

SCHOOL CHOICE

# ISSUES

IN THE STATE

## Illinois' Opinion on K-12 Education and School Choice



### **Parent Choice for Illinois:**

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 Illinois children, it is critical to know the facts about parent choice, and to have an understanding of how parent choice programs have had an impact on communities, parents and students around the country. All of this analysis is done with one goal in mind: The best possible education for all of Illinois' children.

Prepared By:

Paul DiPerna

Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation

December 2007

Study released jointly by the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, Agudath Israel, Black Alliance for Educational Options, Catholic Conference of Illinois, The Champion Foundation, Congress for the New Urbanism, Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options, Illinois Policy Institute, and School Choice Illinois

A MESSAGE FROM THE FRIEDMAN FOUNDATION:

## OUR CHALLENGE TO YOU

Our research adheres to the highest standards of scientific rigor. We know that one reason the school choice movement has achieved such great success is because the empirical evidence really does show that school choice works. More and more people are dropping their opposition to school choice as they become familiar with the large body of high-quality scientific studies that supports it. Having racked up a steady record of success through good science, why would we sabotage our credibility with junk science?

This is our answer to those who say we can't produce credible research because we aren't neutral about school choice. Some people think that good science can only be produced by researchers who have no opinions about the things they study. Like robots, these neutral researchers are supposed to carry out their analyses without actually thinking or caring about the subjects they study.

But what's the point of doing science in the first place if we're never allowed to come to any conclusions? Why would we want to stay neutral when some policies are solidly proven to work, and others are proven to fail?

That's why it's foolish to dismiss all the studies showing that school choice works on grounds that they were conducted by researchers who think that school choice works. If we take that approach, we would have to dismiss all the studies showing that smoking causes cancer, because all of them were conducted by researchers who think that smoking causes cancer. We would end up rejecting all science across the board.

The sensible approach is to accept studies that follow sound scientific methods, and reject those that don't. Science produces reliable empirical information, not because scientists are devoid of opinions and motives, but because the rigorous procedural rules of science prevent the researchers' opinions and motives from determining their results. If research adheres to scientific standards, its results can be relied upon no matter who conducted it. If not, then the biases of the researcher do become relevant, because lack of scientific rigor opens the door for those biases to affect the results.

So if you're skeptical about our research on school choice, this is our challenge to you: prove us wrong. Judge our work by scientific standards and see how it measures up. If you can find anything in our work that doesn't follow sound empirical methods, by all means say so. We welcome any and all scientific critique of our work. But if you can't find anything scientifically wrong with it, don't complain that our findings can't be true just because we're not neutral. That may make a good sound bite, but what lurks behind it is a flat rejection of science.

# Illinois' Opinion on K-12 Education and School Choice

Prepared By:

Paul DiPerna

Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation

Poll taken by:

Strategic Vision, LLC

December 2007



## About the Author



Paul DiPerna ([paul@friedmanfoundation.org](mailto:paul@friedmanfoundation.org)) is a State Program Director for the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation, an organization dedicated to educating the public on the issue of school choice. He joined the Friedman Foundation in September 2006. Before moving to Indianapolis, DiPerna served as Assistant Director for the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution. His six years at Brookings included projects evaluating the federal Blue Ribbon Schools Program and analyzing student achievement in charter schools. DiPerna was a research analyst for the first five issues of the Brown Center Report on American Education (2000-2004), and he managed the activities of the National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education (2001-2005).

DiPerna is fascinated by the potential of the Internet, particularly in terms of discovering and coordinating information, mobilizing people, building social networks, improving organization and management, and communicating innovations. 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*.

## About Strategic Vision, LLC



STRATEGIC VISION, LLC  
CORPORATE, LITERARY, POLITICAL

Strategic Vision, LLC is an Atlanta-headquartered public relations and public affairs agency with a division that specializes in polling. Our team is knowledgeable about politics and current events throughout the nation and operates nationally on a variety of races and issue advocacy programs. Among the media that Strategic Vision's polls have been used by include 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.

## About the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation



The Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation is a nonprofit organization established in 1996. The origins of the foundation lie in the Friedmans' long-standing concern about the serious deficiencies in America's elementary and secondary public schools. The best way to improve the quality of education, they believe, is to enable all parents with the freedom to choose the schools that their children attend. The Friedman Foundation builds upon this vision, clarifies its meaning to the public and amplifies the national call for true education reform through school choice.

## About Agudath Israel of America



Agudath Israel of America is part of the world movement of Agudath Israel, which was founded in 1912 to mobilize Torah-loyal Jews for the perpetuation of authentic Judaism. Agudath Israel aims to establish the sovereignty of Torah in all problems facing Jewish people as individuals and as a nation. To achieve these aims, Agudath Israel of America maintains nineteen divisions of activity embracing every phase of Jewish life and affecting daily the lives of many thousands of Jews, young and old.

## About Black Alliance for Educational Options



Black Alliance for Educational Options

The Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) is a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization whose mission is to actively support parental choice to empower families and increase quality educational options for Black children. Staunch in its belief that parental choice must be an integral part of any serious effort to reform education in America, BAEO believes parental choice programs, which lead to the creation of quality educational options, not only rescue the children who can take advantage of such opportunities but also create powerful incentives for all schools, public and private, to improve.

## About Catholic Conference of Illinois



Formed in 1969 by the Roman Catholic Bishops of Illinois, the Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) is the agent through which the six dioceses of Illinois act mutually and cooperatively in matters of inter-diocesan and statewide interest. CCI is a board-approved administration with legislative priorities that reflect the moral teachings and institutional needs of the Church.

## About The Champion Foundation



The Champion Foundation is an advocate for an efficient, high quality public education system in Illinois and for responsible, effective use of tax dollars by local and state government. It helps raise public awareness of abuses within the public education system and strives to influence public opinion in favor of solutions that will bring about real reform in public education. The foundation's focus is on fiscal accountability and transparency in all matters related to the use of tax dollars, specifically the public education pay system; the replacement of the outdated, union-controlled public school system with a system that uses free market principles, including school choice; achieving flexible education options that address the needs of the student more satisfactorily; and preservation of the rights of parents to direct and control the education of their children.

## About Congress for the New Urbanism



The Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) is the leading organization promoting walkable, neighborhood-based development as an alternative to sprawl. In advancing its vision for community development and regional sustainability based on the Charter of the New Urbanism, CNU's approach is interdisciplinary, bridging architecture, city planning, urban design, landscape architecture, real estate development, housing and transportation policy, government, environmental protection, and civic activism.

## About Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options



Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options (CREO) was founded to address the crisis in Latino education by empowering Latino families with parental choice in education. By creating coalitions with parents, schools, faith-based organizations, advocates and like-minded groups, Hispanic CREO has been able to educate, inform and mobilize Latino parents on the issues surrounding school choice.

## About Illinois Policy Institute



The Illinois Policy Institute is a nonpartisan research and education organization dedicated to making our state a beacon for liberty and prosperity for all citizens. As a leading voice for economic liberty and government accountability, the foundation engages policy makers, opinion leaders, and citizens at state and local levels by promoting free market principles and liberty-based public policy initiatives for a better Illinois.

## About School Choice Illinois



Founded in 2006, School Choice Illinois is an independent, nonprofit organization established in direct response to the growing demand for choices in education. The organization works to educate the public about the need to expand educational options through public policy initiatives and to demonstrate its impact on children, the community, schools and the state. It comprises a dynamic team from diverse professional, political, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds dedicated to empowering parents and shaping school choice policies that lead to more competition, transparency, and accountability in our school system.



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## Executive Summary

This scientifically representative poll of 1,500 likely Illinois voters measures public opinion on K-12 education issues, and in particular, school choice in the form of school vouchers and tax-credit scholarships.

Given the freedom of access and the empowerment to choose schools, most adults in Illinois value having a range of school options for their children. Desirable options include a K-12 universe spanning private schools, charter schools, virtual schools, homeschooling, and regular public schools. The leaders of teachers' unions and school boards often say that the public will not support school vouchers. But in Illinois, one of the most union-friendly states, this poll finds voters are open to a school voucher system.

Illinoisans want an inclusive system of options for selecting schools.

Conducted November 9 to 11, 2007, by Strategic Vision, LLC, the poll has a margin of error smaller than plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

Key findings include:

- **Illinoisans are disappointed with the current system of regular public schools**—57 percent rated Illinois' public school system as "fair" or "poor." In March 2007, a Friedman Foundation poll asked a similar question to likely voters in Georgia. Georgians also expressed dissatisfaction with the public school system (32 percent), but by comparison, there was not nearly as much concern as shown by Illinoisans. This sentiment is most acute among 36 to 55 year-olds (69 percent), African-Americans (65 percent), Asians (69 percent), women (61 percent), and those who live in the Chicago area (62 percent).
- **Illinoisans are content with the level of public school funding as well as the average public school teacher salary.** Almost two-thirds of likely Illinois voters (63 percent) said the current level of public school funding is "about right" or "too high." A majority of Illinoisans (61 percent) actually underestimate Illinois' per student spending by nearly two thousand dollars. About 68 percent of respondents believe the average Illinois public school teacher salary is "about right" or "too high." A majority (63 percent) underestimate the average Illinois public school teacher salary by about five thousand dollars.
- **Only about one out of five Illinoisans (19 percent) say a regular public school is their top preference for their child's school.** Poll respondents expressed almost as much inclination for choosing homeschooling (17 percent) as regular public schools. Women more frequently stated homeschooling (20 percent) as a top choice over regular public schools (14 percent).
- **Illinoisans value private schools and charter schools.** When asked "what type of school would you select in order to obtain the best education for your child?," Illinoisans prefer to choose private schools (39 percent) over other types of schools. Charter schools (23 percent) are the second most desired option.
- **A majority of Illinoisans (56 percent) favor allowing parents the option of using public funds to send their child to a private school.** Favorability jumps to higher levels for 36 to 45 year-olds (63 percent) and 46 to 55 year-olds (64 percent). But younger Illinoisans, 18 to 25 year-olds and 26 to 35 year-olds, less frequently signaled favorability to this kind of parent-driven school finance system (47 percent and 49 percent respectively).
- **About half of Illinoisans support school vouchers**—51 percent of likely voters said they were personally favorable toward a school voucher approach for helping parents pay for the school where they choose to send their child.

