

News Release

Nebraskans speak out on education reform topics

-Survey results find strong support for school choice policies-

OMAHA, NE (September 17, 2009) – More than eight of ten likely voters in Nebraska would send their children to private schools, charter schools, virtual schools or educate their children in a home school setting if they could, according to survey results released today. Eighty-four percent of likely voters polled would opt for schools other than traditional public schools, according to the survey.

The survey of 1,200 likely voters has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent. It was conducted by Strategic Vision, an Atlanta-based polling agency whose surveys have been cited on MSNBC, Fox News, Newsweek, Bloomberg News, Time Magazine, BBC, ABC news and USA Today.

The survey results were released by a group of state and national organizations, including the Nebraska Catholic Conference, Nebraska District Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod Schools, Lincoln Christian School, Nebraska Federation of Catholic School Parents, Omaha Christian Academy, Association of Christian Schools International, Mid- America Region, Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, Black Alliance For Educational Options (BAEO), Agudath Israel of America, National Catholic Educational Association, and the American Legislative Exchange Council.

“We would like Nebraskans to view these results in the context of the academic achievement goals for Nebraska students announced recently in conjunction with the P-16 Initiative. Many recognize that facilitating, promoting, and enhancing educational choices for parents and families would contribute in a significant way to ensuring high quality education for young Nebraskans, instilling in them the knowledge and abilities they need to succeed. Nebraskans and their policy makers cannot ignore the need to improve student achievement, and one way we can address this is to ensure Nebraska families have educational options,” said Jeremy Murphy, Associate Director for Education Issues for the Nebraska Catholic Conference and Secretary of the Nebraska Federation of Catholic School Parents board.

“As a business owner, I am aware of the importance of education and the strong foundation it establishes for success in the real world. Exercising parental choice in education is vital to realizing this in all educational systems. Our collective future depends upon our children’s success in school,” said Brian Neesen, co-owner, Granite Transformations for Kitchens and Baths, Omaha, Nebraska.

“As we have seen in the other states where we have conducted polls, there is a wide disconnect between what the voters would like to see in terms of school choice options with what the system is able to provide,” said Paul DiPerna, director of partner services for the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, which commissioned the survey.

“In the case of Nebraska, the results are clear: voters want more access and schooling options,” “The support for school choice concepts – such as tax credits, vouchers, and charter schools is significant, and cuts across numerous demographic groups.

DiPerna noted that while 44 percent of the state’s K-12 parents would like to send their child to a private school, only about 12 percent of the state’s students currently attend private schools. “Twenty percent of parents would like to home school their children, while eleven percent of parents would like to send their children to a charter school. Twenty-one percent say they prefer regular public schools,” he said.

Today, nearly nine out of ten students – 88 percent -- attend regular public schools. “The implication of these results is that Nebraska, like most other states, does not have a sufficient school choice system in place to match parents’ schooling preferences,” he said.

Other results of the survey:

- The state’s Democrats (D), Republicans (R), and Independents (I) find common ground on school choice topics and issues. High levels of support exist for tax-credit scholarships (D: 52% | R: 59% | I: 53%) and school vouchers (D: 53% | R: 54% | I: 63%).
- Nebraskans are more likely to favor (55%) a tax-credit scholarship system than oppose (41%) such a system.
- According to voters, the top challenges confronting Nebraska’s public school system include a lack of accountability (29%); overcrowded classrooms and schools (23%), and poor engagement with parents (21%).
- Voters are more likely to support a tax-credit scholarship system based upon financial need (57%) than oppose (39%) such a system.
- Similarly, when asked about school vouchers, 55% of Nebraska voters say they favor the idea.

The survey was commissioned in April by the Friedman Foundation, an Indianapolis-based school reform advocacy organization, on behalf of the state and national partners. The Nebraska findings are the latest in a series of surveys commissioned under the Foundation’s *Survey in the State* project, which surveys state residents on a variety of education reform issues and attitudes. Previous surveys have been conducted in 2009 in the states of Kentucky, Ohio, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Oregon; and Montana, Maryland, Oklahoma, Idaho, Tennessee, and Nevada, released during 2008. The Foundation also polled voters in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, and Illinois from 2005 to 2007.

The Indianapolis-based Friedman Foundation is a non-profit organization established in 1996. The origins of the foundation lie in Milton and Rose Friedman’s long-standing concern about the formidable challenges facing America’s elementary and secondary education systems. The best way to improve the quality of education, they believed, is to enable all parents to have a truly free choice of the schools that their children attend. The Friedman Foundation works to build upon this vision clarify its meaning to the general public and amplify the national call for true education reform through school choice.

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