

The Foundation for Educational Choice

What Do Indiana Voters Say About K-12 Education & School Choice?

Executive Summary | *January 10, 2010*

The “Indiana K-12 & School Choice Survey” project, commissioned by The Foundation for Educational Choice and conducted by Braun Research Incorporated (BRI), measures Indiana registered voters’ awareness and opinions on a range of K-12 education issues.

We report the *levels* and *gaps* of voter opinion, knowledge, and awareness when asked about issues in K-12 education and school choice reforms.

Key Findings:

- ▶ On average, registered voters in Indiana are more likely to think that K-12 education is on the “wrong track” (51%) compared to the “right direction” (31%). Six out of eight counties share this angst at varying levels. Hamilton County is statistically even, and Vanderburgh County is the exception, where 52% of voters believe K-12 education is heading in the right direction.
- ▶ Hoosier voters describe the state’s public school system more often as “fair” or “poor” (55%) versus “good” or “excellent” (42%). Marion County is especially negative, with 62% saying the education system is “fair” or “poor.” Vanderburgh County is the most positive, with 60% saying the system is “good” or “excellent.”
- ▶ Indiana voters are under-informed with regard to how much is spent in the public schools. Nearly 2 out of 3 respondents (64%) underestimate per-student spending in the public schools. According to financial information the state provided the U.S. Department of Education for the 2007-2008 school year, total per-student spending on average was \$8,867 to \$10,164 depending on the definition used.¹ Almost 4 out of 10 voters thought the correct range was less than \$4,000 per student. Another 25% of voters

¹ See NCES.ed.Gov (Common Core of Data, “Total Current Expenditures” and “Total Expenditures” for 2007-2008. See also Zhou, L. (2010). *Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education: School Year 2007–08 (Fiscal Year 2008)* (NCES 2010-326). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics: Table 6. The reported dollar figure includes instruction, instruction-related, support services, and other elementary/secondary current expenditures, but exclude expenditures on capital outlay, other programs, and interest on long-term debt.

said it was in the \$4,001-\$8,000 spending range. There is a lack of awareness and understanding about how much money is being spent to educate students in Indiana.

- ▶ When asked for a preferred school type, Indiana voters express a gaping disconnect between their preferred school type and actual enrollment patterns. About 9% of Indiana's K-12 student population attend private schools, but in the survey, 41% of voters would select a private school as their first option. Approximately 90% of the state's students attend regular public schools, but a much lower percentage of voters (38%) would chose a regular public school as their first choice. Less than 1% of the student population are going to charter schools, but 10% of Hoosier voters would like to send their child to a charter school.
- ▶ Indiana voters are much more likely to favor charter schools (66%), rather than oppose such schools (16%). All counties overwhelmingly support charter schools. Marion County voters are most favorable (80%) and Lake County is relatively the least favorable (64%). In the statewide sample, respondents who say they "strongly favor" charter schools outnumber those who say they "strongly oppose" charter schools by a 4-to-1 ratio.
- ▶ There is decidedly strong Hoosier support for school vouchers in Indiana and across the eight featured counties. In the statewide sample, there is a sizeable gap between those who favor school vouchers (66%) and those who oppose (24%) school vouchers, equal to 42 percentage points. The counties showing greatest levels of support are: Elkhart and St. Joseph (76%), Marion (76%), and Vanderburgh (74%). Hamilton County registers the relatively lowest level of support (62%). Nearly half of interviewed voters in Vanderburgh (48%), Marion (47%), and Elkhart-St. Joseph (46%) say they "strongly favor" a school voucher system. At least one-third of voters in the other five sampled counties indicate they are strongly favorable.

A total of 3,445 telephone interviews were conducted in English from November 12-17, 2010, by means of both landline and cell phone. BRI's trained callers interviewed 1,017 registered voters in Indiana to produce an initial statewide sample. BRI then made additional phone calls to achieve at least 350 total completed interviews in each of the following counties/regions: Allen (351), Elkhart/St. Joseph (367), Floyd (360), Hamilton (351), Lake (352), Marion (372), Vanderburgh (354), Vigo (350). Statistical results were weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the overall statewide sample is ± 3.1 percentage points. Margin of error for each county sample is approximately ± 5.4 percentage points.

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