- **Women and men differ on school vouchers.** Women stated more frequently than men that they were “very familiar” or “somewhat familiar” with school vouchers—56 percent versus 46 percent, respectively. A majority of women (58 percent) were personally favorable toward the use of school vouchers, whereas 44 percent of men said they were favorable.
- **Illinoisans more frequently cite “academic quality” than any other reason as to why they would say a chosen school is best for their child.** There is general consistency across race/ethnic groups signaling academic quality as the most important reason for selecting the ideal school. More than a third of respondents within each race/ethnic group name academics as the reason for selecting the optimal school for their child. This is true for Asians (37 percent), whites (37 percent), Hispanics (34 percent), and African-Americans (34 percent).
- **Majorities within all race/ethnic groups agree that “school vouchers should be available to all families regardless of incomes or special needs.”** Support for a universal school voucher system is highest among Asians (72 percent) and gets solid support from African-Americans (55 percent), whites (55 percent), and Hispanics (51 percent).
- **Illinois voters favor tax-credit scholarships.** When asked “if a proposal were made in Illinois to create a tax-credit scholarship policy,” 54 percent said they favored this policy. Tax-credit scholarship support climbs to 59 percent among 36 to 55 year-olds.
- **Illinois voters are more likely to vote for a state representative, state senator, or governor who supports school vouchers.** Voters said they would be more likely to vote for a governor or legislator who supports school vouchers—25 percent saying “more likely” versus 20 percent saying “less likely.” Likewise, voters indicated they would be more likely to vote for a governor or legislator who supports tax-credit scholarships—27 percent saying “more likely” versus 17 percent saying “less likely.”
- **There are plenty of opportunities to reach out to Illinoisans and inform them about school vouchers and school choice.** Knowledge about school choice and school vouchers is at a low baseline in Illinois. Nearly two-fifths of respondents had never heard about school vouchers (38 percent). After hearing a brief description of the school voucher approach, nearly half of Illinoisans still said they were “not very familiar” (29 percent) or “not familiar at all” (20 percent) with the approach.

## Methodology

This survey provides a statistically valid representation of the views of likely Illinois voters. A total of 1,500 completed interviews were obtained. This provides statistical significance more than sufficient for decision-making purposes. The statistical margin of error at the conventional 95 percent confidence level is smaller than plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

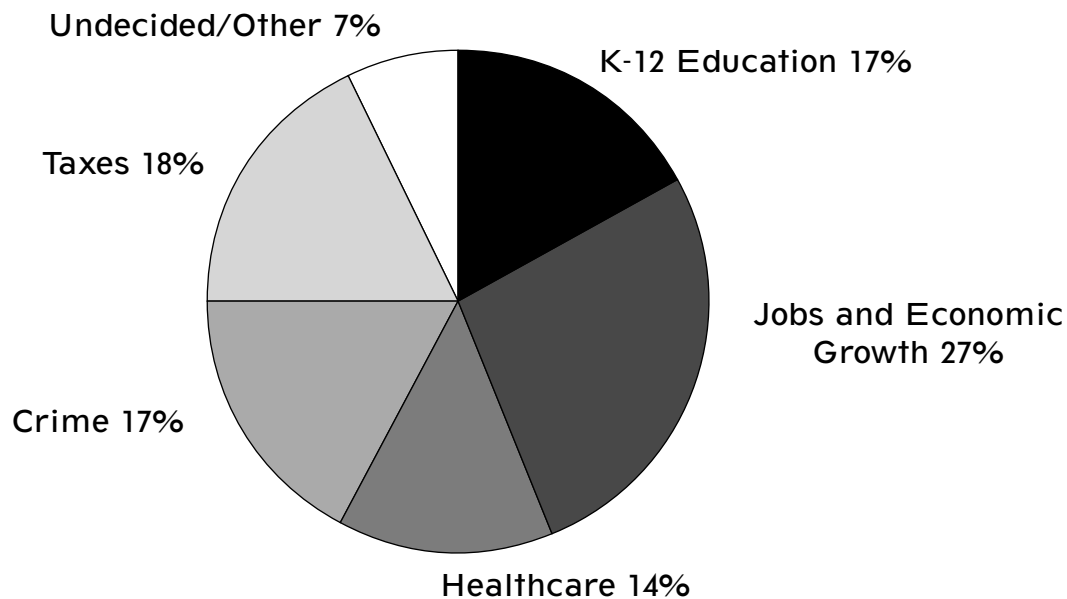
For this survey, the research firm Strategic Vision, LLC, conducted phone interviews of a random sample of registered Illinois voters from its call center. Interviews were conducted from November 9 to 11, 2007.

Respondents were asked whether they 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.

## Results

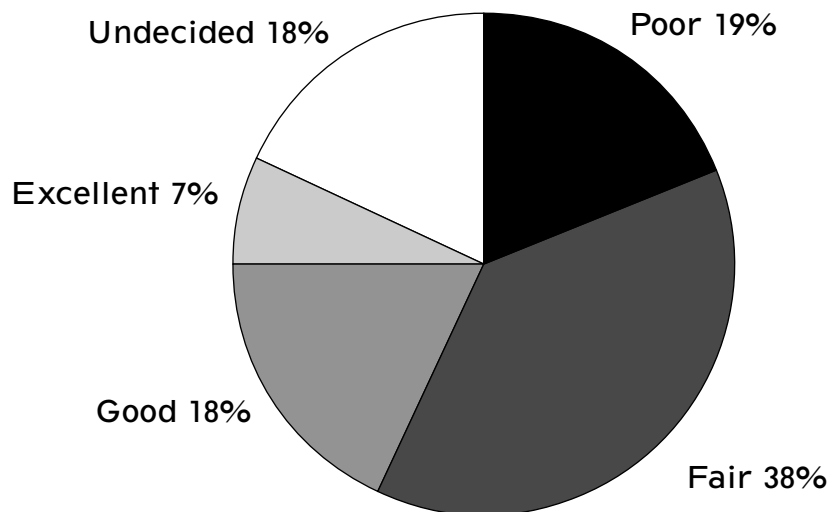
The following are the results of the survey.

