



NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Education  
Polls

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February 22, 2000

Bruce Reed  
Director, Domestic Policy Council  
The White House  
Washington DC 20500

→ NAT STDS FOR TEACHERS, STATE TESTS  
TO MEET THEM

Re: Bipartisan Survey of Voters' Education Views

Dear Mr. Reed: *Bruce*

We are pleased to forward for your information and use the enclosed Executive Summary and supporting materials for an NEA-commissioned survey of likely voters on education issues. The survey, designed and conducted by a bipartisan team of research firms, interviewed 1,000 likely voters between January 18 and January 26, 2000. The results demonstrate the importance that voters place on supporting and strengthening public schools.

The survey results highlight voters' strong commitment to public education. Voters identify education as the single most important issue nationally. They support a higher level of federal education funding and strongly favor increased national investment in public schools. In particular, voters express strong support for reducing class size, targeting resources to low-performing schools, improving teacher quality, and modernizing school buildings -- initiatives that have consistently ranked as top priorities for this administration.

We believe these survey results clearly indicate that voters want policymakers to place strengthening public education at the top of their agenda. We hope you find the enclosed materials informative and useful.

Sincerely,

*Mary Elizabeth Teasley*

Mary Elizabeth Teasley  
Director of Government Relations



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This memorandum summarizes the findings of a survey of likely voters on education issues. The survey was commissioned by the National Education Association. The project was designed and conducted by a bi-partisan team of research firms, consisting of Greenberg Quinlan Research, Inc. (Stan Greenberg and Alan Quinlan) and Voter / Consumer Research (Jan van Lohuizen). Details of the survey execution are the following:

- Interviews were conducted by telephone with 1,000 likely voters, stratified to reflect voter turnout by state.
- Interviews were conducted between January 18 and January 26, 2000.
- The margin of error associated with the results is +/- 3.1 percent.

American voters are ready to embrace a national program of investment in public education that addresses the problems in schools today. Education stands out as the single most important issue nationally and voters support action at the national level to improve the nation's schools. Education demands attention and public officials who ignore it do so at great risk.

Voters now support a higher level of federal funding for education and believe the federal government should share responsibility with states and localities. Education is now the highest priority for additional federal funding (42 percent). It surpasses health care (37 percent), Social Security and Medicare (33 percent), tax cuts (20 percent), and paying down the debt (20 percent). A large majority, 61 percent, believes the federal government spends too little on education, an increase from two years ago (58 percent).

The electorate believes public schools need improvement (60 percent) and expresses a strong commitment to improve these schools: 79 percent believe it is important to have strong public schools. The importance of public education paves the way to broad support for a set of national proposals aimed at improving public education. When faced with a choice of a national investment in public schools or local control and vouchers, voters favor a national investment by a 53 to 33 percent margin

The support for national investment does not come without strings, however, and voters want to be sure the money is used to address specific needs. While their feelings are mixed about increasing the role of the federal government in education decisions generally, they support federal initiatives that aim to fix the problems in public schools.

At the center of this debate are teachers and students, both of whom are pivotal players in efforts to improve education. Teachers are central to any strategy aimed at improving education, and voters place initiatives that improve the quality of teachers at the top of their list. Voters are ready to commit resources to ensure that they have the best teachers possible by encouraging the best students to enter the profession, providing financial incentives to keep good teachers, and raising salaries. However, they demand accountability in return and overwhelmingly support national standards and certification for all teachers.

At the same time, the overwhelming majority of voters support national proposals that address their other fundamental concern – that too many students do not receive the attention they need and cannot learn in a huge and unruly classroom. Broad support emerges for measures to reduce class size, increase funding to low-performing schools, and provide additional assistance to help special needs students receive the attention they need.

Each of the eight initiatives tested receives at least two-thirds support; seven of the eight garner more than three-fourths support:

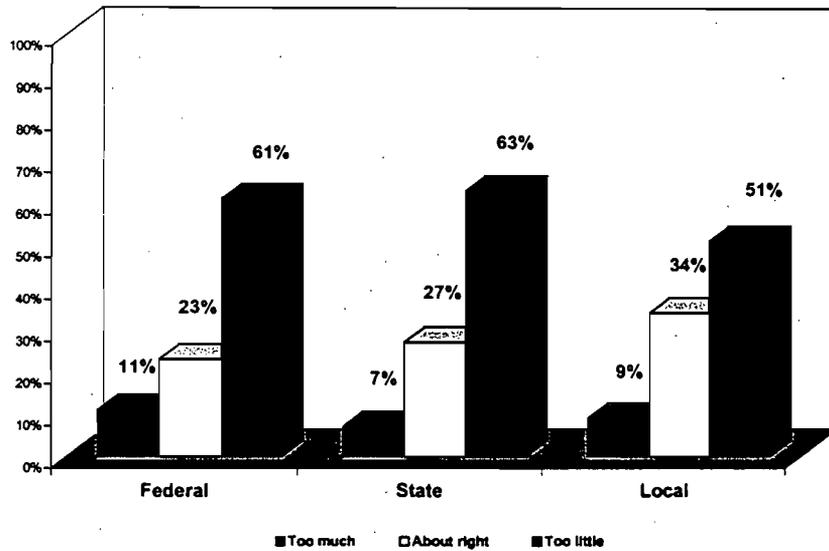
- Increased funding for special needs students (88 percent)
- College scholarships to attract the best high school students to teach (85 percent)
- Financial incentives to keep and attract good teachers (82 percent)
- Increased funding for districts with large proportions of poor or disadvantaged students (82 percent)
- National certification standards for all teachers (80 percent)
- Three billion dollars to help local school districts modernize (78 percent)
- Hire 100,000 new teachers (75 percent)

#### Education: Top Budget Priority

The prominence of education is clear and it now stands above other issues as an issue Washington should pay attention to. Education is the top concern for voters, and is cited by 38 percent when asked to name their two top concerns, surpassing Social Security (35 percent), health care (31 percent), taxes (17 percent), crime (15 percent), moral decline (14 percent), national debt (12 percent), the economy (10 percent) and the environment (9 percent).

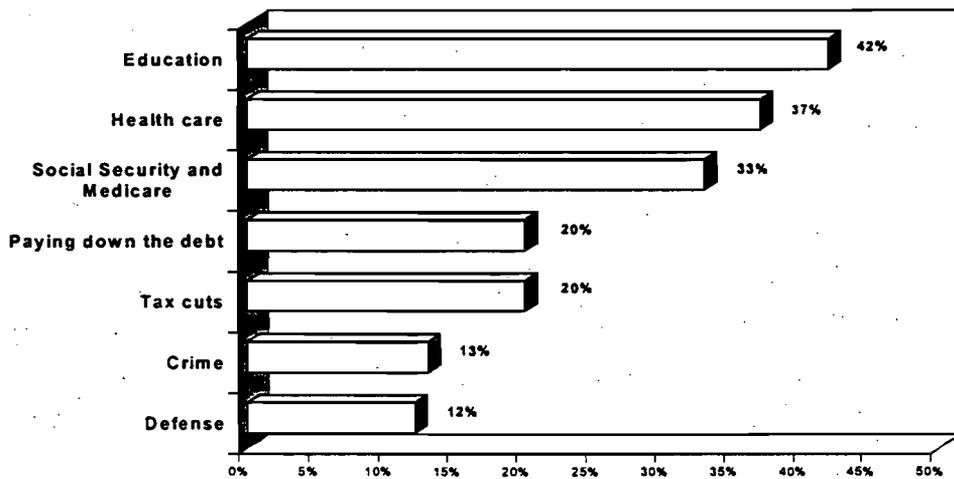
Voters are ready for more federal spending on education; a large majority (61 percent) believes the federal government spends too little on education, compared to just 11 percent who think it spends too much. An equal number believe their state government spends too little on education (63 percent) and a majority, 51 percent, look for more spending from their local government. At each level of government, the call for more spending has increased in the last two years, and voters are now more likely to want increased spending from the federal government than from local government on education.

**Government Spending on Education**



**Education is now the single most important funding priority for the federal government and more voters want additional spending on education than for any other area.** In spite of last year's debate on tax cuts, debt retirement, Social Security and Medicare, education emerges as the top priority for federal budget next year. When asked to name the two areas for more federal spending next year, 42 percent cite education, placing it again above health care, Social Security, and other issues.

**Top Two Priorities for the Federal Budget**



While education has broad appeal throughout the electorate, it is particularly compelling with key swing audiences, including Independents, liberal/moderate Republicans and Republican women. It stands as the most important spending priority among moderates (45 percent), and the same is true of voters with school-age children. As the table below underscores, it has strong appeal with key groups.

EDUCATION IS TOP FUNDING PRIORITY AMONG PARTISAN GROUPS		
	Education is Top Budget Priority	Advantage over Next Top Priority
Democrats	46	+5
Independents	43	+2
Republicans	36	+7
Liberal-Moderate Republicans	49	+16
Republican Women	43	+10
Women with Children	50	+9
Men with Children	47	+17

Even among conservative Republicans, education is cited as a top priority by 30 percent, equal to paying down the national debt (29 percent), and slightly higher than tax cuts (27 percent) as a spending priority.

