

September 3, 2013

To: Interested Parties
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Re: **PACE/USC Rossier School of Education California Statewide Survey Results**

As another school year begins, MFour Research and Tulchin Research recently conducted a survey on education issues among 1,001 registered voters in California on behalf of Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) and the University of Southern California Rossier School of Education. This is the third poll done in this series that focuses on voters' attitudes toward public schools and education policy. This most recent poll covered a variety of education-related topics, including measuring general attitudes toward California's public schools, assessing elected officials' job performance in handling education, views on the impact on Proposition 30, and opinions toward teachers, standardized testing, evaluations, and accountability.

Here we present some of our key topline and demographic findings.

California Voters Strongly Favor Standardized Testing as Means of Evaluating Students and Teachers

There has been a lot of debate at the national and state level about what role standardized tests should play in our educational system, focusing in particular on how often we should test students and how test data should be used. This poll finds that California voters overwhelmingly support the regular use of state standardized tests to measure student performance and favor using student test scores as one important measure of teacher effectiveness.

Strong Support for Testing at All Grade Levels, Testing High School Students on All Subjects

To assess how the public feels about the frequency of testing, this survey asked whether California should test students in each grade or if the state should cut back on testing. Two thirds of voters (66 percent) preferred students be tested in every grade level to ensure they are progressing, while just 22 percent say the state should cut back on testing and test only at certain grade levels. The findings among all voters are largely mirrored among parents of school children as 66 percent of parents support testing students in each grade level to just 25 percent who want to reduce the amount of testing.

<p><i>“California currently tests all students for proficiency in English and Mathematics in Grades 2 through 8, and also in specific subjects, including Algebra, Biology, Chemistry, Geometry, History, Physics, and others during Grades 9 through 12. Which one of the statements below best reflects your view?”</i></p>		
	All Voters	Parents of School Children
California should test students in each grade level to make sure they are progressing	66%	66%
California should cut back on testing and test only at certain grade levels	22%	25%
Neither/I don’t know	12%	9%

This view extends across the political spectrum, with strong majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independent voters favoring testing students in each grade over cutting back on standardized testing.

- Republicans prefer testing at each grade level with 71 percent favoring it to 20 percent who support cutting back.
- Democrats favor testing at each grade level over cutting back on testing by a better than three-to-one margin, with 65 percent of Democrats favoring testing at each grade to just 21 percent who say we should cut back.
- Among those voters registered with no party preference or minor party affiliation, 63 percent favor testing at each grade level to 25 percent who support cutting back on testing.

Further reflecting the broad consensus on this issue, our poll finds testing at each grade is also favored by wide majorities of voters of all ethnic backgrounds.

- The strongest support for testing each grade comes from African American and Latino voters – 74 percent and 68 percent, respectively.
- Caucasian voters also support testing every grade by a margin of 65 percent to 23 percent who would prefer to cut back on testing.
- Asian American voters favor testing each grade by a margin of 63 percent to 22 percent.

We also asked voters specifically about their attitudes toward testing high school students to evaluate student performance in subject areas. This survey found a majority of California voters (55 percent) in favor of testing high school students in all subjects while just over a third (34 percent) said students should only be tested in English and mathematics while allowing teachers to evaluate performance in other subjects. A majority of parents of school children shared this view, albeit by a smaller margin than all voters statewide as 51 percent of parents support testing high school students in all subjects while 42 percent say testing should be limited to English and math.

<i>“California currently tests students in specific high school subjects, including English, Algebra, Biology, Chemistry, Geometry, History, Physics and others. Which of the statements below best reflects your view?”</i>		
	All Voters	Parents of School Children
California should test high school students in all subjects	55%	51%
California should test high school students in English and mathematics, and let teachers evaluate their students in other specific subjects	34%	42%
Neither/I don’t know	12%	7%

Overwhelming Support for Using Student Test Performance to Evaluate Teacher Performance

The poll also finds overwhelming support for using student performance on standardized tests as an important element of evaluating teacher effectiveness. More than eight in ten California voters (81 percent) believe students’ standardized test scores should be a factor at least on some level when evaluating teachers to just 10 percent who say test scores should not be a factor at all.