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

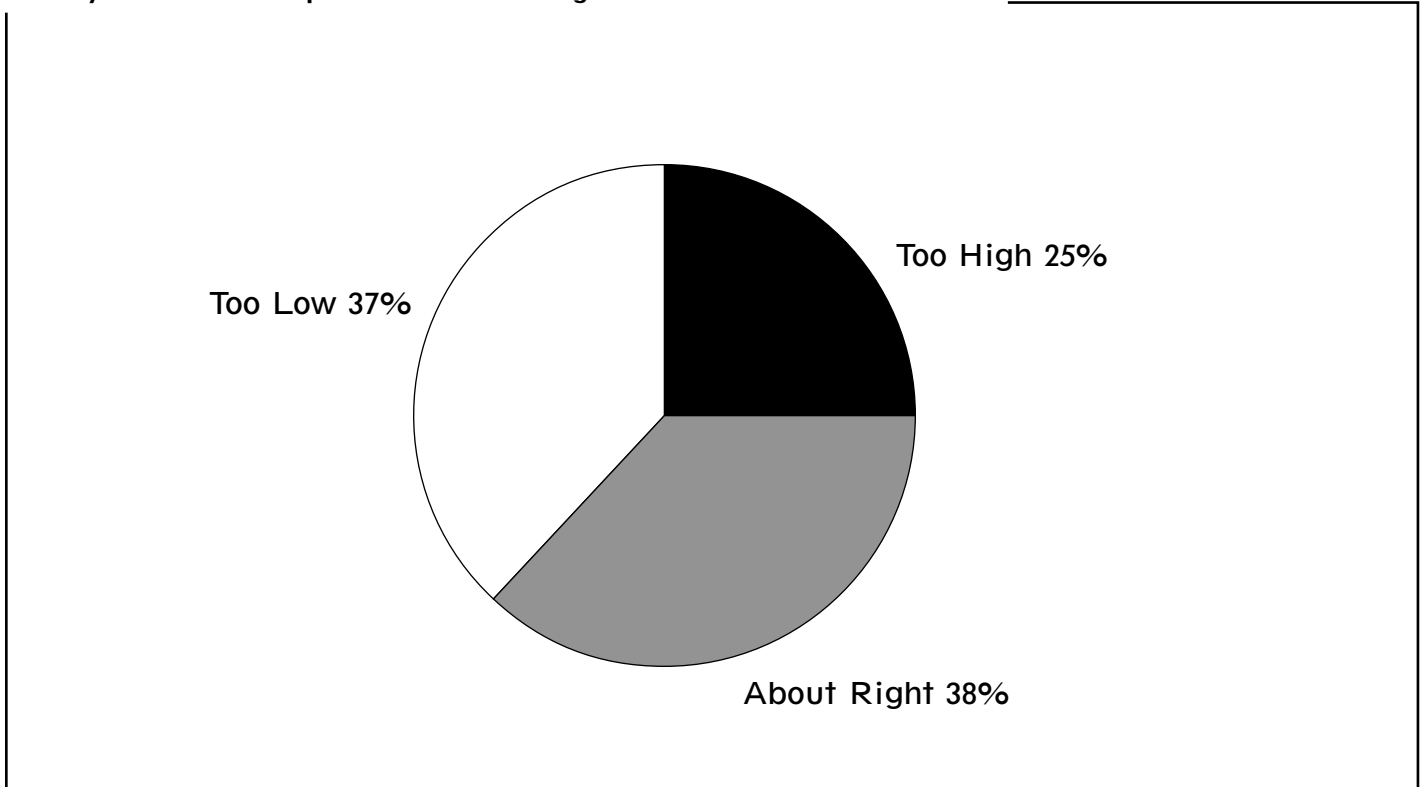


The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

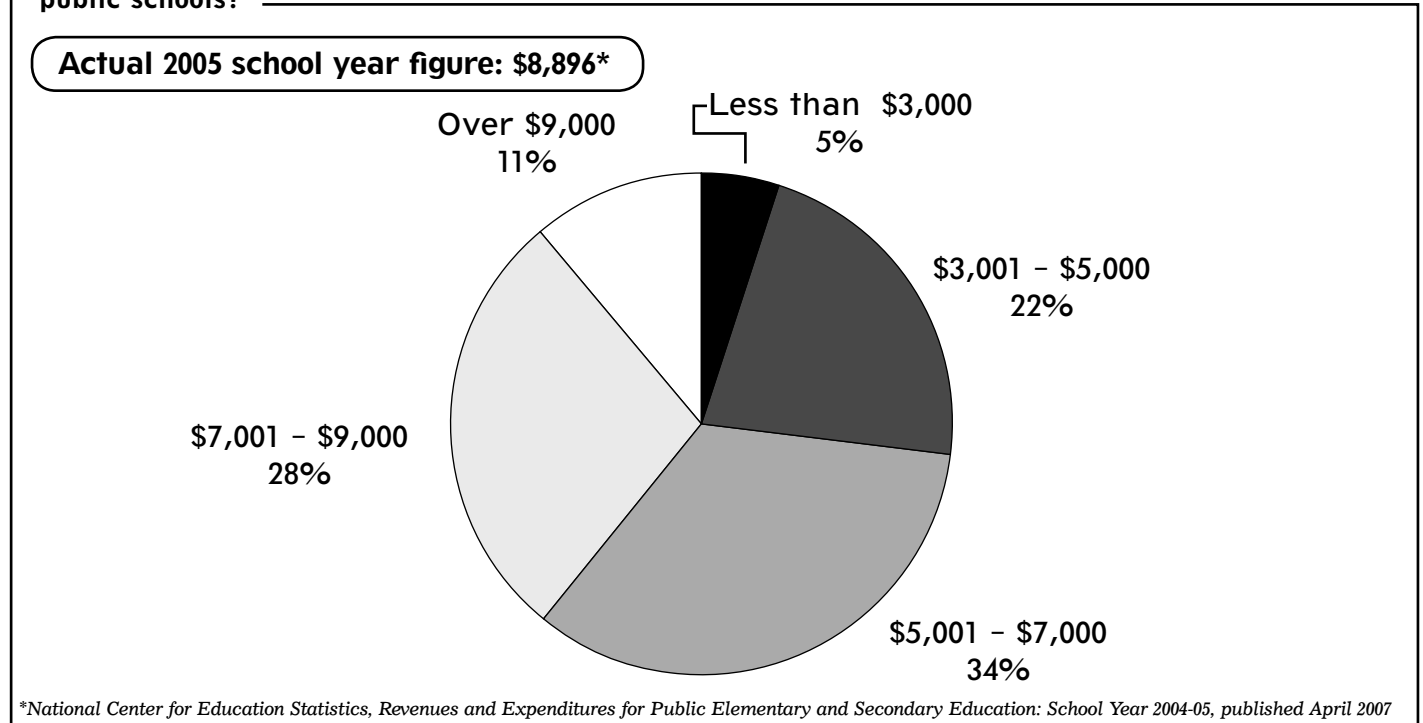
2. How would you rate Illinois' public school system?



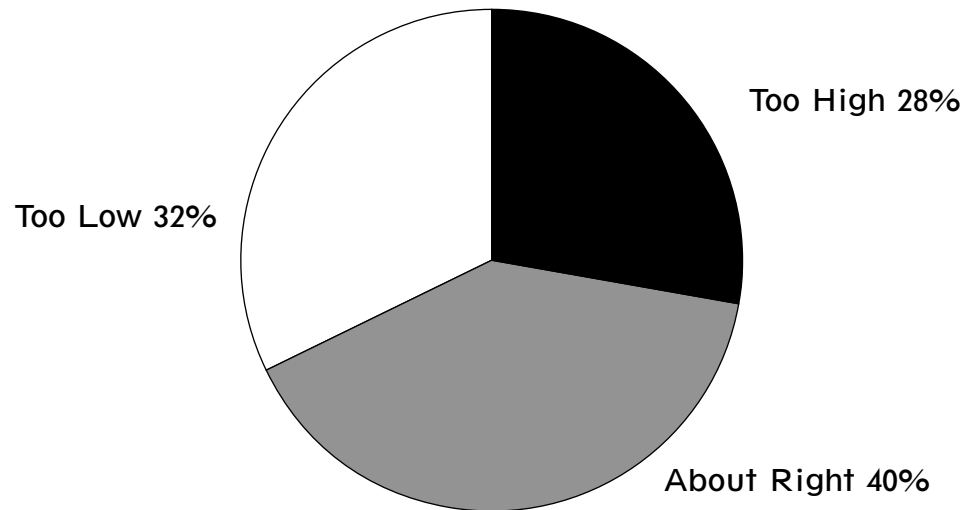
3. Do you believe that public school funding in Illinois is at a level that is: \_\_\_\_\_



4. Approximately how much do you think that the State of Illinois currently spends on each student in public schools? \_\_\_\_\_

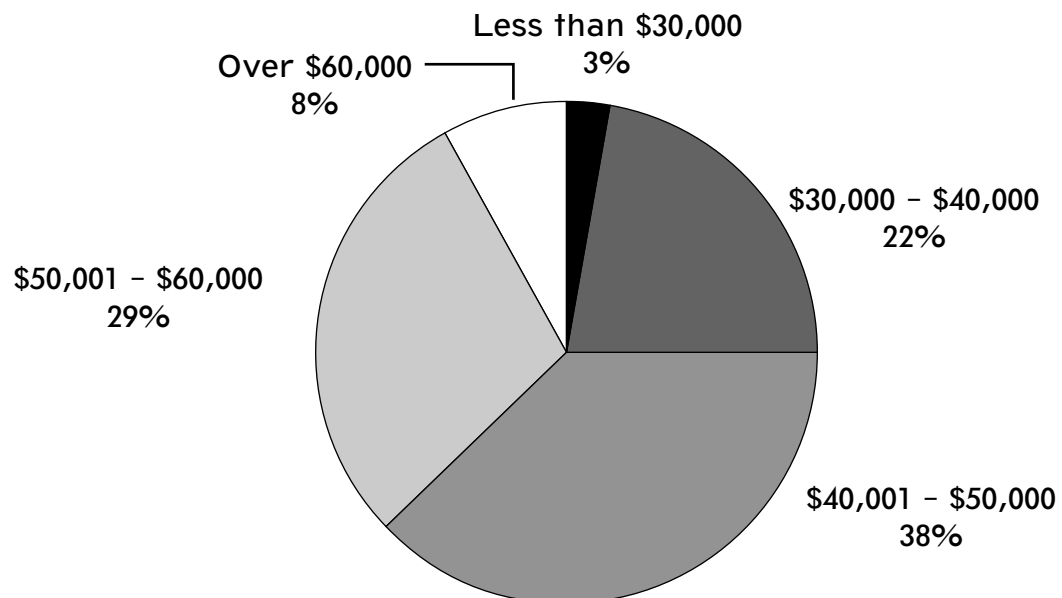


5. Do you believe that the average salary for Illinois public school teachers is: \_\_\_\_\_



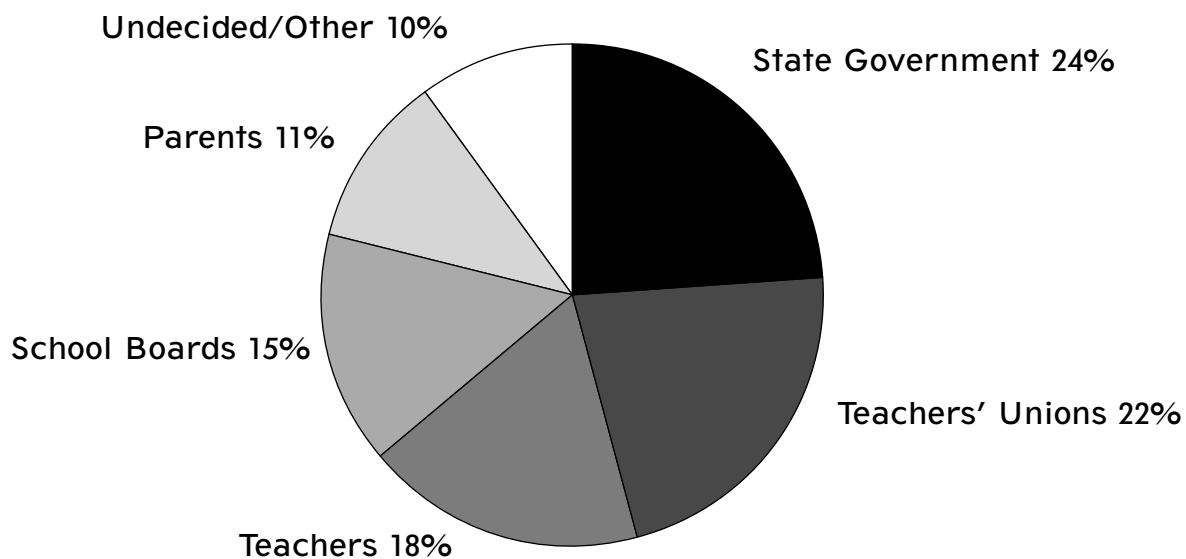
6. Approximately how much do you think is the average salary for Illinois public school teachers? \_\_\_\_\_