Finally, education dominates tax cuts as a budget priority among some key swing audiences – liberal-moderate Republicans and Independents. Liberal-moderate Republicans prefer education to tax cuts by a two-to-one ratio (49 and 25 percent respectively), while the ratio grows to more than two-to-one among independents (43 and 18 percent).

Federal Role Linked to Specifics

The federal role voters envision on education is one founded on specific initiatives and proposals that directly address their concerns. In the abstract, voters are unsure of a larger federal role and tend to split three ways on the question with 38 percent supporting a larger role, 35 percent a smaller role, and 24 percent maintaining the same role. A strong partisan trend emerges in which Democrats support larger versus smaller role by 48 to 23 percent, Independents split down the middle (36 to 34 percent), and few Republicans support a larger role (27 to 52 percent).

When the focus shifts to specific areas of education, voters want the federal government to take some responsibility, along with state government, to solve the problems. Voters still look to the states as primarily responsible for education, but majorities now believe the federal government should also play a role on a wide range of education issues.

Voters readily believe the federal government should either take primary responsibility or share responsibility with the states on a wide range of education issues: provide funding to help disadvantaged and special needs students (65 percent), funding for modernization and wiring of classrooms (65 percent), assistance to low-performing schools (58 percent), setting performance standards for teachers (56 percent) and for students (52 percent). Majorities of Democrats, Independents, and liberal-moderate Republicans support a federal role in each of these areas.

Just as voters support a shared federal role in education, we found majorities support setting standards whenever public funding is involved. More than three-fourths of the electorate believes any school receiving taxpayer funding should release financial records, admit any student, maintain the same standards as public schools, hire only certified teachers, and meet the needs of at-risk students. Before voters allow taxpayer funding to go to non-public schools, they will demand that a strong set of standards be maintained.

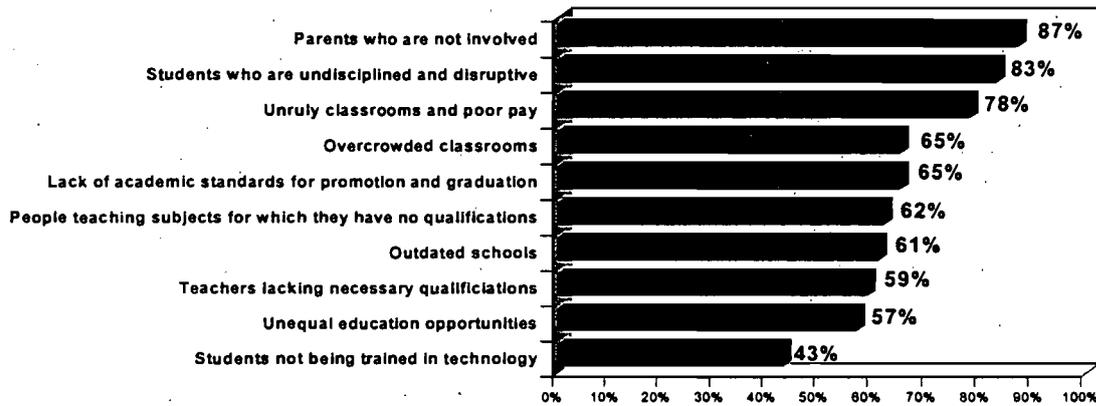
#### Classrooms Where Students Can Learn

The education debate is now centered very firmly on the classroom environment, a setting that impedes the ability of students to learn and keeps teachers from teaching to their ability. Voters hold a set of concerns that are centered on smaller and orderly classrooms where students receive more attention, more parental involvement, more qualified teachers and must meet higher standards for students. Their focus is now on improving the classroom setting and creating an environment in which every student learns.

Parents, teachers and students are at the core of this debate. On the one hand, parents are viewed as the people trying to improve education more so than others (41 percent). Yet parents' not being involved in their child's education is the single biggest problem to voters (87 percent serious, 57 percent very serious). "Undisciplined and disruptive students" is the second biggest problem (83 percent, 53 percent), a reaffirmation of a belief that too many parents send their kids to school unprepared or ill behaved. Parents are a key player in any strategy to improve the schools.

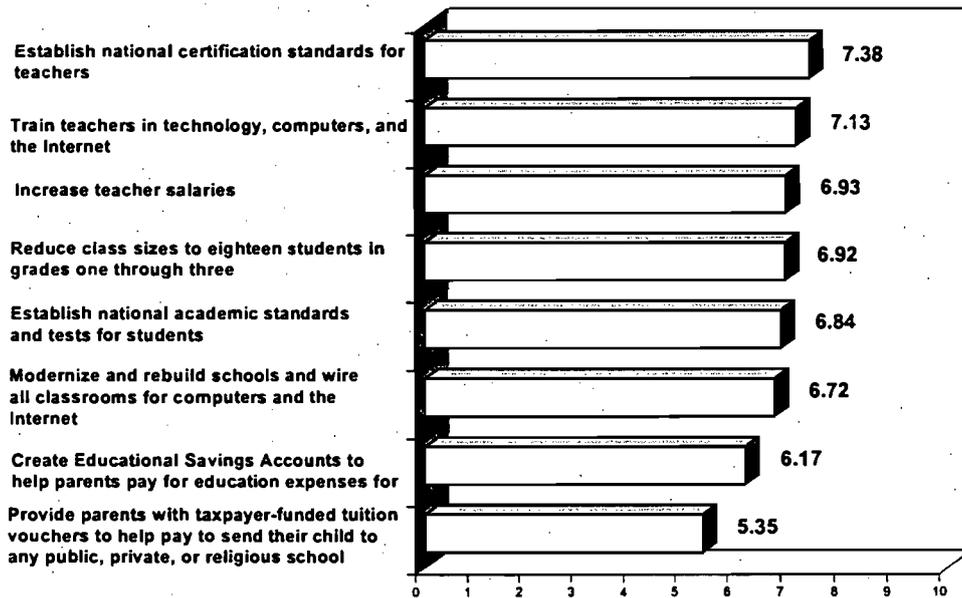
Even more important to the education debate are teachers and some of the biggest problems in education are a function of teachers not being able to control and teach in their classrooms. Except for parents, teachers are seen as the people trying the most to make things better in education (37 percent), but some of the biggest problems confront them directly – overcrowded and unruly classrooms and low pay – and make it difficult to keep good teachers. At the same time, voters want teachers to be accountable and qualified to teach effectively.

**Potential Problems in Schools Today**  
(Percent Responding Very Big/Serious Problem)



These concerns produce broad-based support for a range of proposals to alleviate the problems. The survey utilized a scale of 0 to 10 to measure the relative importance of a range of proposals, most of which received very high scores. The graph below highlights the list and the mean, or average score, each proposal received.

**Importance of Enacting Education Proposals**  
(Mean Score Scale of 1-10)



A few trends are telling. First, voters strongly endorse proposals aimed at improving the quality of teachers, including financial incentives. The top three proposals are centered on teachers – national certification standards, training in technology, increased salaries – which are followed closely by reduced class sizes. The electorate supports higher pay and expending resources to improve the teaching corps, but wants accountability and high standards in return.

#### Little Energy for Tuition Vouchers

An agenda of choice, tuition vouchers, and education savings accounts does not fare as well and elicits little energy from the electorate. Tuition vouchers in particular are met with a lackluster response, the weakest of the entire list of initiatives by a wide margin.

Educational savings accounts hold broader appeal and attract some support, though the proposal does not command the support received by other initiatives. The concept scores lower than any initiative other than vouchers, but does attract a plurality when contrasted with a negative counter-argument that only the wealthy will benefit (49 to 42 percent).

While the deepest support comes from Republicans (+23 points), ESA's hold an advantage among Independents (+8) and trail among Democrats by only 5 points. This proposal is capable of attracting broad support in the absence of an alternative program.

#### A National Investment in Education

The electorate is ready to embrace a new national investment in education and supports increased funding to enact a national program to improve the public schools. The prominence of the issue, coupled with the strong economy, produces a groundswell of support for a wide range of initiatives aimed at improving public education.

When faced with a choice between a Democratic message of national commitment to invest in smaller classes, academic standards, and modernization and a Republican message of local decision making, school accountability and vouchers, voters favor the national commitment and investment by a startling 20-point margin, 53 to 33 percent. The national investment message attracts a broad base that cuts across partisan, gender, and regional lines. It prevails among men (+11) and women (+26) and has bi-partisan appeal; Independents favor it by 16 points and one-third of liberal-moderate Republicans cross over and favor the Democratic position.

