

SCHOOL CHOICE  
**SURVEY**  
IN THE STATE

# SURVEY

## Oklahoma's Opinion on K-12 Education and School Choice



**School Choice for Oklahoma:**

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 Oklahoma children, it is critical to know the facts and to have a good understanding of public opinion.

This scientifically representative poll of 1,200 likely Oklahoma voters measures public opinion on a range of K-12 education issues including school choice.

Prepared By:  
Paul DiPerna

Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice

June 2008

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.

# **Oklahoma's Opinion on K-12 Education and School Choice**

Prepared By:

**Paul DiPerna**

Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice

Poll taken by:

**Strategic Vision**

**June 2008**

## About the Author



Paul DiPerna ([paul@friedmanfoundation.org](mailto:paul@friedmanfoundation.org)) is a director of partner services for the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, an organization dedicated to educating the public on the issue of school choice. He joined the Friedman Foundation in September 2006. DiPerna directs the organization's state polling series and leads grantmaking and direct service activities in more than a dozen states. He previously served as assistant director for the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution, working there for more than six years. DiPerna was a research analyst for the first five issues of the Brown Center Report on American Education (2000-2004), and managed the activities of the National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education (2001-2005).

DiPerna takes a special interest in Internet activity, particularly in terms of discovering and coordinating information, mobilizing people, building social networks, improving organization and management, and amplifying fundraising activities. 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*. DiPerna has authored a chapter in the forthcoming *Handbook of Web Log Analysis*, to be published in late 2008 by Idea Group Publishing.

## About Strategic Vision



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Strategic Vision is an Atlanta-headquartered public relations and public affairs agency with a division that specializes in polling. The public affairs team is knowledgeable about politics, issues, and current events throughout the nation. Strategic Vision operates nationally, and its polls have been used by MSNBC, 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 and Survey USA.

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## Executive Summary

This scientifically representative poll of 1,200 likely Oklahoma voters measures 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 their public institutions, leaders, innovative ideas, and the current K-12 power and priority structure.

In particular, Oklahomans have shared with us their views about “school choice” in the forms of tax-credit scholarships, school vouchers, charter schools and virtual schools. Results imply that voters like the idea of customizing the school selection process in a way that best meets the needs of a child and his or her family.

So how high is the support for school choice reforms? Percentages favoring tax-credit scholarships, school vouchers, and charter schools are consistently in the 50s—generally and across nearly all subgroups. In some cases, favorability to a particular school choice reform reaches the 60s. For example, 60 percent of African-Americans favor a scholarship granting system funded through business tax credits; 63 percent of African-Americans like charter schools; and 63 percent of Hispanics favor “allowing students and parents to choose any school, public or private, to attend using public funds.”

School choice is not a partisan issue among voters in Oklahoma. Favorability spans political parties and political self-identification. Democrats, Independents, and Republicans favor publicly funded scholarship granting systems (through business or individual tax credits), school vouchers, and charter schools. Proportions are very similar across these subgroups on school choice-related questions. In some cases, support is extraordinarily high: 61 percent of Democrats favor tax-credit scholarship legislation; 60 percent of Republicans and 58 percent of Independents favor a scholarship granting system funded through individual tax credits; and all three political groups are more likely to vote for rather than against a candidate who supports a tax-credit scholarship policy.

A total of 1,200 phone interviews were conducted by Strategic Vision, between April 25 and April 27, 2008. The margin of error for the full sample of likely voters is  $\pm 3$  percentage points; the margin of error is higher when considering the response percentages for a given demographic subgroup.

Key findings include:

- **About two-fifths of Oklahoma voters are not satisfied with the state's current public school system—41 percent rate Oklahoma's public school system as “poor” or “fair.”** Excluding the one of five voters who are undecided, this proportion rises to 51 percent.
- **Nearly two out of three Oklahomans are content with current levels of public school funding.** A large majority of voters (64 percent) say Oklahoma's level of public school funding is either “too high” or “about right.” At least 67 percent of the poll's respondents underestimate the state's actual per-pupil funding, which suggests that the funding satisfaction level is probably a conservative figure.
- **More than four out of five Oklahomans would prefer to send their child to a school other than a regular public school—only 17 percent say a regular public school is their top choice.** This low figure is consistent with what we have learned from previous state polls asking the same question, most recently in Idaho (12 percent), Tennessee (15 percent), Nevada (11 percent), and Illinois (19 percent).

- **Oklahoma voters value private schools—they are more than twice as likely to prefer sending their child to a private school over any other school type.** When asked “what type of school would you select in order to obtain the best education for your child?” **41 percent** of respondents selected private schools. This finding is consistent with other recent state polls asking the same question: Idaho (39 percent), Tennessee (37 percent), Nevada (48 percent), and Illinois (39 percent).
- **Oklahomans like having a range of schooling options.** Majorities express support for school vouchers (**53 percent**) and charter schools (**54 percent**), with many also open to virtual schools (**40 percent**), even though nearly a third of respondents stated they “have never heard of virtual, cyber, or online schools.”
- **School choice is not a partisan issue among likely voters.** There is solid potential for building bridges between Democrats (D), Republicans (R), and Independents (I). Voters who identify themselves differently in terms of political affiliation are likely to have common views on various school choice reforms and policies spanning **charter schools** (D: 52 percent | R: 56 percent | I: 55 percent), **virtual schools** (D: 38 percent | R: 40 percent | I: 42 percent), **school vouchers** (D: 53 percent | R: 54 percent | I: 53 percent), or a generic **public-funded school choice system** (D: 55 percent | R: 53 percent | I: 56 percent).
- **More than half of voters are favorable to a tax-credit scholarship system.** When asked “if a proposal were made in Oklahoma to create a tax-credit scholarship system,” **54 percent** say they favor a scholarship system funded by business charitable donations. A slightly higher figure (**57 percent**) say they favor a scholarship system funded by individual charitable donations.
- **Likely voters view recent tax-credit scholarship legislation positively—58 percent say they are favorable to such school choice legislation.** Majorities cut across Democrats (**61 percent**), Republicans (**55 percent**), and Independents (**53 percent**).
- **Oklahomans are more likely to vote for a state representative, state senator or governor who supports a tax-credit scholarship system.** Nearly twice as many voters say they are “more likely” (**21 percent**) rather than “less likely” (**11 percent**) to vote for such a candidate. Independents are nearly five times more likely to vote for a person supporting tax-credit scholarships (**23 percent vs. 5 percent**).
- **Knowledge about school vouchers is at a low baseline in Oklahoma—there is an information deficit about this type of system reform.** Although a majority of Oklahoma’s likely voters (**55 percent**) said they were either “very familiar” or “somewhat familiar” with school vouchers, there is still a lot of potential for educating citizens on the issue. This figure is comparable to what has been measured in other states such as Idaho (59 percent), Tennessee (45 percent), Nevada (55 percent), and Illinois (51 percent).



## Methodology

This survey provides a statistically valid representation of the views of likely Oklahoma voters. A total of 1,200 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 plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Strategic Vision conducted phone interviews of a random sample of registered Oklahoma voters from its call center. Random Digit Dial (RDD) samples were produced by Survey Sampling International (SSI) from a sampling frame that includes all active telephone area codes and exchanges in the United States.

SSI starts with a database of all listed telephone numbers, updated on a four- to six-week rolling basis, 25 percent of listings at a time. All active blocks—contiguous groups of 100 phone numbers for which more than one residential number is listed—are added to this database. Blocks and exchanges that include only listed business numbers are excluded.

A set of screening questions were used to determine past voting behavior and likely voting in 2008. Respondents were asked whether they had 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.

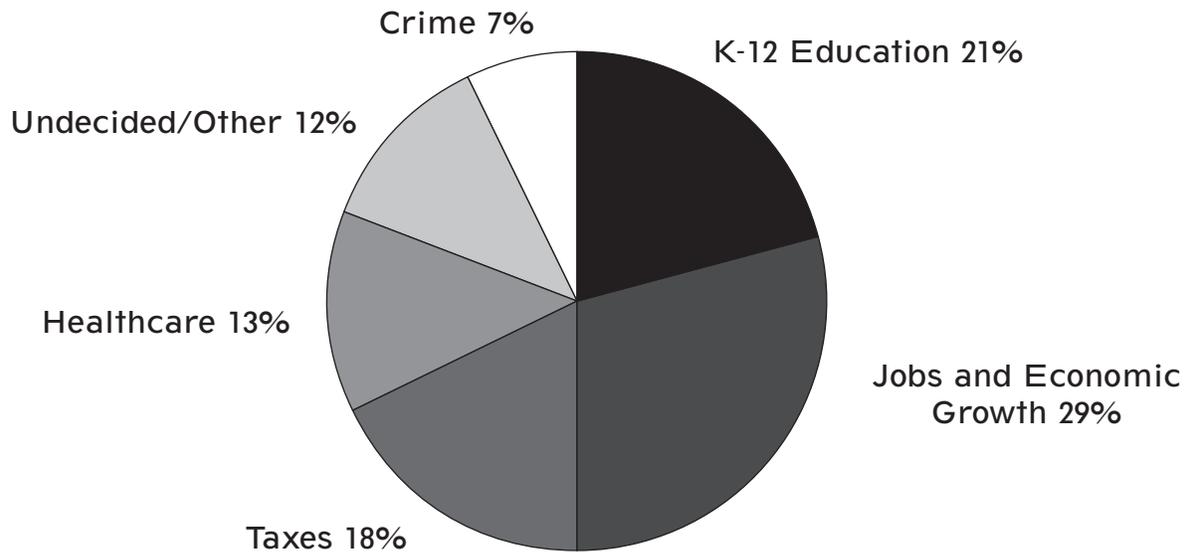
All phone interviews were conducted by live callers, from April 25 to 27, 2008. A total of 4,141 calls were made in Oklahoma. Of these calls 612 were disconnected, non-residential, or inactive numbers; 1,603 were refusals; 512 did not qualify as voters; 214 did not complete the survey, but began the survey.

