

SOONER SURVEY

*Cole Hargrave
Snodgrass & Associates*



VOLUME 24

April 2015

Education Issues Not as Divided as Many Think

By: Pat McFerron, President, Cole Hargrave Snodgrass and Associates, Inc.

Spending time at the capitol, watching twitter feeds or reading press and releases and clippings, it becomes reasonable to believe Oklahoma is divided on any myriad of education issues. The perception becomes that everyone has to fall into one of two camps: Education Reformers or Supporters of Public Education. The reality is the public is largely in both camps. Voters do not want to cut education funding and voters do want more parental choice. The one area we see more division is in testing, particularly as it relates to ending end of instruction exams and replacing them with an ACT test.

When voters are asked if education funding should be cut as a way to address the budget shortfall, an impressive 80% opposed doing so. This spans all groups, hitting 83% opposition among registered Democrats, 74% opposition among registered Republicans and 69% opposition among Republicans who have voted in at least two of their party's last five primaries. Even 75% of those who say they get the bulk of their news from the Fox News Channel are opposed to balancing the budget on the back of education.

When a similar question asks voters to choose between raising taxes, cutting all

programs including education or cutting all programs, excluding education, a higher percentage we do see 41% who believe cutting



education is part of the solution to the budget. Only 14% say the budget should be balanced through tax increases while 37% would hold education harmless and more severely cut other programs. Again, the dividing line is not what many would expect. **While much of the conventional wisdom is that Democrats would be more in favor of saving funding for education than are Republicans, in reality only minimal differences exist.** Fully 41% of registered Democrats believe cutting education should be a part of

(Story continued on page 2)

balancing the budget – a percentage that increases only to 43% among registered Republicans. Even among those who identify themselves as being a member or supporter of the Tea Party, more than four-in-ten prefer raising taxes (6%) or severely cutting other programs (36%) while just 48% say to cut education as cutting other programs. **Among those who have voted in at least two of the last five Republican primaries, only 41% want to keep education funding on the chopping block, while 50% opt for raising taxes (11%) or holding education harmless (39%).**

When it comes to expanding charter school availability statewide we again see support showing more consistency than conventional wisdom expects. Overall 61% support allowing charter schools to open in other parts of the state and less than half as many (27%) oppose. Those living in rural areas (60% favor vs. 27% oppose) are just as supportive of expanding charter school availability as are urban residents (61% favor vs. 27% oppose). In addition, a majority of Democrats support expansion of charter schools (52% favor vs. 34% oppose) as do 70% of Republicans. The unity for charter school expansion is perhaps best represented by the broad range of support we see regardless of preferred cable news source. Overall, 19% of Oklahomans say Fox News is their most trusted source of political information and 68% of these voters support expanding charter schools. Among the 11% that prefer either CNN (7%) or MSNBC (4%) we still see 59% support for charter expansion and only 22% opposing.

When it comes to replacing End of

Instruction exams (EOI) with the ACT, voters are not as resolved as they are on funding or expanding charter schools. However, we again see that opinion transcends traditional lines. Currently 48% support replacing EOIs with the ACT and 38% oppose this change. Republicans are slightly more supportive of this change (48% favor vs. 35% oppose) than are Democrats (43% favor vs. 45% oppose). However, among the most active Republican primary voters, we see a stark change and opposition: among the 9% of Republicans who have not missed a recent primary election (34% favor vs. 51% oppose). Because of this split among Republicans on this issue, it becomes a unique area where those who support the Tea Party (46% favor replacing EOIs;



36% oppose) and those who disagree with the Tea Party (50% favor replacing EOIs; 39% oppose) agree with each other and those neutral view of the Tea Party have a different view (42% favor vs. 46% oppose).

When it comes to EOI testing, the most significant lines are not partisan or ideological, but rather age. Among those under 45 years of age, 50% support this change as do 52% of those between the ages of 45 and 54. Support for the change then drops rapidly among voters over that age – 45% among those 55 to 64, 42% among those 65 to 74 and 35% among those over 75 years of age.

