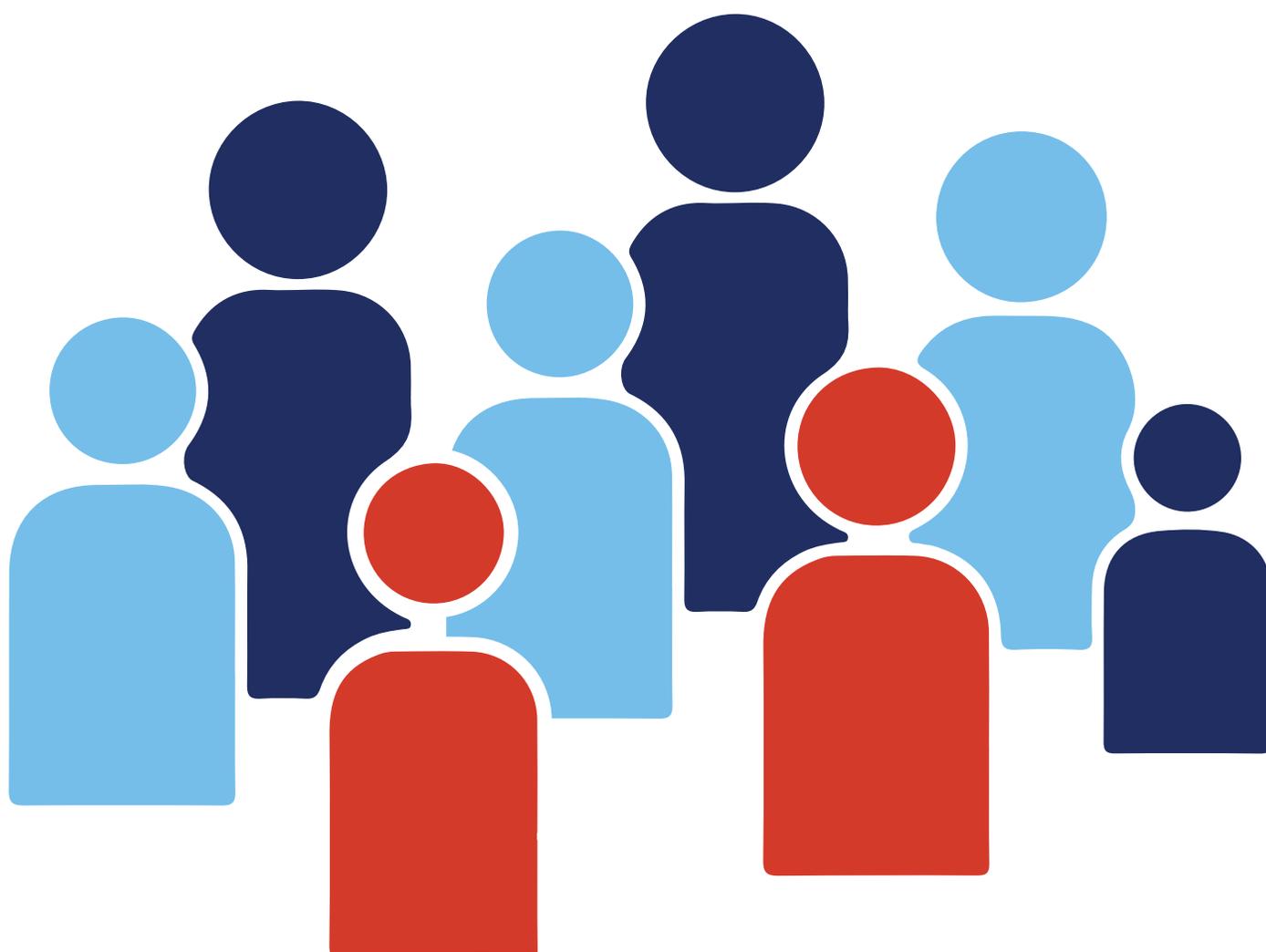


A DEMOCRATIC GUIDE TO PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS: PUBLIC OPINION

