.77%)

Independents

Strongly Support	9.00%
Support	20.85% (Sum Support: 29.86%)



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Neither	35.07%
Oppose	18.01%
Strongly Oppose	17.06% (Sum Oppose: 35.07%)

Topline Support for Freezing Charters

Regarding charters, voters were asked the question, *“How much do you support or oppose freezing the expansion new public charter schools which don't need the approval of the local school district to open in Wisconsin?”* Similar to the question on freezing the voucher program, “neither” and “don’t know” responses made up nearly 1/3 of all responses, suggesting that there is still room to influence opinion. But, in this case, plurality opposition was found across Republicans, Democrats, and independents. Interestingly, opposition was higher among Democrats (43%) than Republicans (40%), suggesting that plans to freeze independent charters among Democrats are out-of-step with even their own party.

Strongly Support	9.93%
Support	17.64% (Sum Support: 27.57%)
Neither	29.50%
Oppose	22.00%
Strongly Oppose	17.50% (Sum Oppose: 39.50%)

Republicans

Strongly Support	9.18%
Support	19.53% (Sum Support: 28.71%)
Neither	29.22%
Oppose	20.87%
Strongly Oppose	17.53% (Sum Oppose: 38.40%)

Democrats

Strongly Support	10.84%
Support	15.66% (Sum Support: 26.51%)
Neither	27.54%
Oppose	23.75%
Strongly Oppose	19.10% (Sum Oppose: 42.85%)

Independents

Strongly Support	9.55%
Support	17.73% (Sum Support: 27.27%)
Neither	35.45%



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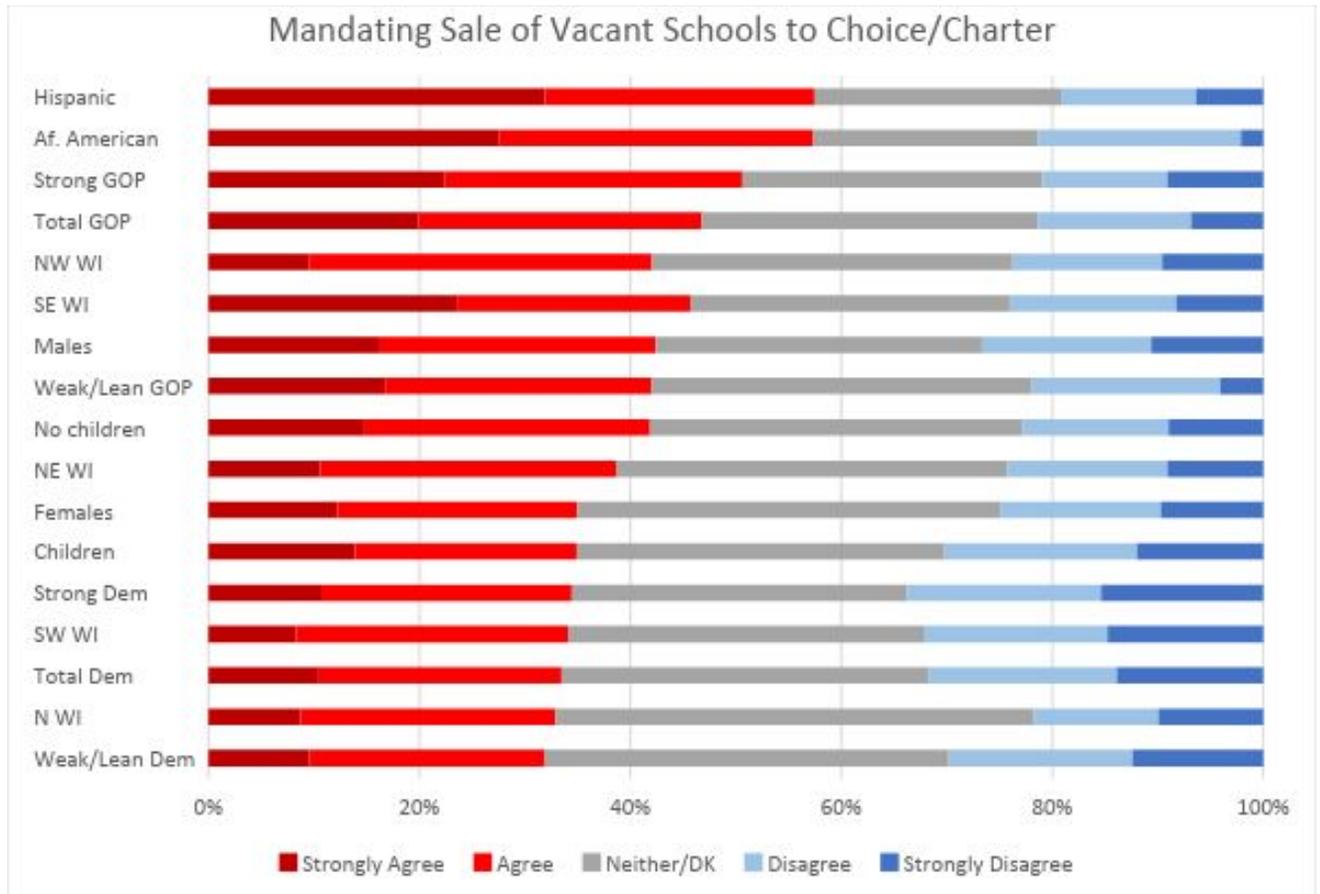
Oppose	20.45%
Strongly Oppose	13.17% (Sum Oppose: 33.63%)