The survey data shows that Oklahomans really are more united on education issues than most believe. It also reveals that where unity does not exist, such as on EOIs, the divisions are not partisan or ideological.

1. It has been estimated the state budget will have a 611 million dollar shortfall this year. Which of the following ways do you think is the best way to make the budget balance?

- Raise taxes 14%
- Cut spending roughly equally across the board a small amount 41%
- Cut spending significantly among everything except education and keep it from being cut 37%
- Undecided 8%

Now I want to read you a short list of possible ways the state could help balance the state budget. For each one, please tell me if you would favor or oppose using that option as a way to balance the state budget. Remember, none of these alone would balance the budget.

2. Cut education funding which makes up more than half of the state budget.

- Favor.....17%
- Oppose..... 80%
- Undecided 3%

3. As you may or may not know, public charter schools are generally only allowed in the state’s largest school districts. These schools are free to parents but are not burdened with some of the regulations and requirements, such as negotiating with teachers unions, that is the case with traditional public schools. Do you favor or oppose allowing public charter schools to open in other parts of Oklahoma?

- Strongly Favor33%
- Somewhat Favor.....28%
- Somewhat Oppose 9%
- Strongly Oppose18%
- Undecided12%

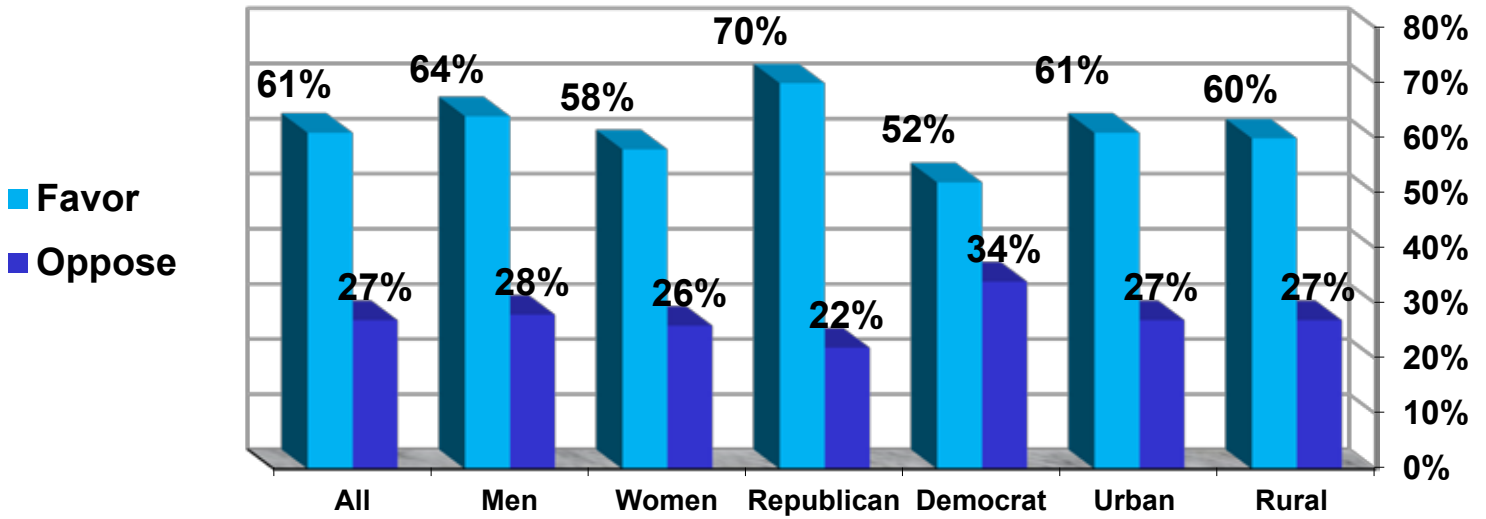
4. It has been discussed that Oklahoma stop giving end of instruction exams to high school students in classes like biology, Algebra II, English III and others. Instead of having a requirement that these tests are passed to get a diploma, the state would instead substitute a nationally recognized test like the ACT. Do you favor or oppose getting rid of end of instruction exams?

