

SCHOOL CHOICE

# ISSUES

IN THE STATE

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



### **Parent Choice for Nevada:**

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 Nevada children, it is critical to know the facts about parent choice, and to have an understanding of public opinion. This polling and analysis is done with one core goal in mind: The best possible education for all of Nevada's children.

Prepared By:

**Paul DiPerna**

The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice

January 2008

Poll and analysis released jointly by The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, Agudath Israel, Black Alliance for Educational Options, The Center For Charter School Development, The Center for Education Reform, Nevada Business Journal, Nevada Manufacturers Association, and Nevada Policy Research Institute

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.

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

Prepared By:

Paul DiPerna

The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice

Poll taken by:

Strategic Vision, LLC

January 2008



## About the Author



Paul DiPerna (paul@friedmanfoundation.org) is 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. Before moving to Indianapolis, DiPerna served as Assistant Director for the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution. His six years at Brookings included projects evaluating the federal Blue Ribbon Schools Program and analyzing student achievement in charter schools. DiPerna was a research analyst for the first five issues of the Brown Center Report on American Education (2000-2004), and he managed the activities of the National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education (2001-2005).

DiPerna is fascinated by the potential of the Internet, particularly in terms of discovering and coordinating information, mobilizing people, building social networks, improving organization and management, and communicating innovations. 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*.

## About Strategic Vision, LLC



STRATEGIC VISION, LLC  
CORPORATE, LITERARY, POLITICAL

Strategic Vision, LLC is an Atlanta-headquartered public relations and public affairs agency with a division that specializes in polling. Our team is knowledgeable about politics and current events throughout the nation and operates nationally on a variety of races and issue advocacy programs. Among the media that Strategic Vision's polls have been used by include 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.

## About the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice



The Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation 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.

## About Agudath Israel of America



Agudath Israel of America is part of the world movement of Agudath Israel, which was founded in 1912 to mobilize Torah-loyal Jews for the perpetuation of authentic Judaism. Agudath Israel aims to establish the sovereignty of Torah in all problems facing Jewish people as individuals and as a nation. To achieve these aims, Agudath Israel of America maintains nineteen divisions of activity embracing every phase of Jewish life and affecting daily the lives of many thousands of Jews, young and old.

## About the Black Alliance for Educational Options



Black Alliance for Educational Options

The Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) is a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization whose mission is to actively support parental choice to empower families and increase quality educational options for Black children. Staunch in its belief that parental choice must be an integral part of any serious effort to reform education in America, BAEO believes parental choice programs, which lead to the creation of quality educational options, not only rescue the children who can take advantage of such opportunities but also create powerful incentives for all schools, public and private, to improve.

## About the Center For Charter School Development



The Center For Charter School Development is a nationally recognized, non-profit technical assistance and resource center that provides a variety of services to developing and operational charter schools in Nevada and surrounding states. Services include school planning & design, operational guidance, grant writing, professional development, and student support. CFCSD supports educational reform and innovation by helping founders and operators work through the challenges of designing and operating a chartered public school.

## About the Center for Education Reform



The Center for Education Reform (CER) creates opportunities for and challenges obstacles to better education for America's communities. Founded in 1993 to translate ideas into action, CER combines

education policy with grassroots advocacy to work deep within the nation's communities to foster positive and bold education reforms. CER advocates reforms that produce high standards, accountability and freedom, such as strong charter school laws, school choice programs for children most in need, common sense teacher initiatives, and proven instructional programs.

## About the Nevada Business Journal



Nevada Business Journal, the only statewide business magazine in Nevada, is the voice of conservative business leaders. With a readership of over 82,000, the four color glossy magazine is read by business leaders throughout Nevada and is the most respected business publication in the state. Every issue of the magazine includes vital information on real estate, finance, technology, healthcare and profiles on companies and individuals that are an integral part of Nevada's business climate.

## About the Nevada Manufacturers Association



The Nevada Manufacturers Association is the non-profit trade association for manufacturing companies in Nevada. It advocates on issues for its members and all manufacturing companies primarily in the state legislature. Nevada's K-12

system routinely ranks at or near the bottom at a time when the productivity gains are required in the manufacturing sector in order to compete in the global marketplace. NMA 15 plus years ago was supportive of the public schools, but has evolved to support charter and other options in a effort to get the education quality required for our member companies. NMA is one of the few Nevada business organizations to openly challenge the existing system's status quo.

## About the Nevada Policy Research Institute



The Nevada Policy Research Institute is a free-market think tank that seeks private solutions to public challenges facing Nevada, the West and the nation, with a particular focus on education and tax policy. The Institute's mission is to educate Nevada's citizens, media members and public officials about the importance of advancing free-market principles in public policy.



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## Executive Summary

This scientifically representative poll of 1,000 likely Nevada voters measures public opinion on K-12 education issues. In particular, the poll emphasizes questions about school choice in the form of school vouchers, special education scholarships, tax-credit scholarships and charter schools.

Recent local events suggest a polling project should be timely. On November 30, 2007, the Nevada Board of Education voted 8-0 to place a moratorium on new charter schools. Prior to the Board meeting, which was held late on a Friday afternoon, there was little consideration for the views of Nevada families. The Board acted without the benefit of knowing where the voting public stood on charter schools.

So where does Nevada stand on school choice and other K-12 issues? At least one general finding comes through clearly in this poll: Nevadans would like a K-12 school choice system that offers opportunity and access to a range of schooling options.

Conducted December 14-16, 2007, by Strategic Vision, LLC, the poll's margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Key findings include:

- **A majority of Nevadans are not satisfied with the current system of regular public schools**—53 percent rate Nevada's public school system as "poor" or "fair." Among 36 to 55 year-olds, who tend to be most emotionally and financially invested in K-12 schooling, this number jumps to nearly 60 percent.
- **Only one out of ten Nevadans say a regular public school is the top choice for their child's school. Citizens want more school options.** This finding is consistent across major demographic categories including age, race/ethnicity, gender, and geographic region—never rising above 16 percent for any one subgroup.
- **Nevada voters overwhelmingly prefer private schools and charter schools.** When asked "what type of school would you select in order to obtain the best education for your child?", Nevadans preferred private schools (48 percent) over other types of schools. Charter schools (23 percent) were the second most desired option.
- **Nevadans appear content with levels of public school funding and the average public school teacher salary.** About three out of five likely Nevada voters (61 percent) say the current level of public school funding is "about right" or "too high." More than two-thirds of respondents (69 percent) believe the average Nevada public school teacher salary is "about right" or "too high."
- **Charter schools are a popular idea for educational reform**—55 percent of Nevadans are favorable to charter schools. This feeling is strongest among 36 to 55 year-olds (64 percent), African-Americans (64 percent), Asians (58 percent) and those who live in the Las Vegas area (57 percent).
- **A majority of Nevadans (53 percent) favor allowing parents the option of using public funds to send their child to a private school.** Favorability elevates to significantly higher levels for 36 to 45 year-olds (62 percent) and 46 to 55 year-olds (63 percent). By contrast, younger Nevadans—18 to 25 year-olds and 26 to 35 year-olds—are less favorable to a choice-driven K-12 finance system (43 percent and 47 percent respectively). African-Americans (56 percent) and those living in the northwest part of the state (58 percent) report higher than average rates of favorability.



- **More than half of Nevadans support school vouchers**—54 percent of likely voters say they are personally favorable toward a school voucher approach for helping parents pay for the school where they choose to send their child.
- **Nevada voters support special education scholarships.** When asked “if a proposal were made in Nevada to create a special needs scholarship system, would you favor or oppose such an idea,” 56 percent said they favored this policy. Support for special education scholarships climbs to nearly 60 percent among 36 to 55 year-olds.
- **Nevadans also favor a tax-credit scholarship system.** When asked “if a proposal were made in Nevada to create a tax-credit scholarship system,” 53 percent said they favored this policy. Women (57 percent) and 56 to 65 year-olds (59 percent) indicated highest favorability rates among demographic subgroups.
- **Over half of Nevadans cite “academic quality” or “school curriculum” as the main reason they would choose a particular type of school as the best type for their child.** This finding is consistent across all major demographic categories. Academic quality is the most frequent reason cited by all demographic subgroups spanning age, race/ethnic categories, gender, and geographic region.
- **Nevada voters are more likely to vote for a state representative, state senator or governor who supports school vouchers.** Voters say they would be more likely to vote for a governor or legislator who supports school vouchers, with 35 percent saying “more likely” versus 25 percent saying “less likely.”
- **Nevada school choice advocates have the opportunity to reach out to families and communities and inform them about school choice, including school voucher systems and charter schools.** As in other states, knowledge about school choice is at a low baseline in Nevada. One-third of Nevada likely voters had never heard about “the use of school vouchers in K-12 education.” Sixty percent of respondents are either “not very familiar” or “not familiar at all” with charter schools. These reforms still remain relatively unfamiliar ideas. Building local level relationships and networks, communications, and messaging are likely to be vital activities for Nevada school choice advocates in the future.

## Methodology

This survey provides a statistically valid representation of the views of likely Nevada voters. A total of 1,000 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.