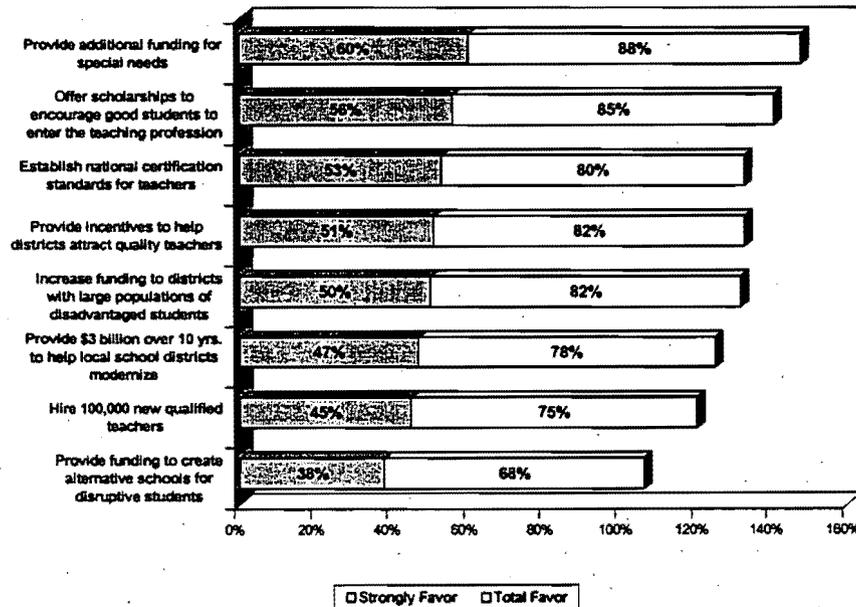
*Democrats say we need a new national commitment to public education so every student has the opportunity to learn and succeed. Democrats want to invest in the nation's public schools by reducing class sizes to 18 in every school and hiring more teachers. They propose national academic standards for student performance. Democrats call for modernizing and rebuilding schools and wiring them for computers and the Internet so every child is prepared to succeed.*

*Republicans say students learn best when education decisions are made at the local level. Republicans support increased funding for education, but they believe spending decisions should be made at the local level with few federal government restrictions. Republicans favor holding low performing schools accountable and propose giving parents tuition vouchers so their children can go to the public, private, or religious school of their choice.*

**Total Democrats.....53**  
**Total Republicans .....33**

The support for a national program to improve public education is reinforced in the response to a series of specific proposals as part of that federal program, all but one of which attract support of at least three-fourths of the electorate.

Support for National Education Proposals



The national program encompasses three powerful dimensions, each of which reinforces the others to make a strong case for investing in public education.

**Dimension One: Smaller Classes and More Attention for Students**

The single strongest overall message is centered on creating smaller classes and schools so children, parents, and teachers can build relationships and students can receive the attention they need (77 percent very convincing). Voters are strongly supportive of initiatives that put resources into low performing schools, to help students with special needs, and to reduce class sizes overall.

*Provide additional funding to ensure that students with learning disabilities and special needs receive additional attention*

Total favor 88%, Strongly favor 60%, #1 overall

*Increase funding to local school districts with large populations of disadvantaged and poor students to improve student achievement*

Total favor 82%, Strongly favor 50%, #4 overall

*Hire 100,000 new, qualified teachers to reduce class sizes.*

Total favor 75%, Strongly favor 45%, #7 overall

**Dimension Two: Best Teachers in the World**

The second strongest overall message is based on giving children the best teachers in the world (76 percent very convincing reason to support the program) and a number of proposals aimed at improving the quality of teachers rank among the most compelling elements in a national program. Voters are ready to invest resources to attract, keep, and train the best teachers, but also demand accountability in return with standards and certification.

*Offer scholarships to some of the best high school students to encourage them to enter the teaching profession*

Total favor 85%, Strongly favor 56%, #2 overall

*Provide financial incentives, including bonuses and tax incentives, to help local school districts attract and keep top quality teachers*

Total favor 82%, Strongly favor 51%, #3 overall

*Establish national certification standards for all teachers, regardless of where they teach*

Total favor 80%, Strongly favor 53%, #5 overall

### Dimension Three: Modernization

Though not as compelling as the first two dimensions, the plan to modernize schools elicits a very positive response and reinforces again the electorate's readiness to invest in schools now.

*Provide 3 billion dollars over 10 years to  
help local school districts renovate,  
modernize and rebuild schools*

Total favor 78%, Strongly favor 47%, #6 overall

*Note: This data confirms the findings of a bi-partisan survey conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Research and The Tarrance Group in January 1998.*

### Education and Partisanship

Education is an issue neither party can afford to ignore and both parties are in positions to gain by taking positions in support of a national education program as measured in this survey. Democrats begin with the advantage on the issue (+10 points), but there is evidence that Republicans can gain support among key swing voters, Independents, by supporting this program.

The generic congressional contest is essentially even at the outset, with Democrats holding a 40 to 38 percent edge, but they help themselves dramatically by staking out a position in favor of the national program to improve public education. We utilized an exercise in which half of the sample was presented with a Republican candidate supporting the national program, and the other half heard a Democratic candidate support the program.

**The National Program**

- *Increased funding for special needs students (88 percent)*
- *College scholarships to attract the best high school students to teach (85 percent)*
- *Financial incentives to keep and attract good teachers (82 percent)*
- *Increased funding for districts with large proportions of poor or disadvantaged students (82 percent)*
- *National certification standards for all teachers (80 percent)*
- *Three billion dollars to help local school districts modernize (78 percent)*
- *Hire 100,000 new teachers (75 percent)*
- *More alternative schools for violent or disruptive students (68 percent)*

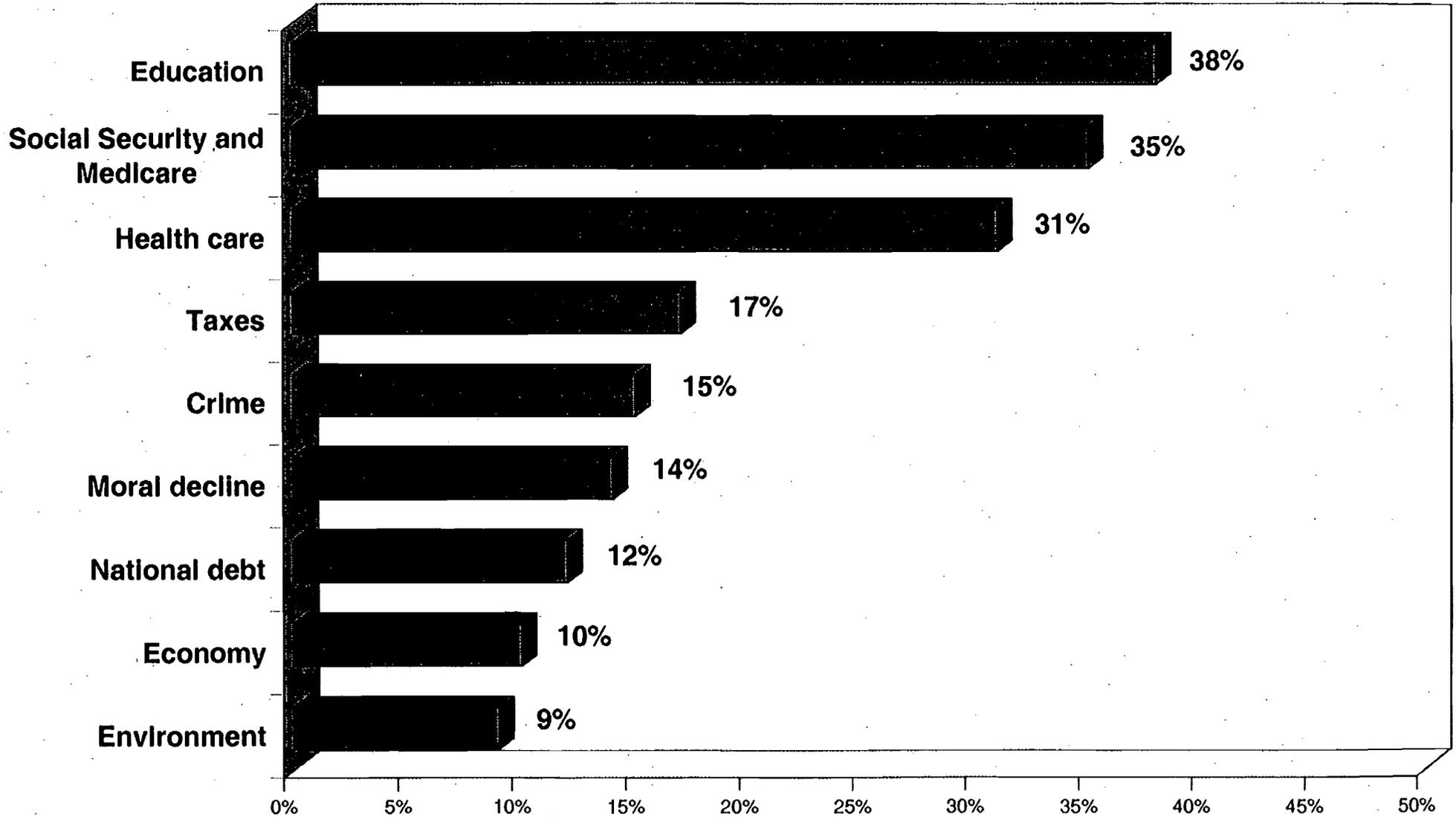
When the Democrat supports the national investment program without challenge from the Republican, the Democrat surges to a 15-point advantage, 47 to 32 percent. The shift is dramatic, broad, and extends to Independents (+10 net shift) and liberal-moderate Republicans (net +18 points). The danger for a Republican is evident and allowing a Democrat to take the education issue alone presents them with a serious problem.

The Republican benefits slightly overall by supporting this program and gains a net 4 points to take a slim 2-point advantage. However, taking this position enables the Republican to regain swing voters, particularly Independents, moderates, and parents with school age children. The pro-education investment Republican prevails among Independents by 11 points, but the Republican not associated with the program trails the pro-investment Democrat among Independents by 16 points.

