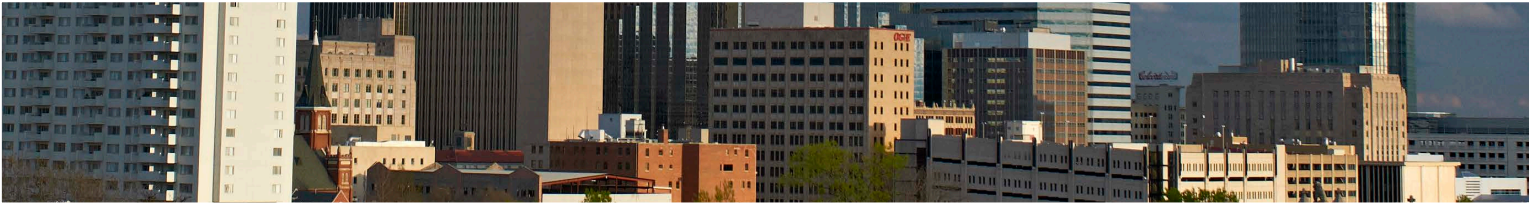
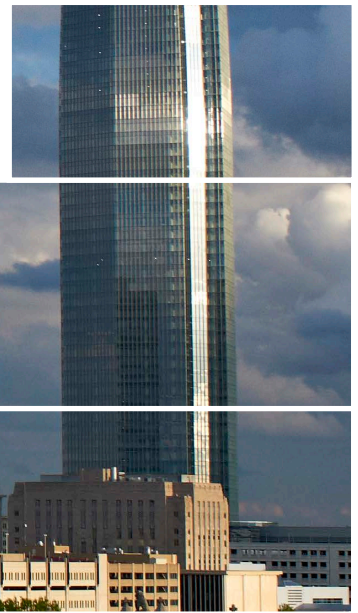


# SOONER SURVEY



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## Voters, Parents Emphatically Support School Choice Expansion

*By: Pat McFerron, President, Cole Hargrave Snodgrass and Associates, Inc.*

Oklahoma voters strongly embrace school choice and giving parents the right to use tax dollars to send their child to their choice of public or private schools. Support for school choice is overwhelming – fully 70% of all voters, including 79% of Republicans and 60% of registered Democrats support school choice for public or private schools.

Not only do 70% support school choice, but 47% say they strongly support it – 54% among those Republicans with a history of voting in primaries. Women with a child in the home are the most committed to school choice with 78% supporting parental ability to direct their tax dollars to a public or private school of their choosing and 60% say they strongly favor this ability. Anyone abiding by the old adage “if Momma isn’t happy, ain’t nobody happy” should pay close attention to this issue.

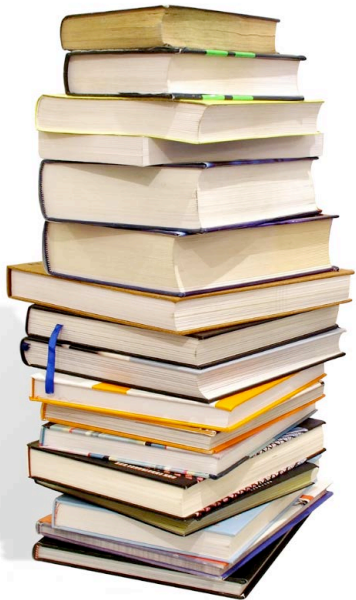
As one might anticipate, those under 45 years of age are the most supportive of

school choice (75%) – but even among those over 65 years of age, 67% still support it. What some might find surprising is that rural residents (70% favor) are just as supportive as are their counterparts from the two large metro centers (70% favor). Unexpected by those who are new to the issue is that the strongest support comes from households with incomes of less than \$50,000 a year (78% favor school choice) and this support steadily decreases to 67% support among voters with annual family incomes in excess of \$100,000.



(Story continued on page 2)

School choice does not have a sharp ideological angle. Tea Party advocates (which represent 30% of the total electorate) are strong supporters (78% favor school choice), but even among the 31% of Oklahomans who disagree with the Tea Party, we see solid support (58% favor school choice). School choice is not just a secondary issue. Two-thirds of voters say it is either “extremely” or “very” important to them. The key, however, is that 34% say it is an extremely important issue. Women with a child in the home (54%), those getting educational information from social media (50%), Tea Party supporters (45%) and lower income homes (48%) see school choice as an extremely important issue. Even among key swing groups such as those neutral toward the Tea Party (68% extremely/very important) this issue has the ability to affect an election.