**The author of this report takes sole responsibility for any errors or misrepresentations.**

# Findings

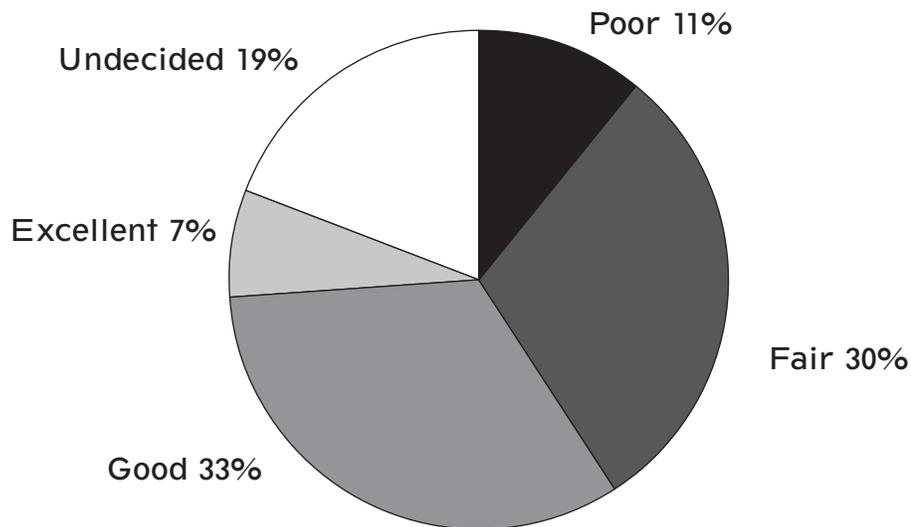
The following are the results of the survey.

1. I am going to name several issues facing the State of Oklahoma, 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 Oklahoma's public school system? \_\_\_\_\_



**Demographic Perspectives**

**DISSATISFIED VOTERS\* (n=492)**

42% prefer private schools over other school types; 18% prefer regular public schools

51% favor public-funded school choice (implicit voucher question #16)

55% favor school vouchers (explicit voucher question #34); 47% are unfamiliar with school vouchers

54% favor charter schools; 41% are unfamiliar with charter schools

39% favor virtual schools; 61% are unfamiliar with virtual schools

56% favor business-funded tax-credit scholarships

58% favor individual-funded tax-credit scholarships

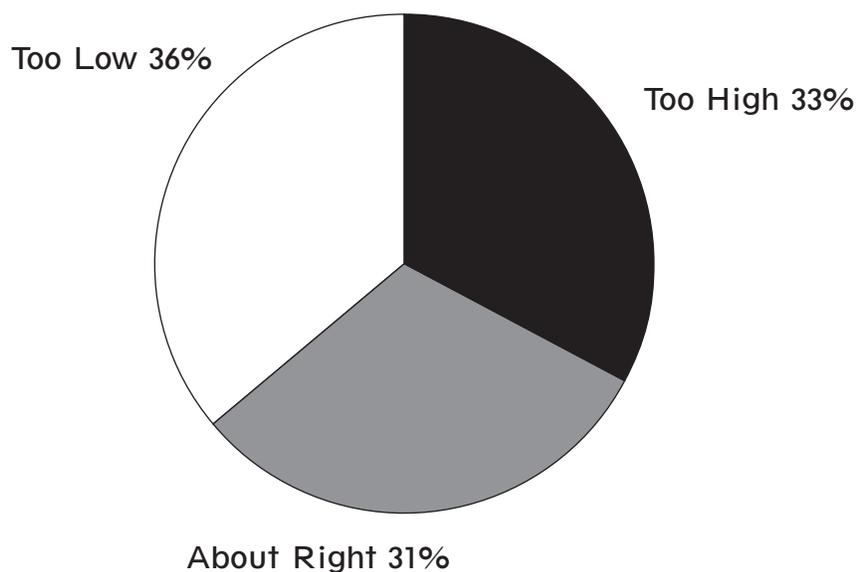
58% agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships

54% agree in principle with needs-tested eligibility of scholarships

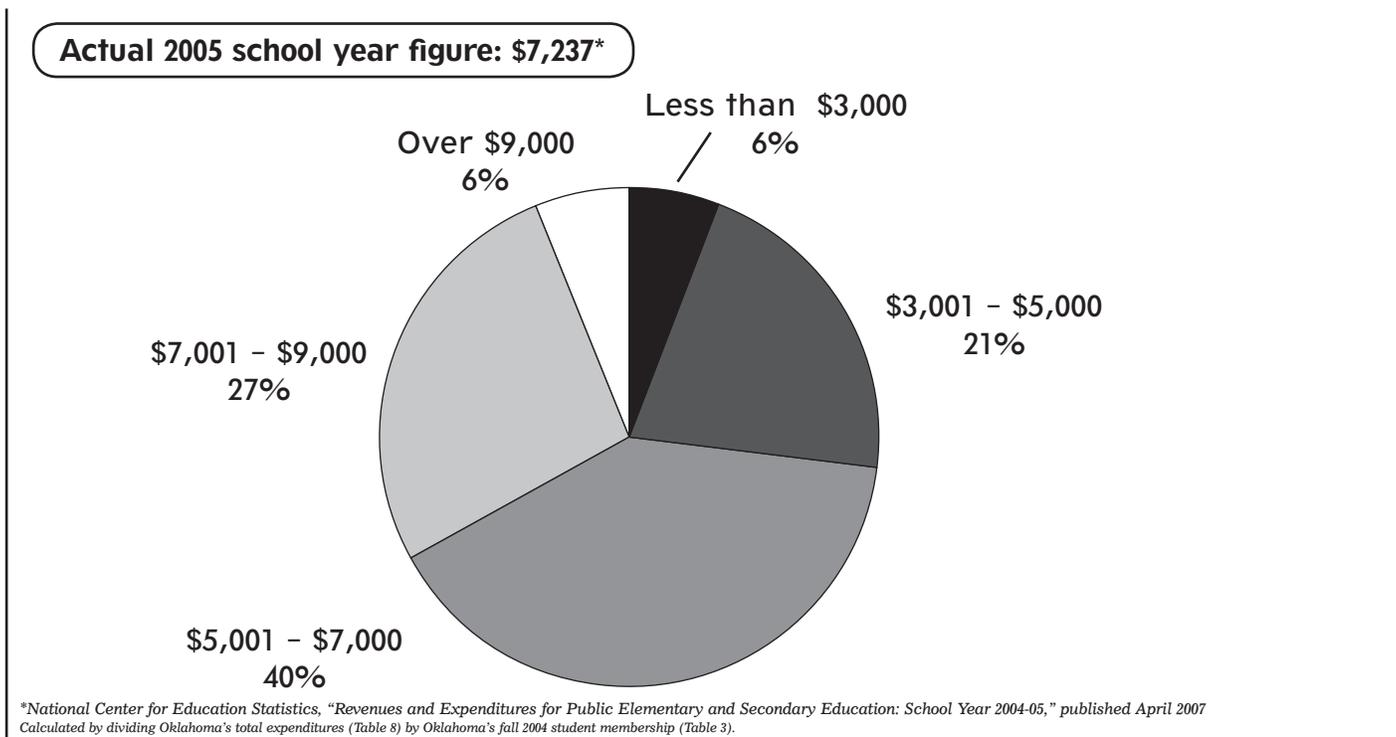
55% favor tax-credit scholarship legislation

**Dissatisfied voters are more than twice as likely (25%) rather than unlikely (10%) to vote for a candidate who supports a tax-credit scholarship policy.**

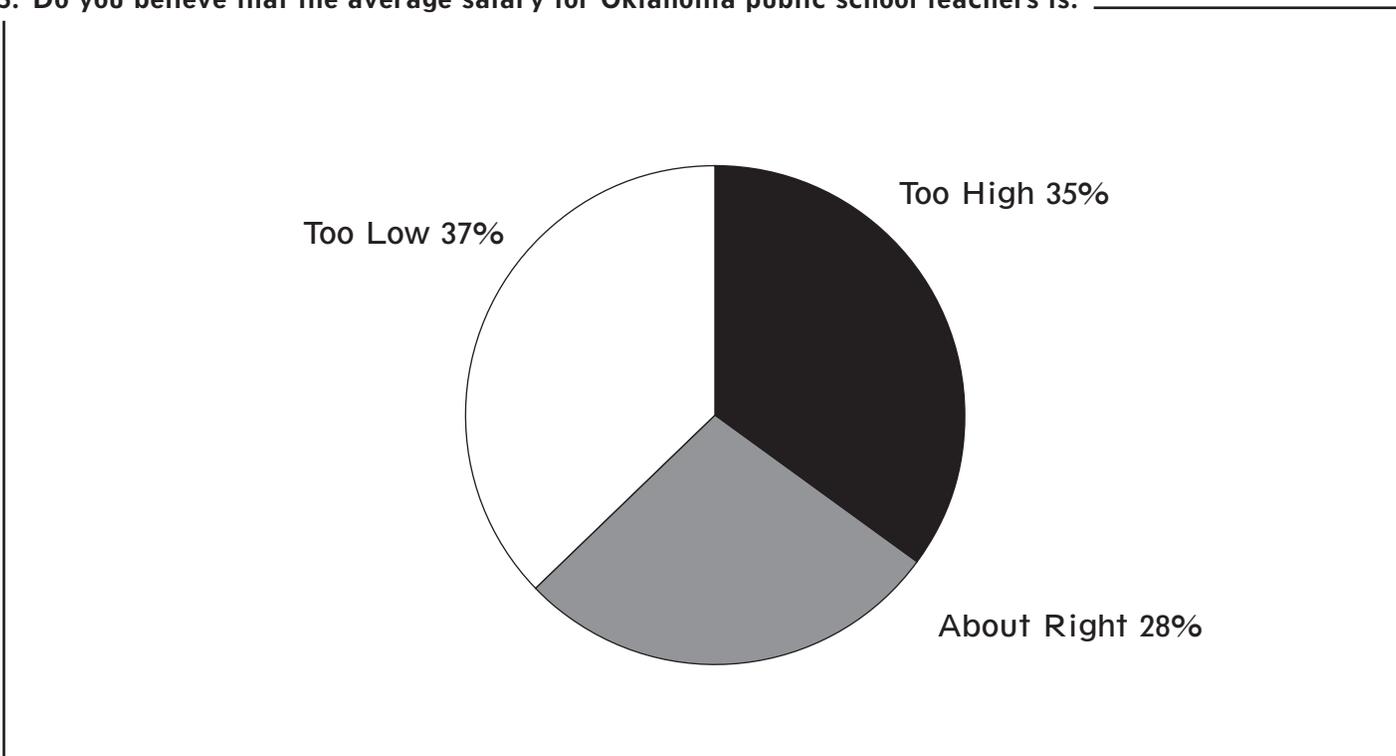
3. Do you believe that public school funding in Oklahoma is at a level that is: \_\_\_\_\_



