



Memorandum

To: American Federation for Children
From: Beck Research LLC
Date: January 21, 2021

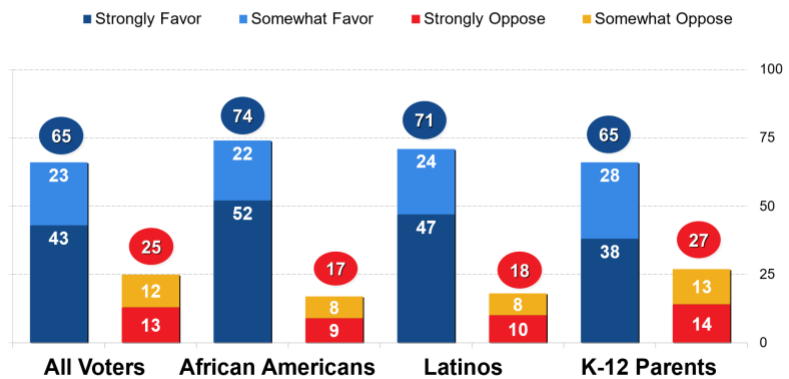
School Choice in the Era of Coronavirus: AFC's Seventh Annual National Survey Results

Despite a chaotic and difficult year for education due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, support for school choice remains high and stable, while being backed by a broad, enthusiastic coalition. Our seventh annual national survey among likely 2022 General Election voters illustrates that both the concept of school choice and the specific bill in front of Congress receive strong and diverse support across the country. This year, the concept of school choice is favored by a 65%-to-25% margin. African Americans and Latinos remain extremely supportive, with 74% of African Americans and 71% of Latinos backing the concept of school choice. In addition, roughly two-thirds (65%) of K-12 parents support school choice. Support for public charter schools has increased to 77% and the federal Education Freedom Scholarship legislation continues to outpace the broad concept of school choice (79% support).

The Concept of School Choice Has Broad and Consistent Support. Over the past seven years, roughly two-thirds of voters have favored the concept of school choice. This incredible consistency from 2015 to 2021 illustrates the power of school choice.¹

As we have seen in the past, a broad and deep coalition of voters back school choice:

Two-Thirds Back Concept of School Choice

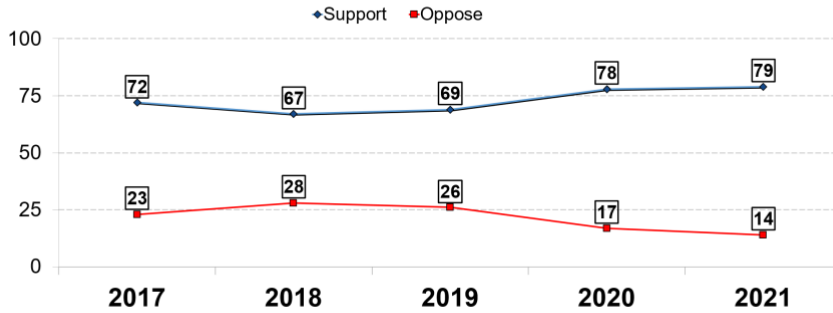


- African Americans and Latinos remain very enthusiastic supporters of school choice. This year, 74% of African Americans favor school choice, and 71% of Latinos support school choice.

¹ "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 designated for their child's education to send their child to the public or private school which best serves their needs."

- Fully 65% of K-12 parents back school choice, including 66% of public-school parents. Parental support is even higher among K-12 parents who work full-time and among middle school and high school parents (both 72%).
- School choice continues to enjoy bipartisan support. Republicans continue to be the most enthusiastic supporters (82%), but 69% of Independents and 55% of Democrats favor school choice.

Four out of Five Voters Back Education Freedom Scholarships



Support for Education Freedom Scholarships Remains Extremely High. A federal tax-credit scholarship continues to have very strong support, with 79% supporting the federal initiative, equal to last year’s level of support. Last year the description was updated to reflect the bill before Congress: “The Education Freedom Scholarship is a federal

scholarship tax credit that allows individuals and businesses to donate to in-state non-profit scholarship granting organizations that would provide scholarships for students to attend public, private, or career or technical schools of their choice.”² As we saw last year, this detailed description garners wide support, including 92% of African Americans and 86% of Latinos.