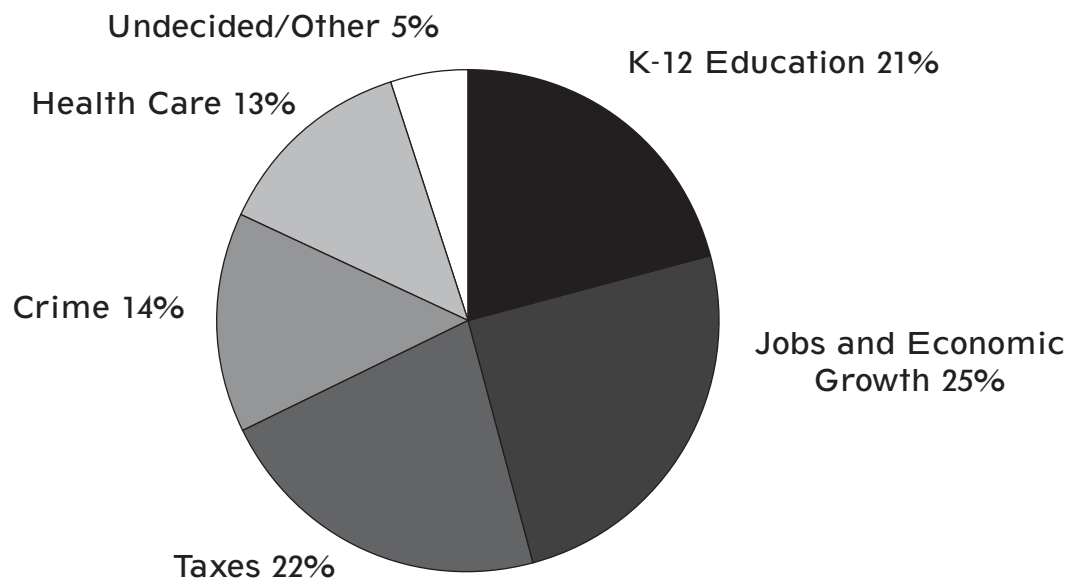
For this survey, the research firm Strategic Vision, LLC, conducted phone interviews of a random sample of registered Nevada voters from its call center. Interviews were conducted from December 14 to 16, 2007.

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.

# Results

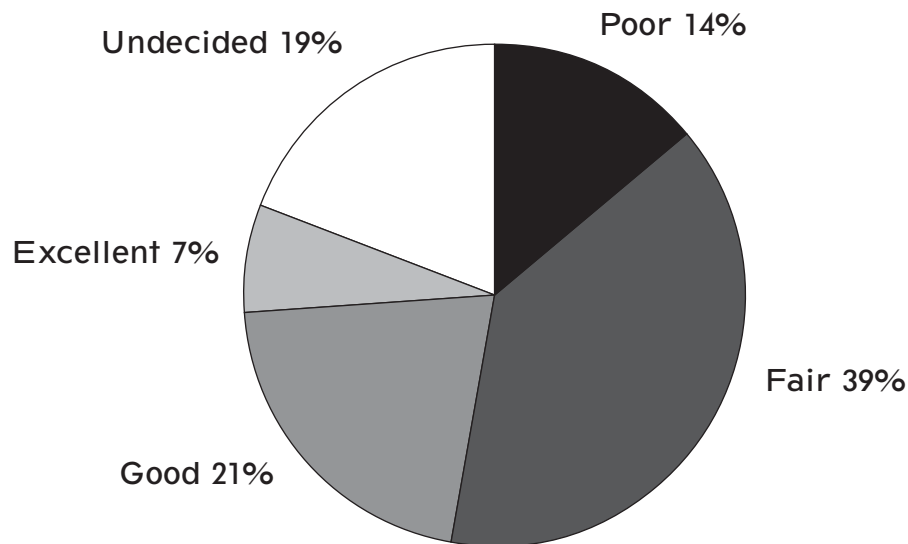
The following are the results of the survey.

1. I am going to name several issues facing the State of Nevada, and I would like you to select the one that is most important to you. \_\_\_\_\_

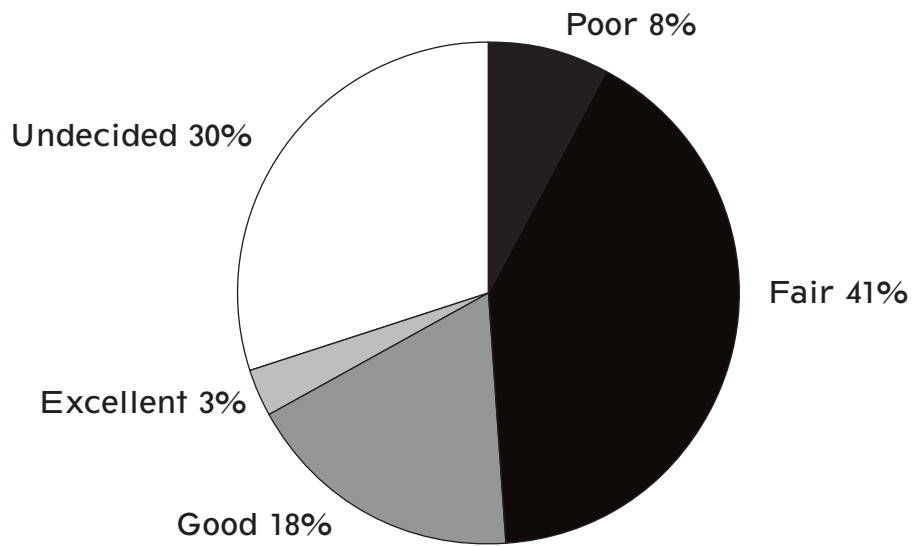


The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

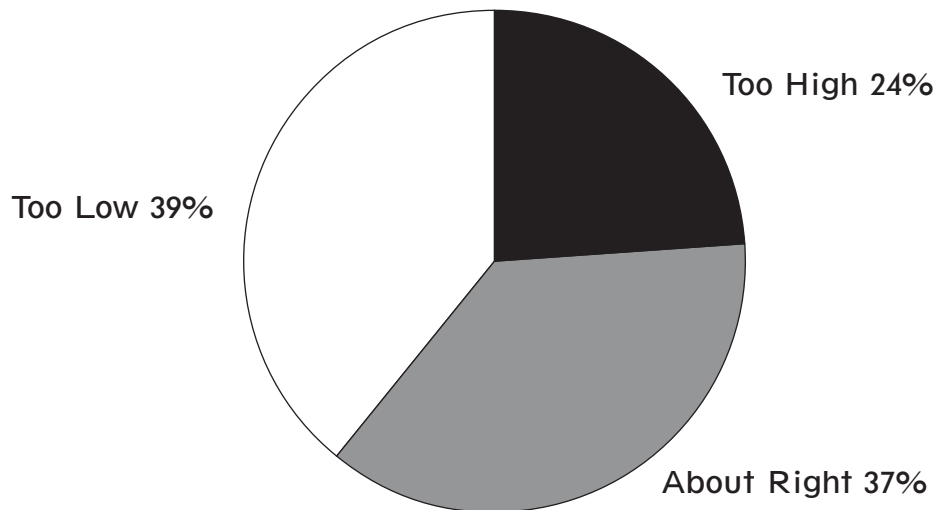
2. How would you rate Nevada's public school system? \_\_\_\_\_



3. How would you rate Nevada's public school system when it comes to how well they educate students with special educational needs? \_\_\_\_\_

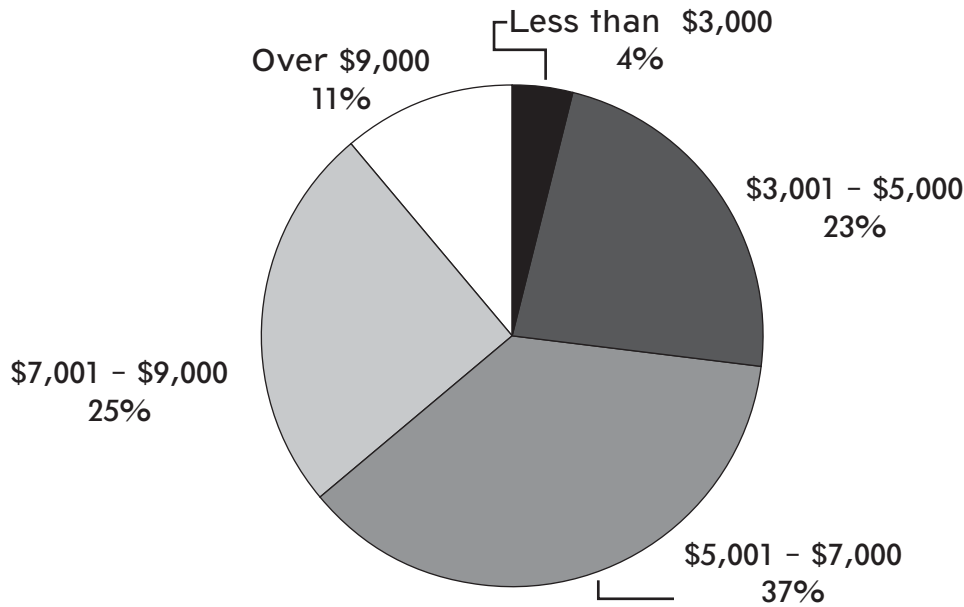


4. Do you believe that public school funding in Nevada is at a level that is: \_\_\_\_\_



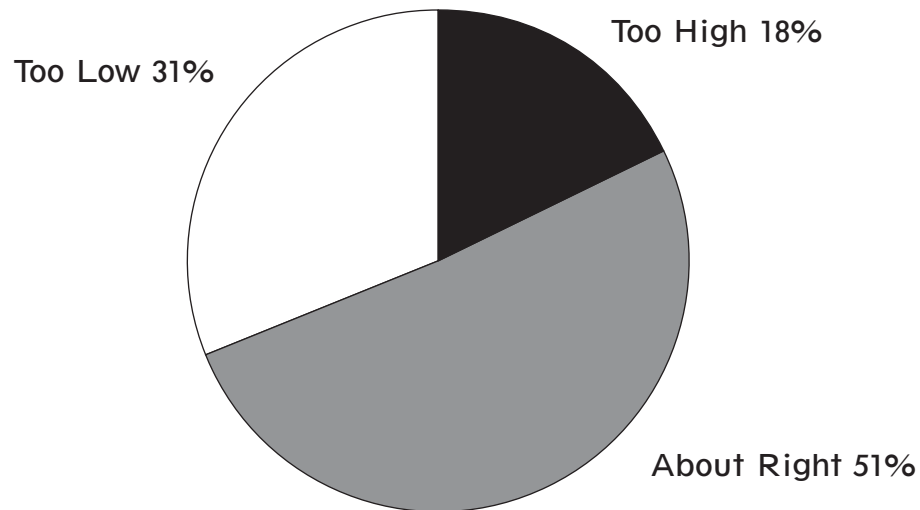
5. Approximately how much do you think the State of Nevada currently spends on each student in public schools?