Actual 2005 school year figure: \$55,629\*



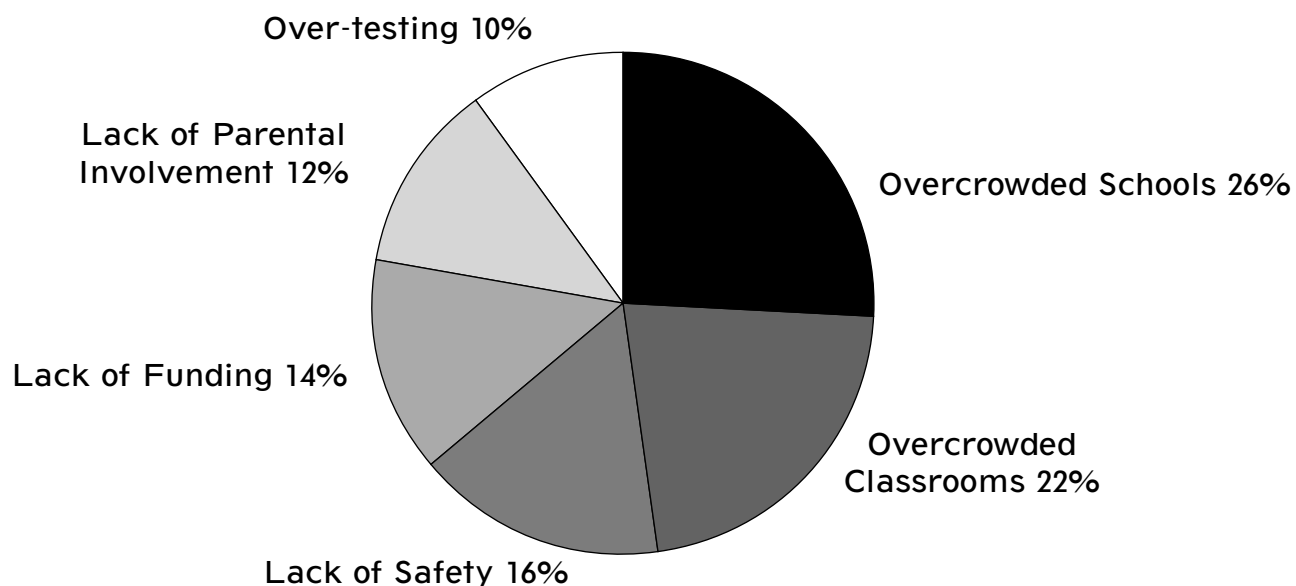
\*National Center for Education Statistics, 2006 Digest of Education Statistics, published July 2007

7. Who is most responsible for the situation of Illinois' public school system?



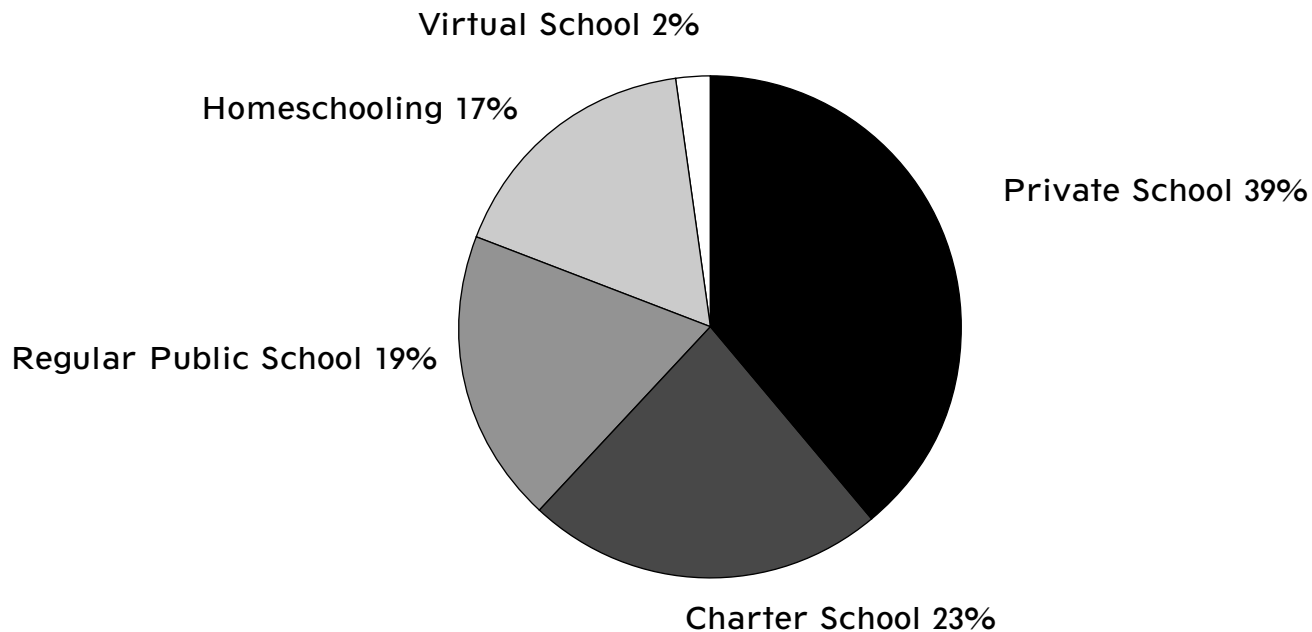
The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

8. What do you see as the biggest problem confronting Illinois' public school system?



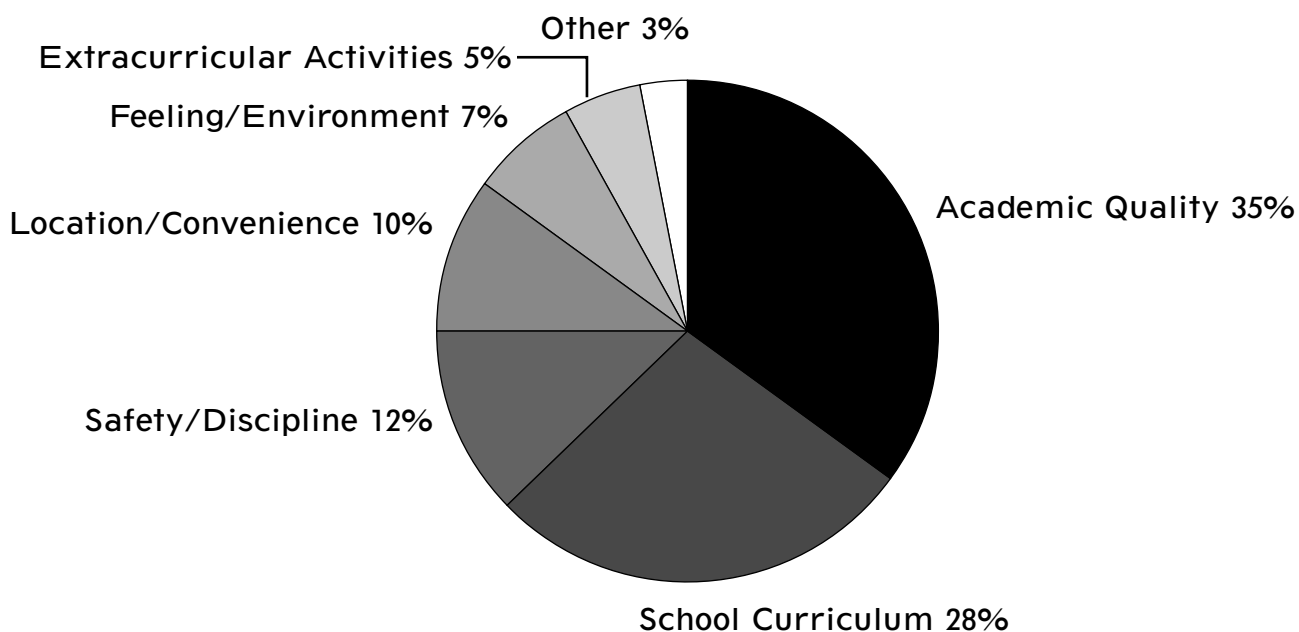
The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

