

New survey shows majority of independent voters favor charter schools, feel unions do 'more harm than good'

September 21 2012

(Phys.org)—Both Republicans and Democrats can take comfort in the latest findings about political independents contained in the most recent nationally representative survey released today by the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University (PEPG). More political independents lean Democratic than lean Republican, but the views of independents on educational issues appear closer to those ones articulated by Republicans than those traditionally espoused by Democrats.

When asked for their [political affiliation](#), 41 percent of all those interviewed in May 2012 said they were independents, as compared to 34 percent who said they were Democrats and 25 percent who said they were Republicans. Further, 52 percent of the independents said they leaned toward the Democratic Party, and 40 percent said they leaned toward the Republican Party, with the rest saying they did not lean in either direction.

But 56 percent of independents thought teacher unions had "done more harm than good," 54 percent supported [school vouchers](#), and only 34 percent favored raising teacher salaries once they had been informed about average salary levels in their state.

"With [Barack Obama](#) and [Mitt Romney](#) running neck-in-neck," observes PEPG director Paul E. Peterson, "the nation's eyes are trained on

independent voters, who will likely decide the presidential election. Romney's education plan may not be unattractive to this group." Just one-third of independents report that President Obama has done an "excellent" or "good" job of handling education issues, while the rest assigned him a "fair" or "poor" rating.

No issue divides Republicans from Democrats as sharply as their views on teacher unions; in the survey, 71 percent of self-identified Republicans say unions have a negative impact on schools, while only 29 percent of self-identified Democrats take that position.

Other key findings from the survey include:

- 54% of the public believes student performance on tests should factor in decisions on teacher tenure and teacher salaries. Teachers, however, remain unenthusiastic about assigning student test scores much weight; 44% prefer being evaluated by principals.
- A higher percentage of Hispanic adults thought more highly of public schools than did others. Nearly 40 percent of Hispanic adults give the nation's public schools a grade of an "A" or a "B", whereas less than 20 percent of whites and African Americans give the nation's schools one of these top two grades.
- The survey suggests that public "trust in teachers" is actually weaker than other pollsters have reported. For the first time, respondents were asked to break its assessment of teachers into four categories indicating degrees of trust and confidence (in addition to answering to a simple yes/no question about trust in teachers). 58 percent of the public has "little" trust or only "some" trust in teachers, with just 42 percent of the public having "complete" or "a lot of" trust in teachers. That compares to 72 percent who answer yes rather than no when simply asked

if they have trust in teachers (a result found in both the PEPG and other polls).

- Support for increased spending in their local district drops from 61 percent to 41 percent when those interviewed are told how much is currently spent; support for increasing taxes to pay for schools falls from 35 percent to 24 percent among the general public.
- When asked about their feelings on [school](#) vouchers, 50 percent of respondents expressed support, and the other 50 percent were opposed. Meanwhile, 62 percent supported the concept of charter schools, although the survey showed that public knowledge about [charter schools](#) is very limited.

The full findings from the sixth annual PEPG survey conducted in May 2012 is available on the home page of www.educationnext.org. Also available is an article interpreting the key findings, "Reform Agenda Gains Strength: The 2012 EdNext-PEPG survey finds Hispanics give schools a higher grade than others do," by William G. Howell, Martin R. West, and Paul E. Peterson, which will appear in the Winter, 2013 issue of *Education Next*.

More information:

About the Public Opinion Survey

The Education Next-PEPG survey was conducted by the polling firm Knowledge Networks during April and May of 2012. The survey interviewed 2,993 Americans, including a nationally representative sample of 1,727 and over-samples of Hispanics, African Americans, parents, and teachers. Detailed information about the survey protocols is available online at www.knowledgenetworks.com/quality/.

Provided by Harvard University

Citation: New survey shows majority of independent voters favor charter schools, feel unions do 'more harm than good' (2012, September 21) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-09-survey-majority-independent-voters-favor.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.