Vacant Schools

On the topic of vacant schools, voters were asked: *“To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The state should require public school districts with vacant buildings to sell the buildings to high performing public charter and private schools that educate primarily low-income students?”*

Strongly Agree	14.43%
Agree	24.57% (Sum Agree: 39.00%)
Neither	32.00%
Disagree	15.64%
Strongly Disagree	10.21% (Sum Disagree: 25.85%)

Once again, minority respondents have higher levels of support than other subgroups. Hispanic respondents, African American respondents, and strong Republicans all cross the 50% support threshold. Close behind were respondents in southeast Wisconsin, which, because of Milwaukee, probably has the greatest amount of experience and awareness of the vacant schools problem.



Satisfaction with Current Schools

The subset of parents taking the survey were asked about their satisfaction with their current schools with the following question, “How satisfied are you with the _____ of the school(s) your child(ren) attend(s)?” The blank was alternatively filled in with *academics*, *safety*, and *efforts to build character*. The levels of satisfaction reported here were strikingly high. More than 80% of respondents reported being satisfied with school academics and safety, while more than 75% reported satisfaction with character.

Category	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither/DK	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied
Academics	43.46%	42.93%	5.30%	5.38%	2.83%
Safety	45.52%	41.65%	6.32%	4.39%	2.11%
Character	33.92%	42.18%	12.67%	7.91%	3.34%



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The survey asked two questions about respondent feelings on politics in the classroom. The first focused on a traditional narrative that is heard in conservative circles that schools are promoting a liberal belief system. The survey asked respondents, *“How concerned are you with the extent to which your child(ren) ’s school(s) promotes a liberal ideology?”*

Nearly 42% of respondents reported that they were concerned about liberal ideology in the classroom. This number was (expectedly) significantly higher for Republicans than other subgroups.

Very Concerned	24.43%
Concerned	17.40% (Shared Concerned: 41.83%)
Neither	19.60%
Unconcerned	23.37%
Very Unconcerned	13.18% (Share Unconcerned: 36.55%)

Among Republicans

Very Concerned	44.57%
Concerned	21.71% (Shared Concerned: 66.29%)
Neither	8.57%
Unconcerned	16.57%
Very Unconcerned	7.43% (Share Unconcerned: 24.00%)

Satisfaction with Politics in School

The second question removed the liberal component, and asked more generally about sentiments regarding political issues creeping into schools: *“How concerned are you with the extent to which politics is creeping into the classroom in your child(ren) ’s school?”*

Very Concerned	28.47%
Concerned	20.56% (Shared Concerned: 49.03%)
Neither	17.40%
Unconcerned	23.73%
Very Unconcerned	8.44% (Share Unconcerned: 41.13%)

Among Republicans

Very Concerned	44.57%
Concerned	25.14% (Shared Concerned: 69.71%)
Neither	8.57%



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Unconcerned 16.57%
 Very Unconcerned 5.14% (Share Unconcerned: 21.71%)

Among Democrats

Very Concerned 10.85%
 Concerned 15.09% (Share Concerned: 25.94%)
 Neither 22.64%
 Unconcerned 37.26%
 Very Unconcerned 14.15% (51.41%)

Among Independents

Very Concerned 25.93%
 Concerned 19.75% (Share Concerned: 45.68%)
 Neither 25.93%
 Unconcerned 20.99%
 Very Unconcerned 7.41% (28.40%)

Interestingly, answers to this question are predictive of support for vouchers even after controlling for party ID, suggesting that emphasizing the partisan leanings of public schools may still be an effective way to garner support for school choice.

Table 2. Relationship of Concern about Politics in School & Opposition to Vouchers

VARIABLES	Voucher Opposition
Concern with Politics in School	0.145*** (0.0504)
Democrat	0.907*** (0.166)
Republican	-0.331** (0.152)
Black	-0.529 (0.406)
Hispanic	-0.662** (0.325)
Age	0.00708* (0.00423)
Constant	2.111*** (0.296)



Observations	468
R-squared	0.160

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Willingness to consider other options

The survey asked parents how likely they would be to send their children to other types of schools if they were available. The question read: “Now, we are going to read you some types of schools. For each, please tell us how likely you would be to consider sending your child(ren) to them if they were available.”