9. If it was 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? \_\_\_\_\_



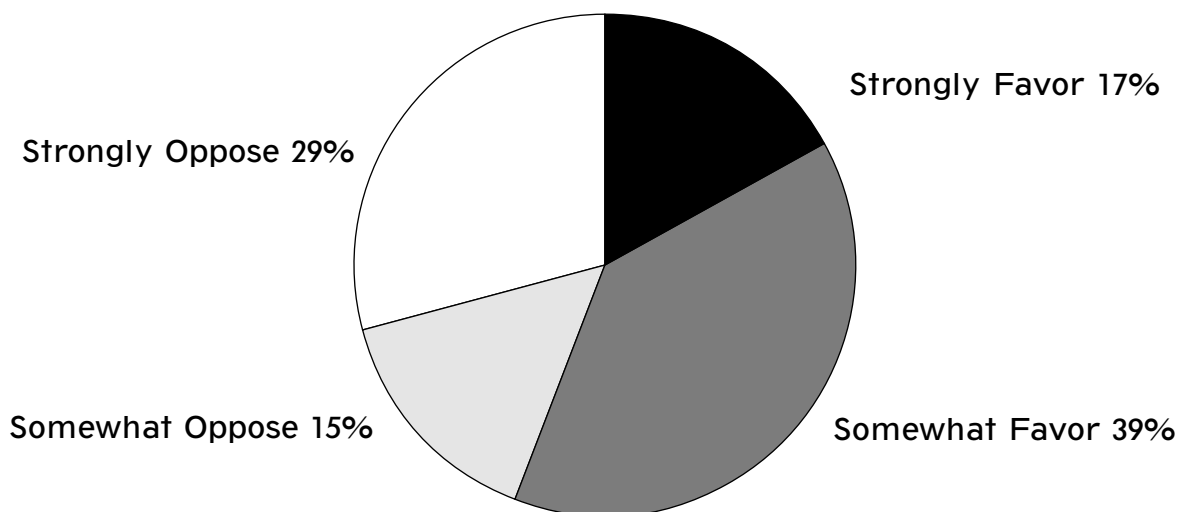
*The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.*

10. Why would you select [answer from question 9] for your child? \_\_\_\_\_

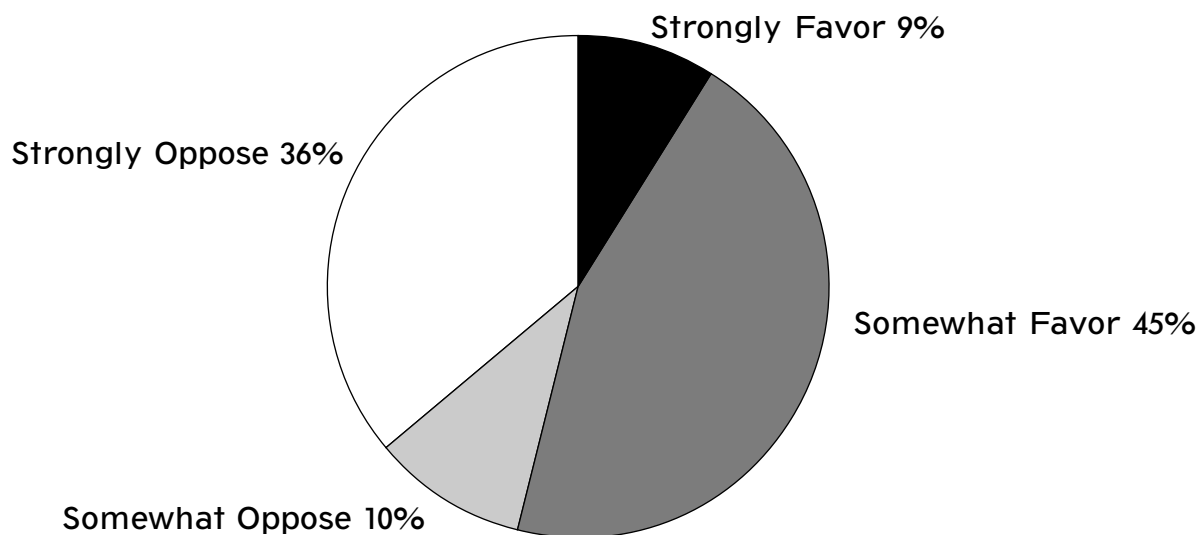


*The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.*

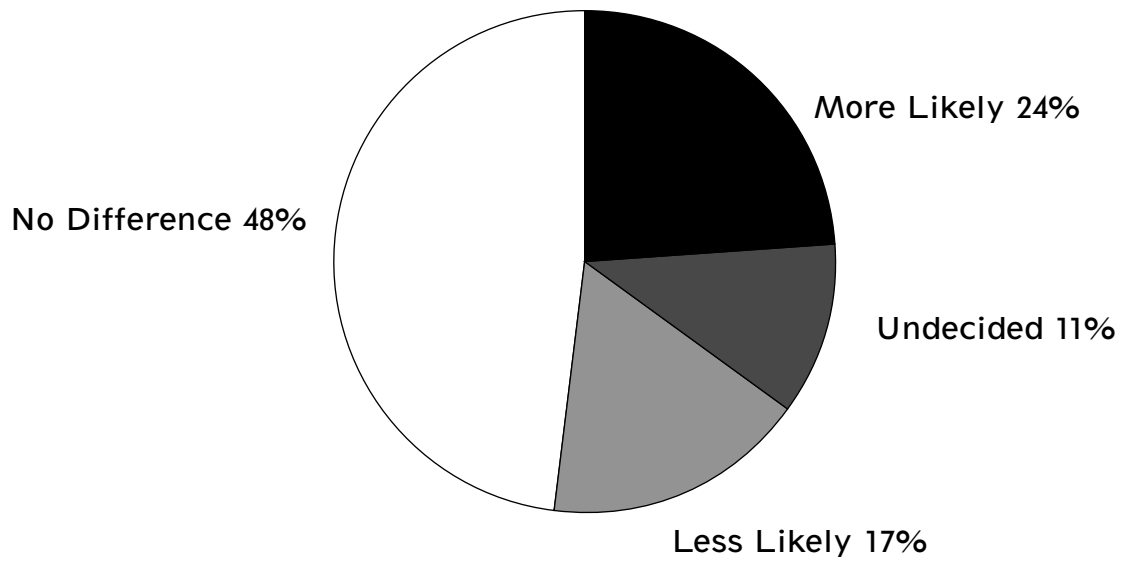
11. If a private school offered the best education possible for a particular child would you favor allowing parents the option of using public funds to send their children to a private school?



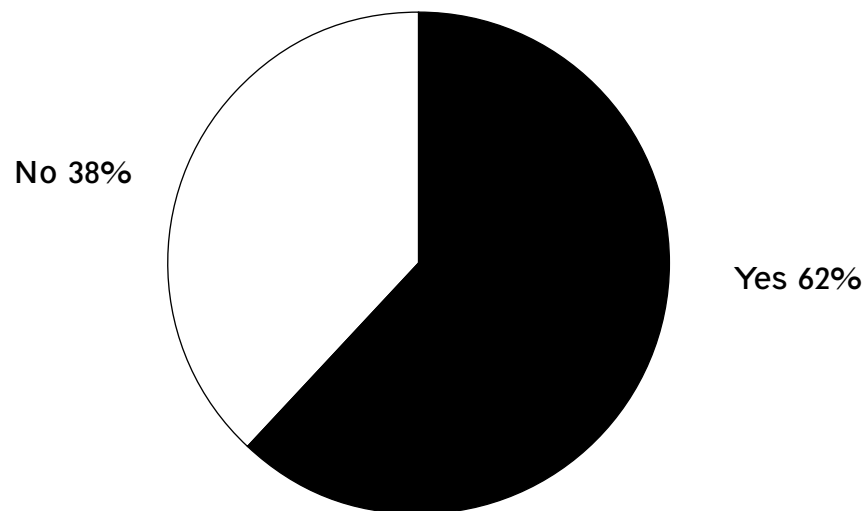
12. Some states give businesses a tax credit if they contribute money to fund private school scholarships. This policy is called a "tax-credit scholarship". If a proposal were made in Illinois to create a tax-credit scholarship policy, would you favor or oppose such an idea?



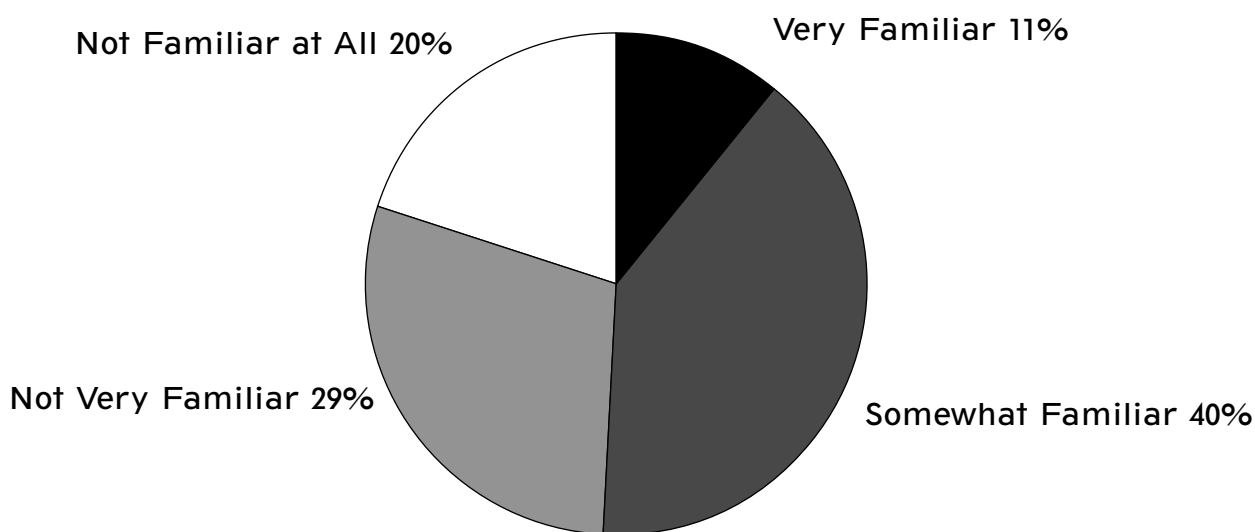
13. Thinking ahead to the next election, when a candidate for Governor, State Senator or Representative supports tax-credit scholarships, would that make you more likely to vote for them, less likely to vote for them, or make no difference whatsoever in your selection of candidates?