Actual 2005 school year figure: \$6,804\*



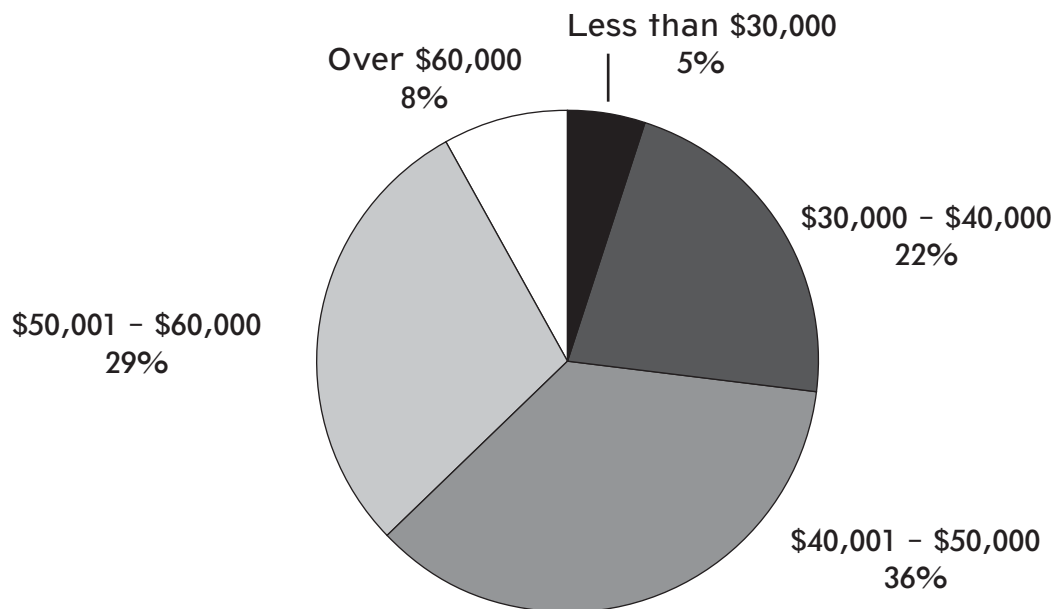
\*National Center for Education Statistics, Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education: School Year 2004-05, published April 2007

6. Do you believe that the average salary for Nevada public school teachers is:



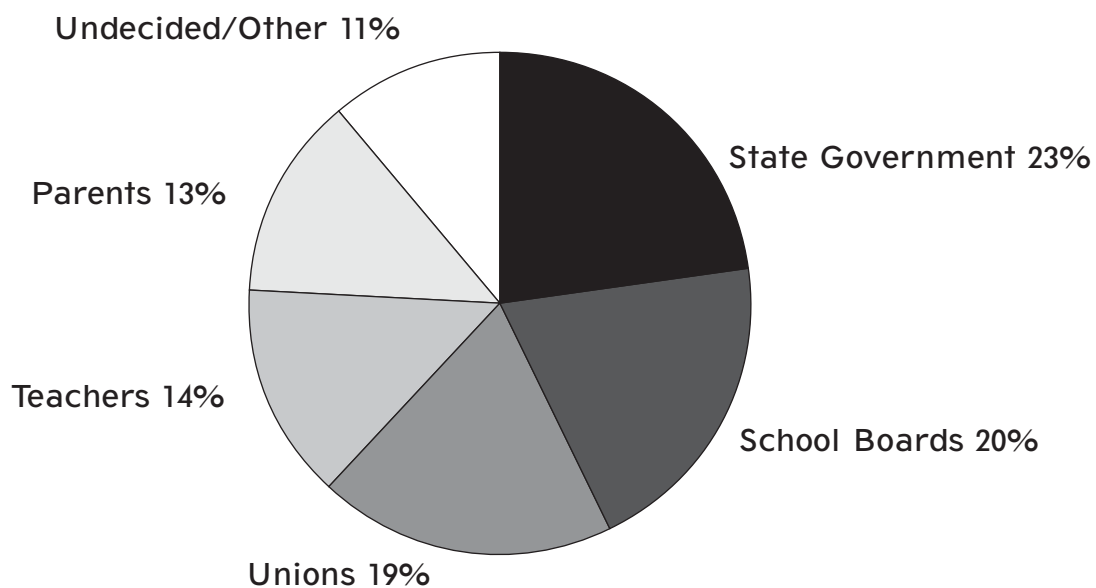
7. Approximately how much do you think is the average salary for Nevada public school teachers?

Actual 2005 school year figure: \$43,394\*



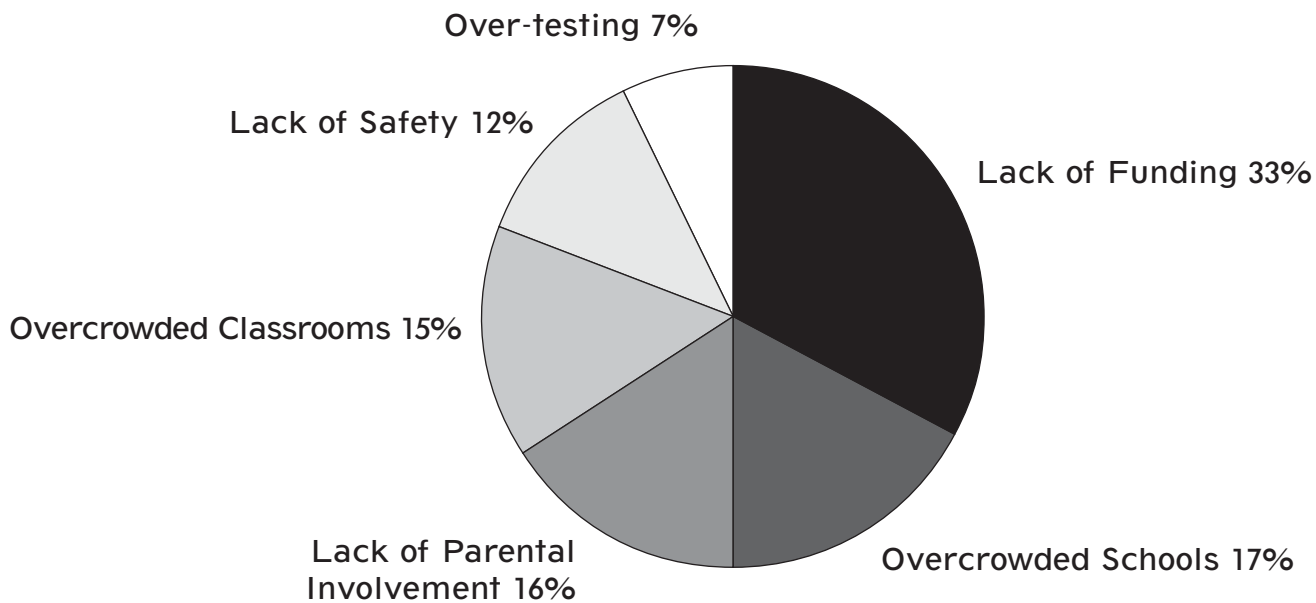
\*National Center for Education Statistics, 2006 Digest of Education Statistics, published July 2007

