



## Memorandum

To: American Federation for Children  
From: Beck Research LLC  
Date: January 28, 2016

### Re: School Choice Survey Research Results

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Our recent national survey among likely 2016 November voters demonstrates that school choice continues to have strong and wide support across the nation. This year's survey has very consistent results from previous year's poll and again illustrates that voters strongly welcome greater school choice. Voters back the concept of school choice by a wide 70%-to-24% margin and there is a small amount of growth on several specific school choice proposals. Last year, voters were divided over school vouchers that allowed parents to use public funds to pay for tuition at private or religious schools, but this year, the proposal reaches majority support (53% support, 46% oppose).

The survey fielded January 19-24, 2016 among a total of 1,100 likely November 2016 voters. The national survey among 800 voters was supplemented with 200 additional Latino voters and 100 additional Millennials<sup>1</sup>. Interviews were conducted via live callers on landline and cell phones. The base sample margin of error is +/- 3.5%.

- **Support for school choice remains steady; 70% support the concept of school choice.** When asked, "Generally speaking, would you say you favor or oppose the concept of school choice? School choice gives parents the right to use the tax dollars associated with their child's education to send their child to the public or private school which better serves their needs," fully 70% support school choice, including 42% who strongly support it. This is almost identical to our findings last year.

Support for School Choice (Support – Oppose)	
January 2016	70% - 24%
January 2015	69% - 27%

Latinos and Millennials support school choice by a wider margin. Three-quarters of Latinos support the concept of school choice (76% to 21%), compared to 68% to 25% last year.

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<sup>1</sup> Millennials are defined as likely voters born after 1981.

Latinos support is now equal to African-American support (also 76% support). Millennials back it by a similar margin (75% to 20%) to have the highest support of the four generations.

As we found last year, school choice has strong support across partisan lines; among Democrats support has increased from 60% in 2015 to 65% in 2016 while among Independents (66%) and Republicans (80%) preference remains steady.

- School choice proposals all enjoy majority support.** Support for various school choice programs is very consistent over the year with special needs scholarships continuing to have the strongest support; a majority (58%) strongly supports special needs scholarships. Two programs have an uptick in support: scholarship tax credits are now supported by 74% and school vouchers have reached majority support for the first time (we split sampled two versions of the voucher language. Opportunity scholarships remain popular with 65% support, but support for “school vouchers to allow individual parents to use public funds to pay for tuition at private or religious schools” increased by four points to reach a slim majority). Virtual learning or online classes are more controversial than expected with 55% who support the proposal and 42% who oppose it.

Support for Individual School Choice Proposals (Support – Oppose)		
	2015	2016
Special Needs Scholarships	83% - 14%	83% - 14%
Public Charter Schools	76% - 20%	75% - 22%
Scholarship Tax Credit Programs	70% - 26%	74% - 23%
Education Savings Accounts	66% - 29%	65% - 29%
Opportunity Scholarships	63% - 34%	65% - 32%
Virtual learning	--	55% - 42%
School vouchers	49% - 49%	53% - 46%

Millennials outperform all adults on each of these proposals. In particular, Millennial support is disproportionately high for public charter schools (85% support) and school vouchers (58% support).

- Education and school choice should have larger role in presidential race.** We probed the importance of education in several ways and in each, a majority thinks education is critical to this year’s contest. First, a majority (55%) agree that “we need to hear more from the presidential candidates on how they will improve education.” Latinos and Millennials disproportionately want to hear from the candidates on education with 71% of Latinos and 67% of Millennials saying they want to hear more about this issue. Second, a majority (51%) say a candidate’s position on education is very important with an additional 42% saying it is somewhat important. Finally, almost two-thirds (64%) say they are more likely to support a Member of Congress or State Legislator who supported expanding school choice.
- Equal opportunity for all students boosts messaging.** Last year, the top arguments in favor of school choice were fairly consistent and each focused on the immediate student benefits

to students. This year, the top message paired our immediacy message with equal opportunity for all children and produced an even more persuasive message. Please note, underline added to highlight question wording differences.

- [SPLIT SAMPLE] *“Too many students are stuck in failing schools and all children should have an equal opportunity to get a quality education. If K to 12 students are not receiving a quality education in their neighborhood public school, parents should have the opportunity to get them a quality education at another school”* (mean of 7.8, 67% give an 8-10 rating).
- [SPLIT SAMPLE] *“Too many students are stuck in failing schools and need help right now. If K to 12 students are not receiving a quality education in their neighborhood public school, parents should have the opportunity to get them a quality education at another school”* (mean of 7.6, 63% give an 8-10 rating).

The other messages that focus on the immediate impact of these programs continue to be persuasive.

- *“Opportunity scholarship programs give children from low income families a way out of failing schools so they are not forced to wait indefinitely for their local schools to improve. Students should not be sentenced to a poor education based upon their zip code”* (mean of 7.4, 57% give an 8-10 rating).
- Latinos also find it persuasive that school choice helps families that need it the most. A top message among this critical group is that *“Opportunity scholarship programs benefit those children most in need. Most of the programs across the country help children from low income families”* (mean of 8.2, 63% give an 8-10 rating).
- **Almost all voters want vouchers in some form.** Finally, we probed eligibility for vouchers in two different ways. First, we found consistent results with our previous construction of this question: 85% of voters think some sort of vouchers and tax credit scholarships should be available in some form, including 43% who think they should be available to all students regardless of household income. However, when we altered the language and allowed multiple responses, 93% think some form of vouchers should be available with only 7% say that no students should be eligible. In addition, 68% think that all students should be eligible.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts. Please let us know if you have any questions.

**Appendix A**

<b>School Choice Support by Key Demographics</b>		
	<b>Initial</b>	<b>Net Support - Oppose</b>
<b>Total Likely Voters</b>	70 – 24	+45
<b>Men</b>	68 – 28	+41
<b>Women</b>	71 – 22	+50
<b>Democrats</b>	65 – 30	+35
<b>Independents</b>	66 – 25	+41
<b>Republicans</b>	80 – 17	+63
<b>Millennials</b>	75 – 20	+55
<b>Generation X</b>	68 – 28	+41
<b>Baby Boomers</b>	71 – 25	+46
<b>Silent Generation</b>	63 – 25	+38
<b>Non-College</b>	74 – 19	+36
<b>College Graduates</b>	66 – 29	+55
<b>White</b>	68 – 26	+41
<b>African-Americans</b>	76 – 20	+56
<b>Latinos</b>	76 – 21	+58
<b>Parents</b>	74 – 23	+51
<b>Public School Parents</b>	70 – 24	+46
<b>Teachers</b>	70 – 26	+44