Asked how teachers should be evaluated, a plurality of voters (43 percent) say evaluations should be based equally on student standardized test performance, classroom performance assessments and peer evaluations, while 30 percent would use test scores as criteria but base evaluations mostly on performance assessments and peer evaluation, and eight percent favor evaluating teachers mostly on student test performance.

<i>“When classroom teachers are evaluated for their performance for the purpose of professional punishment or reward, what do you think these evaluations should be based on:”</i>		
	All Voters	Parents of School Children
Mostly on student standardized test performance, but some classroom performance assessment and peer evaluations	8%	9%
Equally on student standardized test performance, classroom performance assessments and peer evaluations	43%	43%
Some student standardized test performance, but mostly classroom performance assessments and peer evaluations	30%	29%
Only on classroom performance assessments and peer evaluations; no student standardized test performance	10%	12%
Neither/I don’t know	9%	7%

Voters View Teachers as Key to a School's Success, Want Tools to Strengthen Teacher Performance and Hold Teachers Accountable for School Quality

This poll finds that voters believe teachers play a critical role in a child's education and the success and failure of a school. In this context, the survey finds support for efforts to improve the quality of teaching in our schools by holding teachers to high accountability standards, rewarding high-performing teachers, and providing support and training for teachers who are struggling.

Asked what the most influential factor is when determining whether a public school is "good" or "bad", California voters rank the quality of teachers and staff first, with 42 percent of voters, and 40 percent of parents with school age children identifying this as most significant. Performance Index (API) or Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) scores ranked a distant second, at 15% among all voters, but a higher 23 percent among parents.

Voters support high standards for teachers, including using student standardized test performance to evaluate teacher effectiveness, and also support providing incentives and assistance to help teachers meet those standards.

- A majority of voters (52 percent) believe that the quality of education in California public schools would be improved by paying classroom teachers who exceed performance standards more than we pay other teachers who do not, while 21 percent of voters say this would make things worse. One out of six voters (17 percent) felt it wouldn't make a difference and nine percent did not have an opinion.
- Voters prefer assisting struggling teachers over punishing them as a plurality (42 percent) of voters prefer providing additional support and training to struggling teachers over making it easier to fire teachers who "repeatedly fail to perform at acceptable levels" (29 percent). We should note that 19 percent responded "neither" and the remaining 10 percent were undecided.

However, California voters hold teachers accountable for a school's success or failure, with nearly half of voters (48 percent) saying teachers are largely to blame when a school performs badly or fails, followed by 28 percent who largely blame parents and 25 percent who largely blame the local school board. And when asked what would have the most positive impact on public schools, "removing bad teachers from the classroom" tops the list (43 percent), followed by "more involvement from parents" (33 percent), and "more money for school districts and schools" (25 percent). Interestingly, parents of school children rank more money for schools (33 percent) ahead of more parental involvement (26 percent).

Voters Favor Local Responsibility for Determining and Delivering on School Performance Standards

Voters overwhelmingly believe that authority and responsibility for school performance should rest in the hands of local teachers and school boards and not with state government.

Nearly half of voters (49 percent) say the main responsibility for ensuring student success should rest with local educators and another 28 percent say it should rest with parents and local school districts to just 23 percent who say the main responsibility should rest with the State Legislature and State Board of Education.

This preference for local responsibility and control extends across party lines. Furthermore, pluralities – regardless of party affiliation – of voters prefer to assign the main responsibility for student success to professional educators. However, more Republicans than Democrats favor assigning the main responsibility to parents and local school districts while more Democrats than Republicans prefer assigning that responsibility to the state government.

