



NORTH CAROLINA VOTERS AND THE VALUE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION 2015 SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

NORTH CAROLINA VOTERS VALUE PUBLIC EDUCATION AND WANT MORE STATE INVESTMENT

The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation recently commissioned a statewide survey on voter perceptions of public education in North Carolina (April 2015)¹ as a follow-up to a 2013 statewide survey on the same subject. The results show that North Carolina voters strongly value local public schools, support greater investments in overall funding and want more investment in teachers. The most recent survey shows great concern that state education policy and funding are undermining the public's desire to ensure that each child is challenged to grow and is prepared for success in college, career and life. The highlights are summarized below (full results available at zsr.org).

➡ **59% of voters believe K-12 public education in the state of North Carolina is *On the Wrong Track*, an 11% increase from 2013.**

- 26% increase among Liberals (from 44% to 70% *On the Wrong Track* in 2015)
- 10% increase among Moderates (from 44% to 54% *On the Wrong Track* in 2015)
- No significant increase among Conservatives (from 55% to 56% in 2015)

➡ **State budgeting, policies and requirements are most often cited as the reasons why North Carolina's K-12 public schools are *On the Wrong Track*.**

- Curriculum – Common Core, not teaching basics, etc. (27%)
- Underpaid teachers (23%)
- The amount of testing – teaching to the test, too much testing, etc. (22%)
- Not enough funding (21%)
- Teacher retention (14%)

¹1,235 North Carolina voters completed the 2015 online survey between April 16th and May 6th. 85% of respondents had voted in the 2014 elections and 100% voted in the 2012 Presidential election year. The sample is representative of the state census population with regard to race, urban/rural residence and presence of school-aged children in the household. Voters self-identified themselves on social issues as Conservative (29%), Moderate (45%) or Liberal (26%) and significant differences between these subgroups are noted. 1,519 North Carolina voters completed the January 28 – February 6, 2013 online survey with the same criteria and representation of the state population.

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➔ **80% of voters agree “state policy and funding decisions are putting greater burdens on our local schools and giving them fewer resources to educate our students.”**

- 74% of Conservatives, 80% of Moderates and 87% of Liberals strongly or somewhat agree.

➔ **76% believe it is highly important to “make sure the school district is adequately funded to provide a 21st century education.”**

- 65% of Conservatives, 77% of Moderates and 85% of Liberals rated it a six or seven on a seven point scale with 1=*Not At All Important* and 7=*Extremely Important*.

➔ **There is strong voter support for investments in teachers.**

- 76% believe it is very important to build the capacity of teachers to be the best they can be.
- 72% believe it is very important to make sure teachers have opportunities to improve their teaching techniques.

➔ **Critical areas for improvement focus on teacher pay and overall school funding.**

- 62% identify underpaid teachers (up from 54% in 2013).
- 50% identify inadequate funding (new item).
- 44% identify class sizes that are too large (down from 48% in 2013).
- 40% identify curriculum quality (new item).

➔ **Voters believe state elected officials and leaders are primarily responsible for addressing the critical areas for improvement.**

- Underpaid teachers: 39% believe State Legislature responsible and another 24% the Governor.
- Inadequate funding: 49% believe State Legislature responsible and another 23% the Governor.

➔ **Voters continue to see North Carolina’s K-12 education system as extremely important and beneficial to the state.**

- 85% rate it as extremely important (93% in 2013).
- 80% rate it extremely or somewhat beneficial (85% in 2013).

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➡ Voters are critical of policies or programs that use public tax dollars for private and charter schools that are not available to operate all or without the same standards of accountability as K-12 public schools.

- 75% agree public tax dollars should not be used to pay for exclusive private schools (up from 73% in 2013).
- 73% agree public money should not go to private schools. If parents choose to send their children to private schools, they should pay for it (up from 68% in 2013).
- 71% agree tax dollars should not go to for-profit companies who run charter schools that are not accountable to taxpayers for delivering student outcomes in the same way local public schools are.
- 71% believe it is very important that state laws, policies and regulations should require the same measures and level of accountability for student performance from every charter or private school that receives taxpayer funds.
- 70% believe it is very important that charter schools need the same level of accountability for curriculum, teacher quality and student performance as traditional public schools.
- 67% believe private schools that receive public funds should not be allowed to deny a student enrollment based upon religious affiliation.

➡ Voters remain somewhat ambivalent about the future of North Carolina's K-12 public schools.

- 20% strongly agree they have confidence public schools are the best option.
- 34% somewhat agree they have confidence public schools are the best option.
- 32% somewhat agree they lack confidence public schools are the best option.
- 14% strongly agree they lack confidence public schools are the best option.
- 60% agree charter schools are providing important options for children who are not being served well by our local public schools.

➡ Key attributes and benefits of schools that are most predictive of parents' satisfaction with their local public schools include:

- Excellent teachers
- Provides a complete education to students
- Teaches children core academic skills like reading, writing and arithmetic
- Every child is challenged to learn and progress to the next level
- Students are prepared for higher education
- Promotes a safe and healthy community
- Schools adapt to the community's needs