Key swing audiences – Independents, parents with children, liberal and moderate Republicans – clearly care about this issue, which will be part of the debate this fall. Republicans run a real risk if they fail to address the education issue and, though it may not be the issue on which they win, they may well pay a price if they do not put forth an agenda on education.

# Top Concerns for Washington to Address

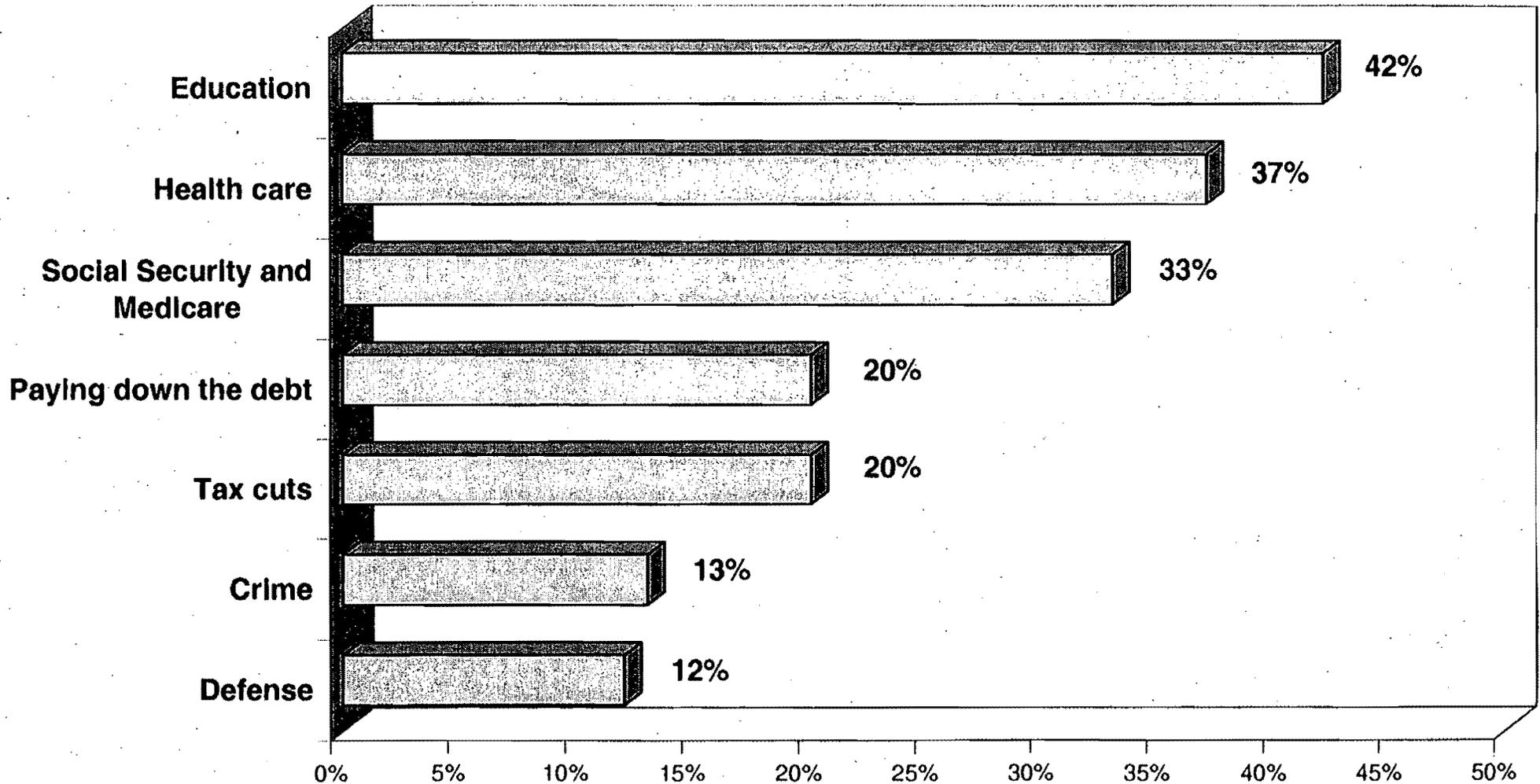
(Top Two Responses)



National Education Association  
January 18-26, 2000

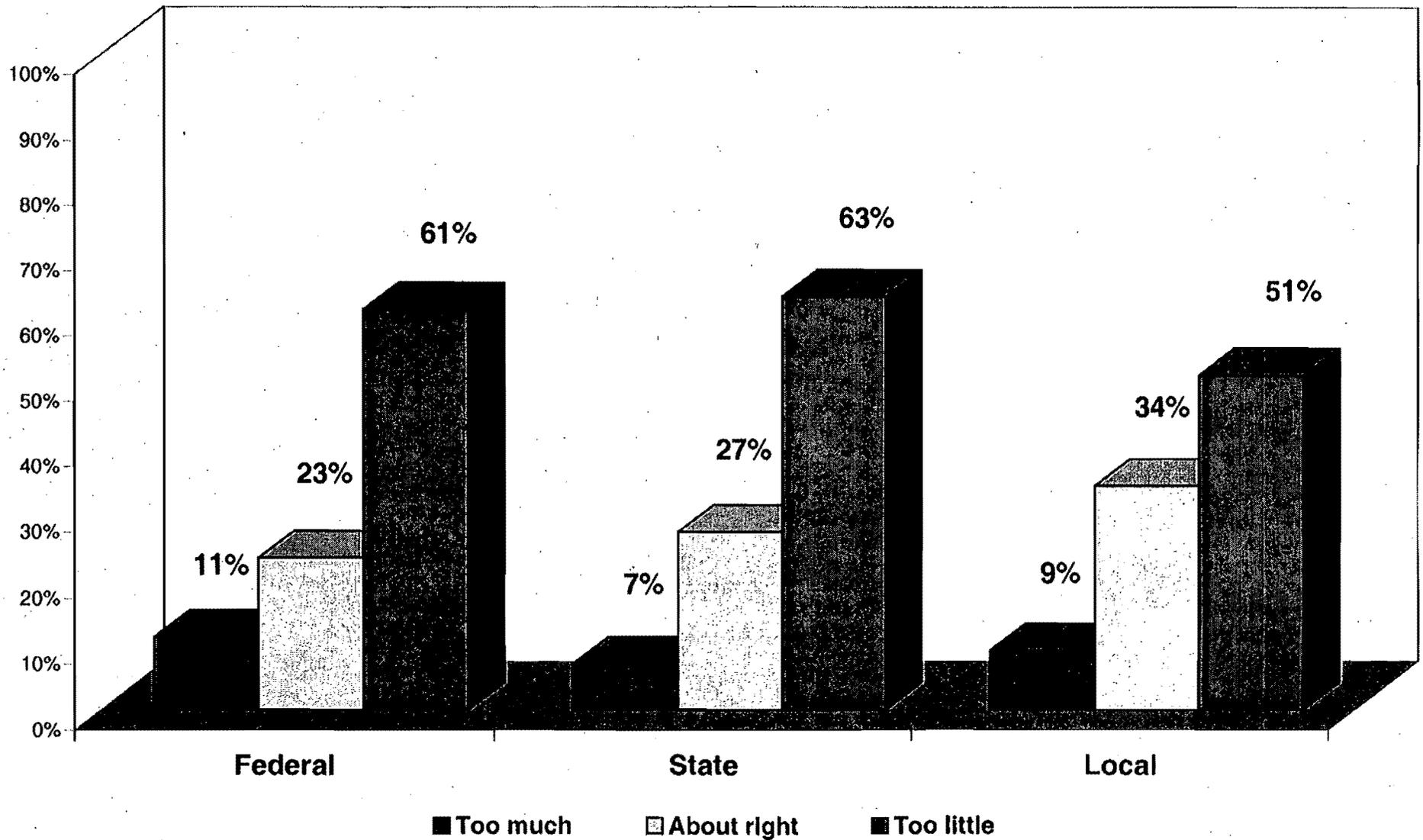
# Priorities for the Federal Budget

(Top Two Responses)



