

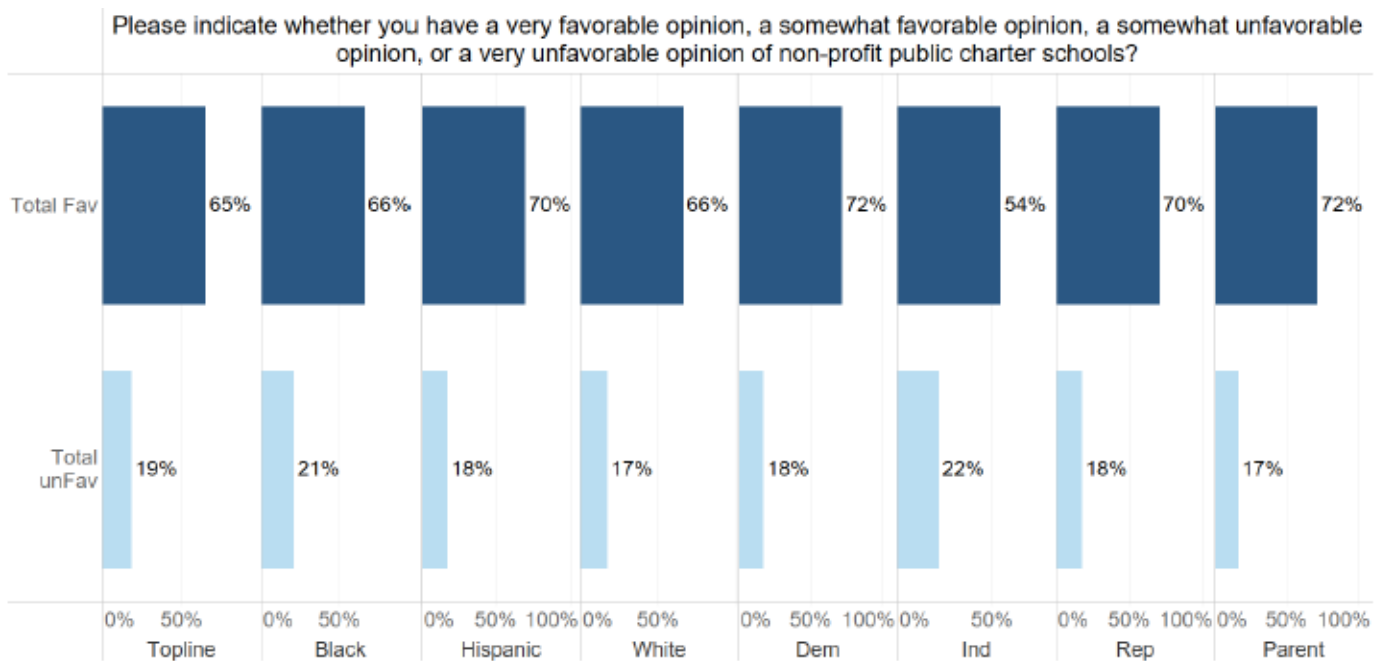
Attitudes and Messaging around School Choice Legislation

State policy debates around school choice have ramped up over the past year, with Florida, Iowa, Arkansas, and Utah all passing laws focused on using public funds to subsidize private school tuition, and 11 states in all considering such legislation. This guide offers support for policymakers across the country to address issues around school choice, recognizing that the political forces allowing Republicans to advance their choice agenda exist across the country, that options exist to implement a choice agenda that is more effective and popular, and that understanding public opinion on this issue can help Democrats reverse recent Republican gains on education issues. The information below is drawn from a poll commissioned by our partners at Democrats for Education Reform (DFER), as well as from NewDEAL Leaders who have fought against private school vouchers in their states.

What do voters think?

