

School Funding Matters Ohio Education Poll

Ohio is approaching a historic moment that will determine the direction of public education for years to come. As Gov. Ted Strickland and the General Assembly prepare to take up the issue of how public schools must change to meet the needs of the 21st century during the biennial budget process, the momentum for addressing the state's unresolved school funding issues is growing.

Yet this moment comes at a time when the country is grappling with the most unsettling economic news in decades. Political attention and public will could be distracted by the news from Wall Street and world markets.

Given this intersection of historic circumstances, School Funding Matters commissioned a public opinion poll to determine where school funding reform ranks among public issues in voters' minds and where they stand on possible alternatives.

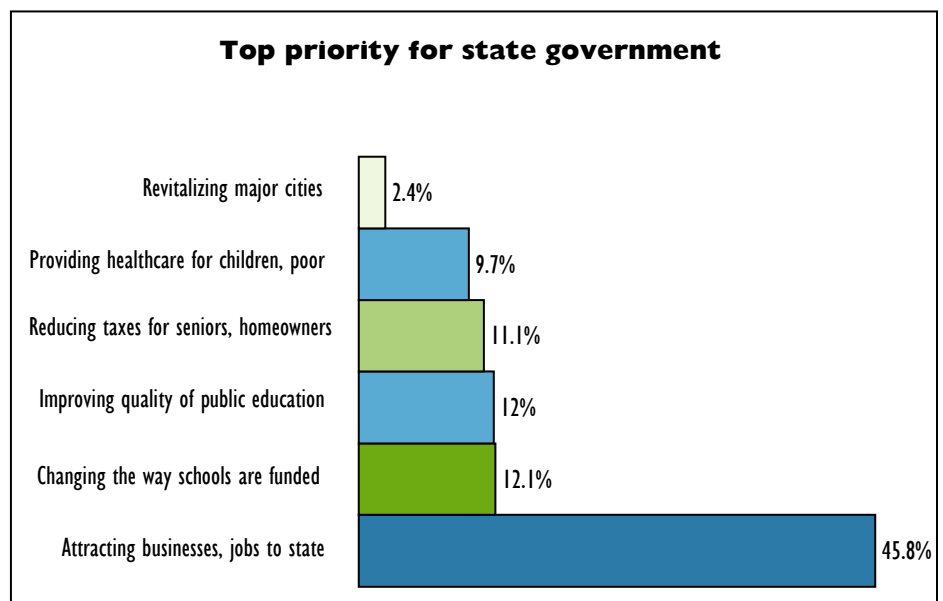
The results present a snapshot of Ohio voters' opinions as the presidential election entered its final weeks and school levy decisions loomed in more than a quarter of school districts across the state.

Findings

I. Even in the midst of potentially calamitous economic news, the importance of education remains primary in the minds of Ohio voters.

While economic issues have risen dramatically in voters' priorities for state government officials, almost a quarter of Ohioans still rank education issues as their top concern. Nearly 46% named attracting more business and jobs to the state as the number one priority – a sharp climb from 26% in a similar poll in May 2007 – but 12% ranked improving the quality of public education highest and another 12.1 percent said changing the way schools are funded should be the top concern.

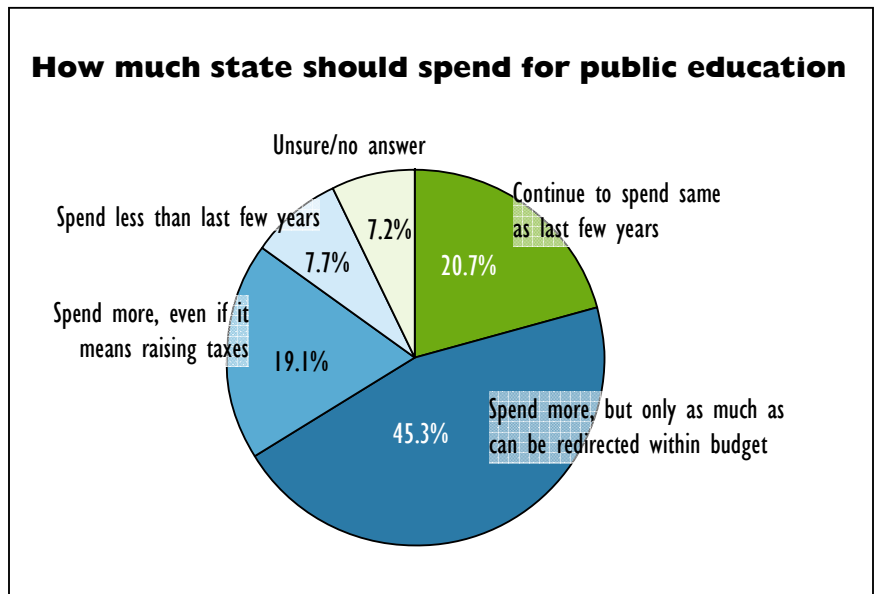
More than three-quarters of Ohioans think changing the way schools are funded



should be a high priority for state officials. Nearly one in five said it should be their highest priority and another 56% said it should be a high priority along with other issues.