8. Who is most responsible for the situation of Nevada's public school system?



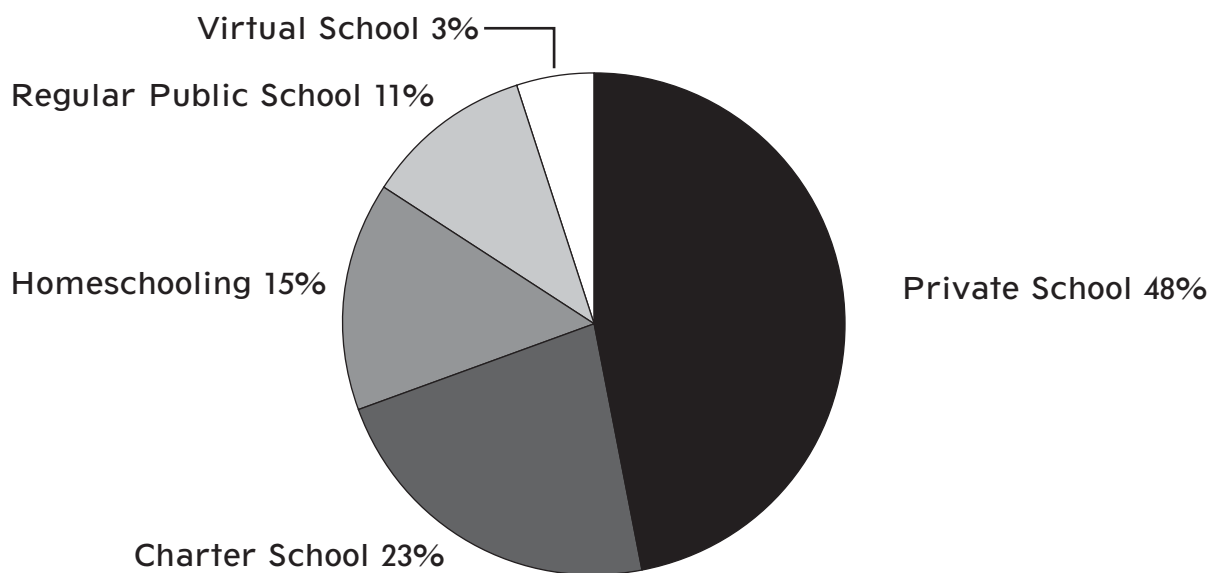
The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

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



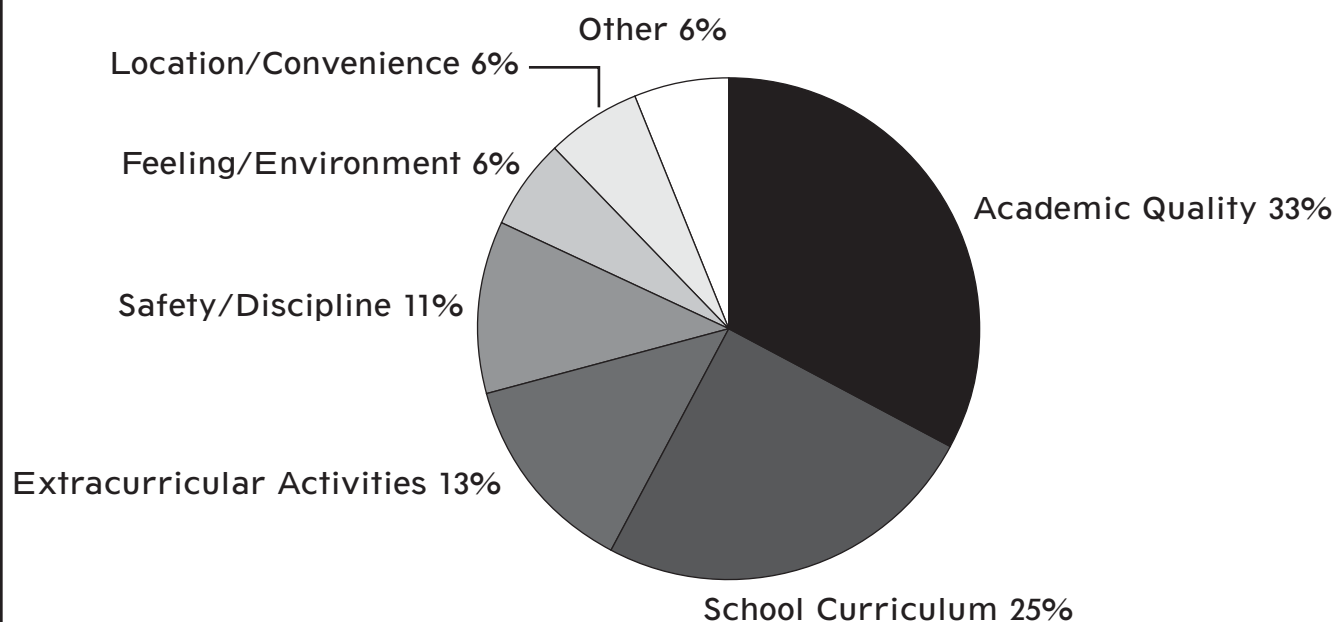
The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

10. If it was 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?



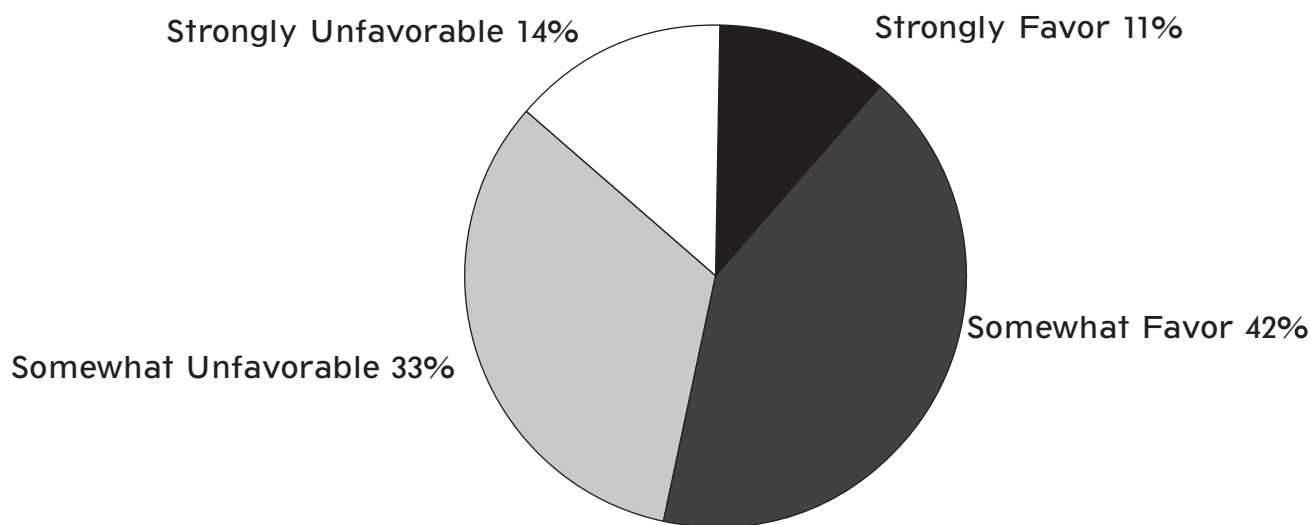
The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