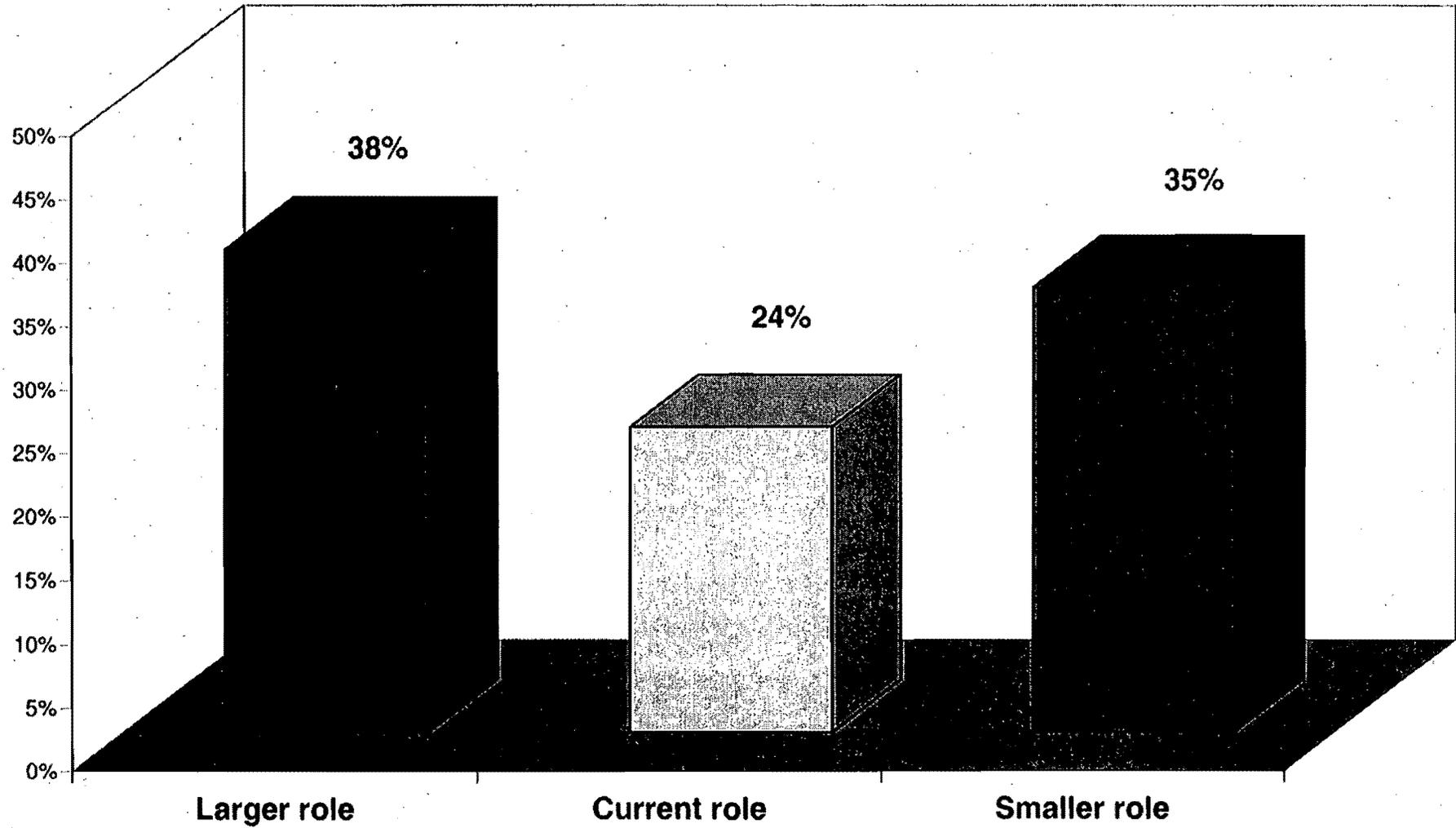
National Education Association  
January 18-26, 2000

