



TO: THE MARYLAND PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE
FROM: BURTON RESEARCH AND STRATEGIES
RE: KEY FINDINGS FROM MARYLAND VOTER SURVEY ON EDUCATION
DATE: APRIL 15, 2018

From March 4-6 and 7-11, Burton Research and Strategies conducted a survey of 600 likely voters in Maryland, with a margin of error $\pm 4.0\%$. The survey measured voters' views of various education proposals and messaging being considered in the state. The sample accurately models turnout in Maryland elections by comparing previous turnout by party registration, ethnicity, region, age, education and ethnicity.

This survey was conducted after the shooting in Parkland, Florida and prior to the recent teacher protests in state legislatures.

Key Findings: In the wake of tragic school shootings nationwide, Maryland Democrats and Republicans agree that school safety should be the top priority for new education spending in the state, followed closely by improving career and technical training.

However, the survey findings cast doubt on several sweeping proposals offered by the state's closely-watch education reform commission, known as the Kirwan Commission on Innovation & Excellence in Maryland. For instance, voters oppose the commission's recommendation to restructure standardized tests to measure Maryland students against students in foreign countries. They favor a "back to basics" approach to education that prioritizes career and technical training over character development or social services being offered at schools. While they are receptive to expanding pre-K services, they are far less likely to support expansion if it is paid for by cutting funds for other government services, such as public safety, children's health insurance, or transportation. They are also less likely to support pre-K expansion if it is paid for through income tax or property tax increases.

In sum, school safety has emerged as one of the rare issues on which Democrats and Republicans agree. Equally important, voters are decidedly skeptical about the Kirwan Commission's sweeping recommendations and their impact on household taxes, state spending, and the state's public school system.

1) Improving school safety is the top education spending priority for voters followed closely by providing more career and technical training.

Survey respondents were read a list of possible options for spending additional taxpayer dollars on education.

25%	Making schools safer
22%	Providing more career and technical training
17%	Providing healthcare and social services within the schools in lower income areas
16%	Raising teacher pay
10%	Expanding Pre-K for all children in Maryland
2%	Providing additional support for the increasing numbers of non-English speaking students

Making schools safer is the number one priority for Republicans (32%) and Democrats (23%).

With the shooting incident at the St. Mary's County school, opinions of Marylanders on making schools safer may be even higher on the priority list than it was in March.

2) Voters want teachers to teach academics over character traits.

Respondents were asked to choose which is a more important role for schools: to give students' academic skills and other knowledge to prepare them for any opportunity they pursue or to develop students' character, so they can make responsible decisions and improve social conditions in their communities. Sixty-seven percent (67%) say it is to give students' academic skills versus twenty-seven percent (27%) who say developing students character is more important.

There is broad support for academic focus across party, ethnic, gender, and generational lines.

3) Marylanders do not believe politicians who say state gambling revenue will be dedicated solely to public education.

The statement from a politician saying revenues from gambling will be dedicated only to education is not believable. While the recently finished 2018 General Assembly session passed a Lock Box referendum to be on the ballot in November, voters question whether it is realistic to believe it actually will be spent as determined in the legislation.

More than eight-in-ten (85%) said the statement is not believable and sixty-two percent (62%) feel strongly it is not believable. Marylanders in 2008 and 2012 were told gaming revenue would solve the concerns for education funding and they won't be fooled again.

4) Marylanders are against using an international standardized test to compare students to students in foreign countries.

Voters oppose restructuring standardized tests to measure Maryland students against students in foreign countries. This policy idea from the Kirwan Commission is not supported by the voters, around one-third favor the idea and twice as many oppose the idea (31% total favor/60% total oppose). Intensity is decidedly negative against the proposal.

5) Support exists for wanting to pay teachers more, but not if it means increasing the budget.

Increasing teacher pay rises to the top as a priority for improving education followed by reducing class size, providing more career and technical training and cracking down on disruptive students.

Interestingly, more than seven-in-ten (72%) agree with the statement: to improve learning opportunities in public schools, policymakers should refocus on reallocating resources more efficiently and effectively, instead of continuously increasing the education budget. And, forty-two percent (42%) strongly agree with the statement. There is strong intensity and agreement with this policy suggestion across party, racial, generational, education, and regional lines.

6) Marylanders say the Kirwan Commission lacks enough input from the business community.

Upon learning that the Kirwan Commission is primarily made up of individuals appointed by the General Assembly and the teachers' union with only one business leader represented, voters are concerned with the commission's recommendations because it needs more input from the business community. By a margin of nearly 2:1 (62% total agree/33% total disagree) voters agree schools are responsible for preparing students for work and careers, and the education commissions' recommendations cannot be considered valid without more input from the business community.

A majority of respondents across regional, party, ethnic, gender, educational, and ideological lines believe the commission needs more input from the business community.

7) Marylanders support the concept of expanding pre-K but not if it means funding cuts to services such as children’s healthcare, public safety, or roads and infrastructure. In addition, they do not want taxes to be increased to fund pre-K.

Broad majorities oppose paying more in income or property taxes to expand pre-K. Voters are against making cuts to roads and transportation (70% total less likely), public safety (70% total less likely), or children’s health insurance (77% total less likely) to afford expansion of pre-k education.