The poll asked about public schools via open enrollment, charter schools, and schools on a scholarship via the parental choice program. More than 30% of parents expressed interest in both open enrollment and charter schools. Perhaps most interestingly, more than 40% of parents expressed interest in the state’s parental choice programs. There is potentially untapped demand for all of these programs.

	Very Likely	Likely	Neither	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
Open Enrollment	10.02%	21.79%	14.41%	25.13%	27.77%
Charter School	10.37%	21.27%	15.47%	26.71%	24.78%
Parental Choice	17.57%	23.73%	13.71%	21.27%	23.20%

Budget & General Policy

WILL wanted to see whether additional information would change the level of support for Governor Evers’s plan to spend an additional \$1.4 billion on Wisconsin schools. To accomplish this, respondents were randomly assigned to 4 conditions with different information about Evers’s plan. In this survey experiment, approximately ¼ of respondents simply saw a description of the bill: *Recently, a proposal has been made to increase spending by \$1.4 billion on Wisconsin’s public schools.* Another ¼ saw information on how much Wisconsin spends per student: *Currently, Wisconsin spends approximately \$10,400 per student on average.* The next ¼ saw information on the likely tax impact of the proposal: *This would lead to an increase in property taxes over time.* And the last ¼ saw a message related to accountability: *This plan includes no accountability for the academic results of schools.*

All of these messages drove down support from the baseline, which was approximately 60%.



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However, majorities of respondents remain supportive in the per-student spending and property tax condition. However, the accountability information flipped support from positive to negative. In that condition, only 39% of respondents expressed support for the additional spending.

Support for Evers's proposal for additional school spending varies substantially based on the amount of information provided.

The baseline received the following information: *Recently, a proposal has been made to increase spending by \$1.4 billion on Wisconsin's public schools.*

Strongly Support	29.14%
Support	30.57% (Sum Support: 59.71%)
Neither	10.86%
Oppose	14.29%
Strongly Oppose	13.43% (Sum Oppose: 27.72%)

Current Spending Information

Strongly Support	20.29%
Support	31.71% (Sum Support: 52.00%)
Neither	13.14%
Oppose	16.57%
Strongly Oppose	15.71% (Sum Oppose: 32.28%)

Tax Information:

Strongly Support	18.62%
Support	33.81% (Sum Support: 52.44%)
Neither	9.46%
Oppose	12.32%
Strongly Oppose	24.93% (Sum Oppose: 37.25%)