# Government Spending on Education

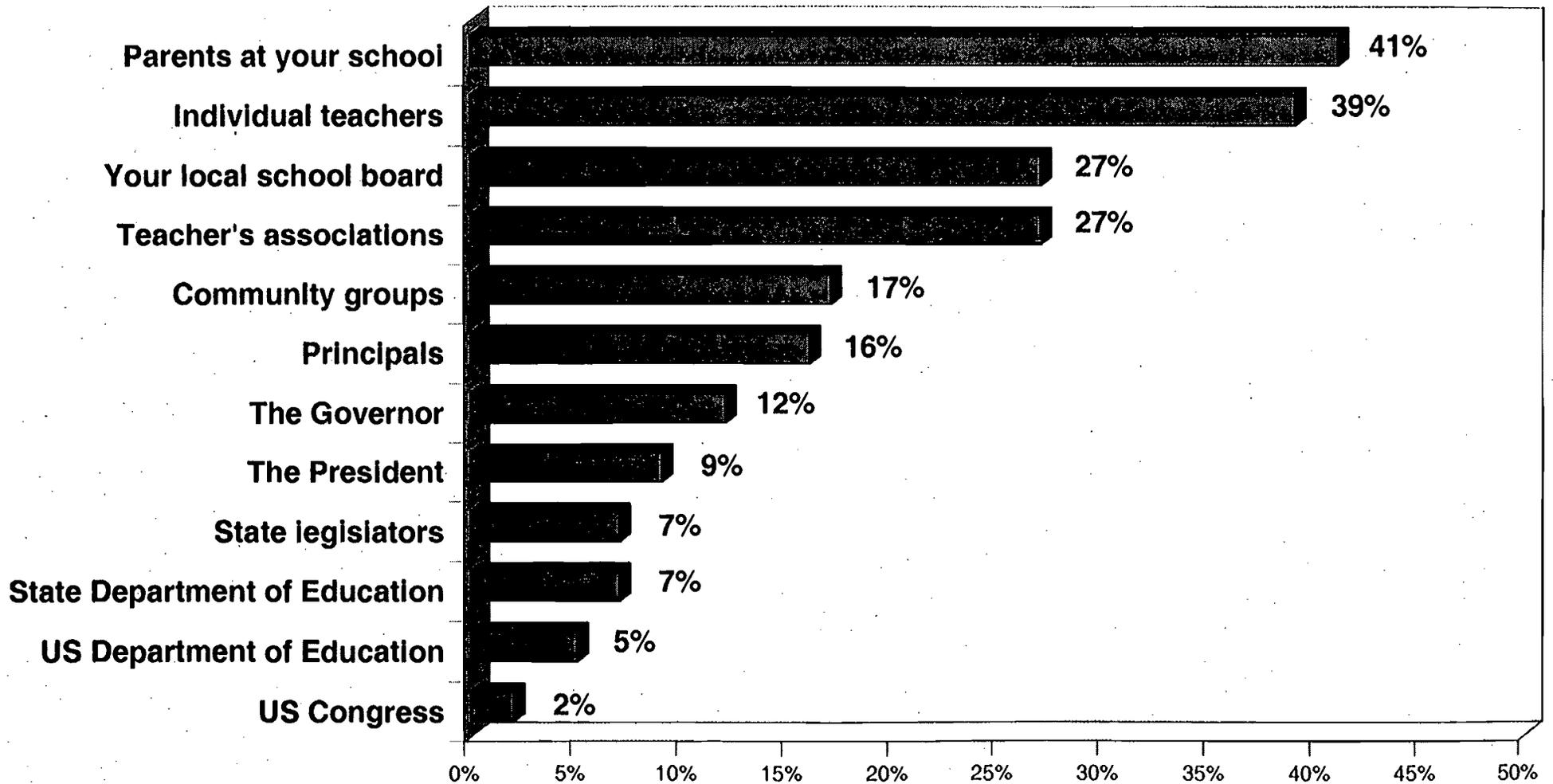


National Education Association  
January 18-26, 2000

# Role of Federal Government in Education

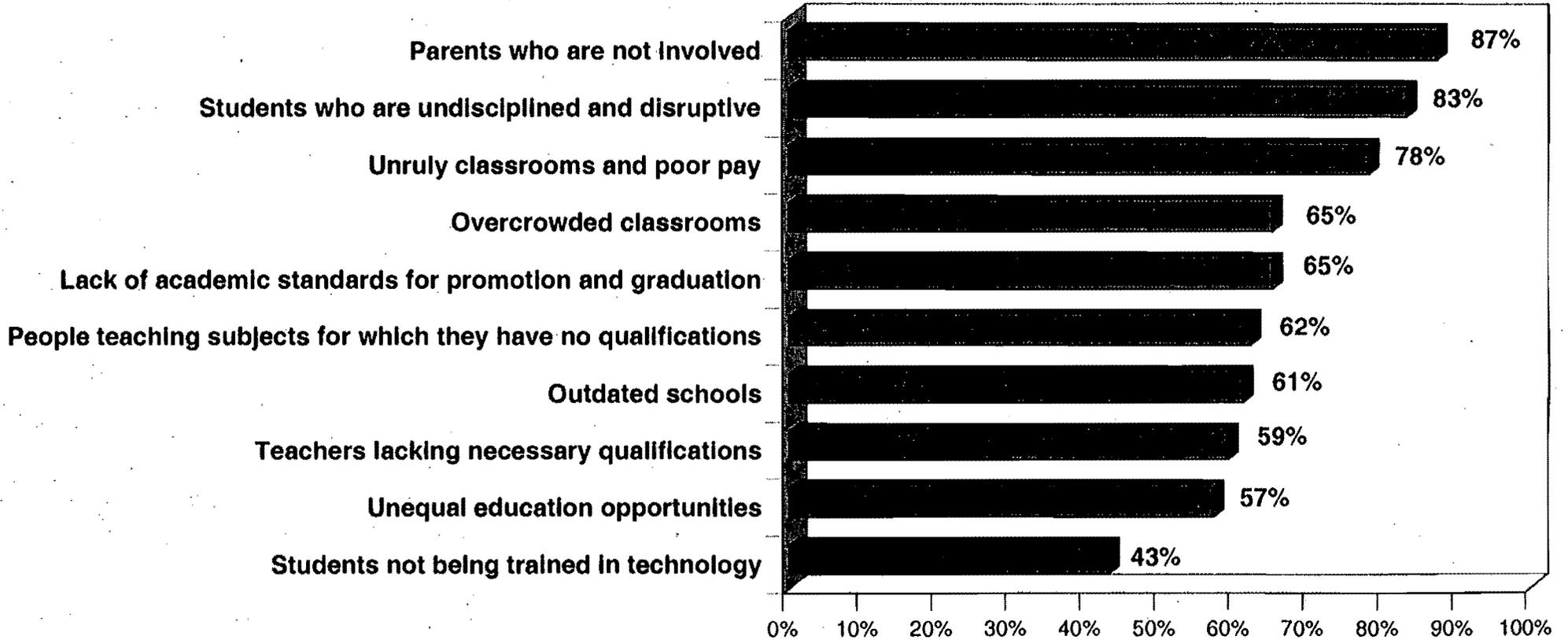


# Groups or Individuals Trying to Help Public Schools



# Potential Problems in Schools Today

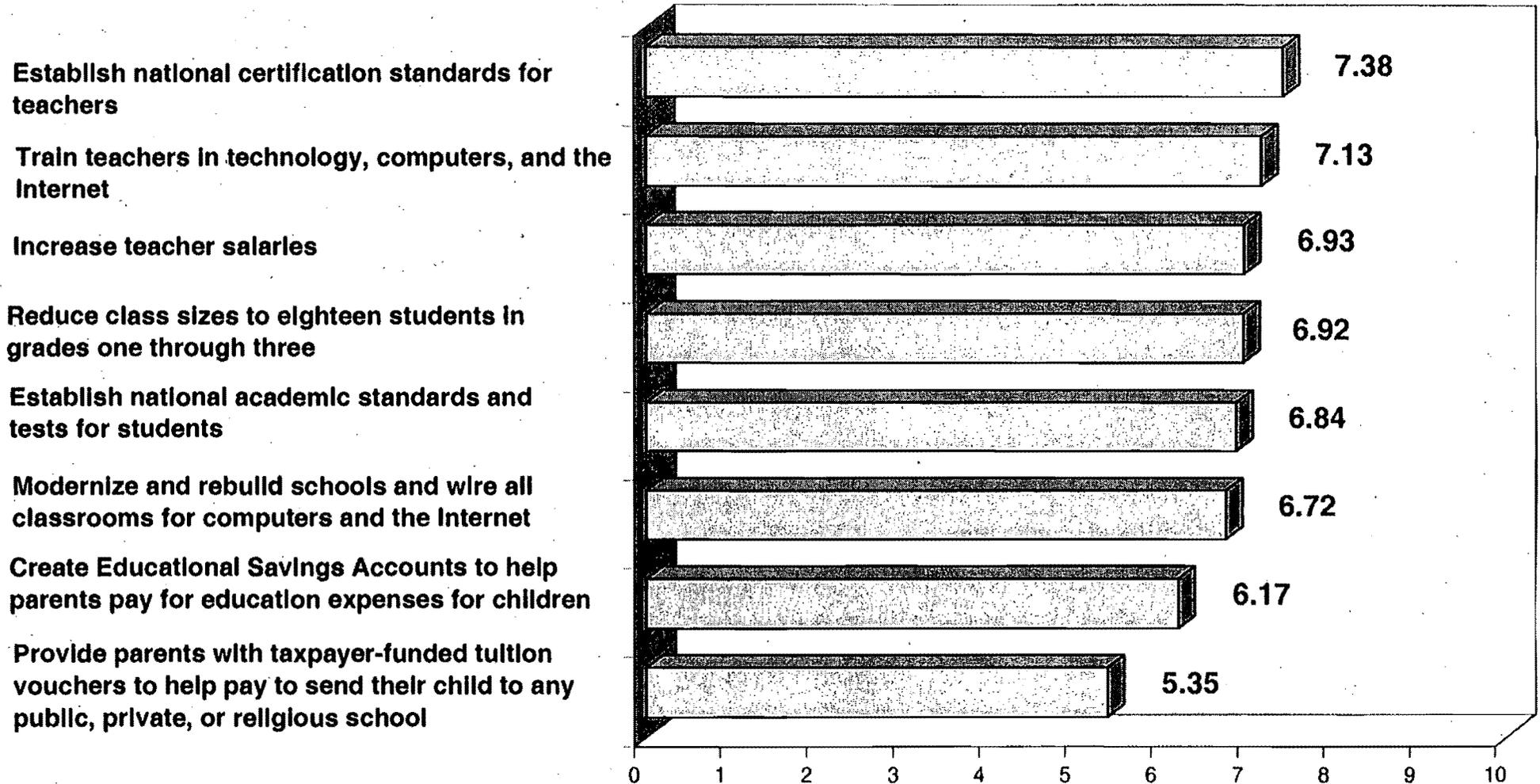
(Percent Responding Very Big/Serious Problem)



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January 18-26, 2000

# Importance of Enacting Education Proposals

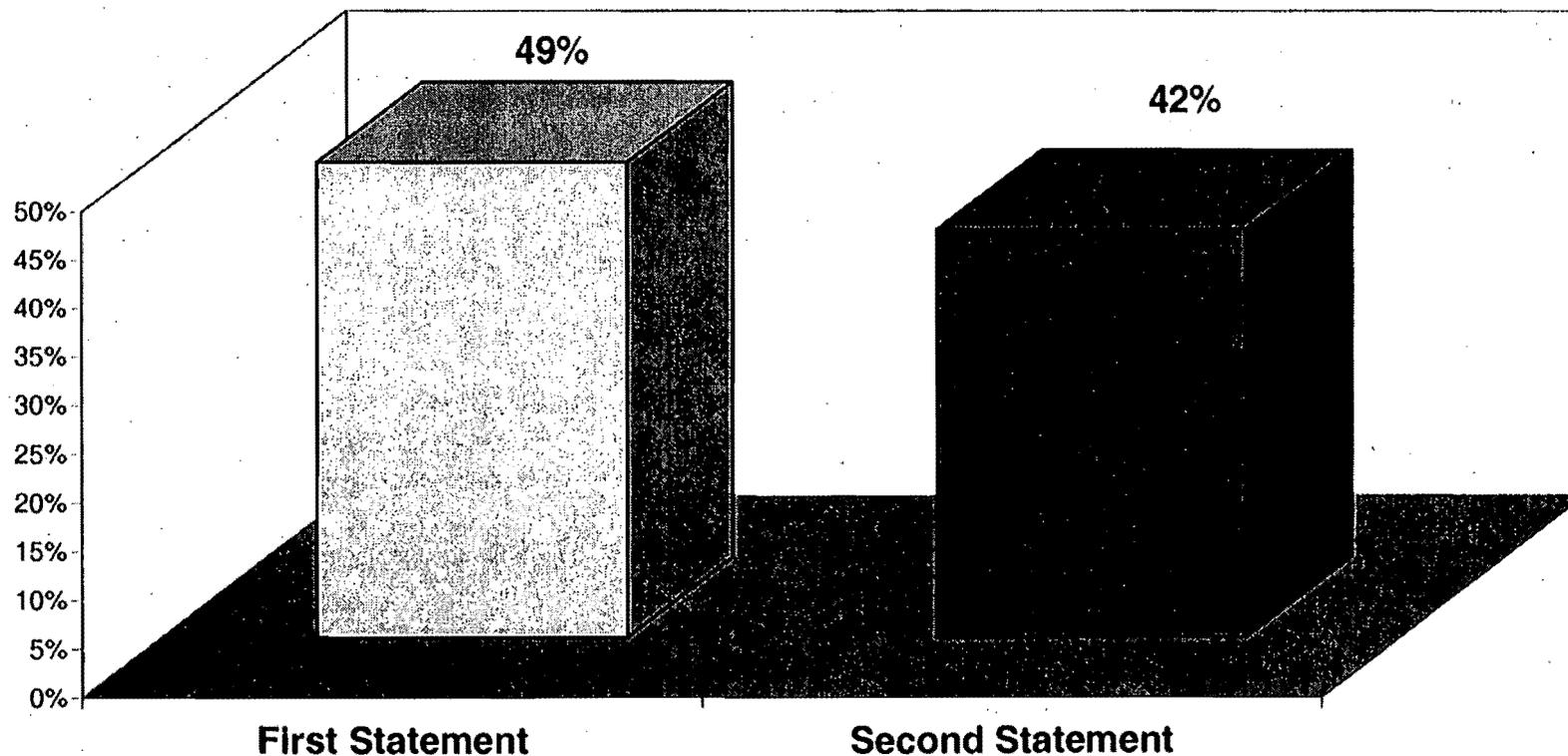
(Mean Score Scale of 0-10)