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



5. Do you believe that the average salary for Oklahoma public school teachers is:



**Demographic Perspectives**

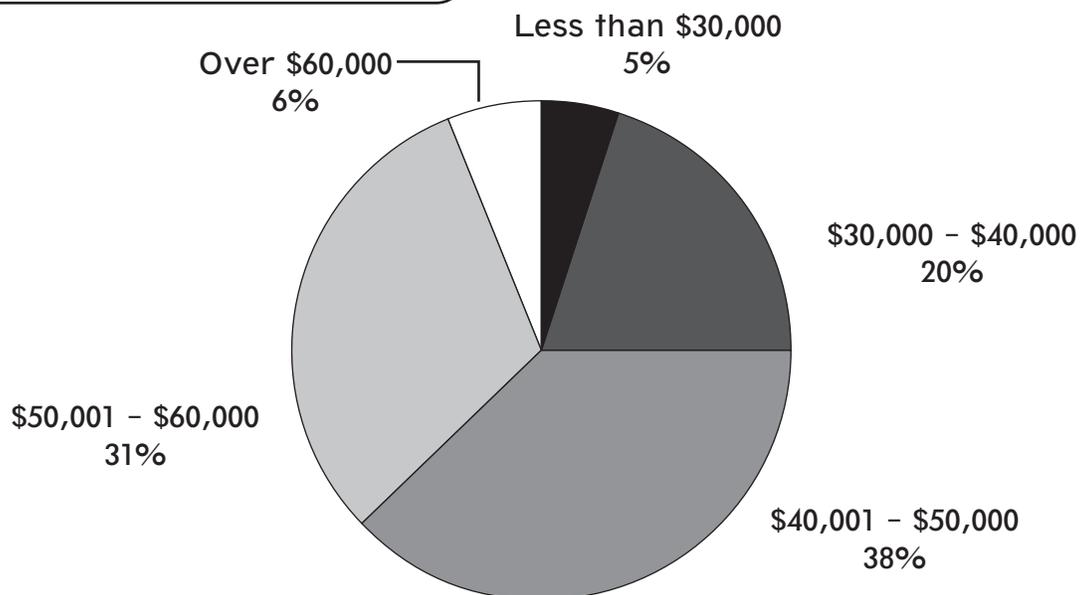
**K-12 PARENTS (n=936)**

- 42% prefer private schools over other school types; 16% prefer regular public schools
- 55% favor public-funded school choice (implicit voucher question #16)
- 52% favor school vouchers (explicit voucher question #34); 45% are unfamiliar with school vouchers
- 54% favor charter schools; 43% are unfamiliar with charter schools
- 39% favor virtual schools; 59% are unfamiliar with virtual schools
- 53% favor business-funded tax-credit scholarships
- 56% favor individual-funded tax-credit scholarships
- 57% agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships
- 57% agree in principle with needs-tested eligibility of scholarships
- 58% favor tax-credit scholarship legislation

**K-12 Parents are nearly twice as likely (22%) rather than unlikely (12%) to vote for a candidate who supports a tax-credit scholarship policy.**

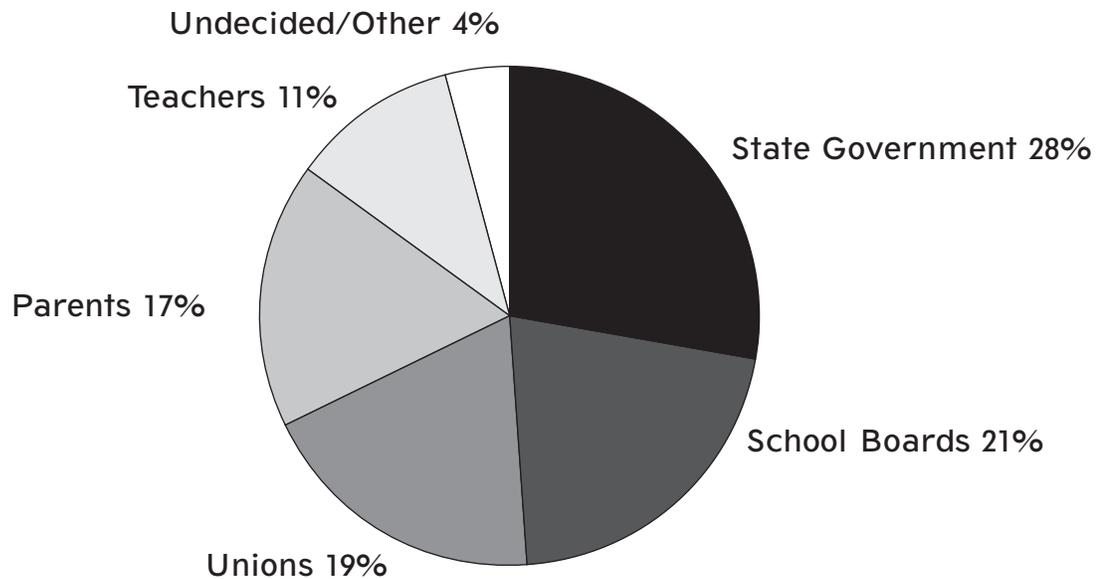
**6. Approximately how much do you think is the average salary for Oklahoma public school teachers?**

**Actual 2005 school year figure: \$37,141\***



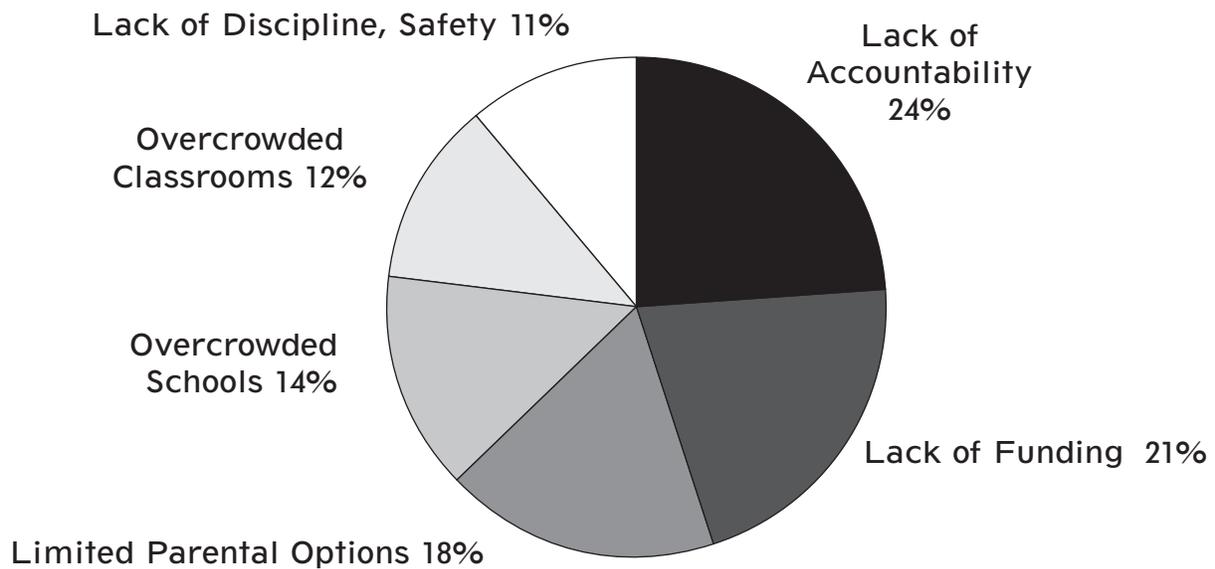
\*National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2006, published July 2007