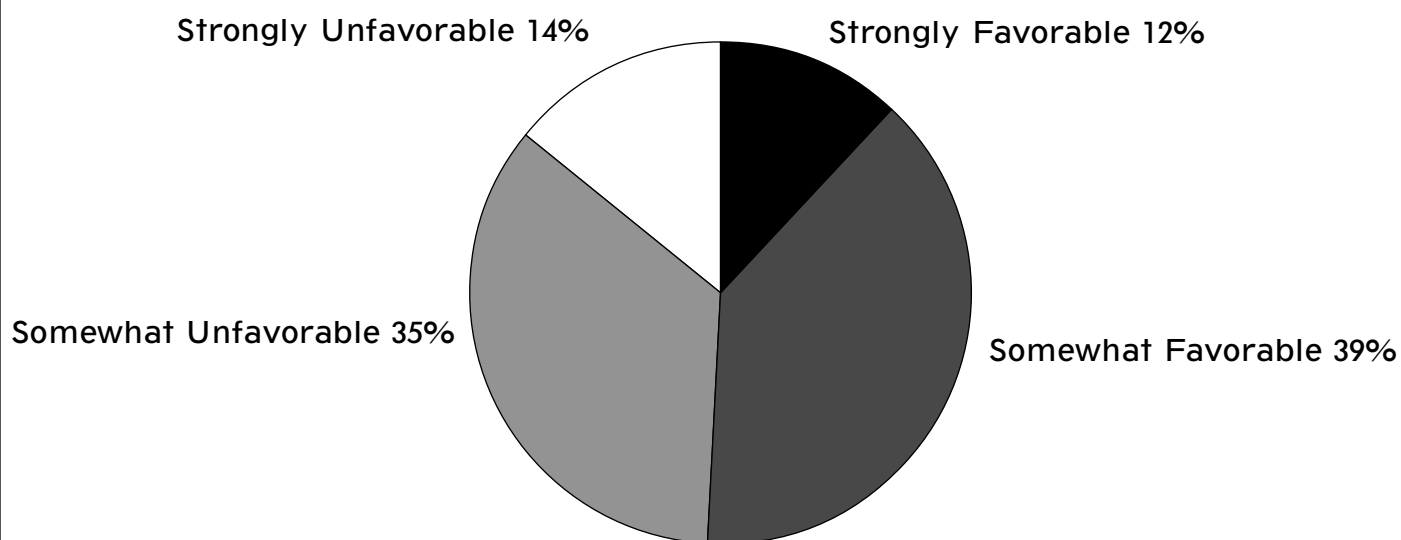
14. Have you heard anything about the use of school vouchers in K-12 education?



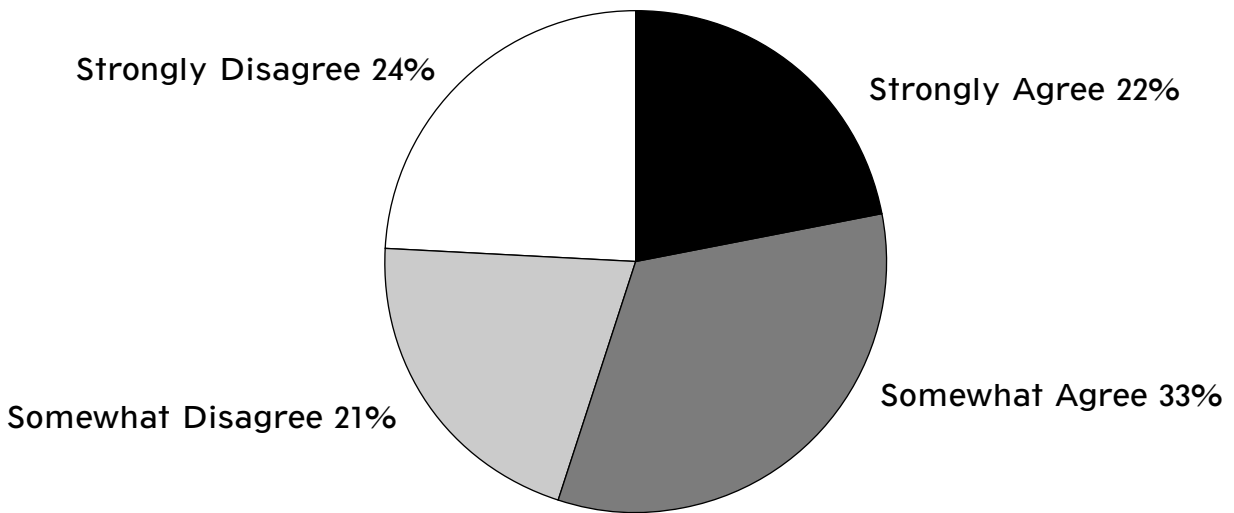
15. In Illinois there is a debate over the direction of K-12 education. Some people promote an approach that would allow parents the option of sending their children to the school of their choice, whether that school is public or private, including both religious and non-religious schools. If this approach 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 for the school where they choose to send their children. How familiar are you with this approach to education? \_\_\_\_\_



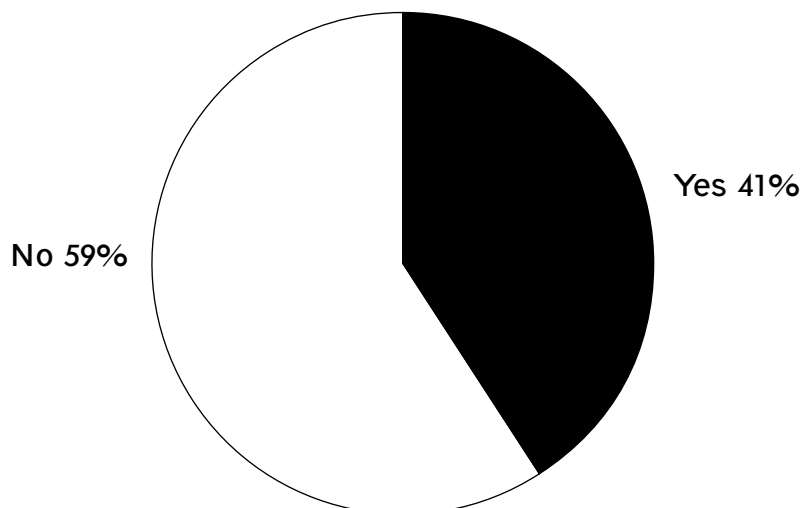
16. Based upon what you know about school vouchers, would you say that you are personally favorable or unfavorable towards this approach? \_\_\_\_\_



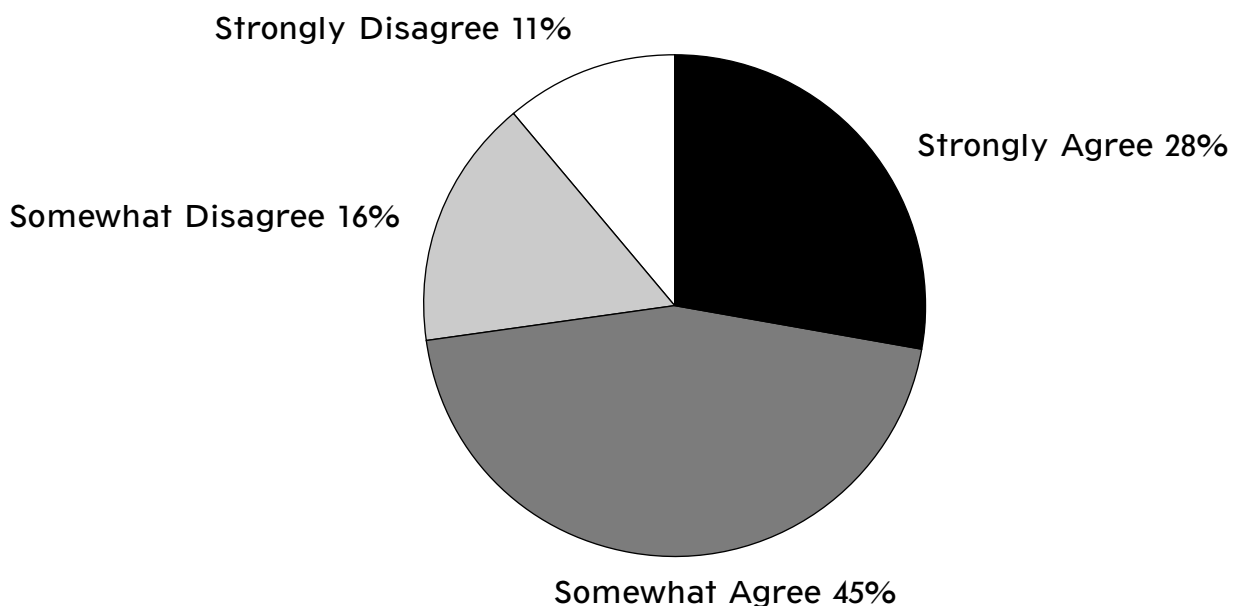
17. Some people believe that school vouchers should be available to all families, regardless of incomes and special needs. Do you agree or disagree with that statement? \_\_\_\_\_