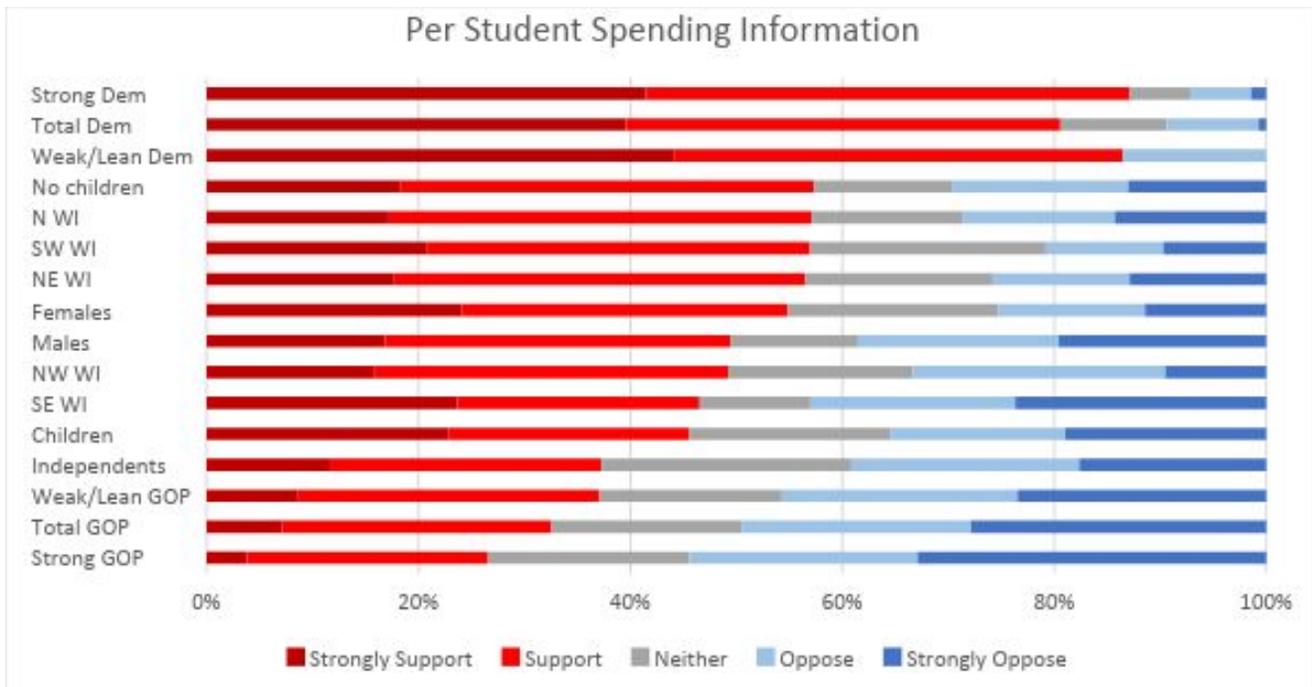
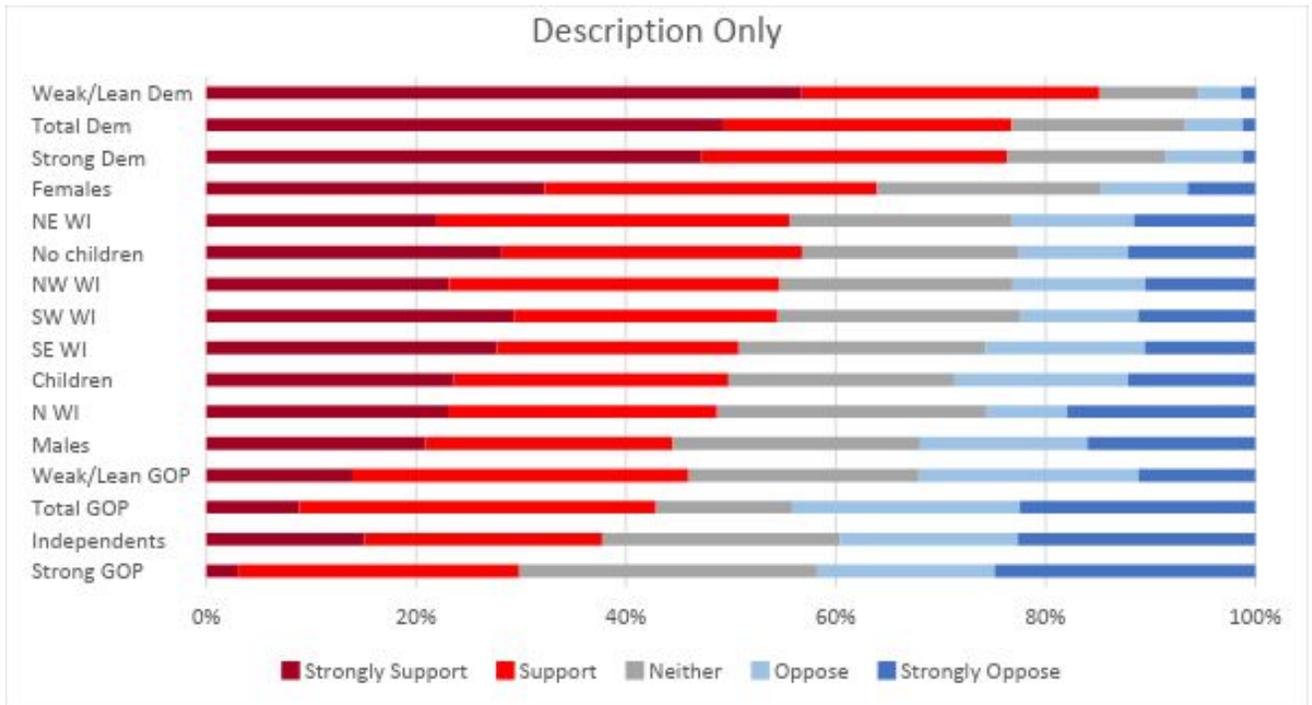
Accountability Condition:

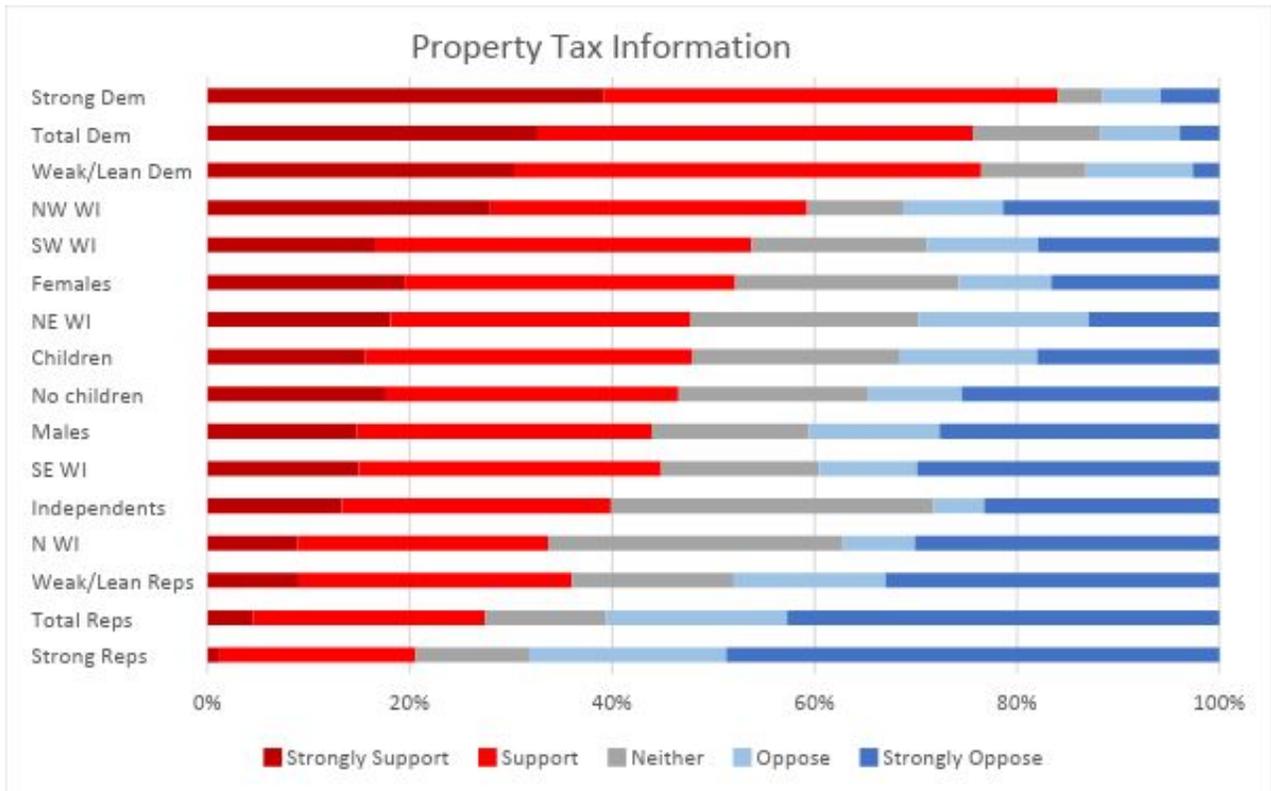
Strongly Support	16.81%
Support	22.51% (Sum Support: 39.32%)
Neither	11.68%
Oppose	19.09%
Strongly Oppose	26.21% (Sum Oppose: 45.30%)