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



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

8. What do you see as the biggest challenge confronting Oklahoma's public school system?



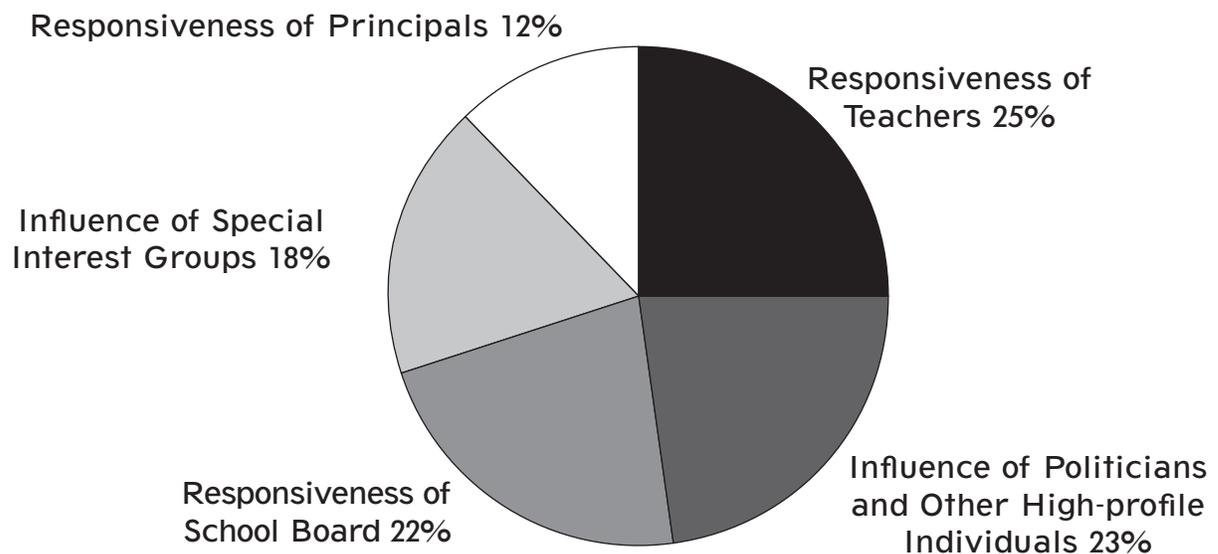
The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

**Demographic Perspectives**

**DEMOCRATS (n = 564)**

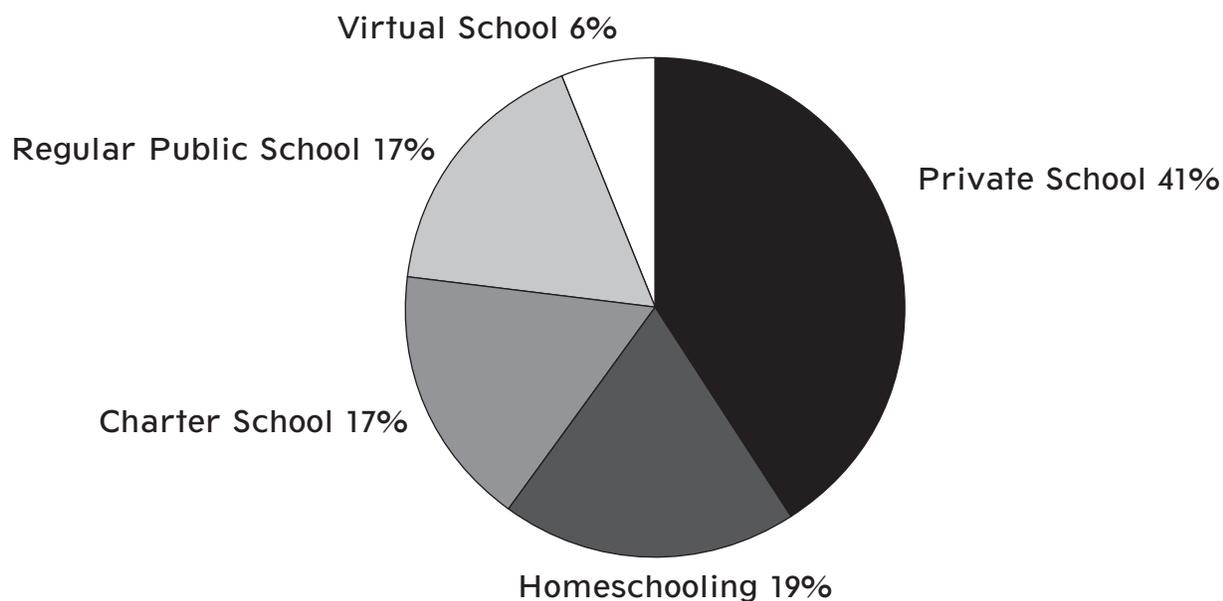
- 43% prefer private schools over other school types; 16% prefer regular public schools
  - 55% favor public-funded school choice (implicit voucher question #16)
  - 53% favor school vouchers (explicit voucher question #34); 43% are unfamiliar with school vouchers
  - 52% favor charter schools; 45% are unfamiliar with charter schools
  - 38% favor virtual schools; 61% are unfamiliar with virtual schools
  - 51% favor business-funded tax-credit scholarships
  - 53% favor individual-funded tax-credit scholarships
  - 53% agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships
  - 60% agree in principle with needs-tested eligibility of scholarships
  - 61% favor tax-credit scholarship legislation
- Democrats are nearly twice as likely (20%) rather than unlikely (12%) to be swayed to vote for a candidate who supports a tax-credit scholarship policy.**

**9. What do you see as the biggest challenge confronting Oklahoma parents who have school-age children?**



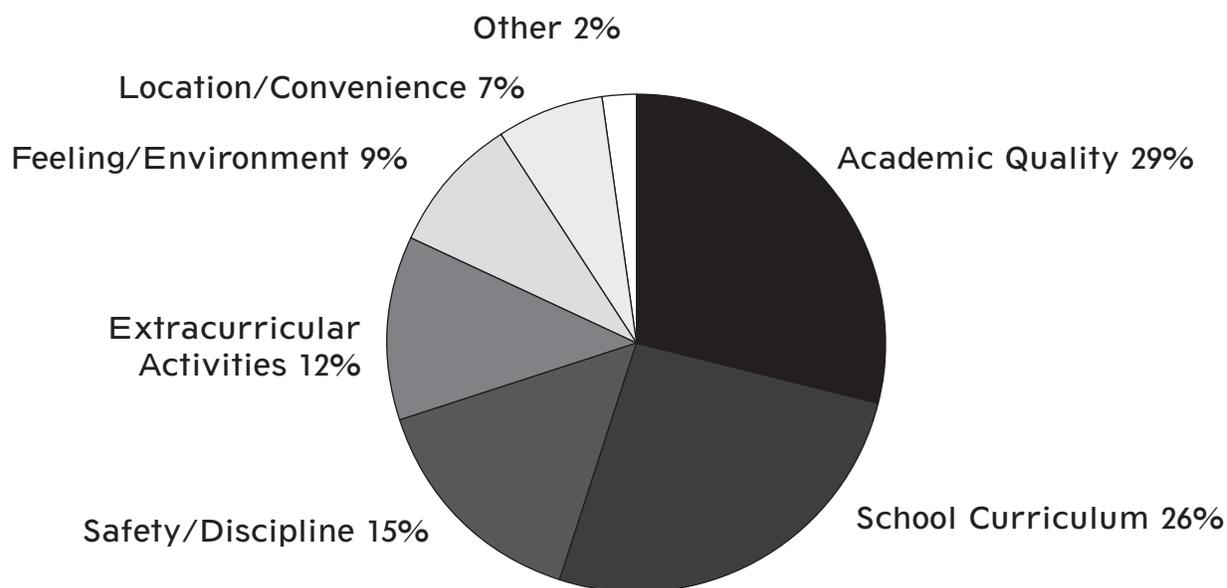
*The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.*