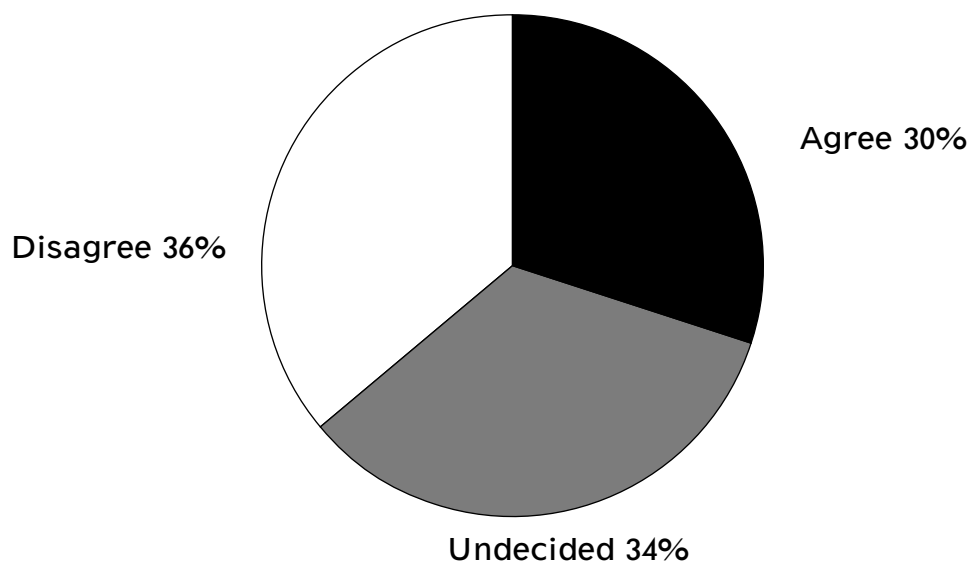
18. This approach is called "universal school choice". Would you like your state legislators to actively discuss and consider a universal school choice policy? \_\_\_\_\_



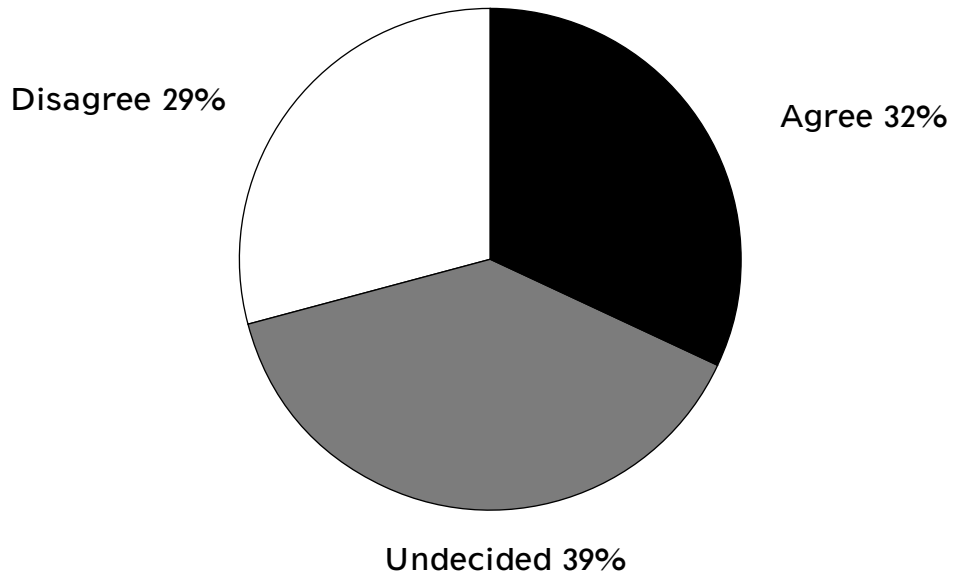
19. Some people believe that school vouchers should only be available to low-income families, to families with special education children, or to families with children in failing public schools. Do you agree or disagree with that statement? \_\_\_\_\_



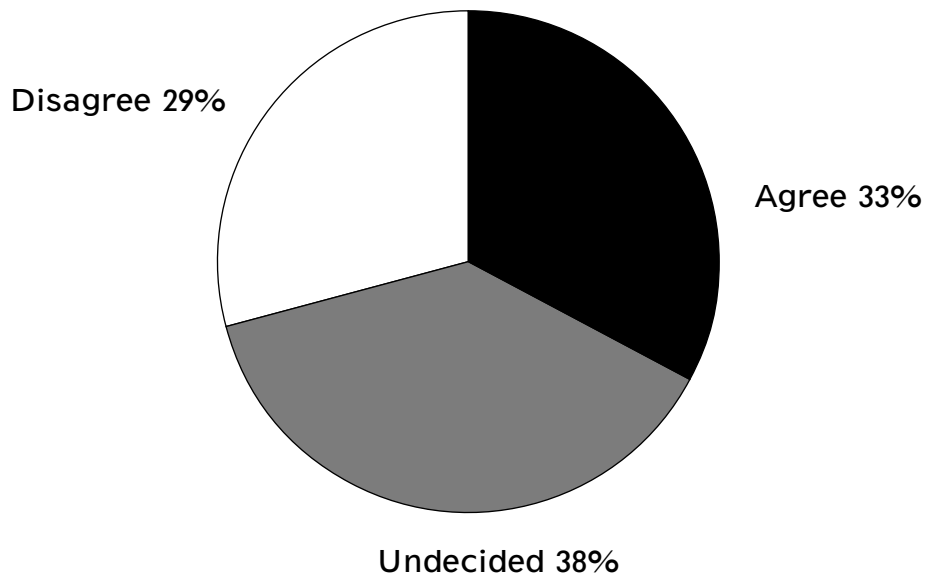
20. One argument in favor of a school voucher system is that public schools and private schools will compete with each other to attract students and engage families. Would you agree or disagree with this? \_\_\_\_\_



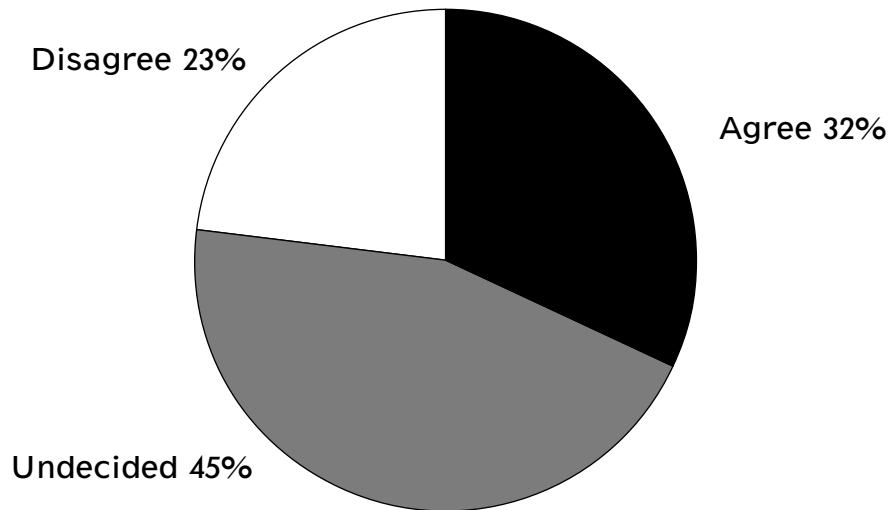
21. One argument against school vouchers is that they will benefit only wealthy families. Would you agree or disagree with that statement?



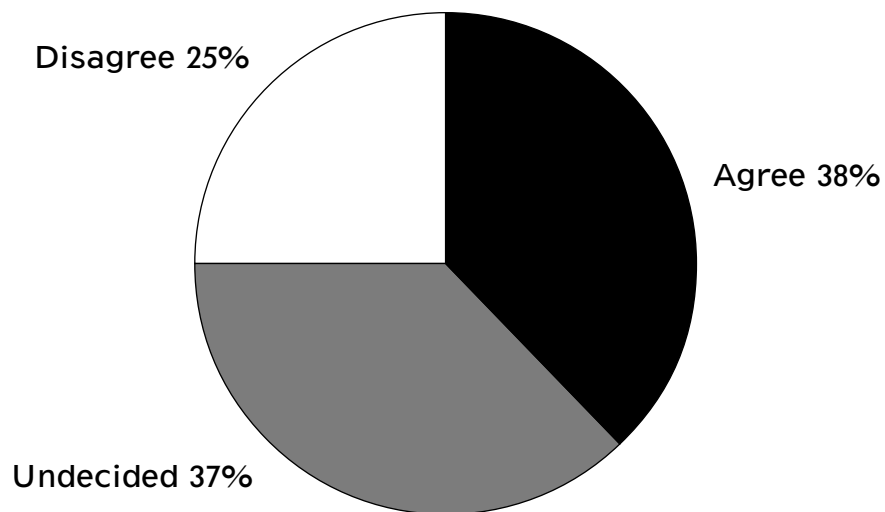
22. One argument in favor of school vouchers is that they will motivate parents to be more directly involved in the education of their child. Would you agree or disagree with that statement?