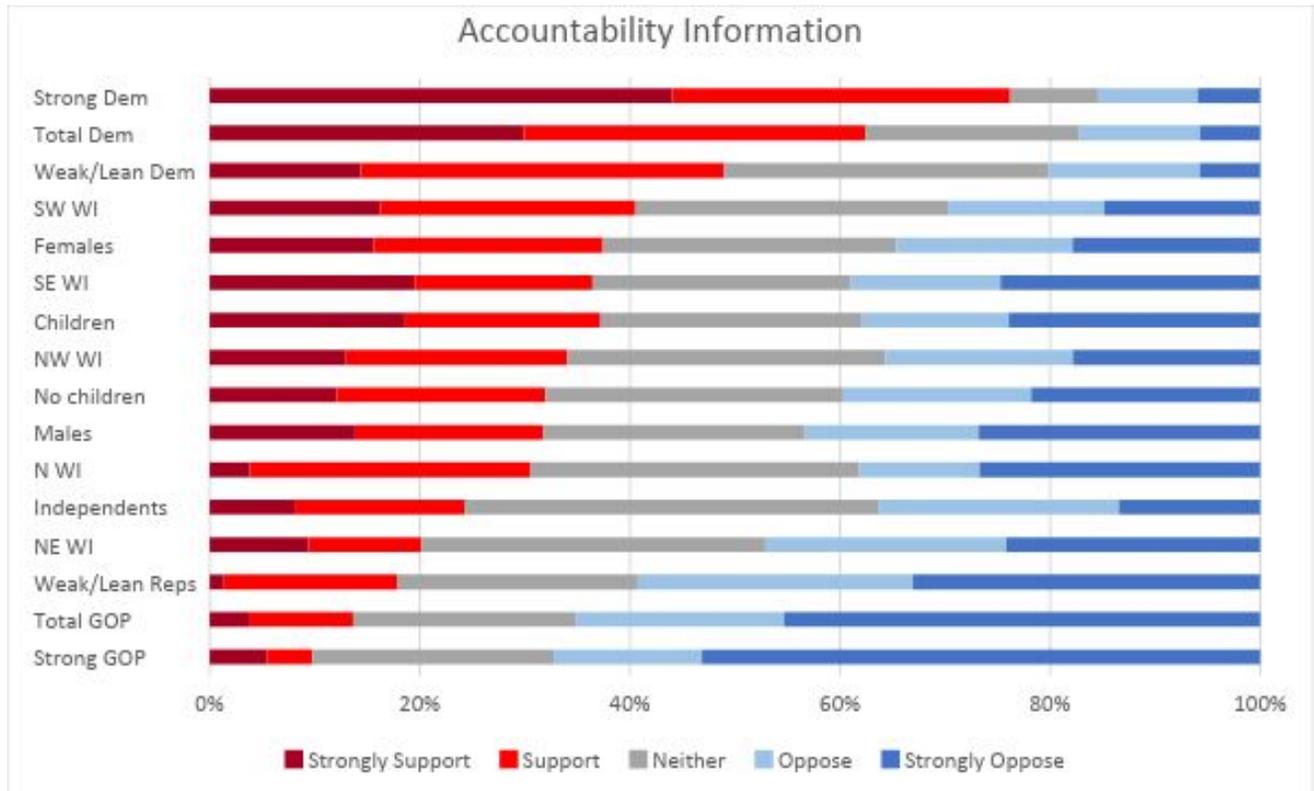


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It is important to note that the property tax message is particularly effective with Republican respondents—driving down support to a significant extent. Democrats continue to overwhelmingly support additional spending in all conditions with the exception of the accountability condition, where support dips from above 70% to the low 60s. Note that minority groups were not included in this analysis, as the cell size in each condition was too small for meaningful comparisons.







Public School Transparency

WILL wanted to know the extent to which respondents thought there should be greater transparency in public school spending. To answer that question, we asked, *“To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: More information should be readily available on how public school districts spend taxpayer money?”*

This question elicited, by far, the highest level of support of any question we asked in our poll. Over 80% of respondents agreed with this statement.

Strongly Agree	48.50%
Agree	32.64% (Sum Agree: 81.14%)
Neither	5.07%



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Disagree 2.29%
Strongly Disagree 1.07% (Sum Disagree: 3.36%)

Equalized Funding

The survey asked, *“To what extent do you agree with the following statement: All students who attend public school should be funded equally?”*

Other than the question on public-school funding transparency, this question brought about the highest overall agreement rate, at 79%.

Strongly Agree 37.39%
Agree 41.40% (Sum Agree: 78.80%)
Neither 5.07%
Disagree 2.29%
Strongly Disagree 1.07% (Sum Disagree: 3.36%)

WILL wanted to drill down further and examine the extent to which people supported equal funding even including charter and voucher students. So the survey asked the same question as above with the added caveat: *“even those students attending public charter schools or private schools participating in the parental choice program?”*

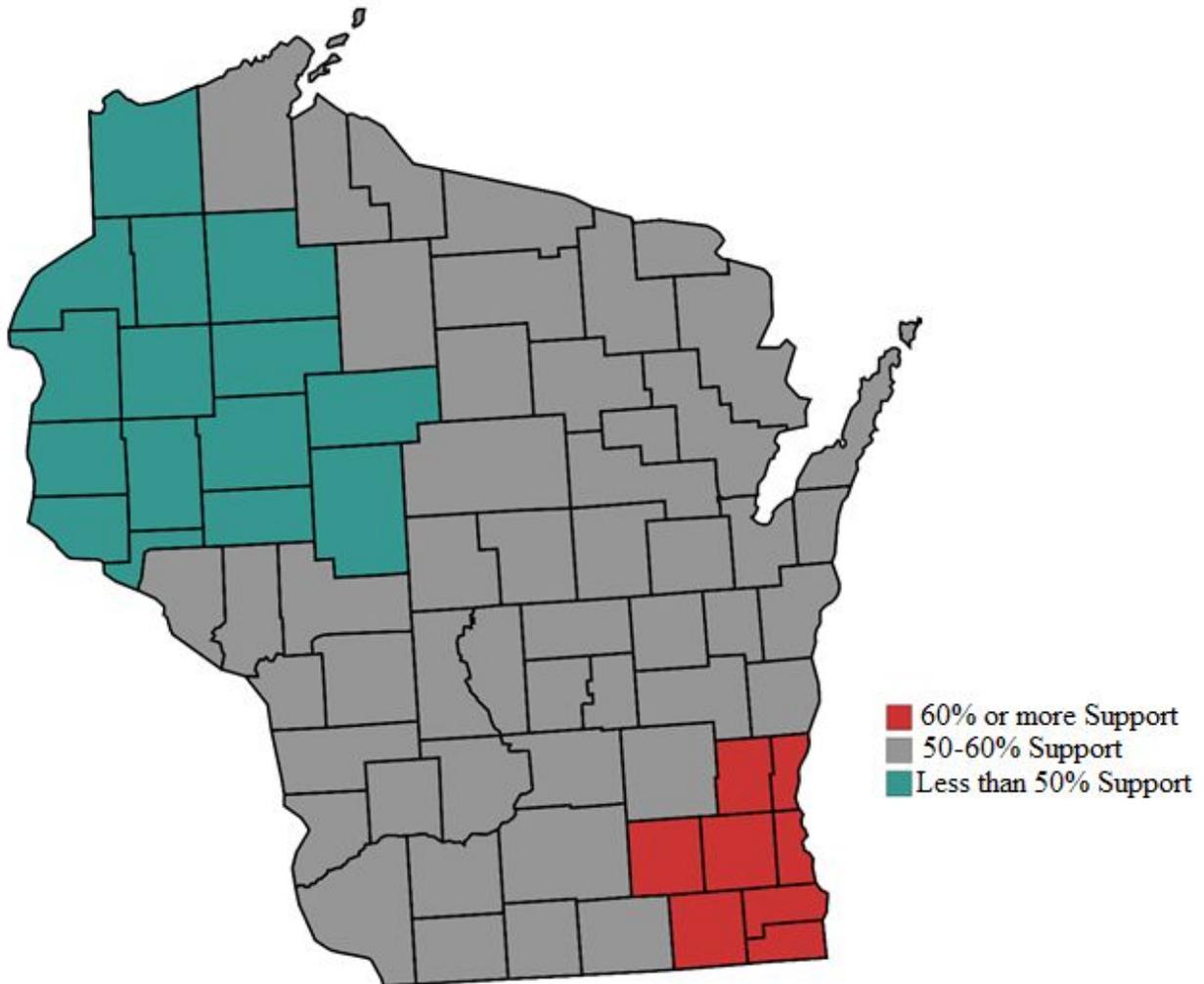
Strikingly, this position still received majority support: 56% of respondents agreed compared with just 27% of respondents who disagreed.