10. If it were 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.*

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



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

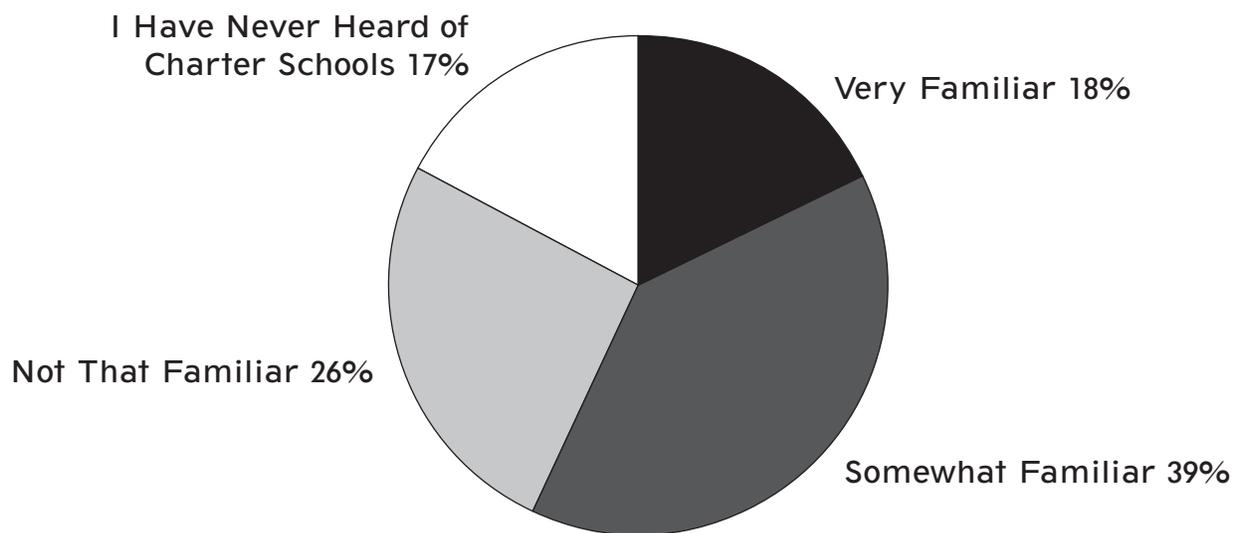
**Demographic Perspectives**

**INDEPENDENTS (n=120)**

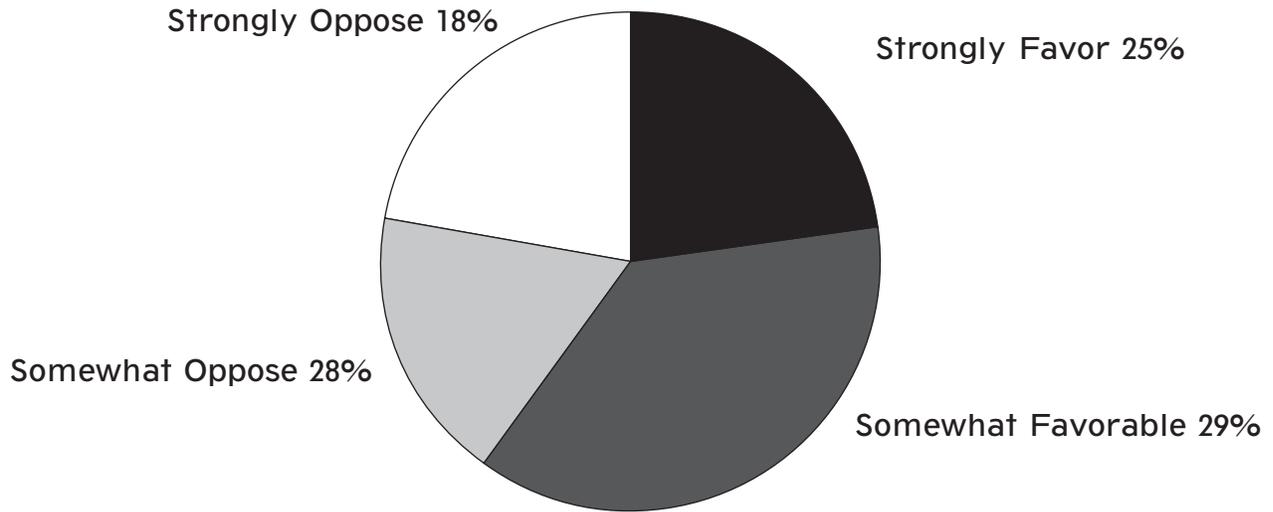
- 32% prefer private schools over other school types; 22% prefer regular public schools
- 56% favor public-funded school choice (implicit voucher question #16)
- 53% favor school vouchers (explicit voucher question #34); 49% are unfamiliar with school vouchers
- 55% favor charter schools; 44% are unfamiliar with charter schools
- 42% favor virtual schools; 53% are unfamiliar with virtual schools
- 54% favor business-funded tax-credit scholarships
- 58% favor individual-funded tax-credit scholarships
- 59% agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships
- 51% agree in principle with needs-tested eligibility of scholarships
- 53% favor tax-credit scholarship legislation

**Independents are nearly five-times as likely (23%) rather than unlikely (5%) to vote for a candidate who supports a tax-credit scholarship policy.**

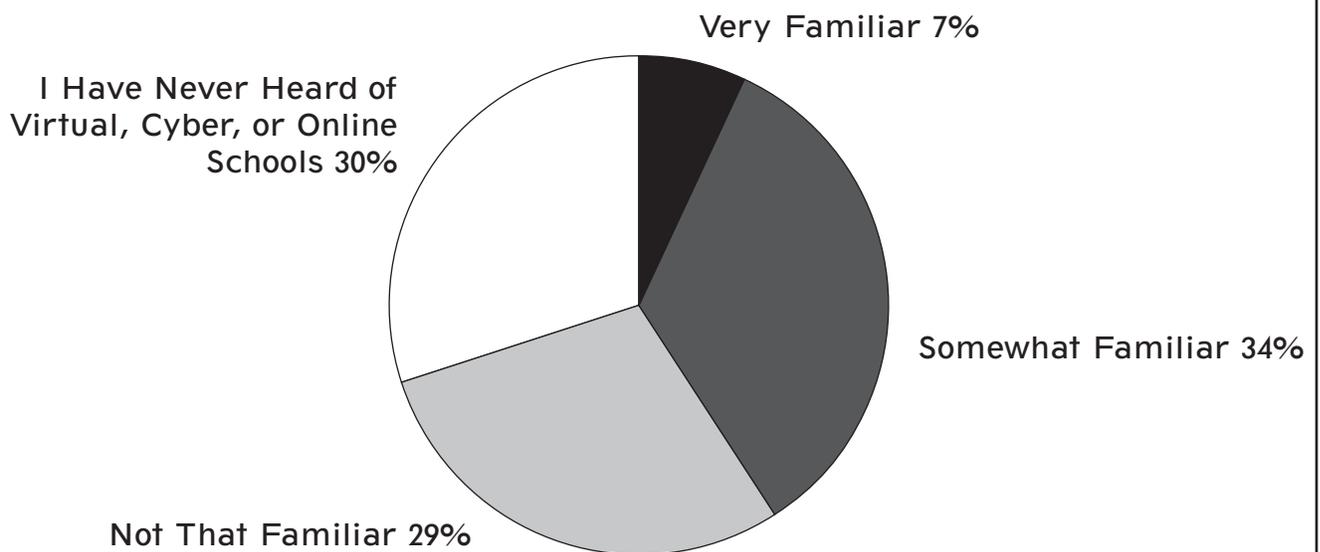
**12. How familiar are you with charter schools in K-12 education?**



13. Charter schools are public schools that have more control over their own budget, staff, and curriculum, and are free from many existing public school regulations. In general, do you favor or oppose this idea?



14. How familiar are you with "virtual schools" in K-12 education? These schools are sometimes called "cyber schools" and "online schools".



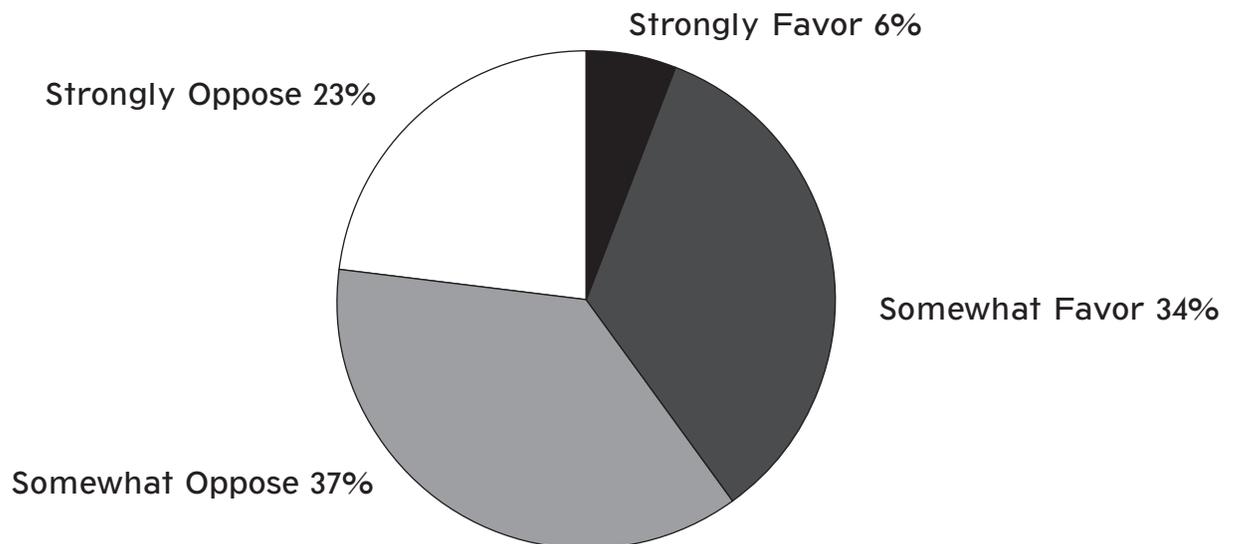
**Demographic Perspectives**

**REPUBLICANS (n = 480)**

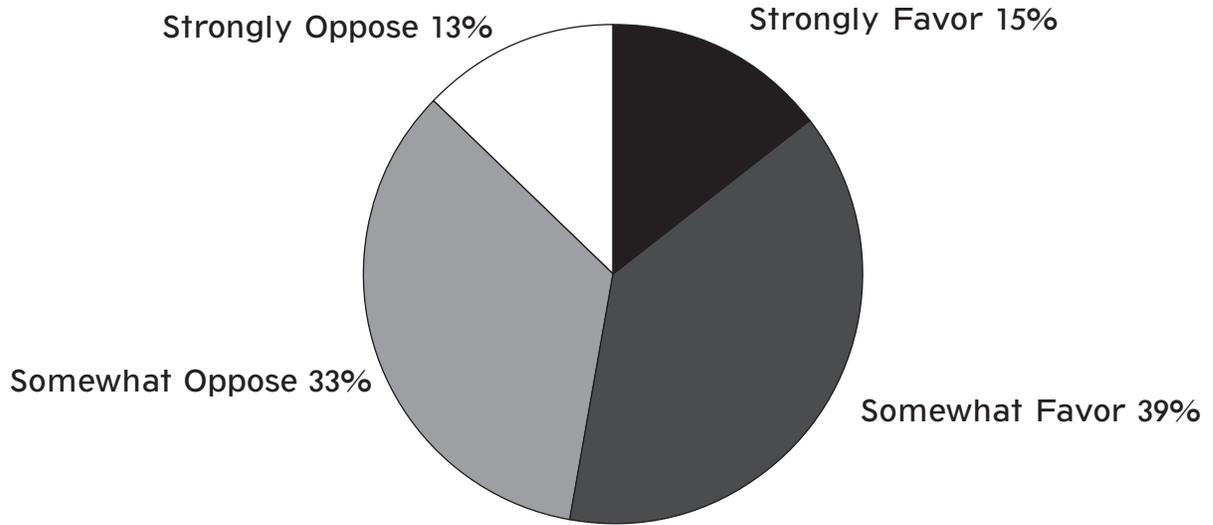
- 40% prefer private schools over other school types; 18% prefer regular public schools
- 53% favor public-funded school choice (implicit voucher question #16)
- 54% favor school vouchers (explicit voucher question #34); 47% are unfamiliar with school vouchers
- 56% favor charter schools, 41% are unfamiliar with charter schools
- 40% favor virtual schools, 59% are unfamiliar with virtual schools
- 57% favor business-funded tax-credit scholarships
- 60% favor individual-funded tax-credit scholarships
- 57% agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships
- 57% agree in principle with needs-tested eligibility of scholarships
- 55% favor tax-credit scholarship legislation