Recent polling from DFER's EdTrends project, shows overwhelming support from parents for increased options in our public school system, specifically public school choice over private schools. Other findings include:

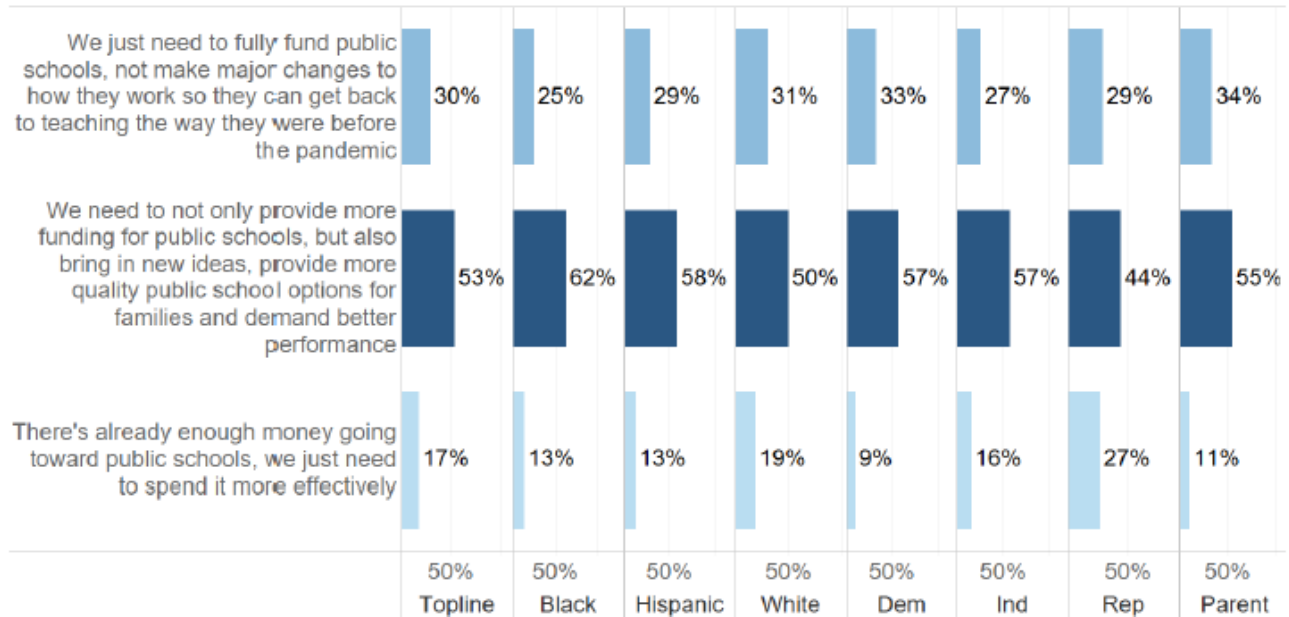
- ▶ **Public charter schools are popular across key constituencies.** When asked using neutral terms, 65% of all respondents and 72% of Democratic voters favored public charter schools. Voters of color in particular view them favorably.



Credit: Democrats for Education Reform (DFER)

