

ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY SURVEY

2003

STATEWIDE SURVEY OF MINNESOTA ADULTS

EDUCATION QUESTIONS

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Drs. Frank, Wagner and Kukoleca are members of the Midwest Association of Public Opinion Research (MAPOR) and the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) and subscribe to the code of ethics of the AAPOR.

WHY WE ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PUBLIC K-12 EDUCATION

This report displays the questions pertaining to education we asked this fall. We asked these questions because several education-related issues, such as vouchers and budget problems, seem to receive significant attention in the media, consume significant tax revenues and are always important issues of public discussion. Consequently, we asked about vouchers, school uniforms, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and the future of state budget cuts.

Vouchers are discussed in some quarters as a possible alternative for some parents and children to public schools, especially if they are unable to afford tuition at private schools. Some argue that failing public schools need competition and one way to provide that competition is through vouchers. Regardless of the reasons some favor voucher programs, we asked if Minnesotans agree or disagree with using public tax funds to finance K-12 vouchers.

Secondly, we are aware that some public schools have started to require their students wear uniforms. Many reasons exist for this requirement, including cost and..... Many, if not most, private schools also require uniforms. Thus, we asked if Minnesotans agree or disagree with the requirement of public school uniforms.

In the 2003 Minnesota legislative session, the house and senate passed legislation and the governor signed it, that requires public school teachers and students recite the Pledge of Allegiance once per week. We were unsure if Minnesotans agree or disagree with this initiative and asked a simple question about this law.

As is commonly known, Minnesota public schools are under financial constraints. Last year, the legislature reduced state funding for many programs in Minnesota K-12 schools. Many school districts recently successfully sought a property tax increase from the voters in their districts. School districts are now changing fees they have never before levied and have increased many existing fees. Given these conditions, we wanted to know if Minnesotans agree or disagree that public K-12 schools should be exempt from future state budget cuts. Our final education question inquires about this possibility.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Please note that we do not normally include “don’t know” responses in the tables. Since almost five percent of respondents answered don’t know for several of the questions, we thought their responses are important enough to note in the report. Otherwise, the following tables show the question and the frequency responses.

We conducted cross tabulation analysis of each question by demographic indicators. They include gender, age, employment status, income and place of residence. We also conducted cross tabulation analysis of party identification. To facilitate this analysis, we collapsed several categories of each (except gender) demographic variable of those that were used when we collected the data. The age variable is collapsed so we have an 18 to 34, 35 to 65 and over 65 breakdowns. The only employment categories we collapsed included unemployed and laid off into one unemployed category. New income categories include less than \$25,000 per year, \$25,000 to \$50,000, \$50,000 to \$100,000 and over \$100,000. Place of residence is based on telephone area code. We collapsed 612, 651, 652, 763 into one metro category and left 218 as a northern category, 320 as a central Minnesota category and 507 as a southern Minnesota category. Finally, we looked at party identification. We combined respondent who indicated they always vote Democratic, usually vote

Democratic, are independent but usually vote Democratic into one Democrat Party indicator. We did the same with Republican and combined everyone else—sometimes vote Green, always vote independent, sometimes vote independent, always vote Independence Party and Independence but sometimes vote Green. The frequency distribution and the original categories of these questions are contained in the SCSU Overall Fall 2003 Survey Report.

SUBSTANTIVE FINDINGS

In terms of the question on vouchers (next), the Gallup polling organization, in a national study conducted this past September, found that 38 percent agree with the use of vouchers. Table 1 shows that 32 percent of Minnesotan are not as inclined to support the use of vouchers. In terms of our analysis of demographic indicators, we found that neither gender nor place of residence explains our findings on vouchers. However, party identification, employment status and income certainly do. Democratic voters and independents are much less to support the use of tax revenue to support a voucher program than are Republicans. We found that respondents over age 65 are more likely to support vouchers and are respondents in other age cohorts. Results regarding employment status are mixed, but employed individuals, retired individuals and students are more likely to support vouchers than are unemployed persons, disabled individuals and household managers. In terms of income, those respondents earning between \$25,000 and \$50,000 are more likely to support a voucher program than are other income groups.

Table 1: Vouchers		
<i>“Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree Minnesota state taxes should be used to pay for tuition vouchers for students attending private K-12 schools??”</i>		
RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Strongly Agree	36	6
Agree	158	26
Disagree	255	42
Strongly Disagree	126	21
Don't Know	30	5
Total	604	100%

Table 2 displays the frequency results of the question on school uniforms. The data is clear. Most Minnesotans do not agree that public school students should wear uniforms. Only one-quarter of our respondents agree that public K-12 students should wear uniforms. In terms of cross tabulation analysis,

Table 2: School Uniforms		
<i>“Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree Minnesota’s public school students should be required to wear school uniforms?”</i>		
RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Strongly Agree	31	5
Agree	125	21
Disagree	328	54
Strongly Disagree	91	15
Don’t Know	30	5
Total	604	100%

Table 3 displays the results of the question we asked about the required recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Although we were unsure of the responses, we did not hypothesize that eight of ten Minnesotans strongly agree or agree with the current law requiring a weekly recitation of the Pledge.

Table 3: Pledge of Allegiance		
<i>“Under Minnesota law, teachers and students in grades K-12 are required to recite the Pledge of Allegiance in class at least one time per week. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with this law?”</i>		
RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Strongly Agree	231	38
Agree	255	43
Disagree	69	11
Strongly Disagree	32	5
Don’t Know	17	3
Total	603	100%

Table 4 shows the results of the budget question. It is clear that most Minnesotans agree that K-12 schools should be held harmless from future budget cuts. Almost two-thirds of Minnesotans either strongly agree or agree K-12 schools should not be the subject of state budget cuts. In terms of an examination of demographic indicators, we found.....

**Table 4:
Budget Cuts**

“If the state of Minnesota faces future budget problems and must cut its budget, do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree public K-12 education funding should be exempt from budget cuts?”

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Strongly Agree	231	38
Agree	199	33
Disagree	136	23
Strongly Disagree	23	4
Don't Know	14	2
Total	603	100%

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