**Republicans are nearly twice as likely (21%) rather than unlikely (12%) to vote for a candidate who supports a tax-credit scholarship policy.**

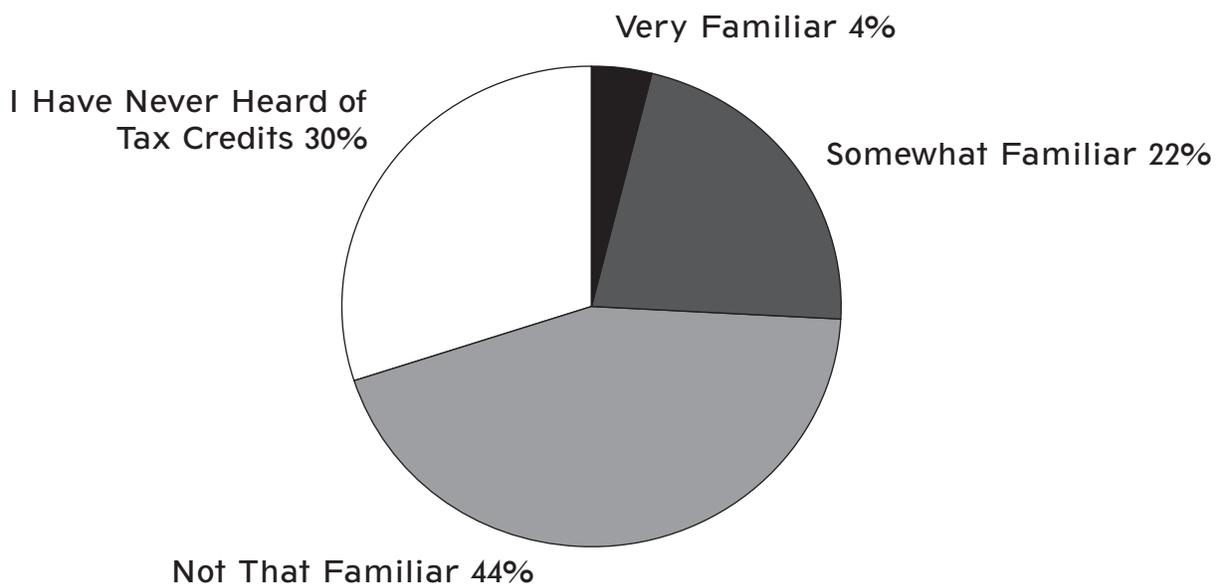
15. Virtual schools can be public or private schools that allow elementary, middle, and high school students to work with their curriculum and teachers over the Internet, rather than a traditional classroom. In general, do you favor or oppose this kind of idea? \_\_\_\_\_



16. Would you favor allowing students and parents to choose any school, public or private, to attend using public funds?



17. How familiar are you with how "tax credits" work?



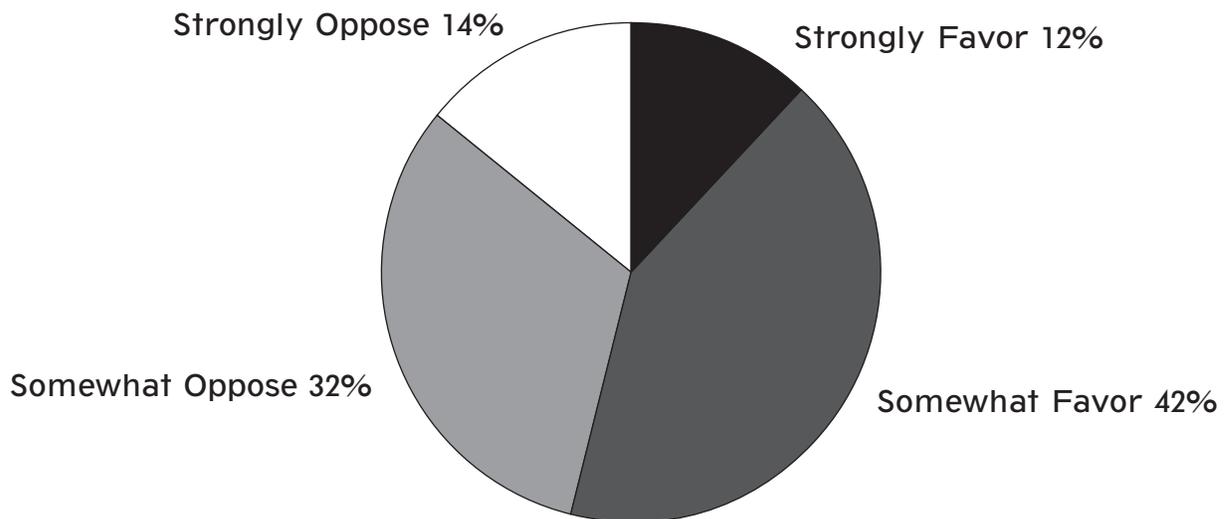
**Demographic Perspectives**

**HISPANICS (n = 108)**

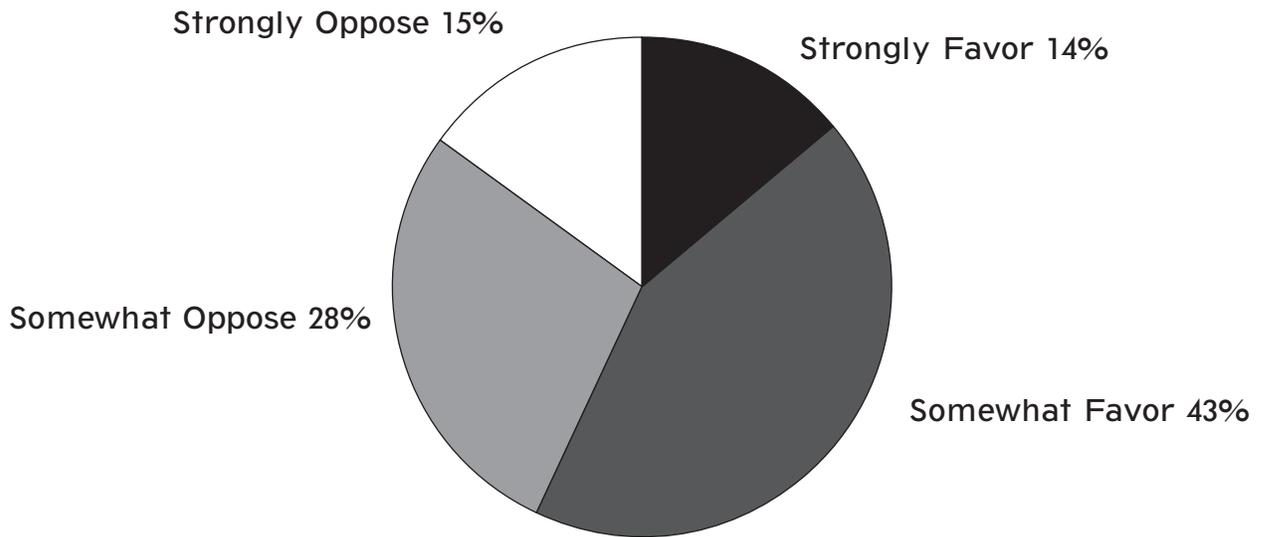
- 39% prefer private schools over other school types; 17% prefer regular public schools
- 63% favor public-funded school choice (implicit voucher question #16)
- 57% favor school vouchers (explicit voucher question #34); 40% are unfamiliar with school vouchers
- 51% favor charter schools; 45% are unfamiliar with charter schools
- 44% favor virtual schools; 67% are unfamiliar with virtual schools
- 57% favor business-funded tax-credit scholarships
- 58% favor individual-funded tax-credit scholarships
- 55% agree in principle with universal eligibility of scholarships
- 58% agree in principle with needs-tested eligibility of scholarships
- 53% favor tax-credit scholarship legislation

**Hispanics are more than twice as likely (28%) rather than unlikely (12%) to be swayed to vote for a candidate who supports a tax-credit scholarship policy.**

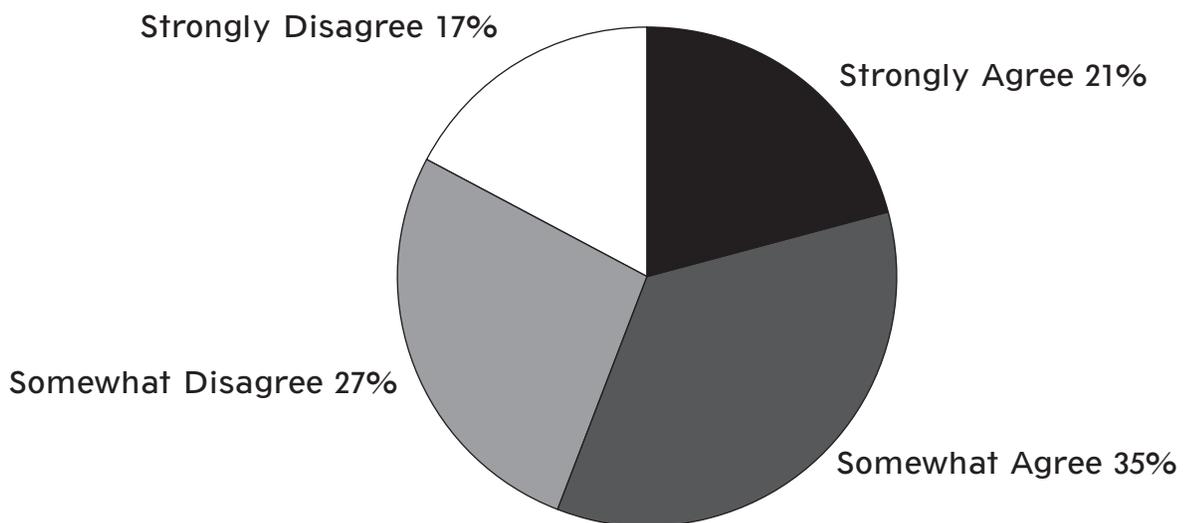
18. Some states give businesses a tax credit if they contribute money to nonprofit organizations that distribute private school scholarships. This policy is called a "tax-credit scholarship." If a proposal were made in Oklahoma to create a tax-credit scholarship system, would you favor or oppose such an idea?



