

NEWS RELEASE

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PPIC STATEWIDE SURVEY: CALIFORNIANS AND EDUCATION

Worried About Budget's Toll on Schools, Most Californians Favor Income Tax Hike—But Only for Wealthiest

MAJORITIES SAY SPECIAL ELECTION ON BROWN'S REVENUE PACKAGE IS A GOOD IDEA

SAN FRANCISCO, April 27, 2011—Most Californians are very concerned that the state's budget deficit will result in cuts to public schools, the area of the budget they most want to protect, according to a statewide survey released today by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), with funding from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. To maintain current funding for K–12 education, a strong majority favor raising income taxes for the wealthiest Californians, but most oppose raising the state sales tax or personal income taxes overall.

With California leaders at a standoff over how to fill the state's \$26 billion budget gap, strong majorities of Californians (68%), likely voters (65%), and public school parents (74%) say the quality of K–12 education will suffer if cuts are made. There are partisan differences, with Democrats (77%) and independents (64%) saying quality will suffer, and Republicans divided over whether it will suffer (49%) or could be maintained (48%).

When Californians are read the major areas of state spending—K–12 public schools, health and human services, higher education, and prisons and corrections—57 percent most want to protect schools. Since PPIC first asked the question in June 2003, a majority have responded this way. Most are very concerned (57%) or somewhat concerned (29%) that the state's budget deficit will result in significant cuts.

“Californians' support for maintaining K–12 spending remains strong. It is a significant factor for the state's leaders to take into account in any proposals that they put before voters this year,” says Mark Baldassare, president and CEO of PPIC. “Residents are worried about the toll that reduced spending is having on the quality of K–12 public education, and public school parents are noticing the impact of state budget cuts on their children's schools.”

SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL ELECTION, BROWN'S JOB APPROVAL UP SLIGHTLY

Californians are slightly more likely than they were in March to say it is a good idea to hold a special election this year on the temporary tax and fee increases that Governor Jerry Brown has proposed to prevent additional budget cuts. Majorities of adults (58%) and likely voters (56%) favor a special election (54% all adults, 51% likely voters in March). Across parties, 72 percent of Democrats, 53 percent of independents, and 38 percent of Republicans say a special election is a good idea.

Most adults (61%) and likely voters (61%) favor Brown's budget plan to close the budget gap—about half through spending cuts and half through temporary tax increases, with no cuts in K–12 schools. A strong

majority of Democrats (72%) and more than half of independents (54%) favor the plan, and Republicans are split (47% favor, 49% oppose).

These results do not necessarily translate into support for the specifics of the governor's plan. Solid majorities oppose increases in the state sales tax (61% all adults, 62% likely voters) or overall state personal income tax (62% all adults, 66% likely voters) to maintain funding for schools—both components of Brown's proposal. Strong majorities of Republicans (76%) and independents (65%) oppose a sales tax hike, as do about half of Democrats (52%). Opposition to an overall income tax increase is similar (82% Republicans, 66% independents, 52% Democrats).

By contrast, 68 percent of adults and 62 percent of likely voters favor raising the top rate of the state income tax paid by the wealthiest Californians to maintain K–12 funding. There is a partisan divide: Democrats (82%) and independents (63%) are in favor, and Republicans (60%) are opposed.

Brown's own job approval rating (40%) is up slightly from March (34%), with 29 percent disapproving and 31 percent unsure. Likely voters view him more favorably (46% approve, 32% disapprove, 21% don't know). But the governor gets lower marks for his handling of K–12 education (24% adults, 25% likely voters approve). The state legislature fares worse than the governor in both areas. Only 21 percent of adults and 14 percent of likely voters approve of the job the legislature is doing (60% all adults, 74% likely voters disapprove). Just 18 percent of adults and 9 percent of likely voters approve of the way the legislature is handling K–12 education.

When it comes to local school funding, most Californians (60%) would support a local bond measure to pay for school construction projects. A slim majority of likely voters (53%) would vote yes, just short of the 55 percent majority required for school bond passage. This is a record low level among likely voters, whose support has been as high as 72 percent (December 1999). If there were a measure to raise local parcel taxes to benefit local public schools, 59 percent of adults and 54 percent of likely voters would approve—well below the two-thirds vote required to pass. Californians are divided over whether it should be easier to pass local parcel taxes: 48 percent of all adults and 46 percent of likely voters say this is a good idea, while 47 percent of adults and 49 percent of likely voters say it is a bad idea.