Strongly Agree 24.93%
Agree 31.34% (Sum Agree: 56.27%)
Neither 14.39%
Disagree 15.10%
Strongly Disagree 12.11% (Sum Disagree: 27.21%)

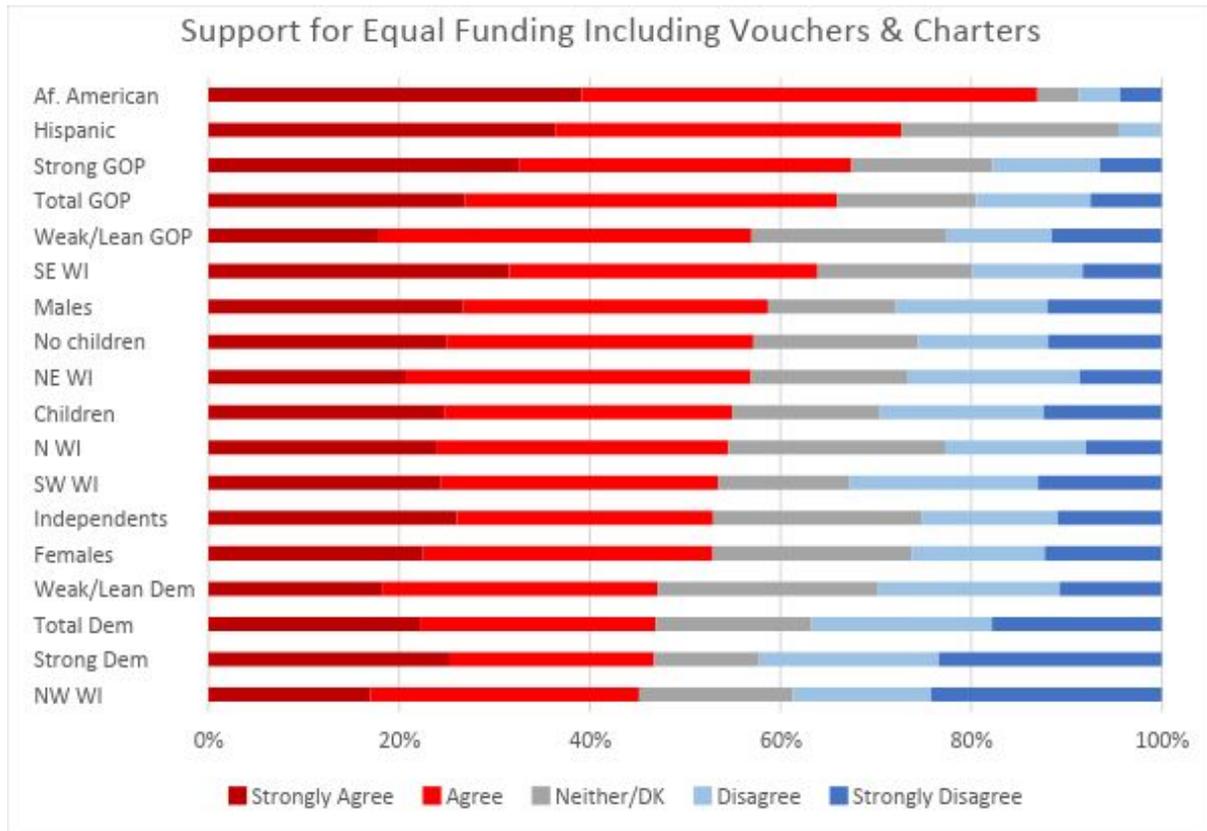
Regional Support for Equal Funding Including Choice & Charter Kids