19. Some states give individuals a tax credit if they contribute money to nonprofit organizations that distribute private school scholarships. This policy is called a "tax-credit scholarship." If a proposal were made in Oklahoma to create a tax-credit scholarship system, would you favor or oppose such an idea?



20. Some people believe that tax-credit scholarships should be available to all families, regardless of incomes and special needs. Do you agree or disagree with that statement?

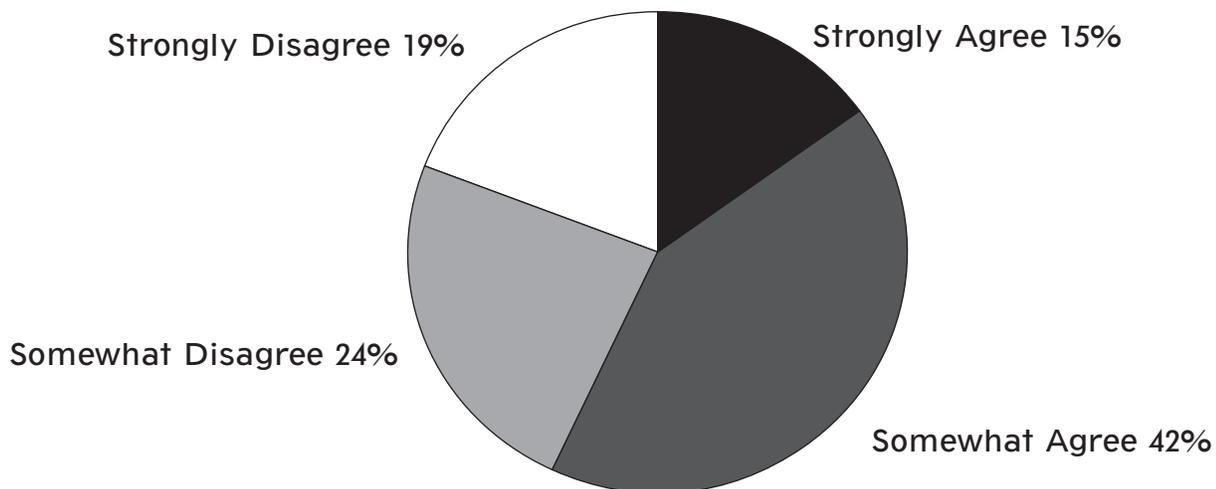


**Demographic Perspectives**

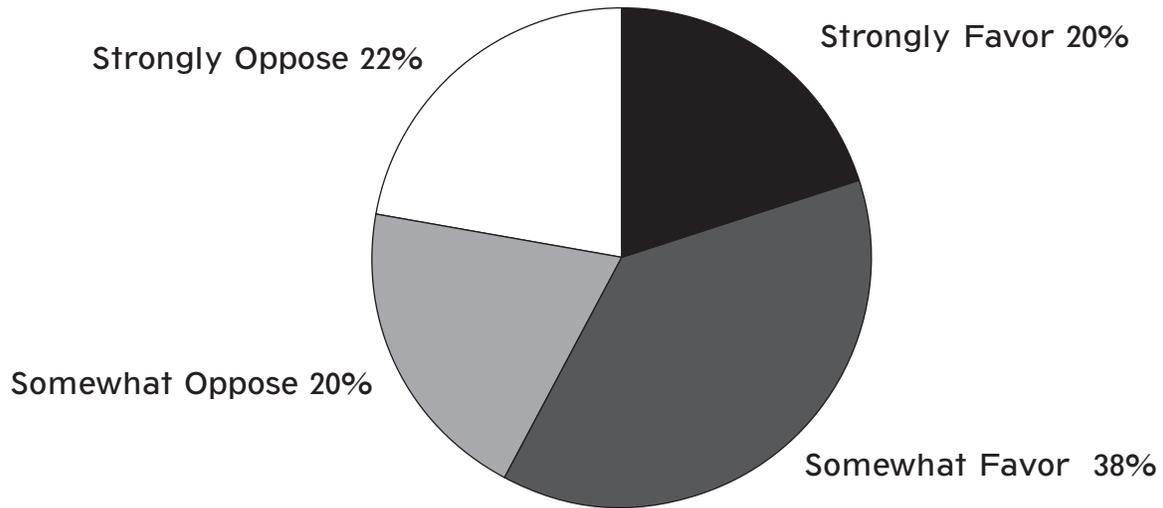
**AFRICAN-AMERICANS (n = 96)**

- 36% prefer private schools over other school types; 22% prefer regular public schools
  - 55% favor public-funded school choice (implicit voucher question #16)
  - 53% favor school vouchers (explicit voucher question #34); 42% are unfamiliar with school vouchers
  - 63% favor charter schools, 37% are unfamiliar with charter schools
  - 38% favor virtual schools, 65% are unfamiliar with virtual schools
  - 60% favor business-funded tax-credit scholarships
  - 57% favor individual-funded tax-credit scholarships
  - 53% agree in principle with universal tax-credit scholarships
  - 53% agree in principle with needs-tested eligibility tax-credit scholarships
  - 55% favor tax-credit scholarship legislation
- African-Americans are twice as likely (21%) rather than unlikely (10%) to vote for a candidate who supports a tax-credit scholarship policy.**

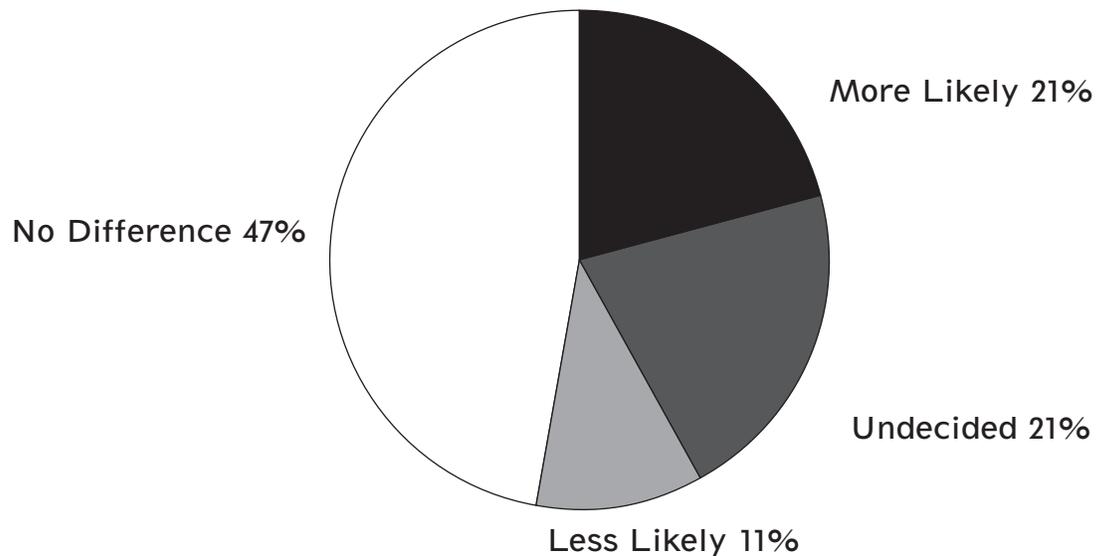
21. Some people believe that tax-credit scholarships should only be available to low-income families, to families with special education children, or to families with children in low-performing public schools. Do you agree or disagree with that statement?



22. The Oklahoma legislature recently debated a bill that would have created a tax-credit scholarship system for students in low-performing public schools. Would you say that you personally favor or oppose the legislation? \_\_\_\_\_



23. 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? \_\_\_\_\_



## Forecasting Questions

In this section, I would like to know if you think the following statements are "likely" or "unlikely" to happen if a tax-credit scholarship system is implemented in Oklahoma. If you are unsure, feel free to say "I don't know". The order of questions 24-32 were rotated to avoid bias.

24. Parents will have more options.



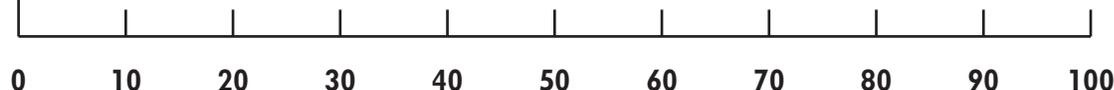
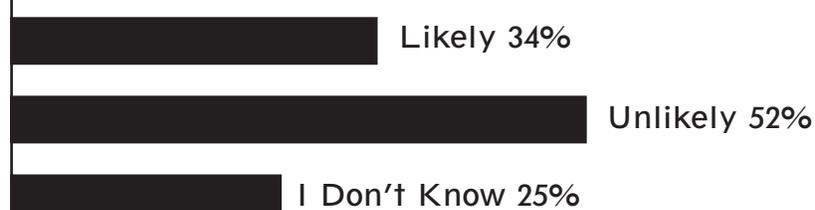
25. Parents will need better information for decisions.



