



To: Democrats for Education Reform
From: BSP Research and IMPACT Research
Date: April 17, 2024
Re: DFER National Registered Voter Focus Group and Survey Summary Results

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

To better understand voter sentiment on education ahead of the 2024 election, Education Reform Now Advocacy partnered with Impact Research and BSP Research for an extensive study, which included three virtual focus groups in December 2023 and nationally representative polling fielded in February 2024. The findings revealed both a troubling trend and a moment of real opportunity for Democratic leadership.

Prior to Covid, Democrats typically enjoyed double digit advantages over Republicans on education, but that traditional advantage has continued to slide, as evidenced clearly in ERNA's new polling. The data shows that while Democrats still lead by 15-percentage points in trust on initiatives that prioritize caring for students, such as ensuring equality and providing essential services like free lunch and after-school care, the advantage has significantly eroded—down to a 1-percentage point lead over Republicans—on outcome-based measures. Specifically, voters no longer view Democrats as the party that will deliver results and educationally prepare kids for future economic success.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Democrats have lost their traditional advantage on education. Parents want more focus on *quality* in education, but Democrats are seen as focused on *equality*. The perception that Democrats “care” about education but do not “deliver” on education is shared across various demographics, including Independents and core Democratic voters. When voters were asked whether they believe that Democrats care about education and thereafter were asked whether Democrats will deliver on education, there was a striking dropoff:

- Independent voters: -16 points
- Latino voters: -10 points
- Black voters: -9 points
- Democratic voters, writ large: -7 points

Speaking to better school funding alone doesn't move the needle for Democrats. Both the focus groups and polls found that voters already trust Democrats on issues such as prioritizing equality, free lunch, after-school care, and school funding.

However, trust in Democrats falls dramatically on outcomes-oriented issues, such as preparing students for success, developing key skills, and meeting standards—especially with voters of color. As one parent noted, “Democrats give a participation trophy instead of rewarding people for knowledge.” **The type of education issues voters are concerned about the most are the ones on which they trust Democrats the least.**

Which party do you trust more to address the following K-12 education issues? (net trust Democrats more)

Improvement is much needed for Democrats as they are essentially tied with Republicans on the outcome-oriented measures but lead on funding/caring measures.

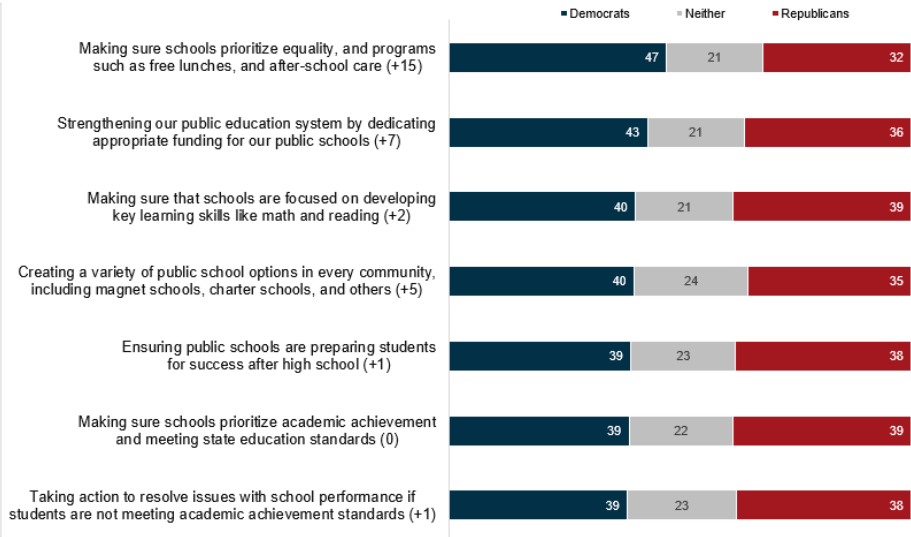
Overall, Democrats are at:

- +15 on prioritize equality, free lunch and after-school care
- +1 on preparing students for success

Between these two items, Democrats drop:

- 16 with Independents
- 10 with Latino voters
- 9 with Black voters
- 7 with Democrats

These results speaks to the problems Democrats face on the economy: more trusted to fund and alleviate poverty but not trusted to manage and help people grow wealth.



2. Education is directly tied to the economy in voters' minds: voters are very worried about the economic security of their kids and young people today, and view improvements to public education as key to setting their children up for economic success.

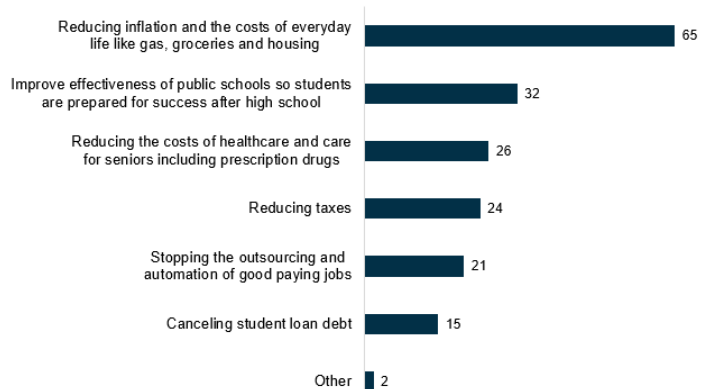
Focus group participants of all races saw education as a long-term economic issue and believed the quality of kids' education directly impacted not only their future, but the country's as well. They described the public school system as a "great equalizer" in society and an engine of the economy.