CHARLES BARONE, DANA LAURENS, AND NICHOLAS MUNYAN-PENNEY



MAY 2019

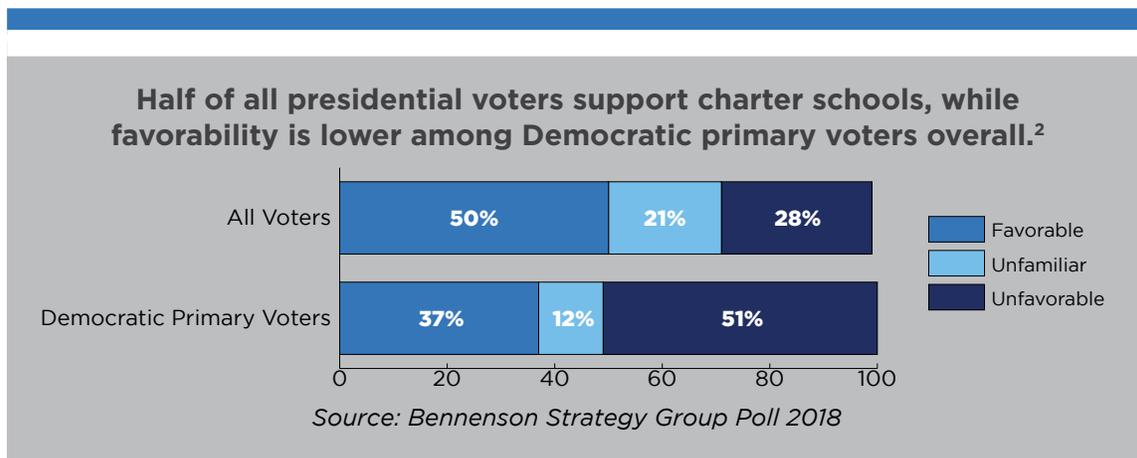
BIG PICTURE. Most polling shows solid support among voters for public charter schools but there are some important differences both between and within the two major political parties.

HERE ARE OUR MAJOR TAKEAWAYS:

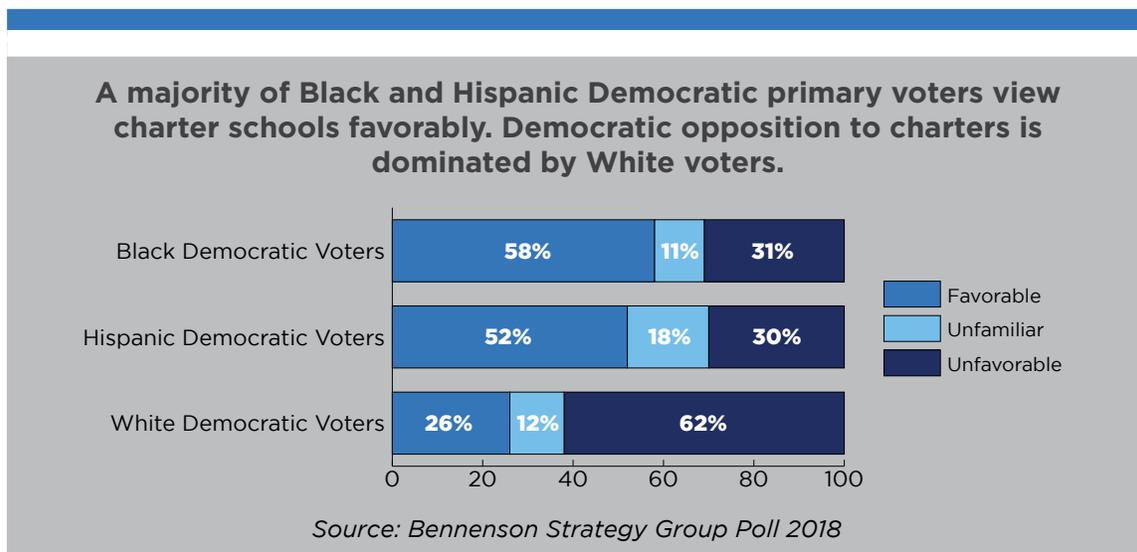
- Findings from a DFER-commissioned poll by the Benenson Strategy Group¹ indicate that **there is strong public support for public charter schools among key Democratic constituencies**, particularly Black and Hispanic voters.
- Findings from a poll of **millennial voters, another key Democratic constituency, show even higher levels of support** overall and similar trends among racial and ethnic groups relative to each other.
- **Progressive charter advocates have some work to do with White Democratic primary voters** who expressed the lowest favorability for public charter schools of all key demographic categories and who are also less likely to have their children enroll in and benefit from public charter schools.
- **The views of White Democratic voters seem to be a significant political impediment to parents of color** gaining access to high-quality public charter schools that best serve their children.
- **Every key Democratic constituency supports public charter schools as part of a *system* of other public school choice options** that includes magnet schools, Montessori schools, and career academies.

PRESIDENTIAL VOTERS. Among those who cast a vote for President in 2016, 50% had a favorable opinion of public charter schools while only 28% of had an unfavorable view. About one in five Presidential voters were unfamiliar with public charter schools.

DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY VOTERS. The picture gets more interesting and complicated when one looks at Democratic primary voters. Among all Democratic primary voters, a slight majority held an unfavorable view of public charter schools while slightly more than one-third had a favorable view. Democratic voters were more aware than Presidential voters overall of public charter schools as only about one in 10 Democrats say they were unfamiliar with charter schools.



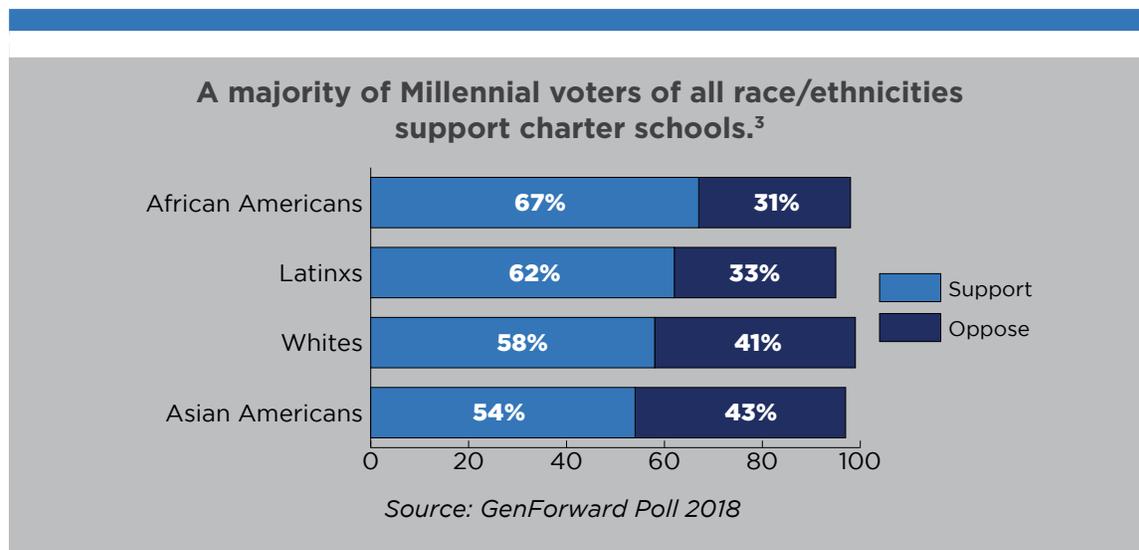
VOTERS OF COLOR. We decided to unpack our findings on Democratic voters and look at responses by race and ethnicity. The differences here are stark and highly illuminating. Democratic voters of color were more than twice as likely as White Democratic voters to hold favorable opinions of public charter schools. Black Democratic voters both gave the



highest favorability ratings to public charter schools and were the least likely to be unfamiliar with them. Charter school favorability among Black Democratic voters was 58%. Favorability among Hispanic voters was only slightly lower, at 52%. In contrast, only 26% of White Democratic voters viewed charter schools favorably.

“Democratic voters of color were more than twice as likely as White Democratic voters to hold favorable opinions of public charter schools.”