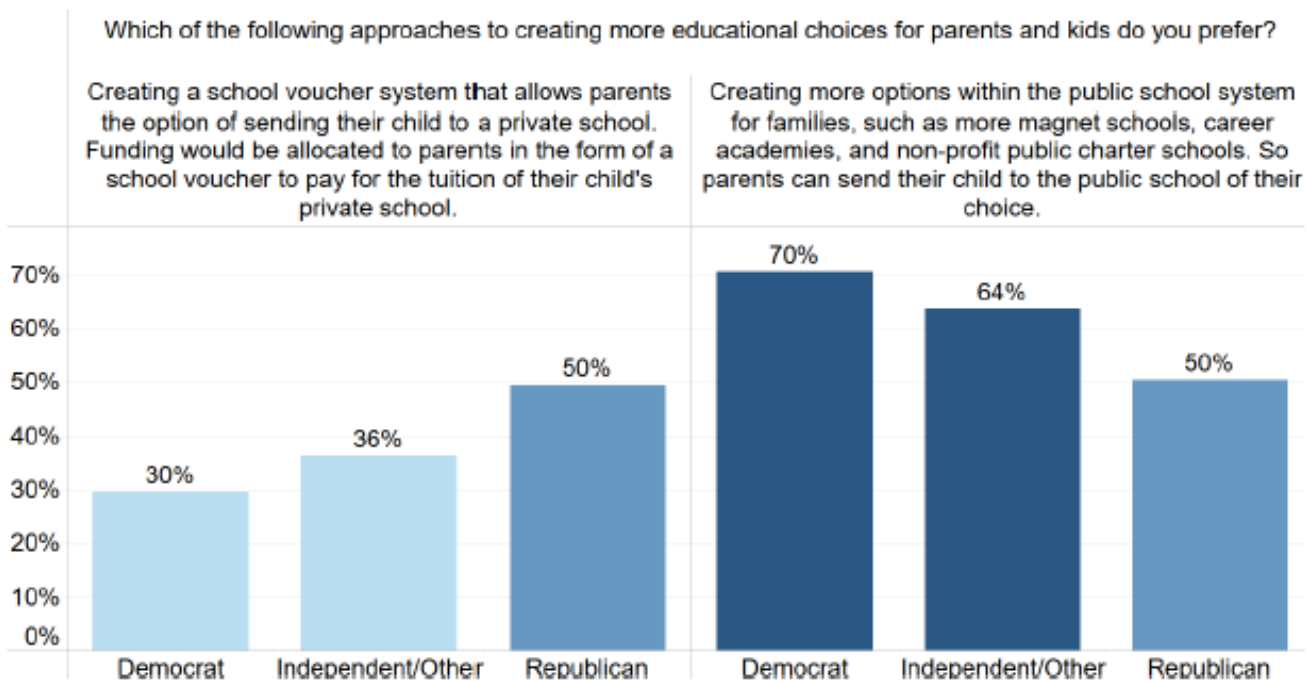
► **Voters favor more investments and new ideas to create real changes.** When asked about potential policy solutions, voters expressed strong feelings that money alone will not improve outcomes. 55% of parents want to see more quality public-school choices and higher standards that will prepare students for success in the future compared to 30% who say improvements just require more money.

Which of the following comes closest to your view about how to improve America's public schools?



Credit: Democrats for Education Reform (DFER)

► **Public school choice options are clearly favored over private vouchers.** Support for public school choice outpace private school vouchers ruled 62% to 38% across race, party, and parental status.



Credit: Democrats for Education Reform (DFER)

Recommendations

School choice is here to stay. Democrats need to lean into it.

The choice versus no choice debate has been hashed out in red and blue states alike. Parents want the option of sending their child to traditional public schools, magnet schools, and charter schools, supporting a type of school choice that is free and open to every child, not just the children of privilege. Embracing public school choice can help Democrats rebuild trust with parents and communities, and remind voters why the party should be trusted on education issues.

Form coalitions with parties that aren't always aligned.

A school choice bill in Georgia was [voted down](#) despite unified Republican control of the legislature and governor's office. Common cause brought together an unexpected coalition of Democratic along with rural policymakers who were concerned about taking away funding from public schools which served as community hubs in their communities. Working across party lines to illuminate the issues for everyday families and stressing the important role schools play in local communities can rally support for public school choice and opposition to private school vouchers.

Highlight the inequities of voucher systems.

Republican school choice schemes offer education welfare for the wealthiest among us. For example, New Hampshire's Republican-backed private [school voucher program](#) has gone more than \$25 million over budget and 89% of program applicants are students who are already enrolled in private schools or are homeschooled. As school choice programs remain popular among the families of historically disenfranchised students, Democrats need to underscore how Republican models of choice continue to benefit the wealthy elite.

Conclusion

As NewDEAL alum and current DFER CEO, Jorge Elorza emphasized at a recent NewDEAL convening: "The choice versus no choice debate has been had; that debate's been settled. Choice won, and choice resonates deeply. And now what we say the new battleline is the form of choice that Republicans are offering, private school choice, and the form of choice that Democrats are offering, or that we hope we more fully embrace and offer, is public school choice." By embracing the need for parents to have high quality public education options, whether they be traditional schools, charter schools, or magnet schools, Democrats can fight for underserved students, appeal to voters across the ideological spectrum, and have the best chance to defeat private school voucher plans.

You can read more about the DFER public opinion survey, conducted with Emerson Polling and involving 1,000 registered voters, [here](#). The NewDEAL convened state and local policymakers with DFER in June to discuss the findings and how to engage on the topic with solutions and messaging. [Watch the full event here](#).