Support Jumps for Public Charter Schools and School Vouchers. School choice comes in many forms and support for all of the seven specific proposals tested this year has increased or remained steady. Support for public charters schools and “school vouchers that allow low- and middle-class families to send their child to any school they deem best” increased this year; 77% of voters support public charter schools and 74% back school vouchers with this framing.

Support is higher among African Americans, Latinos, and K-12 parents for each of these proposals. Support for public charter schools increased by

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Special needs scholarships	83% - 14%	83% - 15%	83% - 13%	83% - 14%	86% - 12%	83% - 13%	84% - 13%
Education savings accounts	66% - 29%	65% - 29%	69% - 24%	75% - 19%	79% - 18%	80% - 14%	77% - 18%
Public charter schools	76% - 20%	75% - 21%	74% - 22%	72% - 25%	74% - 22%	70% - 26%	77% - 20%
School vouchers (SPLIT: any school families deem best)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	65% - 31%	74% - 24%
Scholarship tax credit programs	70% - 26%	74% - 23%	73% - 23%	65% - 30%	68% - 28%	65% - 29%	67% - 27%
Virtual learning	N/A	55% - 42%	59% - 37%	55% - 40%	60% - 37%	65% - 31%	65% - 31%
School vouchers (SPLIT: private & religious schools)	49% - 49%	53% - 46%	51% - 47%	47% - 49%	53% - 44%	53% - 43%	54% - 43%

² 2019 Language: “The scholarship tax credit allows companies or individuals to donate to non-profit organizations that award scholarships to eligible students to attend private schools.”

10 points among Democrats to 67% and by 14 points among Independents to 81% (85% of Republicans back public charter schools). Despite a large-scale shift to online learning due to the Coronavirus pandemic, support for virtual learning or online classes remains identical to 2020 (65% support); three-quarters (74%) of K-12 parents support virtual learning or online classes. K-12 parents also back Education Savings Accounts 78% to 14%. ESAs enjoy strong bipartisan support; 78% of Democrats, 76% of Independents, and 82% of Republicans back the policy.

Parents Desire Different Options for Their Children. Currently, 83% of school-aged children attend district public schools according to federal data and 65% of our survey respondents report having their children or grandchildren attend district public schools. However, only 45% of parents in this survey indicated they would prefer to send their child to a district public school, while 55% of parents would prefer a different option. Private school is the top choice (40%), followed by public charter schools (8%).

Interest in non-public schools has grown over the past year among African American and Latino parents. In particular, African American (26%) and Latino parents (23%) are more interested in private non-religious schools. Latino parents also have grown more interested in public charter schools (16% from 6%).

Arguments in Favor of School Choice Are Highly Persuasive. Although it's been a volatile year for K-12 education, the strongest arguments in favor of school choice build on the themes of our previous research. Voters – and parents – want what is best for their children and the ability to meet each child's individual needs and potential. One-size-fits all education doesn't work so parents should have the choice to move their kids to a different kind of school and students should not have indefinite waits. The top two reasons to support school choice are:

- *“One size-fits-all education doesn't work for all students. Many kids may thrive in a different environment, such as a school with smaller class sizes or different style of learning. Parents should have the choice to move their kids to a different kind of school that is customized to their child's specific needs”* (mean of 7.7 out of 10, 77% provide a positive rating).
- *“Too many students are stuck in failing schools. 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 7.4 out of 10, 73% provide a positive rating).

African Americans also found a racial justice message persuasive: *“The coronavirus pandemic has shined a light on the educational disparities in America's schools. It isn't right that wealthy families have access to private schools which are holding classes in person while low- and middle-class families watch their children struggle with virtual learning. School choice policies like Education Savings Accounts, public charter schools, and vouchers give more families the opportunity to access a great education, because families shouldn't miss out on that better educational option that others are able to access”* (mean of 7.8 out of 10 among African Americans, 78% provide a positive rating).

Methodology

The survey fielded January 6-13, 2021, among a total of 1,200 likely November 2022 voters. The national survey among 800 voters was supplemented with 150 additional African-American voters, 150 additional Latino voters, and 100 additional K-12 parents. Interviews were conducted via live callers and via text (35% cell phone, 32% landline, and 33% text interviews). All respondents were recruited off of the voter file. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. The base sample margin of error is +/- 3.5%.