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A similar pattern holds here as it does to other school-choice related questions. African American, Hispanic, and Republican voters have the highest levels of support. But importantly, even pluralities of Democrats (47%) are supportive. In light of the dramatic funding gaps between choice, charter, and public school students in the state, this suggests bipartisan public support for equalization.



Federal/State/Local Control

The survey asked respondents which level of government they believed should have the greatest level of control over several different educational issues: academic accountability, discipline, and school funding. Across the board, respondents appear to favor local control of funding, with that category achieving majorities across all three issue areas. People appear to be most sympathetic to some level of state intervention when it comes to academics—perhaps because of the state’s ability to monitor and create things like the Forward Exam. They are strongest in terms of local control when it comes to school funding. In no issue area did more than 6% of respondents favor federal control.

Category	Federal	State	Local
Academic Accountability	5.07%	40.93%	52.21%
Discipline	6.00%	35.50%	57.00%
Funding	2.86%	26.00%	69.93%

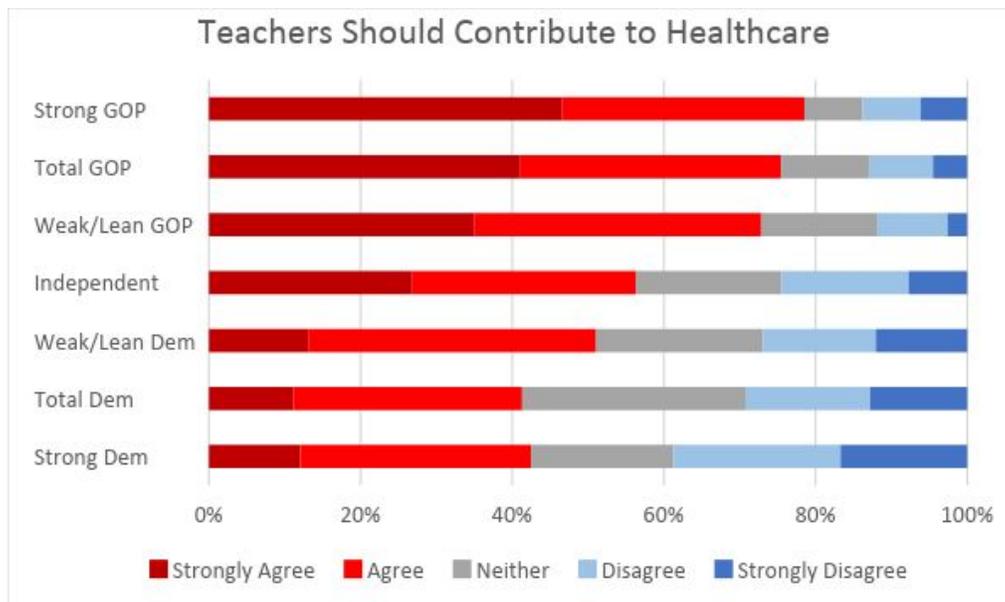


Act 10

The poll asked a couple questions on Act 10 without using the word “Act 10.” WILL thinks that the phrase may have become far too polarized over time to yield an accurate assessment of public opinion. First, respondents were asked, “*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Teachers should continue to contribute at least 12% to their health care costs.*”

In the aggregate, 60% of respondents agreed with this statement, meaning a solid majority of Wisconsinites would like to see this provision of Act 10 continue. But perhaps most interestingly, a plurality of Democrats also agreed with this statement.

Strongly Agree	27.00%
Agree	33.50% (Sum Agree: 60.50%)
Neither	14.86%
Disagree	13.93%
Strongly Disagree	9.14% (Sum Disagree: 23.07%)



The second question involved pensions: “*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Teachers should continue to contribute at least half of the total contributions to their pension benefits, which average approximately 6%?*”



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Once again, more than 60% of respondents agreed. And once again, a plurality of Democrats agreed. The margins here are much wider than has been found in recent Marquette Law School Polls that have asked about Act 10 in general, which have found opposition and support for Act 10 to be approximately equal. It appears Act 10 is more bipartisan than most believe if the term itself is avoided.

Strongly Agree	28.71%
Agree	35.07% (Sum Agree: 63.79%)
Neither	16.79%
Disagree	12.14%
Strongly Disagree	6.29% (Sum Disagree: 18.43%)