2. Ohioans are worried about the quality of education in Ohio and think the state should spend more of its budget on schools.

In a finding consistent with other Ohio education polls in recent years, voters indicated general support for their local school districts and were less enthusiastic about education statewide. Just 41.1% rated the state's public education as good or excellent, while 61.1% gave the same rankings to their own schools. Most strikingly, 23.5% of those polled ranked their schools as excellent while only 3.4% judged state education to be excellent.



When it comes to spending, 64% said more of the state budget should go to public education, with the largest group (45.3%) saying the state should increase spending on schools only as much as it can without raising taxes.

3. The public lacks confidence in the legislature's ability to decide how money is allocated for education and is divided on what should determine how much schools get.

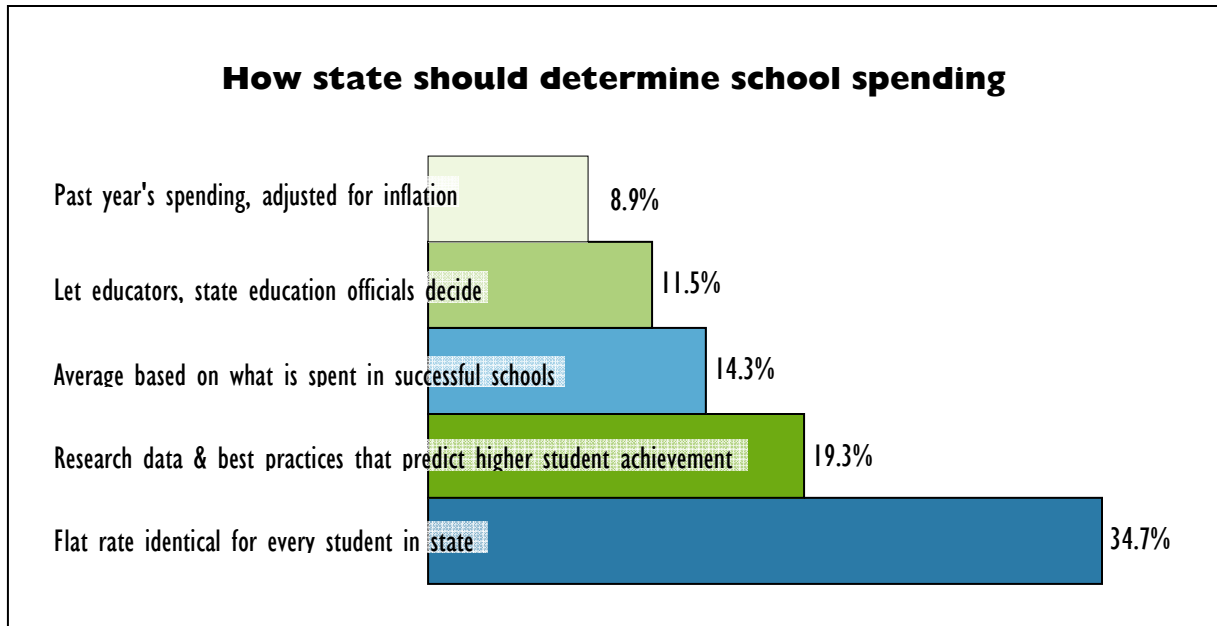
While voters gave mixed responses as to who should control the state education budget, they clearly supported restrictions that would protect the portion of the budget allocated to education. Only 16% said the state legislature, the body that now controls funding for schools, should make decisions about how state education money is spent. The largest group (37.6%) indicated they think voters should decide through annual referendums and 26.8% favored giving that authority to the state board of education.

A far larger percentage - nearly 83% - supported requiring the state to give a certain percentage of its budget to education each year. Of those, 66.2% strongly favored the move to prevent politicians from moving money around in the budget as they did with proceeds from the state lottery.

Public attitudes are less clear on the way the state should set spending. Nearly 35% said the state should provide a flat rate that is the same for every student, but the majority of voters (52.2%) were split among methods that pro-rated spending on various criteria: 19.3% favored basing funding on

research data and best practices tied to higher student achievement; 14.3% favored basing funding on what is spent in successful school districts; 11.4% supporting letting educators and state education officials decide; and 8.2% backed adjusting spending with inflation.