National Education Association  
January 18-26, 2000

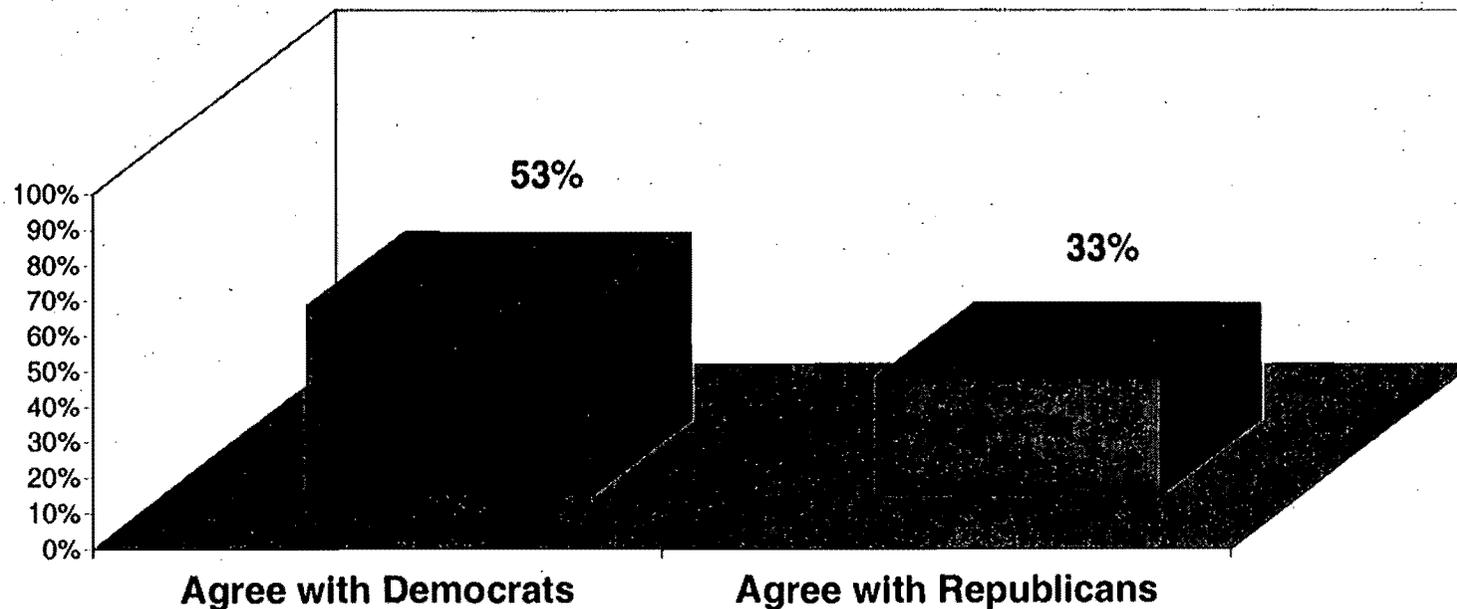
**Some people say Education Savings Accounts are a good approach to helping people pay for education. They say parents are better off keeping their money so they can decide how best to spend money for their kids, rather than having government decide for them.**

**Other people oppose this proposal. They say the working families who need it the most won't be able to save enough money to make a difference for their kids' education and that this proposal will only help the rich, while taking money away from public schools.**

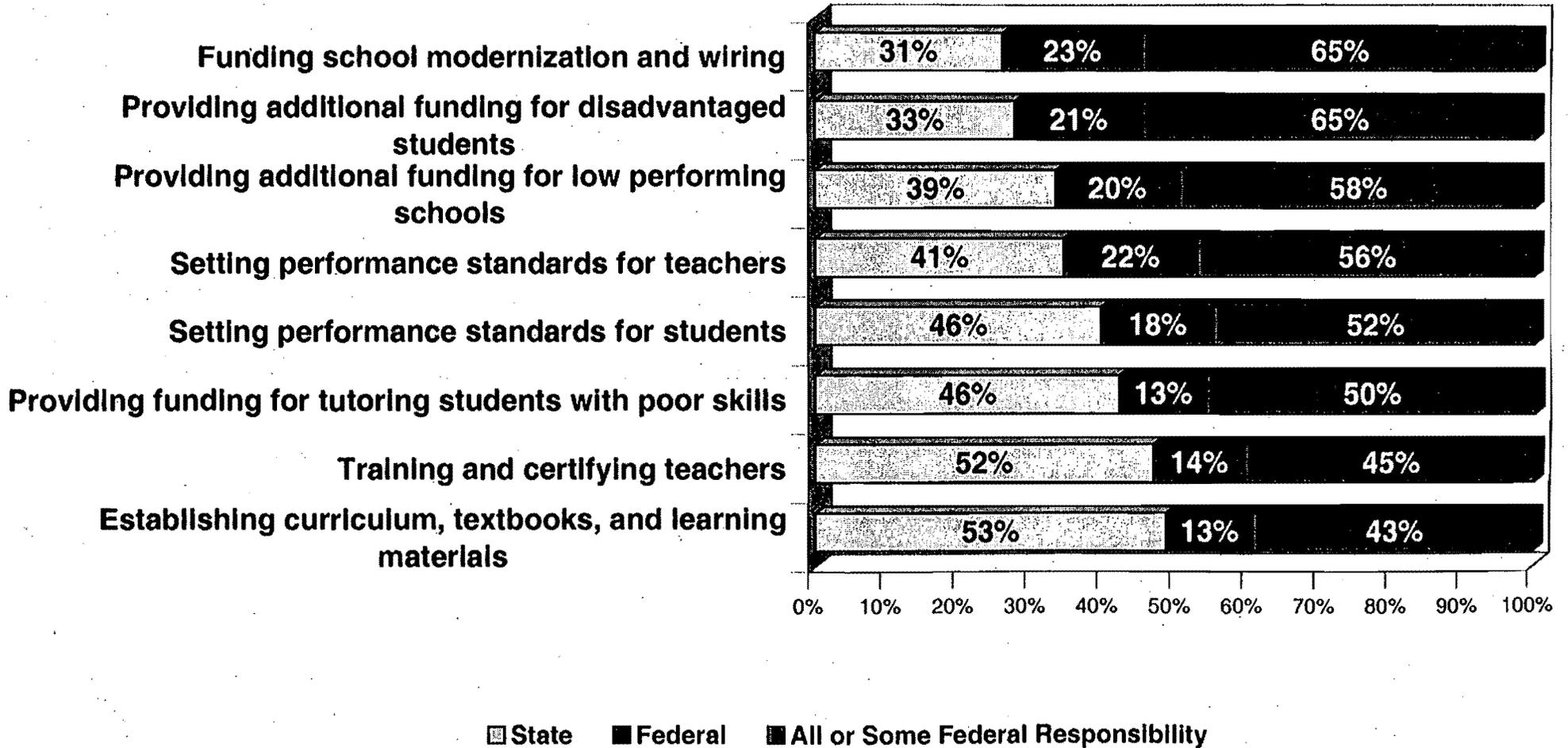


**Democrats say we need a new national commitment to public education so every student has the opportunity to learn and succeed. Democrats want to invest in the nation's public schools by reducing class sizes to 18 in every school and hiring more teachers. They propose national academic standards for student performance. Democrats call for modernizing and rebuilding schools and wiring them for computers and the Internet so every child is prepared to succeed.**

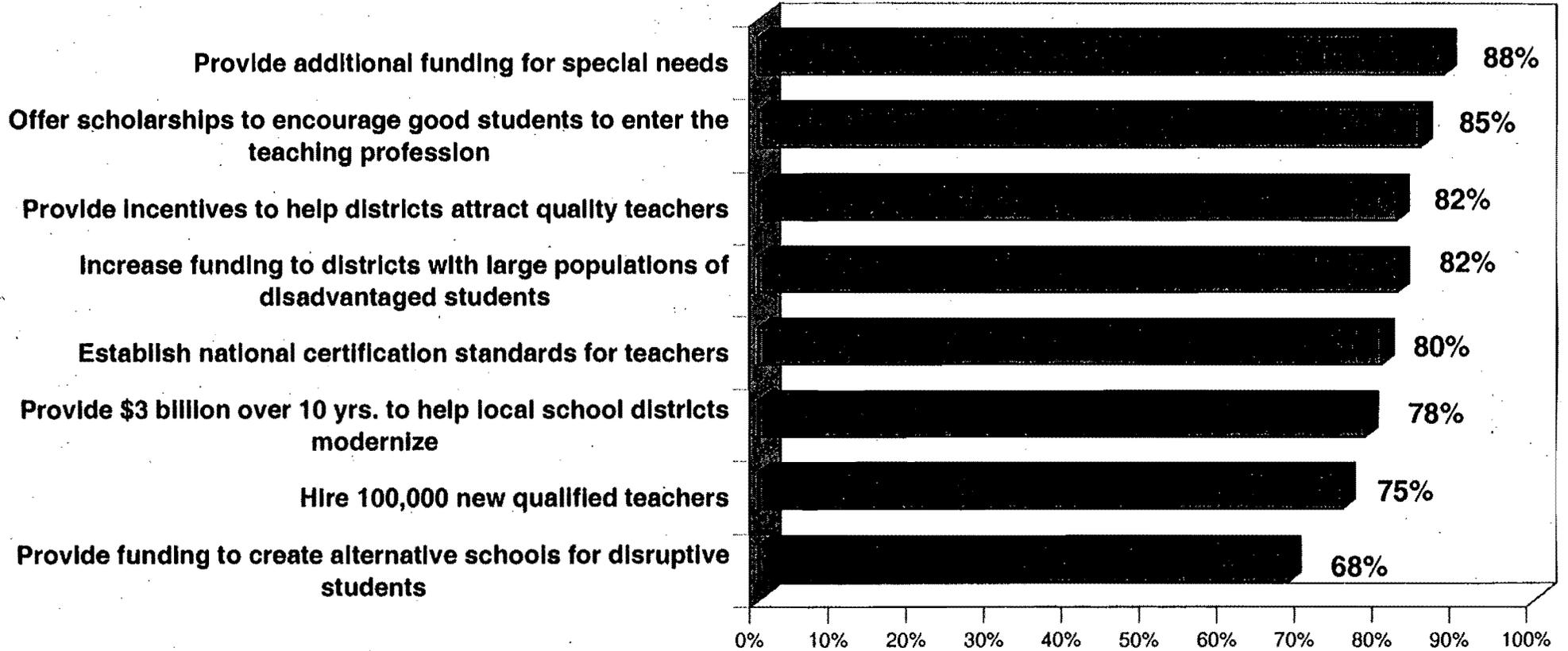
**Republicans say students learn best when education decisions are made at the local level. Republicans support increased funding for education, but they believe spending decisions should be made at the local level with few federal government restrictions. Republicans favor holding low performing schools accountable and propose giving parents tuition vouchers so their children can go to the public, private, or religious school of their choice.**