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

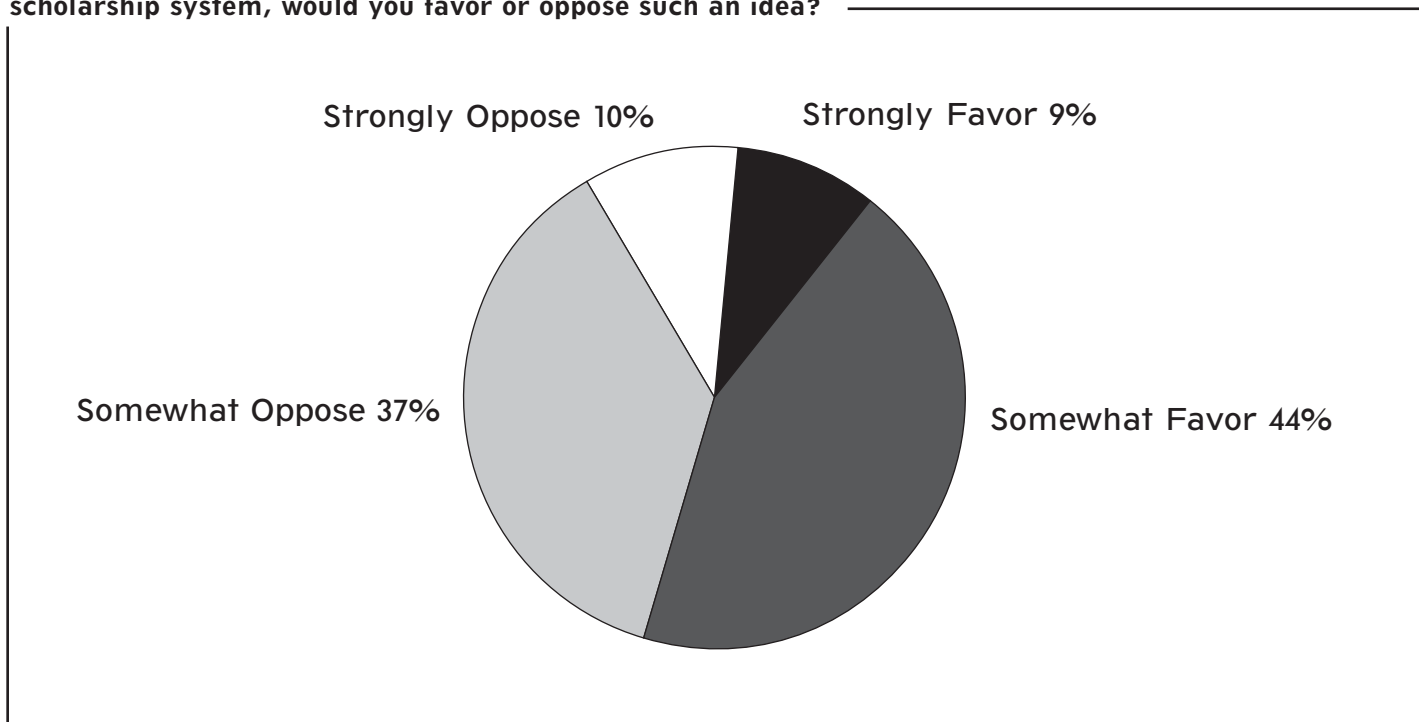


*The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.*

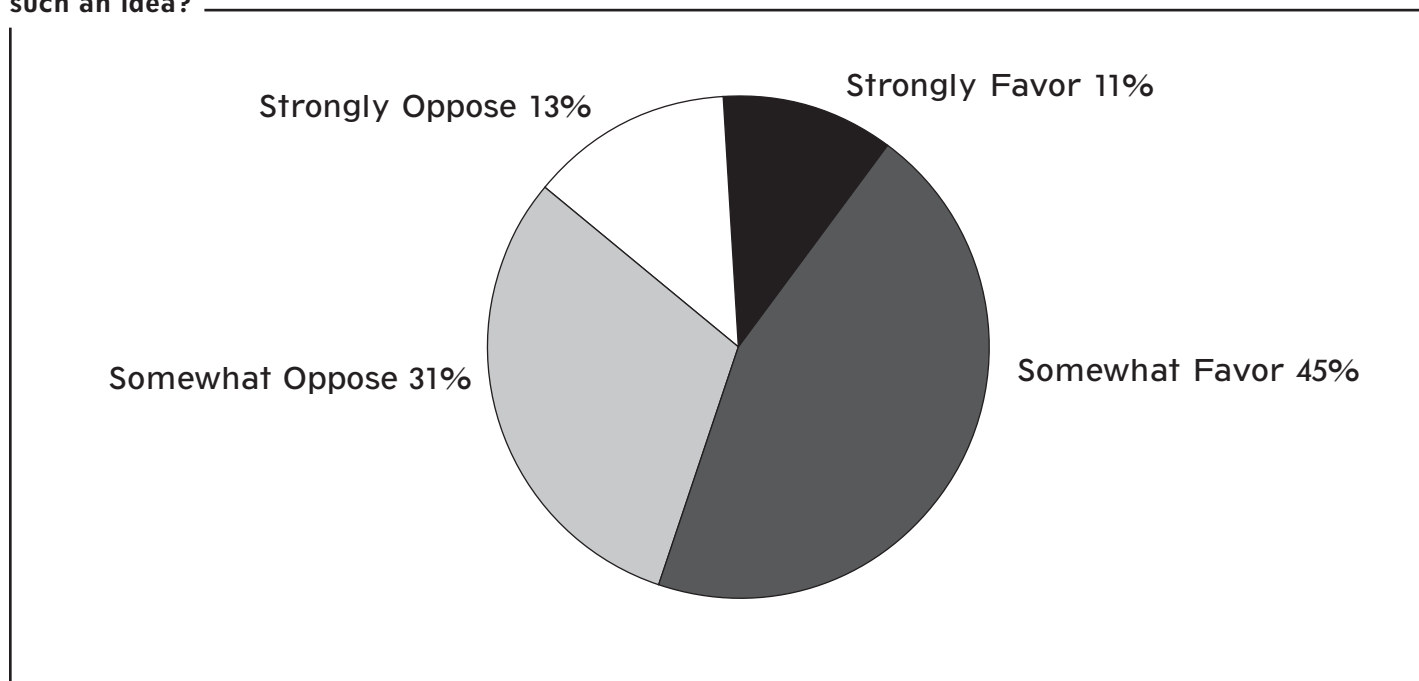
12. If a private school offered the best education possible for a particular child would you favor allowing parents the option of using public funds to send their children to a private school? \_\_\_\_\_



13. Some states give businesses a tax credit if they contribute money to fund private school scholarships. This policy is called a "tax-credit scholarship". If a proposal were made in Nevada to create a tax-credit scholarship system, would you favor or oppose such an idea? \_\_\_\_\_

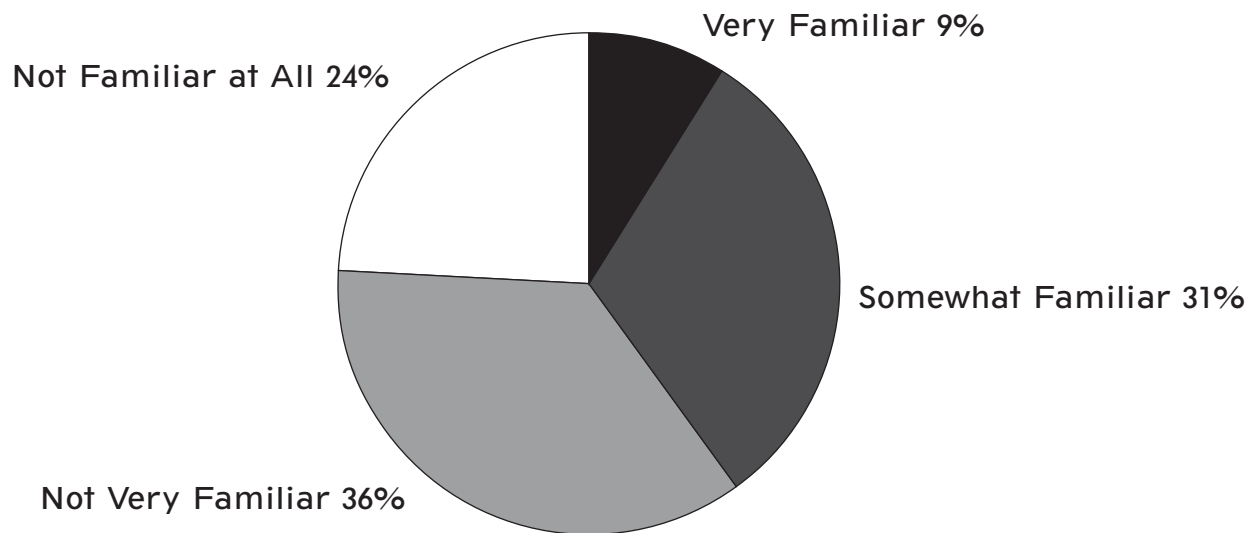


14. Some states allow parents of children with special educational needs to use publicly funded "special needs scholarships" to help pay for the private school or public school where they choose to send their children. If a proposal were made in Nevada to create a special needs scholarship system, would you favor or oppose such an idea? \_\_\_\_\_

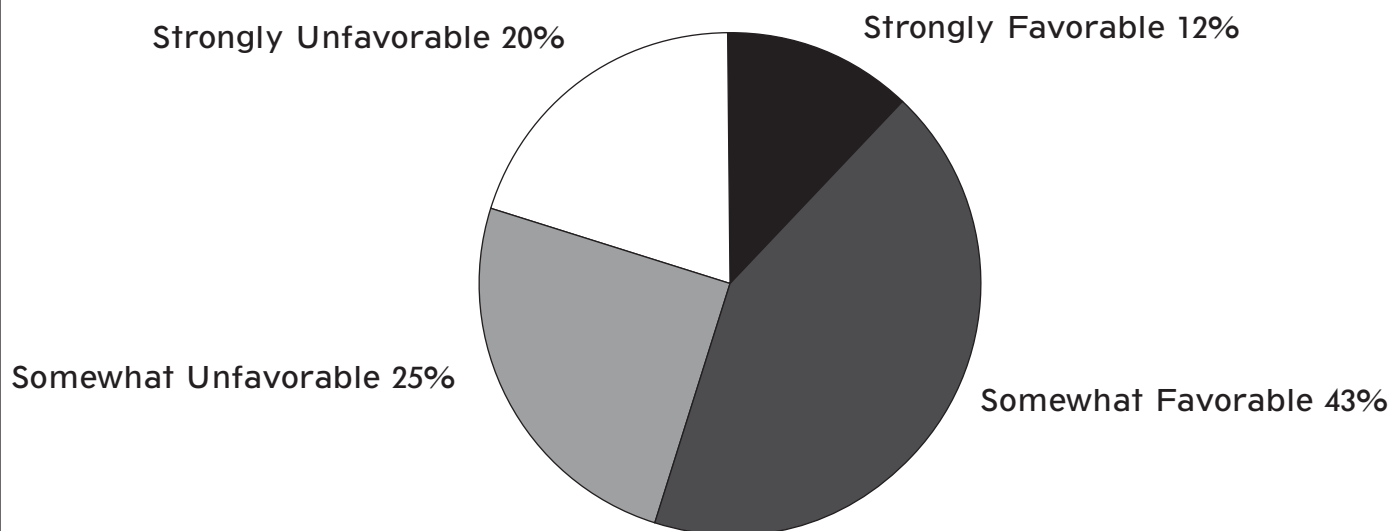




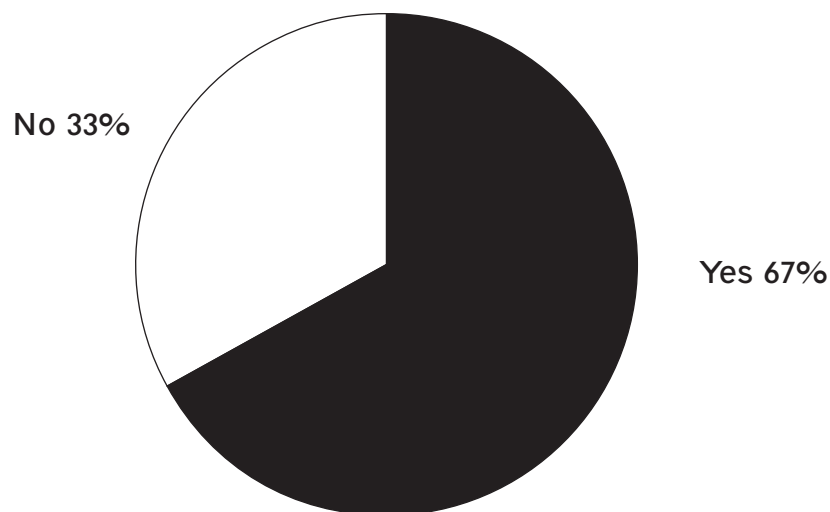
15. How familiar are you with charter schools in K-12 education?



