

Executive Summary

This statistically representative survey of 1,200 likely Ohio voters illustrates public opinion on a wide range of K-12 education issues. The underlying theme of the Friedman Foundation's *Survey in the State* series is to measure voter attitudes toward public institutions and policies, innovative ideas, and the state's K-12 education system.

Ohioans have shared with us their views about "school choice," which includes school vouchers, tax-credit scholarships, charter schools, homeschooling and virtual schools. Ohio is the eleventh state to be surveyed in our series since November 2007.

Survey responses are at odds with how Ohioans enroll their children in schools. There is a very large divide between parental schooling preferences and actual school enrollments. **Forty-five percent** of K-12 parents said they would like to send their child to a private school.¹ In reality, however, approximately **10 percent** of Ohio's K-12 students attend private schools.² **Twenty-seven percent** of Ohio parents said they would like to send their child to a charter school. It is estimated nearly **4 percent** of the state's K-12 student population enroll in charter schools. **Sixteen percent** of Ohio parents said they would choose a regular public school for their child. Approximately **86 percent** of Ohio's K-12 students attend regular public schools. Ohio appears to lack a sufficient school choice system to satisfy parents' schooling preferences.

Our findings reinforce some conclusions drawn in an Ohio survey report released recently by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Catalyst Ohio, and the FDR Group. The two surveys differ in question design and ordering, as well as sampling protocols and methodology – these are important considerations for any cross-survey comparisons. However, we still generally observe in both surveys that Ohioans are not satisfied with the status quo public school system; they support the Educational Choice Scholarship Program and are open to school vouchers; they favor charter schools rather than oppose them; and they are skeptical about new public school spending.³

A total of 1,200 phone interviews were conducted by Strategic Vision between February 20 and 22, 2009. 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:

- **Ohio's Democrats (D), Republicans (R), and Independents (I) are likely to share common views on school choice policies.** Solid levels of support exist for the **Autism Scholarship Program** (D: 63 percent | R: 60 percent | I: 58 percent), **Educational Choice Scholarship Program** (D: 58 percent | R: 59 percent | I: 54 percent), **Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program** (D: 52 percent | R: 54 percent | I: 58 percent), **charter schools** (D: 49 percent | R: 54 percent | I: 49 percent), and **school vouchers** (D: 49 percent | R: 56 percent | I: 56 percent).
- **Twenty percent of likely voters rate the state's Ohio's public school system as "good" or "excellent."** We consistently see low-to-modest figures across the states. We have asked this same question in eleven states, and Ohio voters register the second lowest rating just ahead of Maryland (17 percent). Vermont has scored the highest at 44 percent. We have yet to observe a satisfaction rate greater than 50 percent.

¹ The subgroup "K-12 Parents" makes up 73% of the total survey sample (see page 13).

² Ohio regular public school and charter school enrollments obtained from the Ohio Department of Education (ODEA) website: <http://www.ode.state.oh.us>. Private school enrollment obtained in email exchange with ODE's Center for School Options and Finance.

³ See Steve Farkas and Ann Duffet, *Checked Out: Ohioans' Views on Education 2009* (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2009).

- **Ohioans are skeptical about new public school spending.** Two out of three voters (69 percent) say Ohio's level of public school funding is either "about right" or "too high." Since 71 percent of the survey's respondents actually underestimate the actual per-pupil funding in Ohio public schools (\$11,835), the previously mentioned 69 percent statistic is likely a low estimate.
- **One out of five Ohio voters (21 percent) say "poor engagement with parents" is a major challenge confronting Ohio's public school system.** Ohioans are more than twice as likely to say lack of parental engagement, "lack of accountability" (19 percent), or "overcrowded schools" (19 percent) are systemic challenges rather than "lack of funding" (9 percent).
- **More than eight out of ten likely voters (83 percent) prefer choosing a school for their child among options that include private schools, charter schools, virtual schools, and homeschooling.** This high figure is consistent with previous state surveys asking the same question, most recently in Rhode Island (83 percent), Vermont (89 percent), Oregon (87 percent), and Montana (90 percent).
- **Ohio voters express a relatively high preference for private schools.** When asked "what type of school would you select in order to obtain the best education for your child," 44 percent of respondents chose private schools. This finding is consistent with other recent state surveys: Rhode Island (55 percent), Vermont (44 percent), Oregon (44 percent), and Montana (38 percent).
- **Ohio's three existing school choice policies garner solid support.** The numbers in favor of each program outweigh those who oppose by significant margins.
 - **Autism Scholarship Program:** 61% favor | 34% oppose
 - **Educational Choice Scholarship Program:** 58% favor | 37% oppose
 - **Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program:** 54% favor | 44% oppose
 - **Generally speaking, favorability is a consistent finding regardless of respondents' differing demographic perspectives (see Comparative Tables, pp. 31 – 38)**
- **When asked about school vouchers in general, 53 percent of Ohio voters say they support the idea.** More than half of interviewed voters say they are favorable toward a school voucher approach allowing families to pay for their child's school tuition. Those respondents most likely to be emotionally and financially invested in K-12 schooling, the 36 to 45 and 46 to 55 age groups, show strong support for a voucher system. (56 percent favor | 41 percent oppose). Fifty percent of Ohio low-income households favor school vouchers. Fifty-three percent of households in the middle income bracket (\geq \$25,000 and $<$ \$75,000) also support school vouchers.
- **Ohioans with either personal or familial ties to labor/teacher unions (U) share similar schooling views when compared with "non-union" voters (NU).** They rate the state's school system as "good" or "excellent" at relatively low levels (U: 19 percent | NU: 20 percent). They prefer private schools over other school types (U: 43 percent | NU: 45 percent). Both groups have substantial proportions favoring the **Autism Scholarship Program** (U: 62 percent | NU: 61 percent), **Educational Choice Scholarship Program** (U: 59 percent | NU: 58 percent), **Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program** (U: 49 percent | NU: 56 percent), **charter schools** (U: 49 percent | NU: 51 percent), and **school vouchers** (U: 59 percent | NU: 51 percent).