- Among Republicans, 43 percent would assign the main responsibility for student success to professional educators, 37 percent say parents and local school districts, and 20 percent choose state government.
- Among Democrats, 54 percent say local educators should be assigned the main responsibility for ensuring student success, 20 percent say parents and the local school district, and 27 percent say the State Legislature and State Board of Education.
- Among voters registered with no party preference or with a minor party, 47 percent say professional educators, 31 percent who say parents and local school districts, and 22 percent who say state government.

When asked who should be most responsible for deciding whether a school is succeeding or failing, voters again overwhelmingly prefer local control with 40 percent of voters saying local school boards should decide and 20 percent saying local parents should decide. Just 14 percent of voters said this power should rest with state government and only four percent thought the federal government should have this responsibility. Views of parents largely mirrored those of voters statewide and did not place much more responsibility on themselves.

<i>“Policy makers must decide whether a school is doing a good job or a bad job educating students. If the school is doing a bad job; they need to decide how to improve the school’s performance, or possibly close the school. Who do you think should be most responsible for deciding whether a school is doing a good job or a bad job educating it students?”</i>	
Federal government	4%
State government	14%
Local school board	40%
Parents	20%
Teachers	11%
Someone else	4%
I don’t know	7%

[Jury Still Out on Brown’s Education Accomplishments](#)

While President Barak Obama and Governor Jerry Brown enjoy positive job approval ratings among California voters, opinions shift considerably for Governor Brown when voters are specifically asked how each is handling education.

Overall, the President enjoys a net approval/disapproval advantage among California voters of 15 percentage points, including a total of 57 percent of voters approving how the President is handling his job. Similarly, Governor Brown enjoys a net approval/disapproval advantage of 19 percent, with 55 percent of voters approving how the Governor is handling his job overall.

However, when asked how Governor Brown has handled education in California, a plurality of voters (46 percent) say they **disapprove** compared to 42 percent of voters said they approve of Brown's work dealing with the state's public schools. This represents a net 23-percentage point drop from Brown's overall approval rating.

By contrast, the President's approval ratings remain fairly stable in terms of how voters view the job when addressing education, as a majority of voters (51 percent) approve of how he is handling education in the U.S.; just a net four-percentage point decline from his overall approval ratings.

Governor Brown Sees Drop-Off from Overall Job Approval to Job Approval on Education			
	Net Job Approval Rating	Net Job Approval on Education	Job Approval – Job Approval on Education
President Barack Obama	+15	+11	-4
Governor Jerry Brown	+19	-4	-23

When looking at the drop between the Governor Brown's overall job approval ratings and his education job approval ratings, much of the decrease in support occurs among his traditional base voters: African Americans drop 23 points; Democrats drop 19 points; liberals drop 18 points; union households drop 17 points; and female approval drops 16 points.

Interestingly, the drop is less pronounced among female voters who have kids in school, compared with those who do not: Approval among moms with kids in school drops nine points; Approval among females with no kids at all drops 16%; and approval from moms who no longer have kids in school drops 22 points.

Most voters also said they were not familiar with new education policies Brown and the state Legislature have enacted in the last year.

Sixty-three percent of voters said they were "not aware" of the new funding formula that gives school districts more control over how they spend money and allocates more money to needy districts compared to three in ten who are aware of this new policy.

After reading statements both in support of and opposition to the new funding formula plan, voters are evenly split, with 30 percent agreeing with supporters saying it's a good idea, 31 percent agreeing with opponents saying it's a bad idea, 18 percent agreeing with neither, and 21 percent saying they don't know. Parents of school age children are slightly more against this approach, agreeing with opponents by a margin of 37 percent to 31 percent.