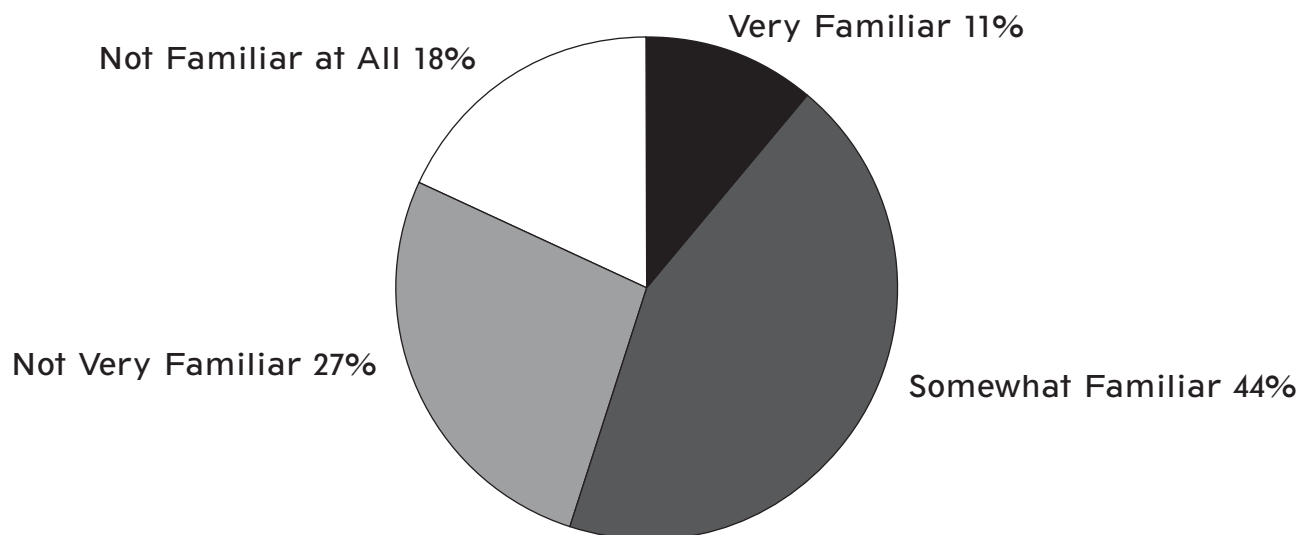
16. Charter schools are public schools that have a lot more control over their own budget, staff and curriculum, and are free from many existing public school regulations. In general, do you favor or oppose this idea?



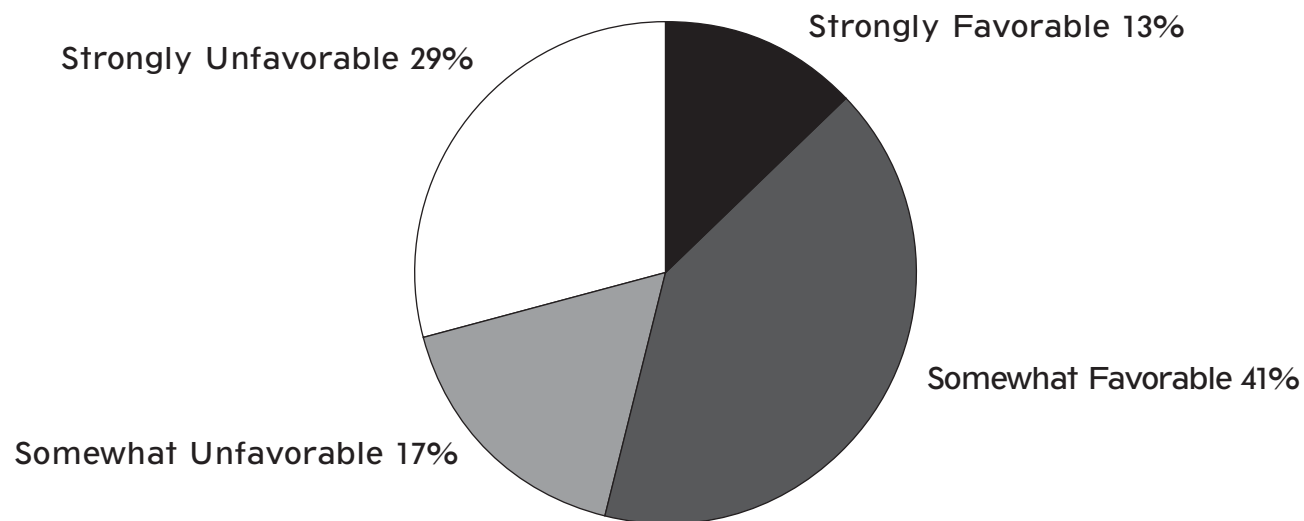
17. Have you heard anything about the use of school vouchers in K-12 education?



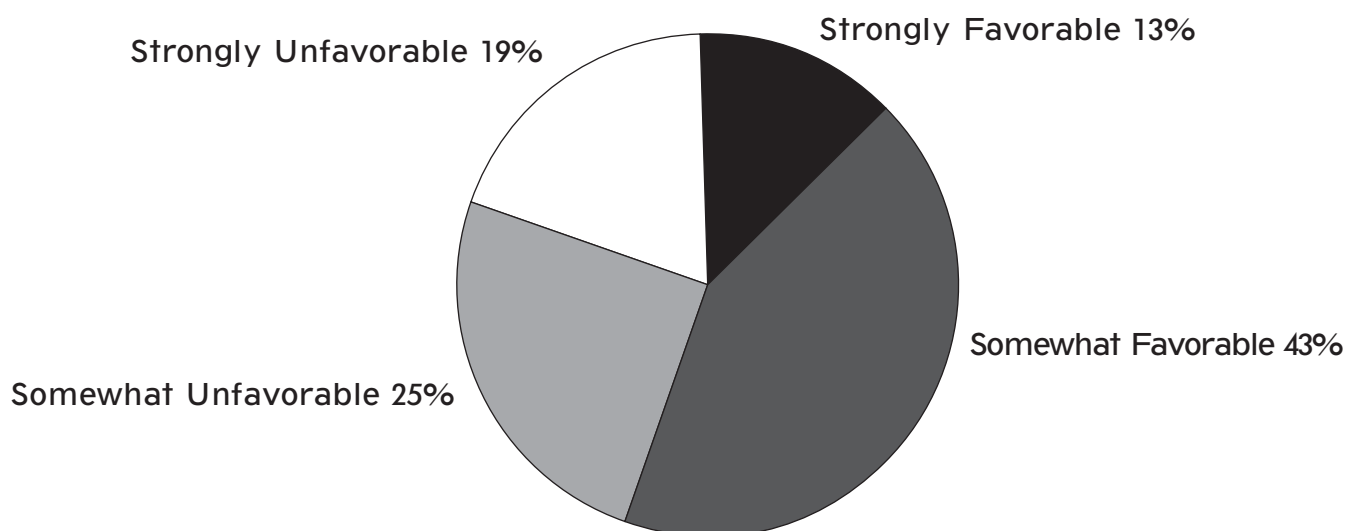
18. In Nevada there is a debate over the direction of K-12 education. Some people promote an approach that would allow parents the option of sending their children to the school of their choice, whether that school is public or private, including both religious and non-religious schools. If this approach 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 for the school where they choose to send their children. How familiar are you with this approach to education?



