

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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EMBARGOED: Do not publish or broadcast until 9:00 p.m. PDT on Wednesday, April 25, 2012.

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### **PPIC STATEWIDE SURVEY: CALIFORNIANS AND EDUCATION**

## **Worried About School Funding, Most Favor Tax Increase—For the Rich**

### **LIKELY VOTERS RELUCTANT TO RAISE OWN TAXES, BUT 54 PERCENT SUPPORT BROWN INITIATIVE**

SAN FRANCISCO, April 25, 2012—California’s likely voters favor raising the state income taxes of the wealthiest state residents to provide more money for public schools, but most oppose increasing the state sales tax for this purpose. These are among the key findings of a statewide survey on K–12 education released today by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC).

The survey finds that 65 percent of likely voters favor raising the top rate of state income tax paid by the wealthiest Californians (34% oppose). By contrast, 46 percent support raising the state sales tax (52% oppose). Temporary increases in both of these taxes are components of Governor Jerry Brown’s proposed November ballot initiative to deal with the state’s multibillion-dollar budget gap.

Asked specifically about Brown’s initiative, 54 percent of likely voters say they would vote for it (39% would vote no) when they are read the ballot title and a brief summary. Direct comparisons with earlier PPIC surveys on this question are not possible because the initiative has changed. However, likely voters’ support was about the same in March when they were read the identical ballot title and a similar summary (52% yes, 40% no). Today, Democrats and Republicans are sharply divided on the measure (75% Democrats yes, 65% Republicans no), with independents more likely to say they would vote yes (53%) than no (43%). Public school parents support the measure by a wide margin (60% yes, 36% no).

If voters reject his initiative, Brown says there will be automatic cuts to public schools. A strong majority of likely voters (78%) oppose these cuts—a view held across parties.

The survey also asked about another idea being proposed to provide more money for education: an overall increase in state personal income taxes. The majority of likely voters (57%) oppose this tax increase (40% favor).

“Most likely voters favor the governor’s tax initiative, although they express much stronger support for raising taxes on the wealthy than increasing their own taxes for public schools,” says Mark Baldassare, PPIC president and CEO.

There is a strong partisan split among likely voters on the specific tax increases to provide more money for public schools. Most Democrats favor increasing the state income tax on high earners (89%), the state sales tax (64%), and personal income taxes overall (56%). Most independents favor raising income taxes on the wealthy (63%), but not the state sales tax (43% favor) or personal income tax (42% favor). Support is low among Republicans for raising any of these taxes to fund schools (36% support higher taxes on the wealthy, 25% support state sales tax increase, 21% support personal income tax increase).

## **DESPITE CONCERNS ABOUT FUNDING, MOST BALK AT RAISING LOCAL TAXES**

An overwhelming majority of likely voters (72%) say the state budget situation is a big problem for public schools, and 67 percent say the quality of education is a big problem. When they are asked to choose among the four main areas of state spending, most (58%) say that K–12 education is the area they most want to protect from spending cuts (17% higher education, 15% health and human services, 7% prisons and corrections). And most (59%) say the current level of state funding for their local public schools is not adequate.

Likely voters are worried about steps that schools have taken to deal with decreased funding: 67 percent say they are very concerned about schools laying off teachers and 62 percent are very concerned about having fewer days of school instruction.

When public school parents are asked about the impact of budget cuts, a large majority (81%) report that their child’s public school has been affected a lot (36%) or somewhat (45%) by recent state budget cuts. Most (58%) say they are very concerned about teacher layoffs at their child’s school, with Latino parents (65%) much more likely than white parents (47%) to feel this way.

But just as most likely voters balk at raising their own state taxes to aid public schools, they are reluctant to increase their local taxes. Asked whether they would vote yes on a bond measure to pay for construction projects for their local school district, 53 percent say they would vote yes—but this is less than the 55 percent threshold needed to pass such a measure. If there were a local ballot measure that increased local parcel taxes to benefit schools, 51 percent would vote yes; this falls short of the two-thirds’ approval required for passage of a parcel tax.

## **FEW SAY THAT MONEY ALONE WILL SOLVE PROBLEMS**

How can school quality be improved? Just 6 percent of likely voters say increased funding alone will lead to significant improvement. Forty-eight percent say that using funds more wisely will significantly improve schools, and a similar share (46%) say both are needed.

“While many Californians believe that the state’s budget situation is a big problem for public schools, few think that money alone is the answer,” Baldassare says. “Most continue to say that significant improvements in the quality of education will take place when we spend money more wisely.”

## **MOST PREFER LOCAL CONTROL OVER STATE FUNDS FOR SCHOOLS**

The governor is proposing two other K–12 education reforms: giving school districts more flexibility in deciding how to spend state funds and giving districts with more low-income students or English learners more money than other schools.