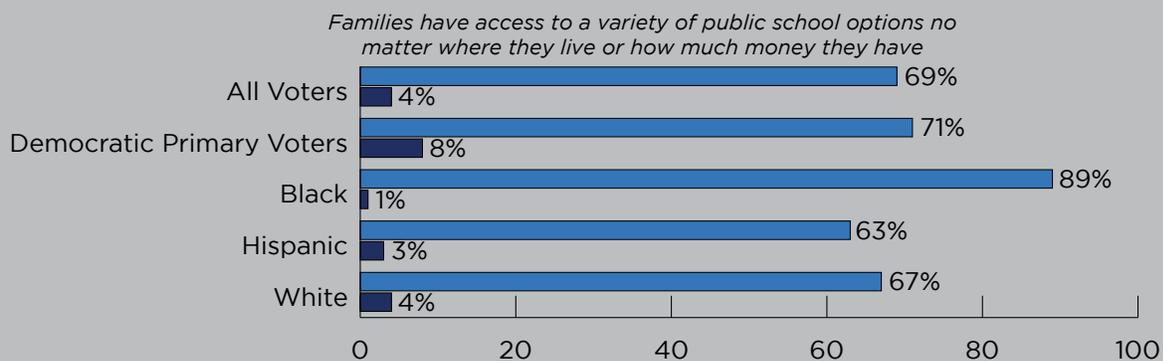
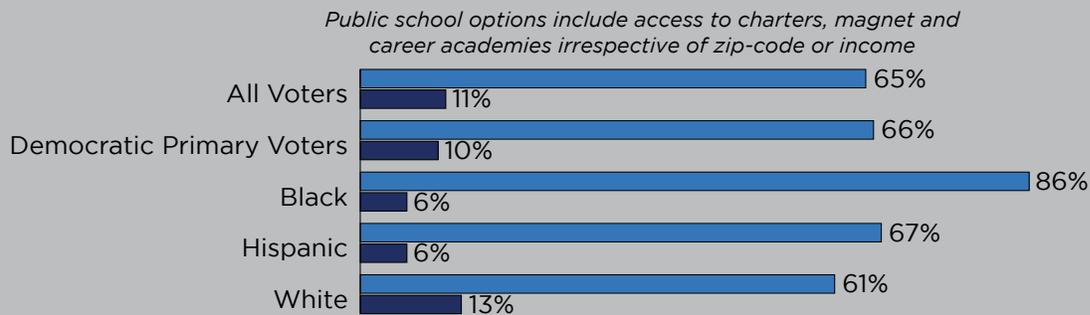
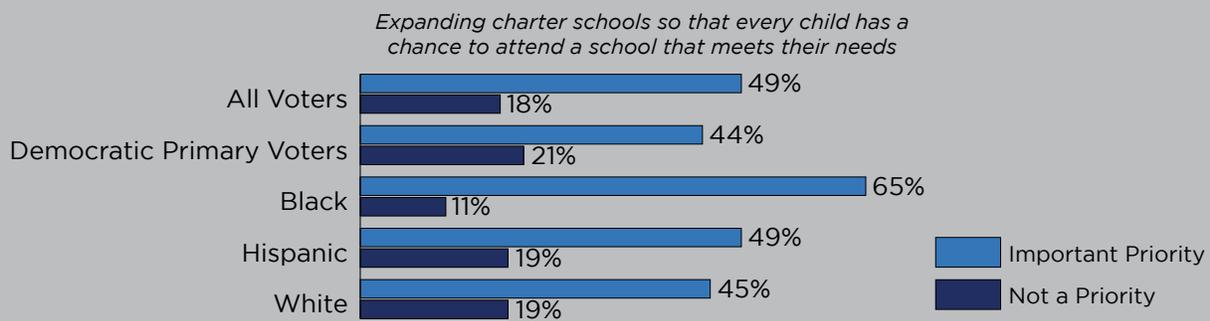
MILLENNIAL VOTERS. A clear majority of millennial voters also support public charter schools. Among millennial voters, as with voters overall and Democratic primary voters, African American voters indicated the highest level of support at 67% closely followed by Latinx millennial voters at 62% and White millennial voters at 58%. Millennial voters are a key Democratic constituency who came out to vote in record numbers in the 2016 election.



CHARTERS AS PART OF A SYSTEM OF PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE. Our polling also finds that voters in both parties consistently support public school choice, both with and without the specific mention of public charter schools. The highest support for public school choice among Democratic primary voters—71%—comes when those surveyed were asked how high a priority it should be that “families have access to a variety of public school

options no matter where they live or how much money they have.” A solid two-thirds of Democratic primary voters placed a high priority on providing public school options that include access to public charters, magnets, and career academies.

An overwhelming majority of Americans believe that providing students with public school options regardless of where they live is an important priority. Black voters in particular strongly support this position.⁴



Source: Bennenson Strategy Group Poll 2018

ENDNOTES

- 1** Benenson Strategy Group, in consultation with 270 Strategies, conducted a nationwide phone poll to identify and test key education attitudes and messages. 1,004 presidential voters, including 415 Democratic primary voters, were interviewed between May 31 – June 7, 2018. The margin of error for the entire sample is $\pm 3.8\%$ at a 95% level of confidence.
- 2** Those surveyed were asked to rate their views on “Public Charter Schools” on a scale of very favorable to very unfavorable. Results on the graph report very favorable and somewhat favorable as favorable and somewhat unfavorable and very unfavorable as unfavorable. Responses of “heard of but no opinion” or “have not heard of” are reported as unfamiliar.
- 3** GenForward surveyed 1,910 a nationally representative sample of adults ages 18-34 between July 26 and August 13, 2018. Those surveyed were asked “Charter schools are publicly funded but are not managed by the local school board. These schools are expected to meet promised objectives, but are exempt from many state regulations. Do you support or oppose charter schools?” Results in the graph report responses of strongly support and somewhat support as support and strongly oppose and somewhat oppose as oppose. <http://api.genforwardsurvey.com/download/188/?f=true>
- 4** Those surveyed were asked to rate the priority of each policy on a scale of 1-7 where: 1 = Not a priority at all, 4 = Somewhat of a priority, 7 = Extremely important priority. Results in graphs are as follows: ‘Not a priority’ = Percentage responding at 1 or 2, ‘Important priority’ = Percentage responding at 6 or 7. Excluded: Percentage responding at 3, 4, or 5.