TEACHER LAYOFFS TOP LIST OF CONCERNS ABOUT CUTS

Asked how the quality of public schools can be significantly improved, 43 percent of residents and 47 percent of likely voters say existing state funds need to be used more wisely. A similar 41 percent of residents and 42 percent of likely voters say funds need to be used more wisely and the amount of funding needs to be increased. Just 13 percent of adults and 9 percent of likely voters say that increasing state funding alone would significantly improve quality.

Public schools have already taken steps to deal with decreased funding, and the PPIC survey asked about four of them. Residents are most concerned about teacher layoffs (68%), but majorities are very concerned about the other areas as well: a shortened school year (56%), elimination of art and music programs (53%), and increased class sizes (52%).

If the legislature or voters reject tax increases, K–12 public education—which accounts for about 40 percent of the state budget—would face cuts. Among the options that would provide the most cost savings, according to the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), are eliminating funding for K–3 class-size reduction, ending the state requirement that students be provided with transportation to school, and requiring children to be 5 years old before starting kindergarten. (Plans are underway to move this date up from December 2 to September 1 in the future, but the LAO identified this as a way to save money in 2011-2012.) Asked about these ideas, a strong majority of Californians (77%) say eliminating funding for reducing K–3 class sizes is a bad idea, and 61 percent say the same about ending the transportation requirement. By contrast, 66 percent say changing the kindergarten age requirement is a good idea.

SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE SEEN AS BIG CHALLENGE

Californians' support for maintaining K–12 spending levels does not mean they are pleased with the quality of education students are getting. Most Californians (85%) say school quality is at least somewhat of a problem. Over half (55%) call it a big problem, a view held by at least half of residents since April 2005. A majority (54%) say school quality has gotten worse in the past few years, while 29 percent say it has stayed the same and just 11 percent say it has improved.

Less than half of Californians (43%) say schools are doing a good or excellent job preparing students for college, and only 36 percent are happy with the schools' performance in preparing students for the workforce.

Asked about some of the challenges in the state's K–12 education system, residents are most likely to view the high school dropout rate (74%) as a big problem, followed by student achievement (46%) and teacher quality (44%). The proportion of adults who view the dropout rate as a big problem is at a new high. Strong majorities of public school parents (73%) and adults across parties, regions, and demographic groups hold this view. Blacks (85%) and Latinos (83%) are much more likely than whites (68%) and Asians (67%) to do so.

MOST WANT TEACHER SALARIES CLOSELY TIED TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The share of Californians who say teacher quality is a big problem is also at a record high. Most Californians say a teacher's salary should be very closely tied to student achievement (29%) or somewhat closely tied (40%). Solid majorities across regions and parties (69% independents, 68% Republicans, 65% Democrats) say the two should be closely tied. Among racial and ethnic groups, Latinos (75%) are the most likely and blacks the least likely (56%) to say so.

Most residents (65%) are very concerned that students in lower-income areas have a shortage of good teachers compared to schools in wealthier areas, up 11 points since April 2008 (54%). When asked about the distribution of resources, such as good teachers and classroom materials, 79 percent of residents say schools in lower-income areas of the state do not have the same amount. And 67 percent say that if new state funding were available, schools in lower-income areas should get more of it.

LOCAL SCHOOLS GET GOOD GRADES

Although most Californians (56% all adults, 66% public school parents) say local public schools do not get enough funding, they have generally positive views of their own schools. Half of adults (51%) give their schools a grade of B or higher, as they have each year since 2005. There are differences across racial and ethnic groups: Latinos (59%), Asians (49%), and whites (48%) are more likely than blacks (39%) to give their local school an A or B. Blacks (45%) are more likely than others to give their schools C grades.

MORE KEY FINDINGS

- **Many unaware how state ranks in spending, student achievement**—page 9

Just one in four Californians (23%) know that both student test scores and spending per pupil are below average compared to other states.

- **Public school parents see impact of cuts**—page 15

More than half of public school parents say they have noticed furloughs or layoffs of support staff (52%) or cuts to programs such as art, music, summer school, or extracurricular activities (58%).

- **Most prefer local control of state money for schools**—page 21

An overwhelming majority of residents (83%) prefer control at the local level, either by school districts (49%) or schools (34%). Just 13 percent prefer that state government make these decisions.

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 survey is part of an annual series focusing on K–12 public education that began in 2005 and is supported with funding from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Its goal is to inform state policymakers, encourage discussion, and raise public awareness about a variety of K–12 issues. Findings are based on a telephone survey of 2,504 California adult residents interviewed on landlines and cell phones from April 5–19, 2011. Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), Vietnamese, or Korean, according to respondents' preferences. The sampling error is ± 3 percent for all adults, ± 3.2 percent for the 1,634 registered voters, ± 3.5 percent for the 1,209 likely voters, and ± 5.5 for the 763 public school parents. For more information on methodology, see page 24.

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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