- Strongly Favor27%
- Somewhat Favor.....18%
- Somewhat Oppose12%
- Strongly Oppose28%
- Undecided 14%

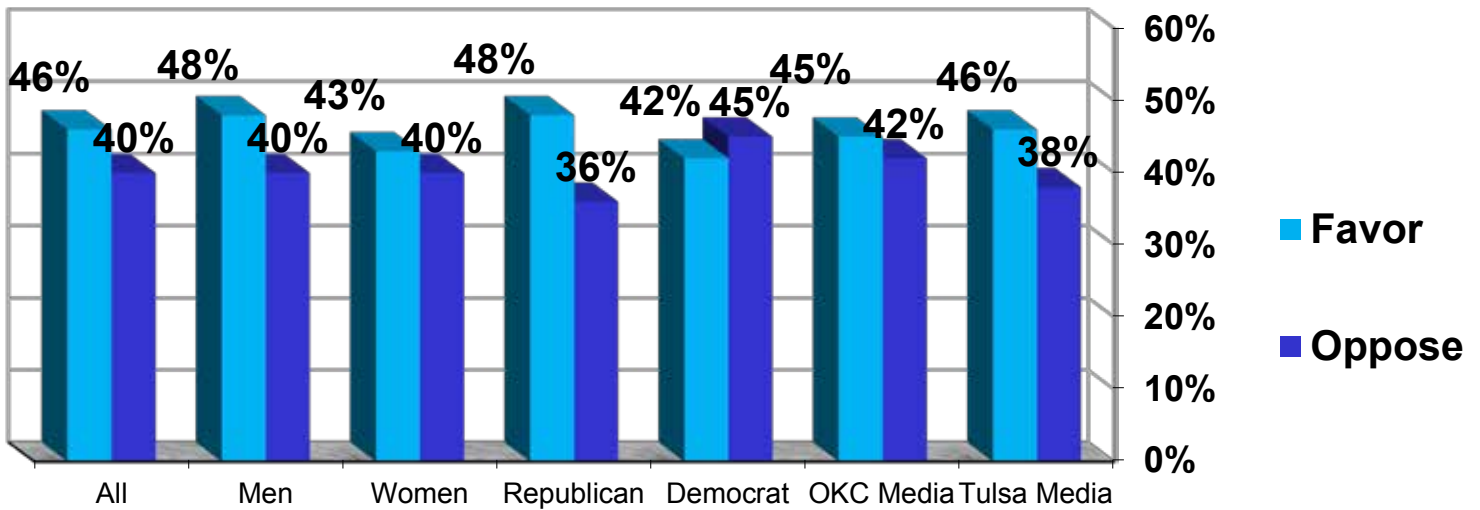
Key Facts

- Oklahoma voters of both parties do not want to balance the budget on the back of public education.
- Members of both parties as well as both urban and rural residents favor the expansion of charter schools to the rest of the state by wide margins.
- Voters are divided on whether or not to replace EOI exams with the ACT, but the differences are primarily age related, not ideological or partisan.

Allow Charter Schools Statewide?



Replace EOI with ACT?



During his more than 20 years with Cole Hargrave Snodgrass & Associates, Pat McFerron has supervised polling and telephone voter contact programs in more than 40 states – including polling for numerous successful gubernatorial, U.S. Senate, congressional and legislative clients throughout the nation. McFerron has been the pollster for all of the recent successful OKC initiatives, including Big League City, MAPs for Kids and MAPs 3, as well as Oklahoma’s historic right-to-work effort and many other state questions. McFerron also oversees marketing research projects for CHS clients who range from Fortune 100 companies to non-profits, universities and entrepreneurial start-ups.

This edition of Sooner Survey was taken March 15–19, 2015. It was a telephone survey of 500 registered voters in Oklahoma, including those on mobile lines. The confidence interval associated with this sample is that 95% of the time, the results are within 4.3% of the true values.

Cole Hargrave Snodgrass and Associates, Inc.
 Phone: (405) 415-3017
 E-Mail: Pat@chs-inc.com
 Address: Post Office Box 2034
 Oklahoma City, OK 73101