Despite some support for a flat rate of funding, voters also indicated they favor allocating funds based on individual needs. More than 64% supported basing funding on the specific educational needs of a district's students and a similar number (66.7%) favor giving more money to districts with large numbers of special-needs students.



4. Voters are open to alternative methods for funding schools, but support for those methods is qualified.

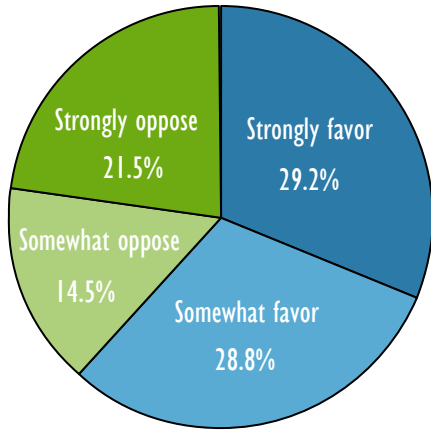
Ohioans appear willing to accept methods for funding schools beyond the system most widely used in Ohio, which relies on local property taxes approved by levy elections, but support wavered depending on the particular proposal.

More than six out of 10 voters said they favor creating a state income tax to fund schools in exchange for reducing property taxes, but nearly the same number (54.5%) oppose substituting a statewide property tax for taxes approved through local levies.

Voters also said they would accept a statewide sales tax for some purposes, but not others. More than half (51.5%) favor such a tax for school building and renovation, but that support slips to 45.5% when a requirement is added that would distribute money to counties based on the taxes they collect.

Voters supported a statewide sales tax of about one-tenth of a percent when it would go for classroom technology and learning materials (69.1%) or to recruit the best teachers for underperforming districts (62.1%).

Allow school revenue from property tax to adjust with property values?

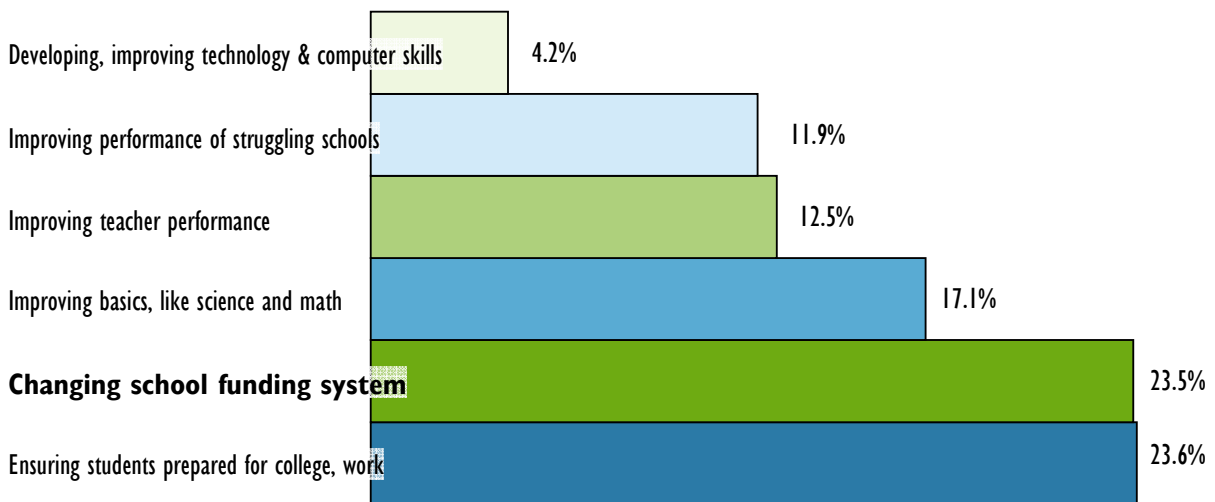


One change to tax policy under debate as a way to reduce the need for school levies on local ballots won support from most voters. About 58% favored changing state law so that the amount school districts receive from property taxes adjusts in keeping with local property values, with more than half of those strongly in favor of such a change.

Ohioans make fixing school funding a priority

When asked which education issues the governor and state legislature should work on during the next two years, Ohioans gave two issues precedence: making sure students are prepared for college or the workplace and changing the system of school funding.

Education priorities for governor and legislature



Poll conducted by Fallon Research & Communications. This survey research was conducted through telephone interviews of 812 randomly selected registered voters in Ohio that have valid residential telephone numbers. Interviews were performed Oct. 1 - 5, 2008. The overall estimated margin of sampling error is +/- 3.43%, based on a confidence level of 95%, although it varies for each individual question. This means that if this survey was repeated, 95 times out of 100 the results would be within plus or minus 3.43% of those provided herein. Further adjustments were made to proportionately weight the results toward the demographic and geographic characteristics of the state.