<i>“Not everyone agrees with Governor Brown’s Local Control Funding Formula approach. Please read the following statements and indicate which you agree with most:”</i>		
	All Voters	Parents of School Children
Mary says the Governor’s Local Control Funding Formula plan is a good idea because all California public schools will get more money than they received last year, but school districts with the highest concentrations of high-needs students will get additional funds to spend as they need, because concentrating funds on these critical school districts will have the greatest impact.	30%	31%
Sally says the Governor’s Local Control Funding Formula is a bad idea because only some school districts will benefit while other districts, even if they have high-needs students and middle class communities that saw substantial cuts during the recession, won’t get any of the additional funds. California education dollars should be shared equally among all school districts, not a select few.	31%	37%
Neither	18%	16%
I don’t know	21%	17%

When asked about California’s implementation of the Common Core State Standards, 71 percent of voters said they knew little or nothing about it, with these attitudes fairly consistent across gender, party and age lines. However, parents with children in school were nearly nine percentage points more likely to be aware of Common Core State Standards than other voters.

While four times as many voters believe Proposition 30 – a temporary sales tax and income tax hike to fund education – has helped public schools (20 percent) than hurt public schools (5 percent), just over half of voters (54 percent), said the measure has had no effect on public schools and 22 percent said they didn’t know if it has had an impact. Parents of schools age children were statistically no more likely than voters statewide to view Prop 30 as having a positive impact on public schools. We should note that these perceptions have a somewhat partisan bent, as older Republican men were most likely to believe Prop. 30 had no impact.

<i>“Last year California voters passed Proposition 30, which increased state sales taxes by one-quarter of a percent for four years and increased income taxes for seven years on those earning more than \$250,000. Most of the money raised by these tax increases was intended for education. From what you can see, has the passage of Prop. 30...”</i>	
Helped public schools	20%
Hurt public schools	5%
Had no effect	54%
I don’t know	22%

Nevertheless, there are signs that voters are becoming slightly more optimistic about public education.

When asked about the state’s public schools, 13 percent of voters said they have “gotten better,” as compared to 7 percent who agreed with this statement in last year’s PACE/USC Rossier Poll. Forty-nine percent said state schools have “gotten worse,” as compared to 57 percent in 2012. Parents are relatively more optimistic than voters statewide as 19 percent of parents believe schools have gotten better while half (50 percent) say they have gotten worse and 27 percent feel they have stayed the same.

<i>“In the past few years, would you say California public schools have gotten better, worse, or have stayed about the same?”</i>		
	August 2013	August 2012
Gotten better	13%	7%
Gotten worse	49%	57%
Stayed the same	30%	27%
I don’t know	9%	9%

Brown Leads Potential Republican Challengers

We asked voters about whom they would vote for in the 2014 gubernatorial election and found Democratic incumbent Jerry Brown with a substantial lead in match-ups with possible Republican opponents. Pitted against former Lt. Governor Abel Maldonado, Brown leads Maldonado by a margin of 42 percent to 21 percent. Facing Assemblyman Tim Donnelly, Brown leads Donnelly 43 percent to 21 percent. And in a race against businessman Neel Kashkari, Brown leads with 44 percent of the voter to 15 percent for Kashkari.

<i>“If the election for Governor were held today between the following two candidates, who would you be more likely to support:”</i>	
Governor Jerry Brown, a Democrat	42%
Businessman and former Lt. Governor Abel Maldonado, a Republican	21%
A third party candidate	7%
I can't say	30%
Brown - Maldonado	+21
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Governor Jerry Brown, a Democrat	43%
Assemblyman Tim Donnelly, a Republican	21%
A third party candidate	7%
I can't say	29%
Brown – Donnelly	+22
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Governor Jerry Brown, a Democrat	44%
Businessman Neel Kashkari, a Republican	15%
A third party candidate	8%
I can't say	33%
Brown – Kashkari	+29

Survey Methodology: The PACE/USC Rossier Poll was conducted August 27-30, 2013 by MFour Research and Tulchin Research and surveyed 1,001 registered California voters. The poll was conducted online and allowed respondents to complete the survey on a desktop or laptop computer, tablet or smartphone. The poll was conducted in English and Spanish. The margin of error for the overall sample is +/- 3.5 percentage points.