Underlying much of the support for school choice is a fundamental belief that competition will help schools. More than three times as many Oklahomans say competition helps schools (67%) as say it does not (21%). Fully

72% of Republicans hold this belief as do 63% of Democrats and 70% of rural residents and 70% of those neutral toward the Tea Party – the critical swing bloc in Oklahoma elections.

Respondents were given a brief explanation of Education Savings Accounts (see page 3 for exact wording). After this explanation, we see an 18-point advantage for supporters (55% favor vs. 37% oppose). As is the case with school choice, the strongest advocates are those under 45 years of age (64% support) parents of school-age children (64%) and Republicans (58%). Key parts of the Republican base are supportive such as economic issue voters (60%), moral issue voters (61%) and Tea Party supporters (63%) are all solidly in favor of ESAs. Some of the normal Democrat constituencies which show strong support are those in households earning less than \$50,000 per annum (58% favor ESAs), infrequent churchgoers (57% favor) and those relying on social media for information (75% favor).

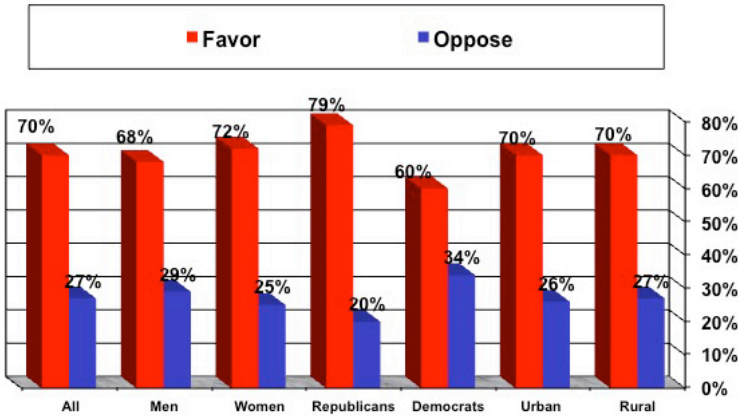
The public is clearly ready to move on school choice initiatives – and this is likely one reason there has been so much fighting from the education establishment against the modest school choice Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarship program. While only 28% of the public is aware of that program, when it is described 74% see it as a good thing and 75% want to expand it to cover more children. When three-quarters of Oklahomans agree on a policy, the courts become the last resort. Elected legislative leaders should watch this issue closely as the public will demand more parental ability to choose the right school for their own child.

1. Generally speaking, do you favor or oppose the concept of school choice? (After response, ask:) Would you say you strongly (favor / oppose) or only somewhat (favor / oppose)?
  - 47% Strongly favor
  - 23% Somewhat favor
  - 11% Somewhat oppose
  - 16% Strongly oppose
  - 4% (Do not read) Undecided
  
2. How important do you believe the issue of school choice is for Oklahoma? Would you say school choice is: (Read list)
  - 34% Extremely important
  - 33% Very important
  - 24% Only somewhat important
  - 7% Not important at all
  - 1% (Do not read) Undecided
  
3. People have different ideas about competition among schools. (Rotate) Some people believe that competition can help improve all schools. Other people believe that competition hurts schools. Which do you believe? (Rotate)
  - 67% Competition can help improve our schools
  - 21% Competition won't improve our schools
  - 11% (Do not read) Undecided
  
4. Oklahoma currently has a very limited school choice program known as the Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarship program. This program allows the parent or guardians of a child with a disability to receive a portion of the tax dollars normally used to educate their child and allow it to be used to enroll their child an approved private school to meet their child's needs. Prior to this conversation, were you familiar with this program?
  - 28% Yes
  - 70% No
  - 2% (Do not read) Uncertain
  
5. From what you know and the brief description I just read, do you think the Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarship program is a good or a bad thing for Oklahoma?
  - 74% Good thing
  - 11% Bad thing
  - 15% (Do not read) Undecided
  
6. Fewer than 500 children in Oklahoma are on the LNH program. Expanding it would not take additional tax dollars because it moves a portion of the existing dollars spent to educate that student from the public school to the private school. Would you favor or oppose expanding this opportunity to more children? (After response, ask:) Would you say you strongly (favor / oppose) or only somewhat (favor / oppose)?
  - 47% Strongly favor
  - 28% Somewhat favor
  - 5% Somewhat oppose
  - 11% Strongly oppose
  - 8% (Do not read) Undecided
  
7. Would you favor or oppose Oklahoma creating education savings accounts? (After response, ask:) Would you say you strongly (favor / oppose) or only somewhat (favor / oppose)?
  - 29% Strongly favor
  - 25% Somewhat favor
  - 11% Somewhat oppose
  - 26% Strongly oppose
  - 8% (Do not read) Undecided