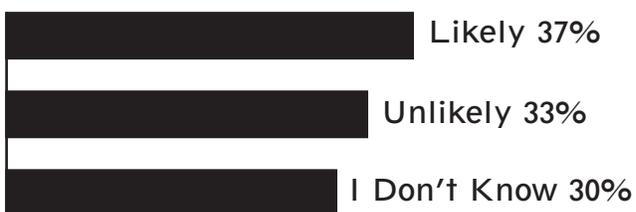
26. Public schools and private schools will compete for students.



27. Private schools will not be accountable.



28. Students will leave failing schools.



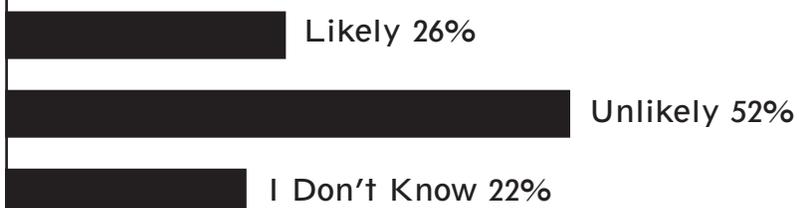
29. Public schools will lose money.



30. Parents will have more power.



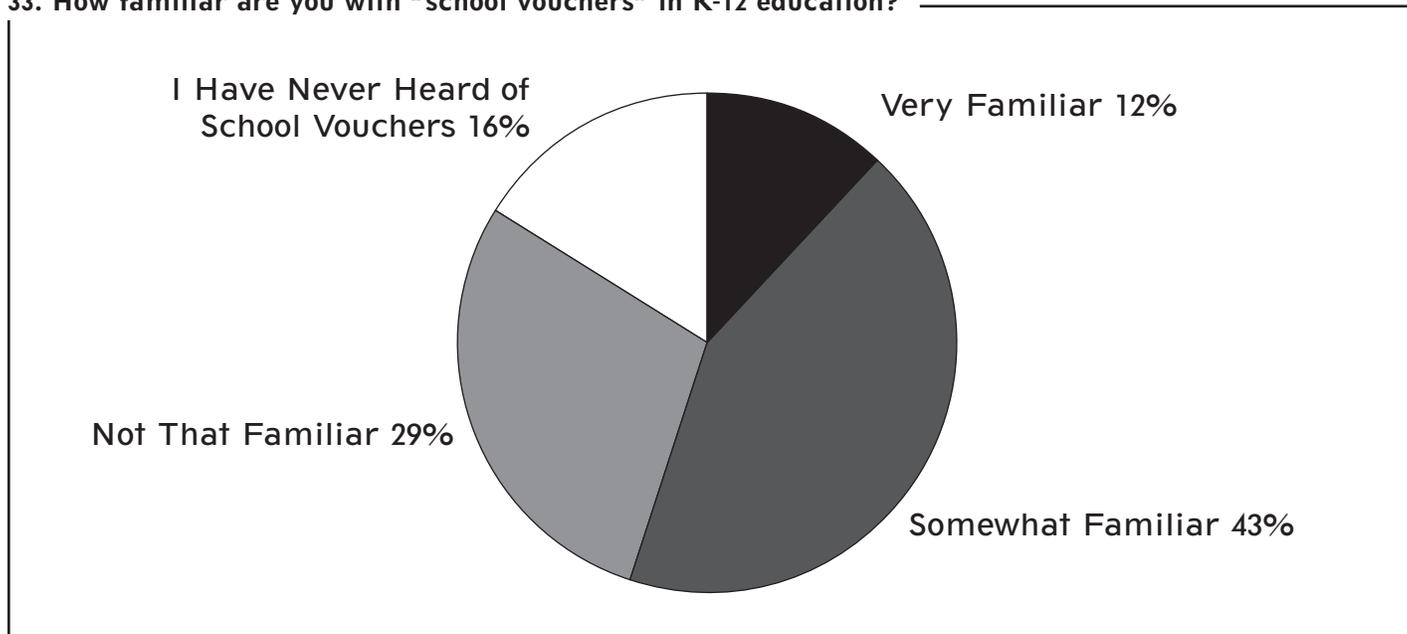
31. Public schools will close.



32. Public schools and private schools will have incentives to improve.

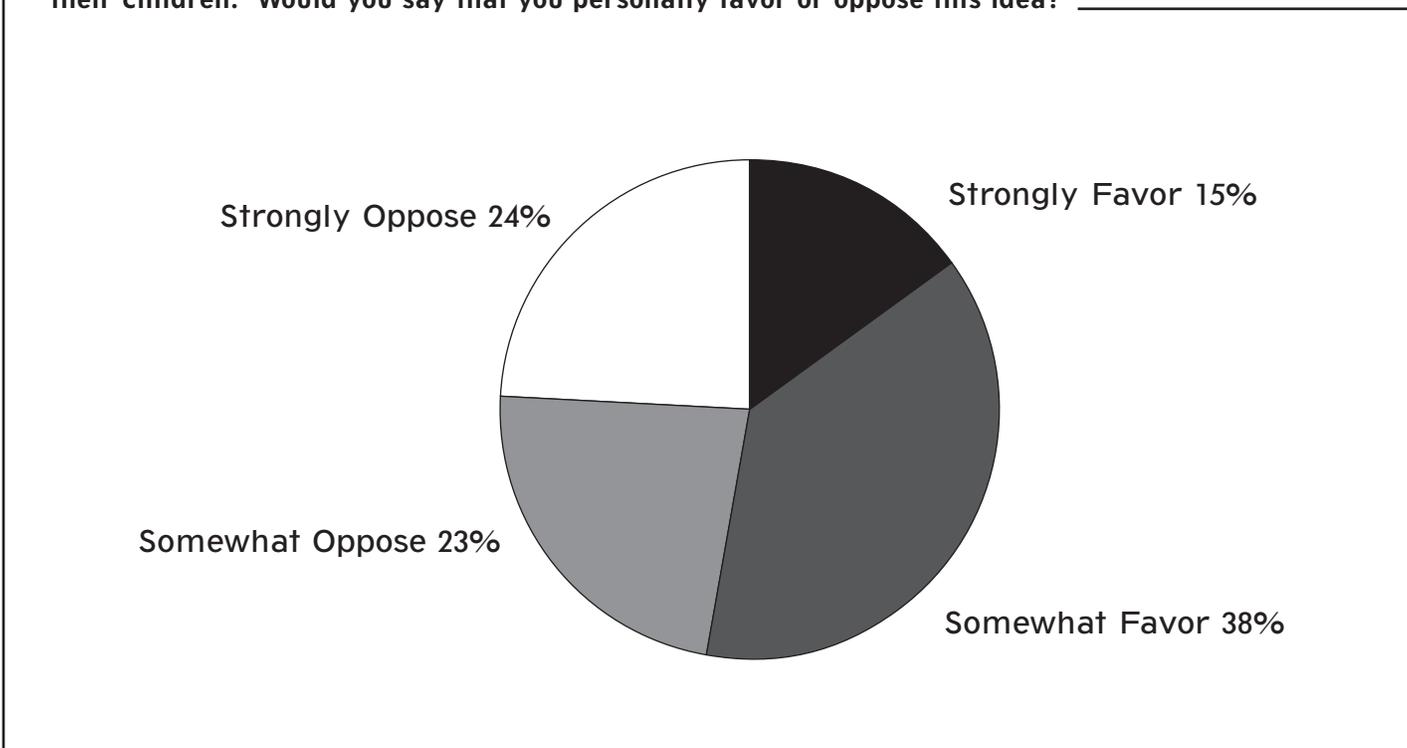


33. How familiar are you with "school vouchers" in K-12 education?



34. In Oklahoma 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 tuition for the school where they choose to send their children. Would you say that you personally favor or oppose this idea?



## Recommended Readings on Public Opinion and Choice in K-12 Education

Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson, and Anthony Folenio, *On Thin Ice: How Advocates and Opponents Misread the Public's Views on Vouchers and Charter Schools* (Public Agenda, 1999).

Terry M. Moe, *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public* (Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

Paul Teske, Jody Fitzpatrick, and Gabriel Kaplan, *Opening Doors: How Low-Income Parents Search for the Right School* (Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2007).

Thomas B. Fordham Institute, *Ohioans' Views on Education 2007* (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2007).

William G. Howell, Martin R. West, and Paul E. Peterson, "What Americans Think About Their Schools," *Education Next* 7(4) (Fall 2007).

## Demographics

### ARE YOU CURRENTLY THE PARENT OR GUARDIAN OF ANY SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IN GRADES K-12?

Yes	78%
No	22%

### WHAT AGE GROUP DO YOUR CHILDREN FALL INTO? [IF "YES" TO PREVIOUS QUESTION]

Under 6	22%
6-10	25%
11-14	14%
15-18	13%
Combination	26%

### ARE YOU REGISTERED TO VOTE AS A:

Democrat	47%
Libertarian	2%
Republican	40%
Other Party affiliation	1%
Independent/No Party affiliation	10%

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

18 - 25	7%
26 - 35	11%
36 - 45	23%
46 - 55	30%
56 - 65	14%
Over 65	15%

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

Under \$25,000	8%
\$25,000 - \$49,999	17%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	39%
\$75,000 - \$150,000	27%
Over \$150,000	9%

### ARE YOU:

African-American	8%
Asian	2%
Hispanic	9%
White	77%
Other	4%

### ARE YOU:

Male	49%
Female	51%



# THE FRIEDMAN FOUNDATION FOR Educational Choice

The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice 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.

**Dr. Milton Friedman, Founder**

Nobel Laureate and Founder of the Friedman Foundation

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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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