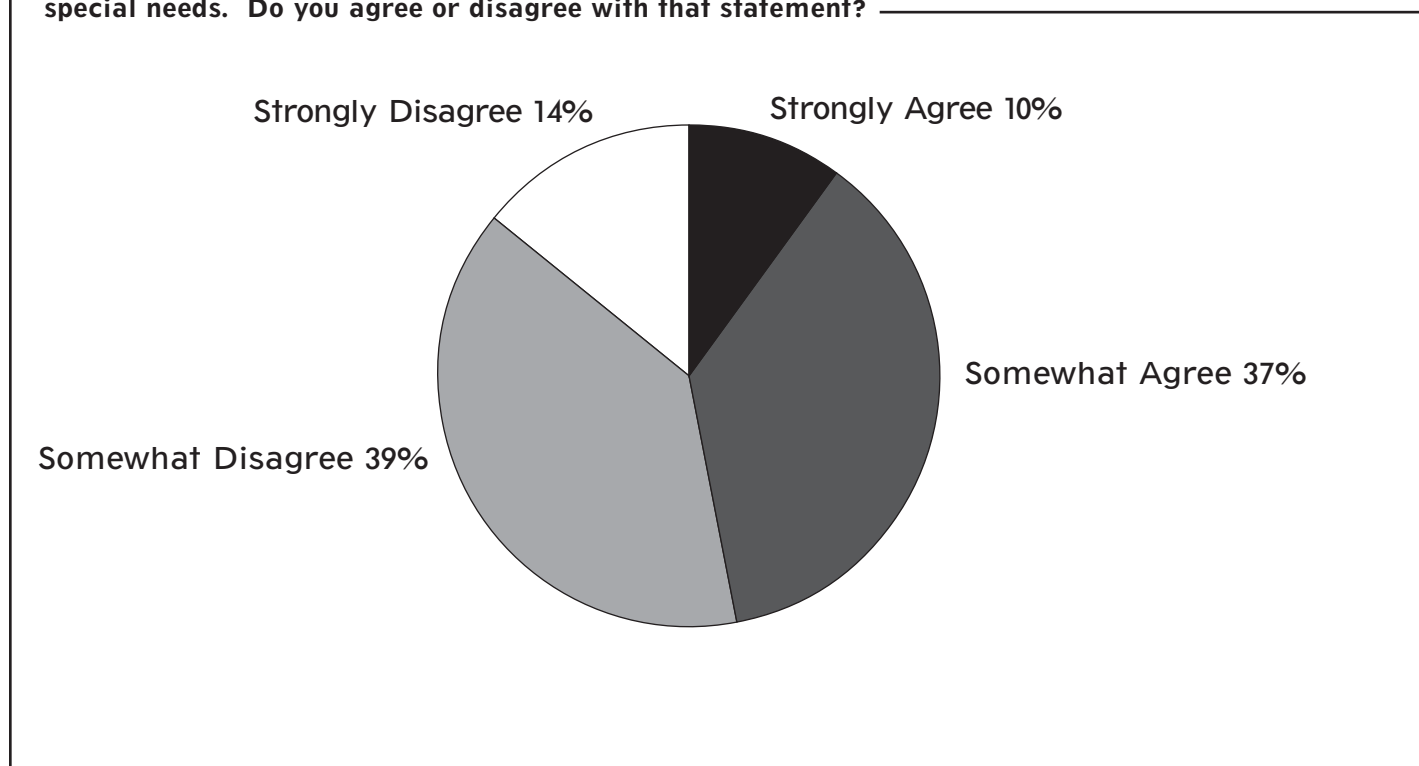
19. Based upon what you know about school vouchers, would you say that you are personally favorable or unfavorable towards this approach? \_\_\_\_\_



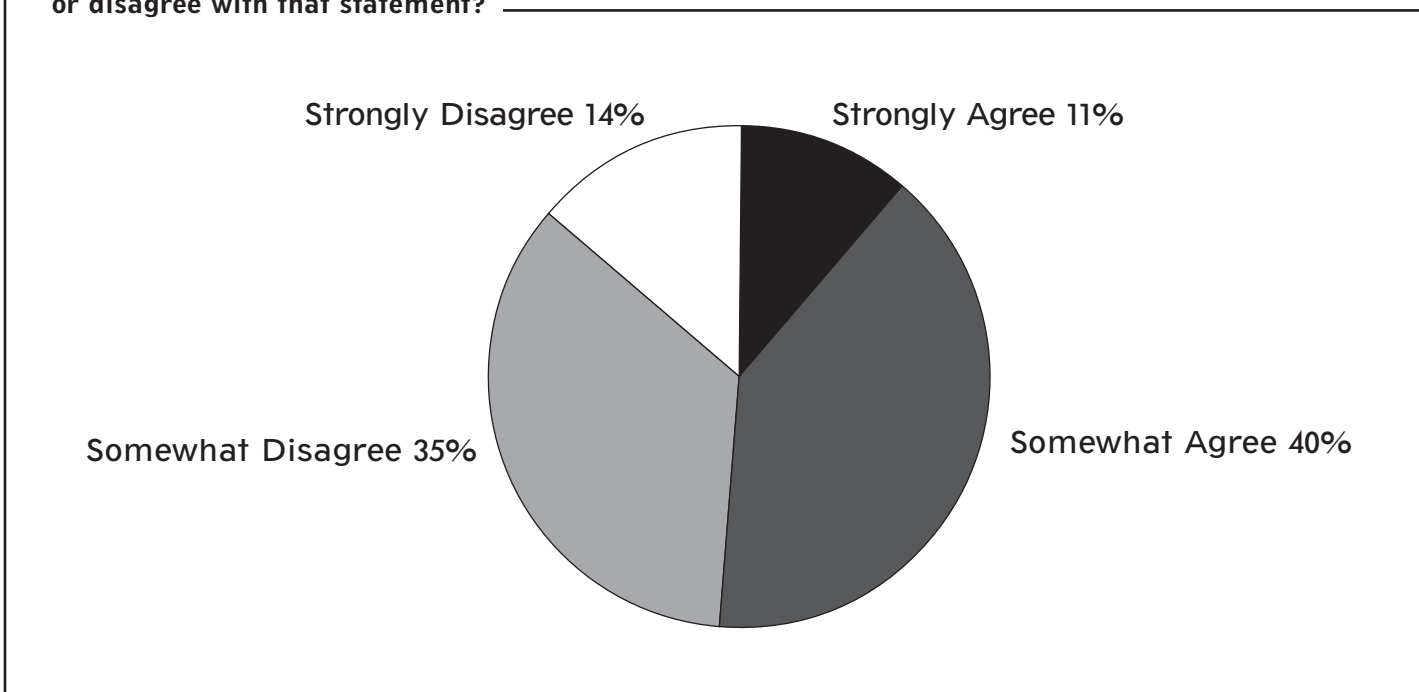
20. The Nevada legislature recently debated a bill that would allow parents of children with special educational needs to use a voucher to send their children to a private school or public school of their choice. Would you say that you are personally favorable or unfavorable to this approach of allowing parents of children with disabilities to send their children to the school of their choice? \_\_\_\_\_



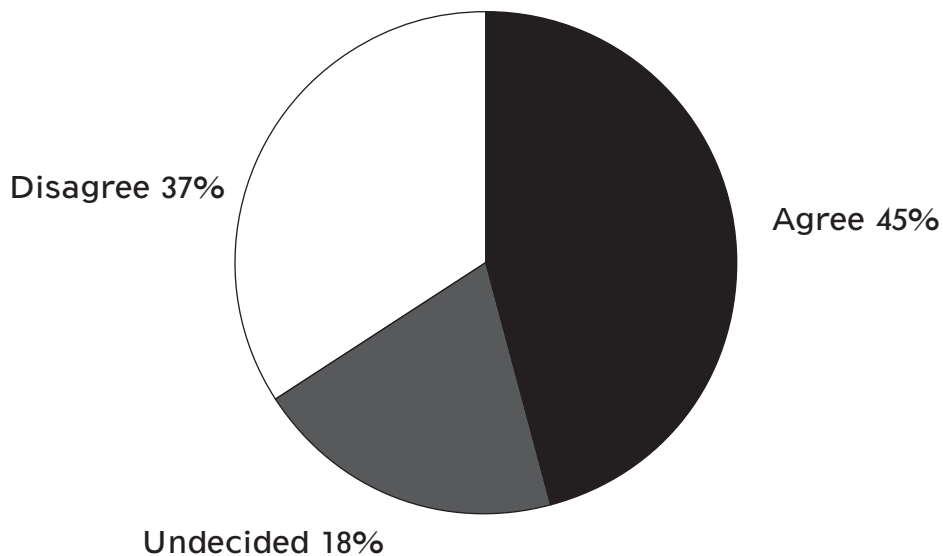
21. Some people believe that school vouchers should be available to all families, regardless of incomes and special needs. Do you agree or disagree with that statement? \_\_\_\_\_



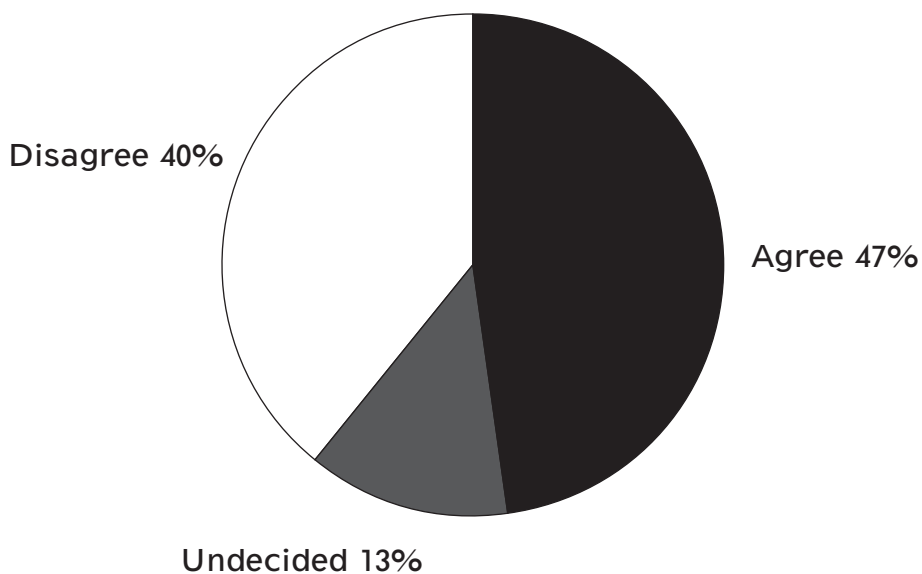
22. Some people believe that school vouchers should only be available to low-income families, to families with special education children, or to families with children in failing public schools. Do you agree or disagree with that statement? \_\_\_\_\_



