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News Release



Governor's Calif. Tax Initiative Vulnerable

PACE/USC Rossier Poll shows most Californians want to target waste before enacting tax hikes to prevent cuts to education and public safety; Poll also shows most Californians want online education included in the school day

A phone conference discussing the results of the PACE/USC Rossier School of Education Poll is TODAY at 10:00 AM PDT. Domestic call-in number: 866-528-2256, Code: 4020850. To reserve a spot, contact Merrill Balassone at balasson@usc.edu

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August 22, 2012 — A slim majority of Californians favor enacting Proposition 30, Gov. Jerry Brown's ballot initiative that would raise taxes in order to avoid further spending reductions in education and public safety, according to results from a new PACE/USC Rossier School of Education Poll released Wednesday. But the arguments against the initiative carry much greater weight with voters, imperiling the initiative's chances of passage when Californians cast their ballots less than three months from now.

The PACE/USC Rossier Poll found about 55 percent of Californians are in support of Proposition 30, and 36 percent oppose it, making it one of several statewide surveys that show support for the initiative is perilously close to the 50 percent threshold needed for passage. When arguments for and against Proposition 30 were compared, Californians were far more likely to agree with the initiative's opponents. About 49 percent agreed with the statement that politicians should focus on wasteful spending before raising taxes, compared to 35 percent who agreed that voters should "take a stand against further cuts to schools and public safety, make the wealthy pay their fair share, and help balance the budget."

Even among parents, 51 percent agreed the focus should be placed first on cutting waste before raising taxes to fund education and public safety.

"Californians are willing to spend money in order to protect their schools from spending cuts. But they also believe that state government is spending too much money on things that aren't necessary and want to see that spending reined in before supporting the governor's initiative," said poll director **Dan Schnur**, who also serves as the director of USC's Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics. "Jerry Brown can still pass Proposition 30, but first he has to convince voters that state government can be trusted with their tax dollars."

The proposition would raise the state sales tax by a quarter-cent for four years and taxes on incomes of more than \$250,000 for seven years to fund schools and public safety.

The poll showed the other tax measure to fund schools and early childhood education, Proposition 38, was losing, with about 40 percent of Californians in support and nearly 49 percent opposed.

When asked where they would spend the money if either proposition passed, Californians said they would direct funds to restore previous education budget cuts and to prevent further cuts, reflecting low expectations for a state system that has been subject to repeated funding cuts in recent years.

If the tax initiatives fail and further education cuts need to be made, Californians said they would first choose to cut transportation of students to school (33%), increase class sizes (32%) or shorten the school year (31%) over cutting extracurricular sports and music programs (23%) or reducing teacher salaries (17%).

TECHNOLOGY IMPORTANT, BUT NOT A PANACEA

Three in four California voters said public schools should invest more in technology to improve students' classroom performance, and a strong majority favored making online education part of the regular school day.

The PACE/USC Rossier Poll showed more than 56 percent of Californians said students should spend part of each day working independently online and part working with a teacher.

"These findings are quite striking. Although there are now some innovative models in K-12 using online learning for part of the school day, these are still the exception," said David N. Plank, executive director of PACE. "Despite rapid changes in technology, most students continue to sit in classrooms all day long with a teacher standing in front of them, much like they did one hundred years ago. Californians appear to be ready to see this change."

But overall, teachers still trump technology, the poll shows.

While more than 77 percent of Californians say students are savvier about digital technologies than are their teachers, they overwhelmingly agreed (83%) that computers and technology cannot replace a teacher.

Thirty-six percent of Californians said schools should invest in new technologies even if it is at the expense of teacher hiring.

LINGERING STIGMA FOR CAREER-TECHNICAL EDUCATION

In addition to teaching the basics of reading, writing and math, Californians agreed schools need to better prepare students for real-world work out of high school.

A majority of Californians (51%) said the state should fundamentally change its approach to education so students can compete for good jobs, as opposed to 42 percent who said the state should maintain its approach but do a better job schooling students in the basics.

Nine out of 10 Californians said students should graduate high school with the skills to get a job. But at the same time, age-old stigmas about career-technical education seem to persist.

More than 48 percent of Californians agreed with the statement: "Career-technical education is for students who don't do well in school," and 45 percent disagreed.

Nearly 80 percent of Californians agreed with the statement: "Some students just aren't good at academic subjects."

"The poll shows a continued strong stigma associated with career-technical education as being for only certain types of students, stemming from the days when 'vocational' education was used as a vehicle to track poor and minority students into a second-class education," said **Dominic Brewer**, Clifford H. and Betty C. Allen Professor in Urban Leadership at the USC Rossier School. "Although high quality career and technical education is clearly needed to meet California's labor market needs - and the poll shows voters recognize this - overcoming the lingering stigma is an uphill battle."

STATE SCHOOLS IN BAD SHAPE

The PACE/USC Rossier Poll also showed Californians continue to rate the state's education system as being in poor shape, with too much waste and bureaucracy and students not prepared for higher education or work after high school.

On average, Californians gave their state and local schools a grade of "C-."

Nearly 42 percent of Californians graded the state's schools with a "D" or "F" and 26 percent gave their local schools those grades. When the PACE/USC Rossier poll was first conducted in May, just 20 percent of Californians gave their local school a "D" or "F" grade.

Californians were also asked to rank various aspects of the state's public schools on a scale of 0 (worst) to 10 (best).

Respondents gave the best mean score – a 5 – to the question of how the state's schools teach students the basics: reading, writing and math. They gave a mean score of 4.3 for "preparing students for a four-year university" and a mean rating of 4.3 for "holding principals, teachers and parents accountable for student performance."

"The PACE/USC Rossier School of Education Poll is an important new effort to inform policymakers on how Californians understand the challenges facing our education system," said Karen Symms Gallagher, dean of the USC Rossier School. "While Californians are clearly frustrated, the results also give us a blueprint for how the intelligent use of technology - like including online education as part of the school day and training tech-savvy teachers - will help our students better compete in the global economy."

The PACE/USC Rossier Poll was conducted Aug. 3 to 7, 2012 and surveyed 1,041 likely California voters online. The margin of error for the overall sample was +/- 3.0 percentage points.

The poll is the second in a series from Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) and the USC Rossier School. **The first PACE/USC Rossier Poll**, released in May, found Californians strongly believe local school districts should hold more control over how money is spent, and the majority of Californians favored higher spending in poor districts even it meant shifting money away from their neighborhood schools.

About the USC Rossier School of Education

The **USC Rossier School of Education** (ross-EAR) is one of the top-ranked education research institutions in the world, preparing teachers, educational leaders and scholars who are committed to improving learning in urban education locally, nationally and globally. Among its innovative initiatives is USC Hybrid High School, a Los Angeles public charter school designed to serve high-need students at risk of dropping out by providing 12 hours per day, seven days per week, year-round access and personalized blended instruction using up-to-date technology.

About Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE)

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) is an independent, non-partisan research center based at Stanford University, the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Southern California. PACE seeks to define and sustain a long-term strategy for comprehensive policy reform and continuous improvement in performance at all levels of California's education system, from early childhood to post-secondary education and training. PACE bridges the gap between research and policy, working with scholars from California's leading universities and with state and local policymakers to increase the impact of academic research on educational policy in California.

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