

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES

FROM: GLEN BOLGER/JIM HOBART

RE: KEY FINDINGS FROM A STATEWIDE SURVEY IN OKLAHOMA

DATE: MARCH 9, 2015

Methodology

Public Opinion Strategies conducted a statewide survey of 400 likely voters in Oklahoma. The survey was conducted March 5-7 and has a margin of error of $\pm 4.9\%$. Seventy percent (70%) of interviews were conducted with landline respondents and thirty percent (30%) were conducted with cell phone respondents.

Key Findings**1. *Oklahoma voters are divided on the direction of the state.***

Forty-eight percent (48%) of voters say Oklahoma is headed in the right direction, while 44% say the state is off on the wrong track. Given that Republicans currently hold the Governor's mansion and majorities in the state legislature, it is not a surprise that GOPers (68% right direction/27% wrong track) are significantly more optimistic than Democrats (29% right direction/58% wrong track).

2. *Given the state's budget shortfall, voters say funding the state's public schools is the most important priority.*

Respondents were read a list of various state government services and asked which is the MOST important for the state to fund, with the state's public schools from kindergarten through twelfth grade easily topping the list.

State Government Service	% Most Important to Fund
Public schools from kindergarten through twelfth grade	59%
Medicaid and other health care programs	12%
Bridge and highway maintenance programs	12%
Corrections and public safety	10%
State colleges and universities	4%

3. ***Voters are strongly opposed to the state government giving parents money for their children to attend a private or religious school.***

Just 34% of voters favor the state government giving parents money to pay for their children to attend a private or religious school, while 65% of voters are opposed to this proposal. Intensity is two-to one against the proposal, with 24% of voters saying they strongly favor the proposal, compared to 48% who are strongly opposed to it.

4. ***Inserting the school vouchers language does not do much to move numbers on this issue.***

Respondents were asked:

As you may know, school vouchers allow parents to use taxpayer money to pay to send their children to the school of their choice, whether that school is public or private, including religious and non-religious schools. Do you favor or oppose providing school vouchers to Oklahoma parents?

Forty percent (40%) of voters favor providing Oklahoma parents with school vouchers, while 57% are opposed to school vouchers. Independents (70% oppose) and Democrats (72% oppose) drive the opposition to school vouchers, but support is also underwhelming among GOPers (57% favor/41% oppose).

5. ***Parents with children age 18 or under in their household are also opposed to school vouchers.***

On the school voucher proposal, there is hardly any difference among parents (40% favor/56% oppose) and non-parents (41% favor/58% oppose).

6. ***There are several messages that move base Republicans and very conservative voters against providing Oklahoma parents with school vouchers.***

Support for school vouchers drops among base Republicans and very conservative voters when they hear that school vouchers would open up private schools to government intrusion, will hurt families that live in rural areas, and that school vouchers are an entitlement program for only a select group of students.

% MUCH LESS LIKELY to Support Providing Parents with School Vouchers

Message	Overall	Among Base GOP	Among Very Conservatives
School vouchers will only benefit families who live in urban areas where there are currently private schools. Families in rural areas where they do not have access to private schools will not benefit at all, and instead will be forced to bear more of the tax burden to fund the state's public schools.	51%	34%	32%
School vouchers will create an entitlement program for a select group of students while doing nothing to improve underperforming schools in our state.	50%	36%	33%
School vouchers are another attempt by state government to interject mandates and to help control what and where children learn, opening even private schools up to government intrusions, such as the use of Common Core.	45%	44%	49%

7. ***Voters move strongly against school vouchers on the informed ballot.***

After voters learn more information about school vouchers, just 27% of voters say they favor school vouchers, compared to 72% who are opposed. Opposition to school vouchers crosses party lines on the informed ballot, with majorities of Republicans, Independents, and Democrats opposing providing Oklahoma parents with school vouchers.

8. ***This data mirrors what we have seen in other states and underscores why there are not school voucher programs in many Republican states.***

School vouchers are a policy proposal that are much better in theory than they are in practice. Giving parents the “freedom to choose” where their children attend school may make for a good sound bite, but in actuality a broad coalition has developed against school vouchers, and the coalition includes key Republican groups such as rural voters and suburban parents. In many cases, these voters feel like they have already made their school choice by living where they do, and they resent money being taken out of their schools to give to families who did not make the same decision that they did.

The Bottom Line

There is simply no desire on the part of Oklahoma voters to begin providing parents with school vouchers to send their children to the school of their choice. Base Republicans and very conservatives initially drive what tepid support there is for school vouchers, but support among these groups collapses once they learn more about vouchers. In short, school vouchers are a losing issue with swing voters, and also far from a sure thing with the Republican base.