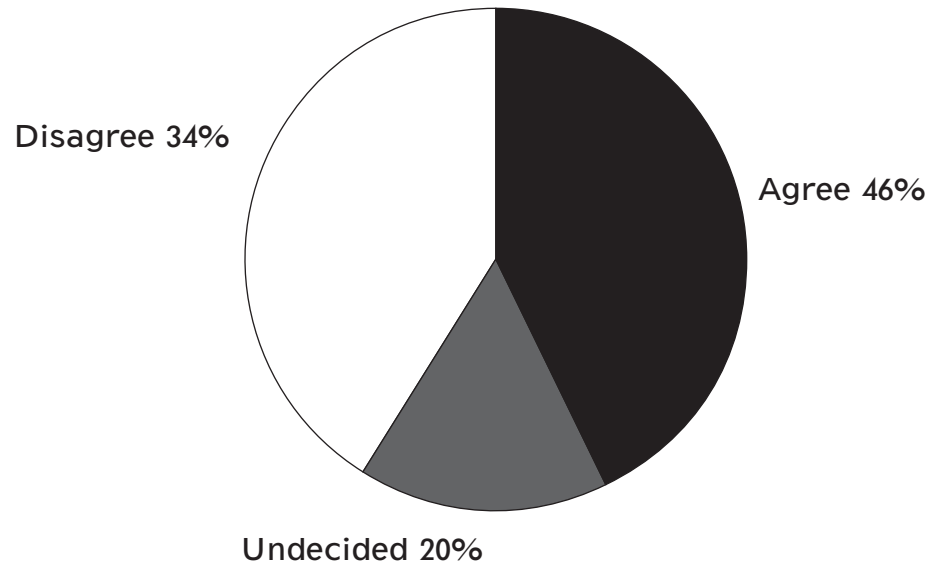
23. One argument in favor of a school voucher system is that public schools and private schools will get better because they will have to compete with each other to hold onto students. Would you agree or disagree with that statement? \_\_\_\_\_



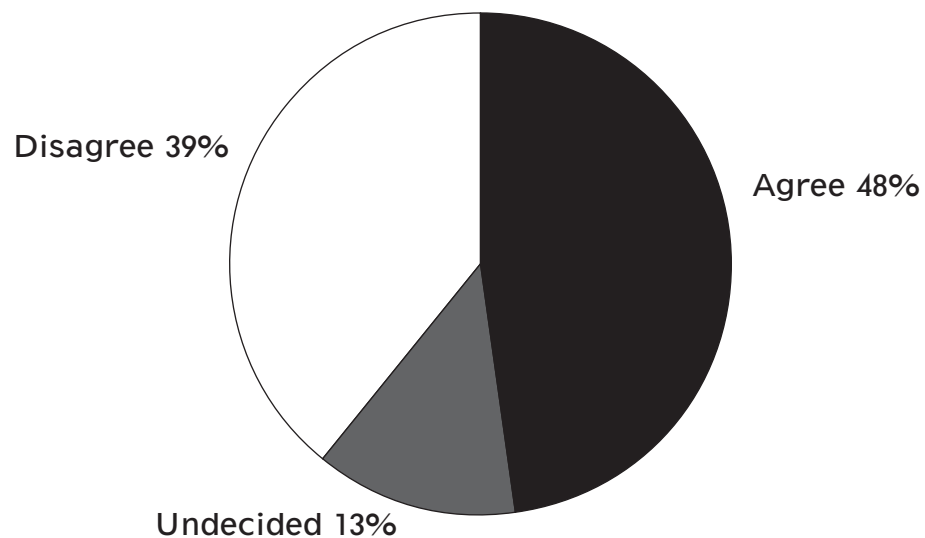
24. One argument against school vouchers is that they will make the public schools worse because they will be left with less money for operations. Would you agree or disagree with that statement? \_\_\_\_\_



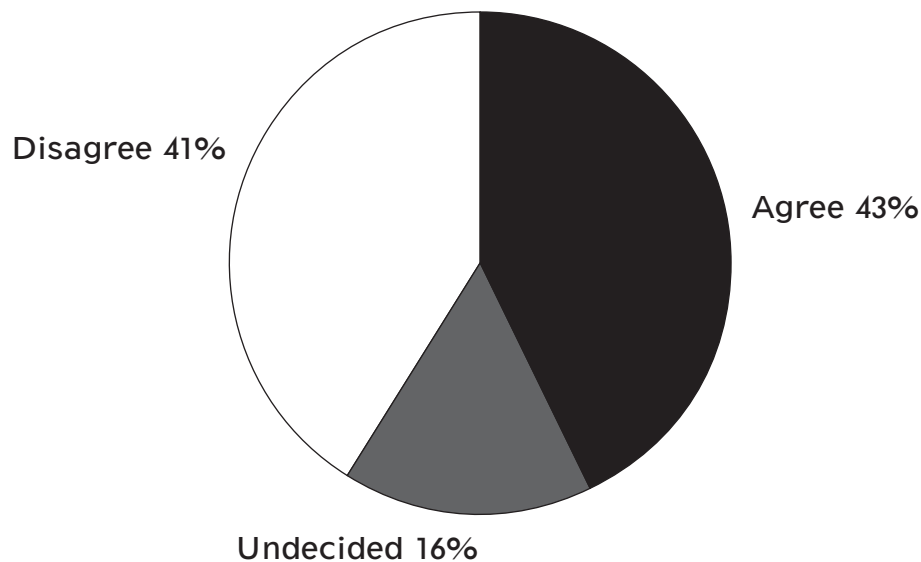
25. One argument in favor of school vouchers is that they are a lifeline for a child who can escape an ineffective, failing public school. Would you agree or disagree with that statement?



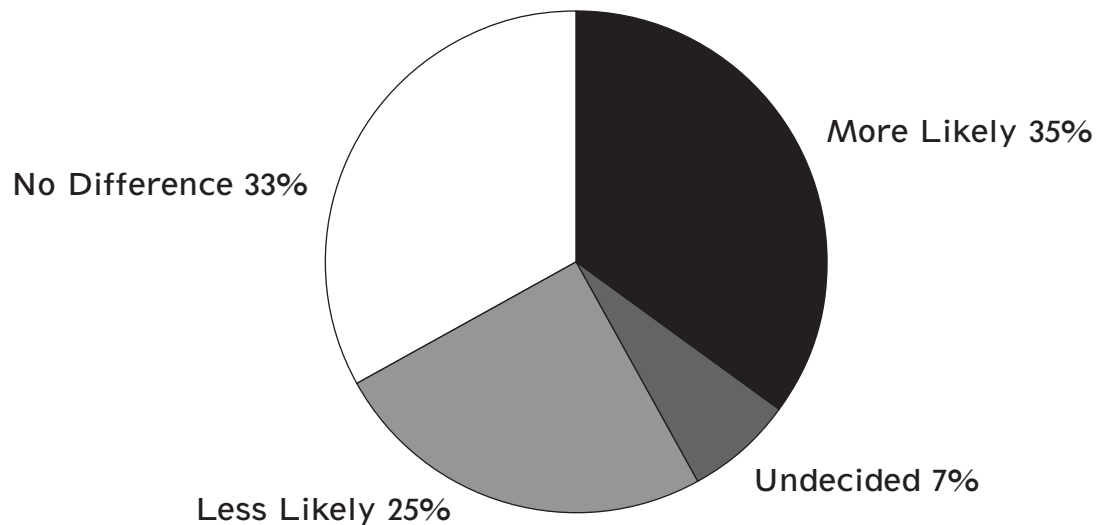
26. One argument against school vouchers is that they will help only a few kids and make things worse for students left behind in regular public schools. Would you agree or disagree with that statement?



27. One argument in favor of a school voucher system is that it will motivate principals, superintendents and school boards to be more responsive to requests made by parents. Would you agree or disagree with that statement? \_\_\_\_\_



28. Thinking ahead to the next election, when a candidate for Governor, State Senator or Representative supports school vouchers, 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? \_\_\_\_\_







## Demographics

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

Yes	58%
No	41%
Don't Know	1%

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

Under 6	10%
6 - 10	31%
11 - 14	23%
15 - 18	17%
Combination	19%

### ARE YOU REGISTERED TO VOTE AS A:

Democrat	41%
Libertarian	1%
Republican	40%
Other Party Affiliation	3%
Independent/No Party Affiliation	15%

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

18-25	8%
26-35	22%
36-45	30%
46-55	25%
56-65	8%
Over 65	7%

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

Under \$25,000	8%
\$25,000-\$49,999	16%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	39%
\$75,000 - \$150,000	28%
Over \$150,000	9%

### ARE YOU:

African-American	7%
Asian	5%
Hispanic	23%
White	63%
Other	2%

### ARE YOU:

Male	51%
Female	49%



# THE FRIEDMAN FOUNDATION WELCOMES YOUR SUPPORT

As a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, we rely solely on the generous support of our donors to continue promoting the Friedman's vision for school choice throughout the country. Please send your tax-deductible gift today and help interject liberty and choice into our education system. 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.

**Dr. Milton Friedman, Founder**  
Nobel Laureate and Founder of the Friedman Foundation

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Several questions contained in this survey have been adapted from earlier survey research conducted by Terry Moe, Paul Teske, and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The author is grateful for the insights their research has given us regarding public opinion and school choice.

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



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