- **59% of voters, and 56% of parents, nationally believe young people will be worse off than previous generations, and 64% see inflation and the cost of living as the most important issue facing the country.**
- **Improving public school effectiveness rates second, only to reducing inflation, as the most important issue elected leaders should focus on to improve the future for young people.**

In general, do you think young people today will be better off or worse off than previous generations of Americans?



Which of the following is the most important issue for elected leaders to focus on in order for today's young people to be better off? (Select up to 2. Sorted highest to lowest)

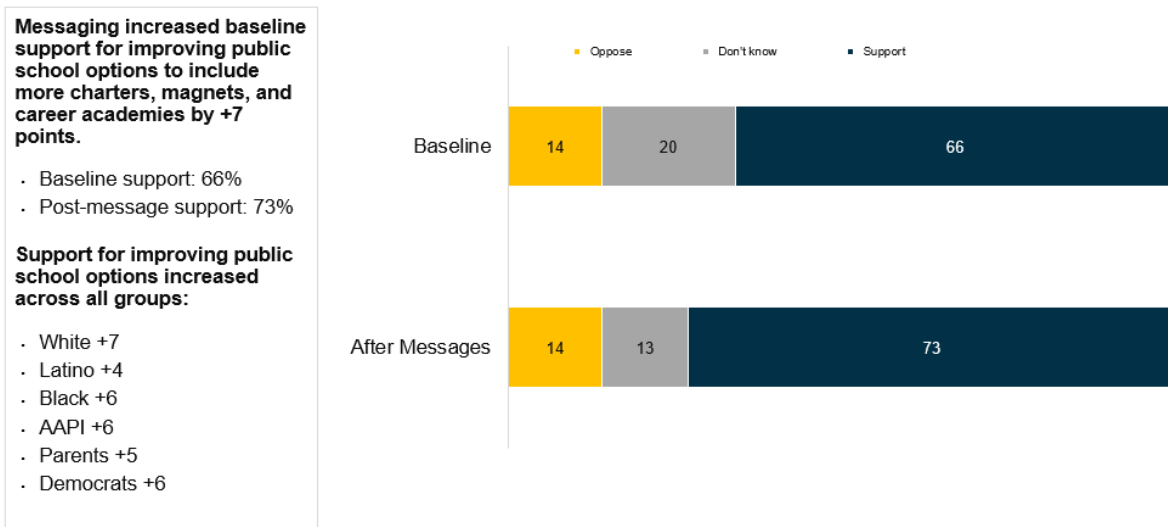


3. An outcome-centered Democratic reform agenda on education provides an opportunity for Democrats: Embracing and emphasizing an outcome-centered education agenda, will not only a) allow Democrats to make up ground on education with key constituencies, but also, b) do so in a way that drives voting decisions.

Specifically, an outcome-centered Democratic education agenda will:

- a. **Speak to the importance of understanding that while increased school funding is necessary, it is not enough alone.** When speaking about money, Democratic leaders should be specific in how those dollars would be used to improve outcomes outright, or result in signs of improving outcomes (i.e. individualized attention, skills orientation, STEM, etc.).
- b. **Present a Democratic vision of public-school choice that taps into voters' concerns about finding high-quality education options.** These options include public charters, magnets, and specialty schools. This is especially important as Republicans are increasingly pushing a version of school choice featuring privatization which is much less popular than providing more high quality public school options).

Would you support or oppose improving public school options to include more charter schools, magnet schools, or career academies opening in your community or school district?



- c. **Counter-message Republican privatization efforts with high-quality public school options that will help students get ahead in life.** Public school choice resonates more deeply with voters than "private" school choice. There is a real opportunity for Democrats to win on education again but the party cannot be on the side of limiting families' choices.

When it comes to options parents have for their children's education, which statement do you agree with more?

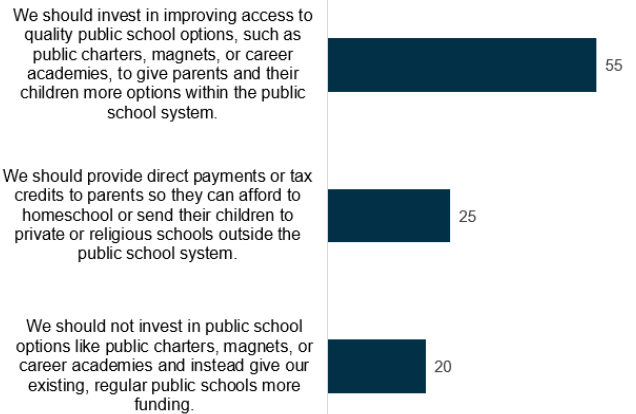
54%

Agree: When deciding where their children will go to school, parents DO NOT HAVE MANY quality options to choose from.
(slightly higher among parents: 56% agree)

46%

When deciding where their children will go to school, parents HAVE PLENTY of quality options to choose from

Thinking about school systems and funding them, which of these do you think is best?



METHODOLOGY

Focus Groups:

- Three groups conducted virtually on December 5-6, 2023
- Swing voters between the ages of 25-55 with children in public school.
- Groups were split by race, with one group each of White, Black, and Latino parents

Survey

- Total N=2,500 registered voters in total (+/-2.0%), including:
 - N= 1100 White; N= 500 Latino; N=500 Black; N=250 AAPI
 - N=922 parents with children age 18 or younger
- Field: Feb 2 - 12, 2024, online
- English or Spanish, according to preference
- Weighted to Census estimates profile of national registered voters