Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty: Releases statewide poll on K-12 education, message-testing

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What do Wisconsinites think of school choice, Act 10, and school funding

June 25, 2018 – Milwaukee, WI – With education issues taking center stage in political debates across the state – and country, the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty released the results of a poll and message test experiment on K-12 education issues. The poll of 1,500 Wisconsin residents surveyed public opinion on spending on K-12 schools, the impact of Act 10, vouchers, charter schools, and education savings accounts (ESAs). In addition, a message test experiment was conducted to better determine which messages are most effective at increasing support for education reform ideas. A summary of the poll can be found here.

Some of the takeaways include:

- Significant Statewide Support for Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) – 64% of respondents support or strongly support ESAs, a policy that allows parents to receive a portion of the money that would have been spent on their children in public school. 79% of Republicans, 69% of Independents, and 46% of Democrats endorse ESAs.
- Knowledge of Actual K-12 School Spending Impacts Views – With no prior information, 54% of respondents said the amount spent per student in Wisconsin was Too Low (34% Just Right and 12% Too High). But when

respondents are given information about the actual amount spent per student – $10,400 per student on average, respondents saying the amount is Too Low drops 14 percentage points to 40%. Those who say the amount is Just Right rises to 41% and Too High goes to 20%, meaning 61% do not want additional spending on K-12 public schools.

- Wisconsinites are concerned of the impact of Act 10 on kids, teachers: – The poll asked respondents about the effect of Act 10 on students and teachers. A plurality (43%) said Act 10 had a negative effect on students (31% positive, 26% neither). A slim majority (51%) said Act 10 had a negative effect on teachers (28% positive, 22% neither). Views on Act 10 are, unsurprisingly, polarized. Republicans view the law's effects more positively (56% positive on students, 47% positive on teachers) while negative views characterize Independents (51% negative on students, 54% negative on teachers) and Democrats (66% negative on students, 74% negative on teachers).
- Voucher and Charter Schools Have Plurality Support – 50% of statewide respondents support charter schools (38% oppose) and 49% support voucher schools (41% oppose). Vouchers and charters are very popular with Republicans (71% support vouchers and 66% support charters) while Independents hover around 50% (47% support vouchers, 51% support charters).
- Messages Can Increase Support for School Choice – The message test experiment revealed several messages on vouchers, charter schools, and ESAs that increase support among various groups. For instance, respondents increase support for vouchers with messages that mention safe schools, diversity, and equal opportunity. For charter schools, emphasizing the schools are public schools and hubs of innovation can increase support.

"While this poll has a wealth of information, three things are clear from the results: school choice is popular, the public responds to information on school spending, and using the right messages matters when discussing education," said Will Flanders, WILL Research Director.

The statewide survey of 1,500 Wisconsin adults was conducted by Research Now Survey Sampling International in April 2018. More information can be found on our website or by contacting Dr. Flanders.