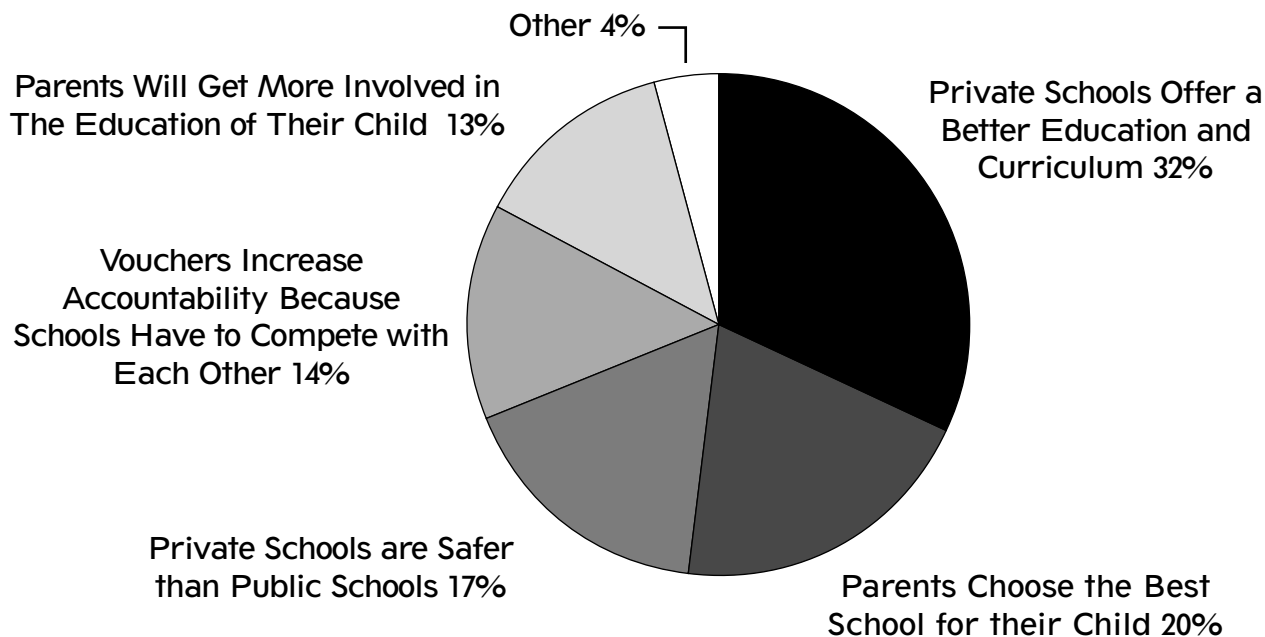
23. One argument against a school voucher system is that private schools will not be held accountable. Would you agree or disagree with that statement?



24. One argument in favor of a school voucher system is that it will motivate principals, superintendents, and school boards to be more responsive to requests made by parents. Would you agree or disagree with that statement?

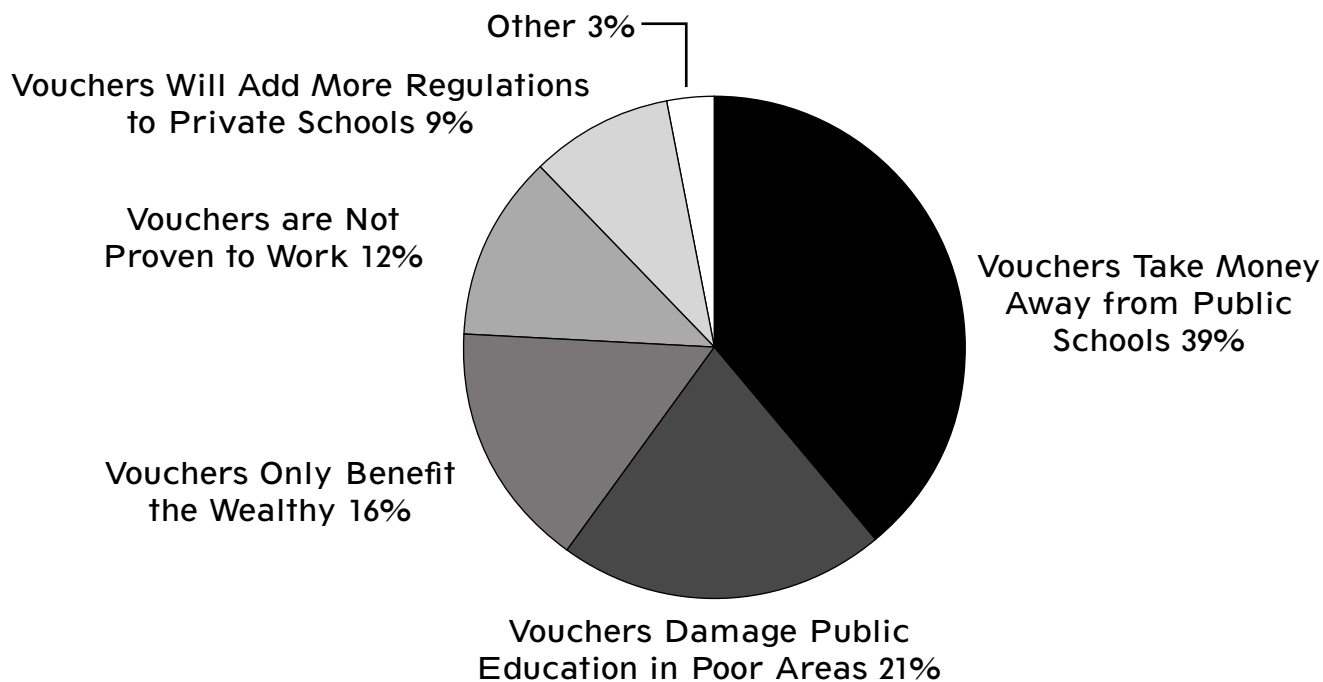


25. What appeals to you most about school vouchers?



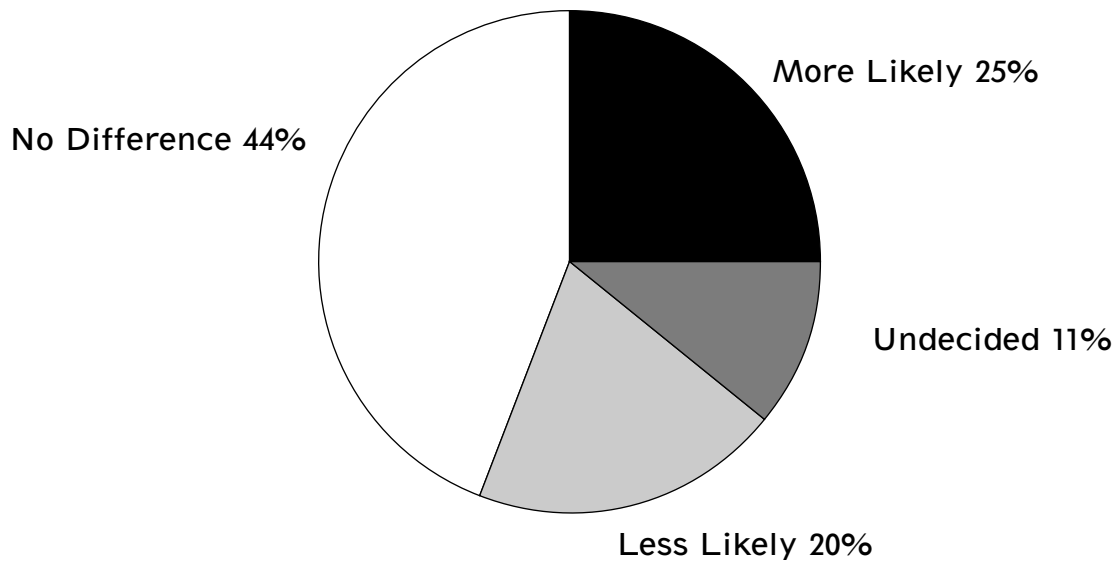
The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

26. What causes you the most concern about school vouchers?



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

27. Thinking ahead to the next election, when a candidate for Governor, State Senator or Representative supports school vouchers, 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?





## Demographics

### ARE YOU REGISTERED TO VOTE AS A:

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Democrat	47%
Libertarian	4%
Republican	32%
Other Party Affiliation	2%
Independent/No Party Affiliation	15%

### IN WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING AGE CATEGORIES DO YOU FALL?

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18-25	6%
26-35	12%
36-45	24%
46-55	29%
56-65	18%
Over 65	11%

### IN WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES DOES YOUR TOTAL FAMILY INCOME FALL?

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Under \$25,000	7%
\$25,000-\$49,999	19%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	37%
\$75,000 - \$150,000	26%
Over \$150,000	11%

### ARE YOU:

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African-American	15%
Asian	4%
Hispanic	14%
White	66%
Other	1%

### ARE YOU:

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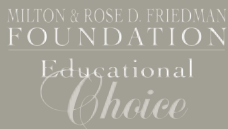
Male	49%
Female	51%



# **THE MILTON AND ROSE D. FRIEDMAN FOUNDATION**

## **WELCOMES YOUR SUPPORT**

As a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, we rely solely on the generous support of our donors to continue promoting the Friedmans' vision for school choice throughout the country. Please send your tax-deductible gift today and help interject liberty and choice into our education system. Giving parents the freedom to choose the school that works best for their children is our goal, and with your help we can make it happen.



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