Likely voters favor the idea of spending decisions made closer to home. Asked who should have the most control over spending decisions—local schools, local school districts, or state government—an overwhelming majority prefer local control (53% districts, 36% schools, 6% state). This majority holds across parties, regions, and demographic groups. But there are some differences: Los Angeles residents are less likely than others to choose local school districts (40% vs. about half in other regions) and more likely to choose state government (21% vs. about 10% in other regions). Among ethnic groups, Latinos (24%) are more likely than Asians (17%) or whites (7%) to favor state government control.

After being informed that some state funding provided to K–12 schools is earmarked for specific programs or goals, the vast majority of likely voters (81%) say they would favor giving local districts more flexibility over how that money is spent. How confident are they that school districts would spend the money wisely? Most (75%) are at least somewhat confident (18% very confident).

## **SUPPORT FOR DIRECTING MONEY TO NEEDIEST STUDENTS**

Brown's proposal to target resources to low-income students and English learners has drawn support from many experts and school leaders, and generated controversy over its impact on districts with fewer of these students.

As they have in past PPIC surveys, most likely voters (79%) say that school districts in lower-income areas of the state have fewer resources—including good teachers and classroom materials—than those in wealthier areas. Fifty-four percent of likely voters say that if new funding were to become available, more of it should go to the districts with more low-income students. They are much less likely (40%) to support the idea of giving more funding to districts with more English learners.

Responses are the same when likely voters are asked to consider the possibility that giving more money to schools with more needy students means that other districts would get less: 53 percent would give more money to districts with more low-income students and 40 percent would give more money to districts with more English learners.

## **BROWN'S JOB APPROVAL RATING HOLDS STEADY**

As the governor tries to build support for his tax initiative, 47 percent of likely voters approve of his job performance (40% disapprove, 12% don't know). This is similar to March (46% approve, 38% disapprove, 16% don't know) and April 2011 (46% approve, 32% disapprove, 21% don't know). Brown gets much lower marks for his handling of K–12 education: 23 percent approve, 54 percent disapprove, 23 percent don't know. The state legislature fares poorly on both measures: Just 15 percent of likely voters approve of the way the legislature is doing its job, and just 10 percent approve of its handling of K–12 education.

## **MORE KEY FINDINGS**

- **One in four know how California ranks on spending, test scores**—page 18

Twenty-seven percent of likely voters correctly state that California is below average in its spending per pupil and in student test scores compared to other states.

- **Concerns about teacher shortage, English learners**—page 19

Most likely voters are very concerned that schools in lower-income areas have a shortage of good teachers compared to schools in wealthier areas (62%) and that English learners score lower on standardized tests than other students (53%).

- **Local public schools get good grades**—page 20

Half of Californians (52%) give a grade of A (17%) or B (35%) to their local public schools, similar to adults nationwide in a 2011 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll. Public school parents are slightly more positive, with 24 percent giving A's and 36 percent giving B's to their schools.

This PPIC survey is conducted with funding from The Dirk and Charlene Kabcenell Foundation, the Stuart Foundation, and The Silver Giving Foundation.

## **ABOUT THE SURVEY**

The PPIC Statewide Survey has provided policymakers, the media, and the general public with objective, advocacy-free information on the perceptions, opinions, and public policy preferences of California residents since 1998. This is the eighth annual survey focusing on K–12 public education. It is conducted with funding from The Dirk and Charlene Kabcenell Foundation, the Stuart Foundation, and The Silver Giving Foundation. Findings are based on a survey of 2,005 California adult residents, including 1,603 interviewed on landline telephones and 402 interviewed on cell phones. Interviews were conducted from April 3–10, 2012, in English and Spanish, according to respondents' preferences. The sampling error,

## PPIC Statewide Survey

taking design effects from weighting into consideration, is  $\pm 3.4$  percent for all adults,  $\pm 3.7$  percent for the 1,310 registered voters,  $\pm 4.3$  percent for the 823 likely voters, and  $\pm 6.2$  percent for the 620 public school parents.

Mark Baldassare is president and CEO of PPIC, where he holds the Arjay and Frances Fearing Miller Chair in Public Policy. He is founder of the PPIC Statewide Survey, which he has directed since 1998.

PPIC is dedicated to informing and improving public policy in California through independent, objective, nonpartisan research on major economic, social, and political issues. The institute was established in 1994 with an endowment from William R. Hewlett. As a private operating foundation, PPIC does not take or support positions on any ballot measure or on any local, state, or federal legislation, nor does it endorse, support, or oppose any political parties or candidates for public office.

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