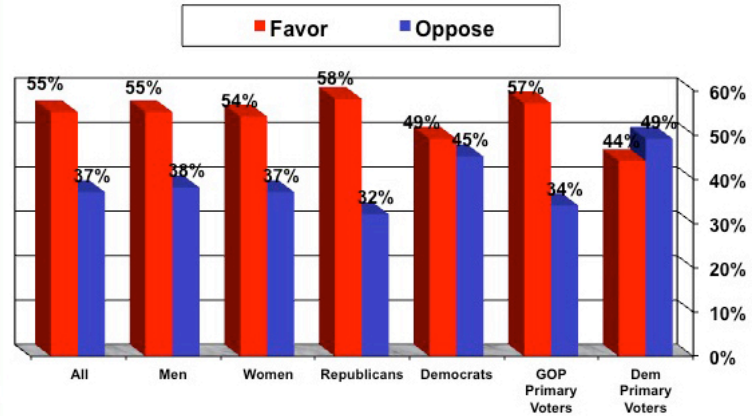
Education Savings Accounts—often called ESAs—is a proposal which would allow parents to take a portion of the yearly state funding which is currently used to educate their child in a traditional public school and create a personalized account to fund their child's education expenses. These expenses could be customized to include private or parochial school tuition, online education programs, tutoring, and books, and other future college expenses. These Education Savings Accounts would be administered and overseen by the state and would contain taxpayer protections against fraudulent activity or misuse of funds.



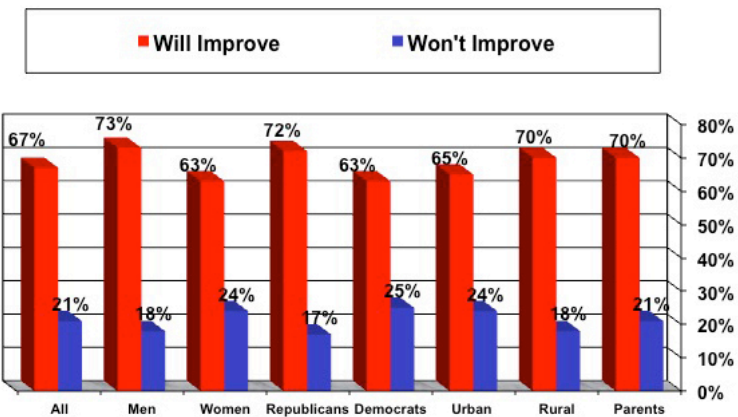
### Favor School Choice?



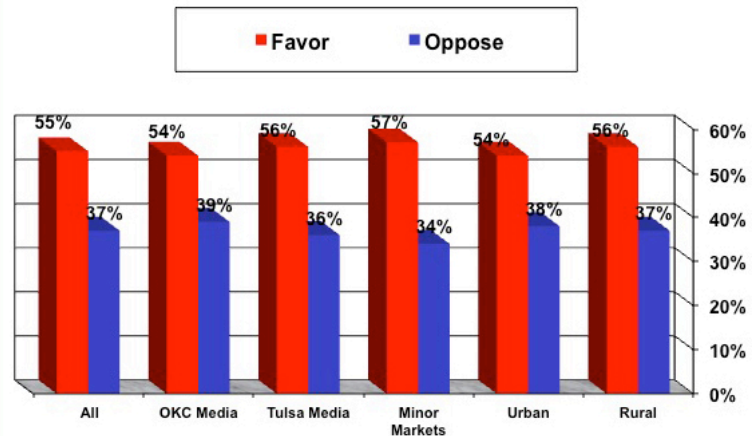
### Favor ESAs?



### Does Competition Improve Schools?



### Favor ESAs?



During his more than 20 years with Cole Hargrave Snodgrass & Associates, Pat McFerron has supervised polling and telephone voter contact programs in more than 40 states – including polling for numerous successful gubernatorial, U.S. Senate, congressional and legislative clients throughout the nation. McFerron has been the pollster for all of the recent successful OKC initiatives, including Big League City, MAPs for Kids and MAPs 3, as well as Oklahoma’s historic right-to-work effort and many other state questions. McFerron also oversees marketing research projects for CHS clients who range from Fortune 100 companies to non-profits, universities and entrepreneurial start-ups.

This edition of Sooner Survey was taken October 26 – November 5, 2015. It was a telephone survey of 500 registered voters in Oklahoma, including those on mobile lines. The confidence interval associated with this sample is that 95% of the time, the results are within 4.3% of the true values.

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