## Responsibility for Areas of Education



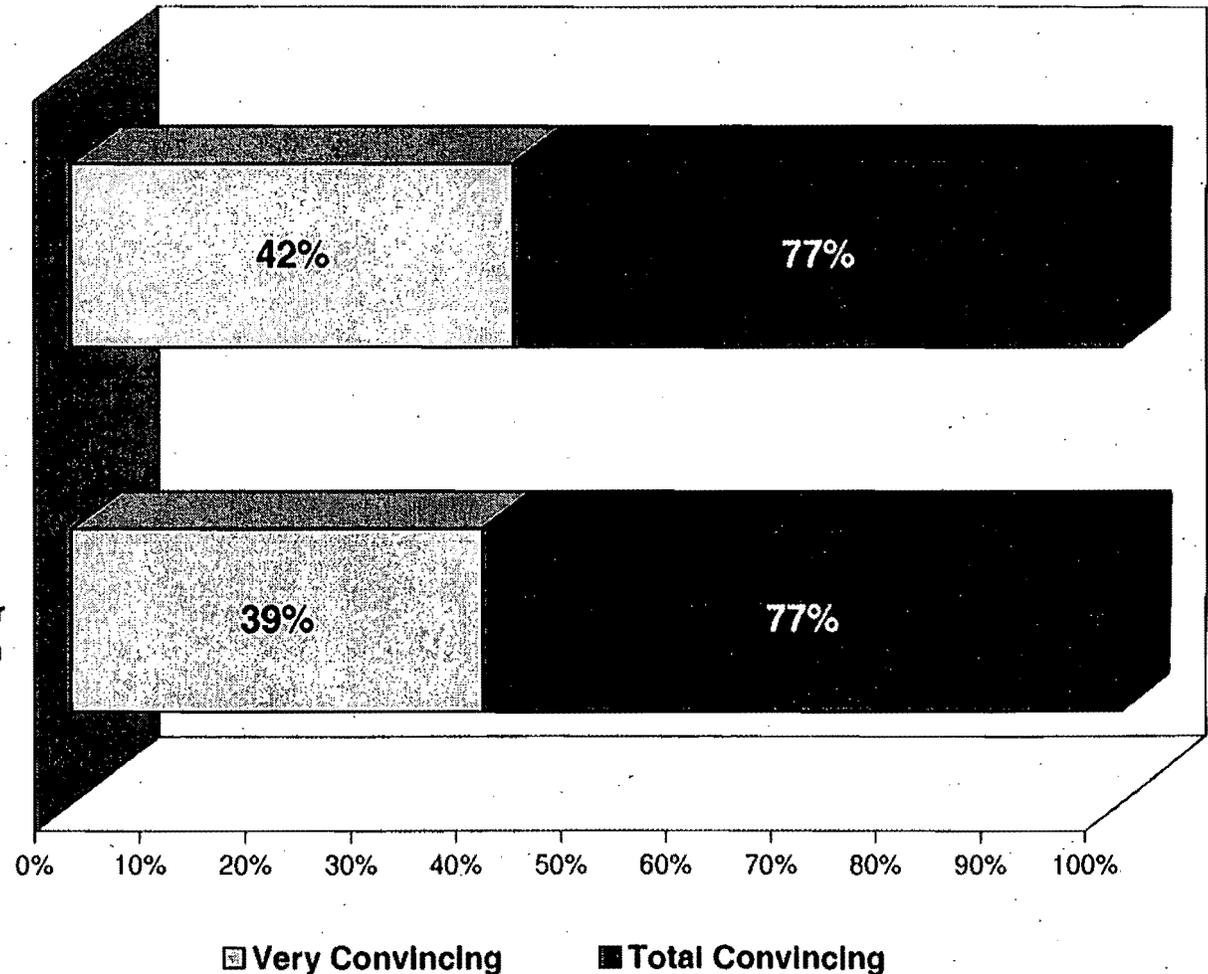
# Percent Favoring Education Program Proposals



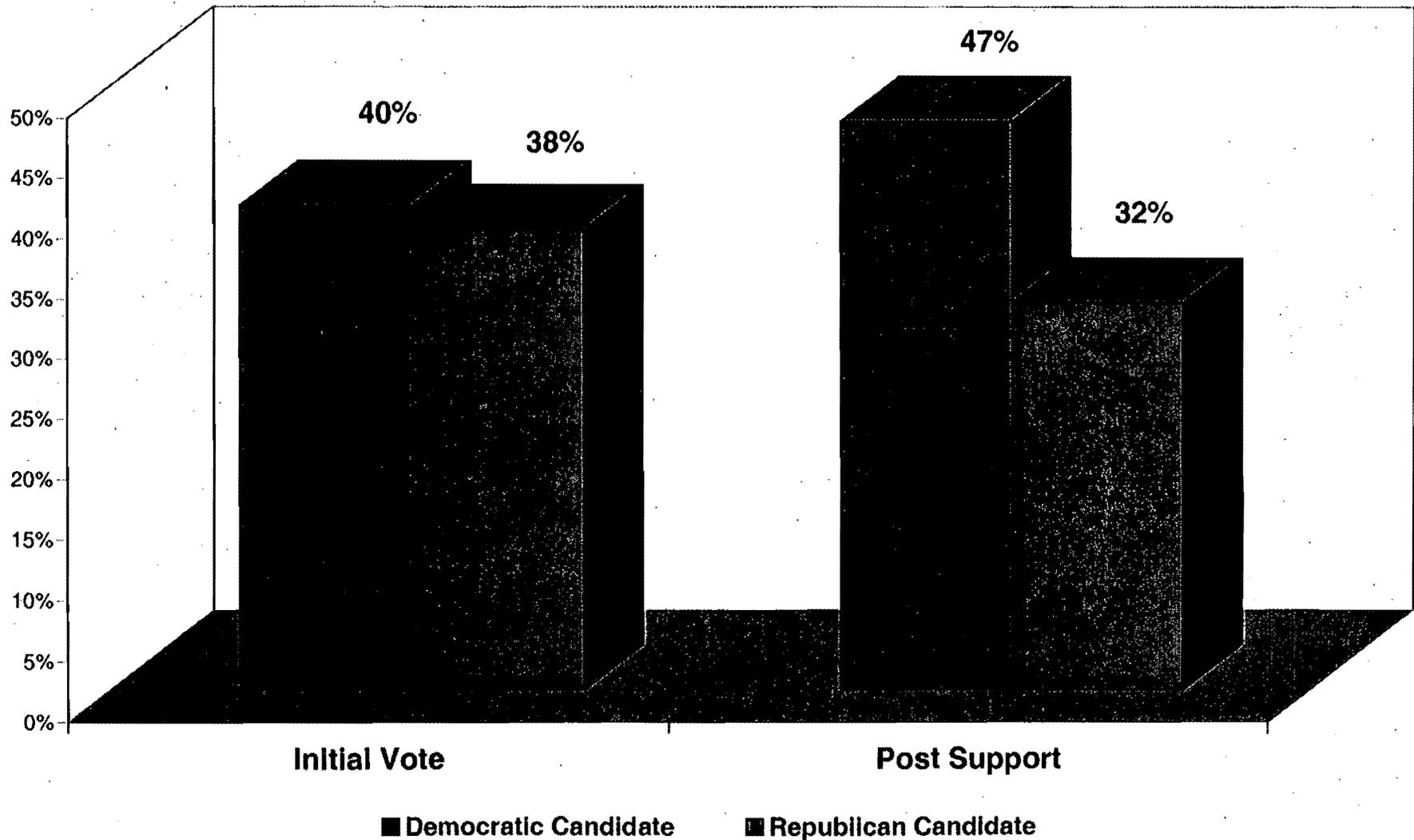
# Convincing Reasons to Support a National Education Program

This program will reduce class sizes and strengthen the connection amongst parents, teachers, and students that is often lost in today's huge schools. With smaller classes and smaller schools, students will receive more attention and parents will be encouraged to become more involved in their child's education.

Our children deserve the best teachers in the world, and this program will help schools attract and keep great teachers. By raising teacher pay and providing the best training for new teachers, we can ensure that our children have the teachers they deserve.

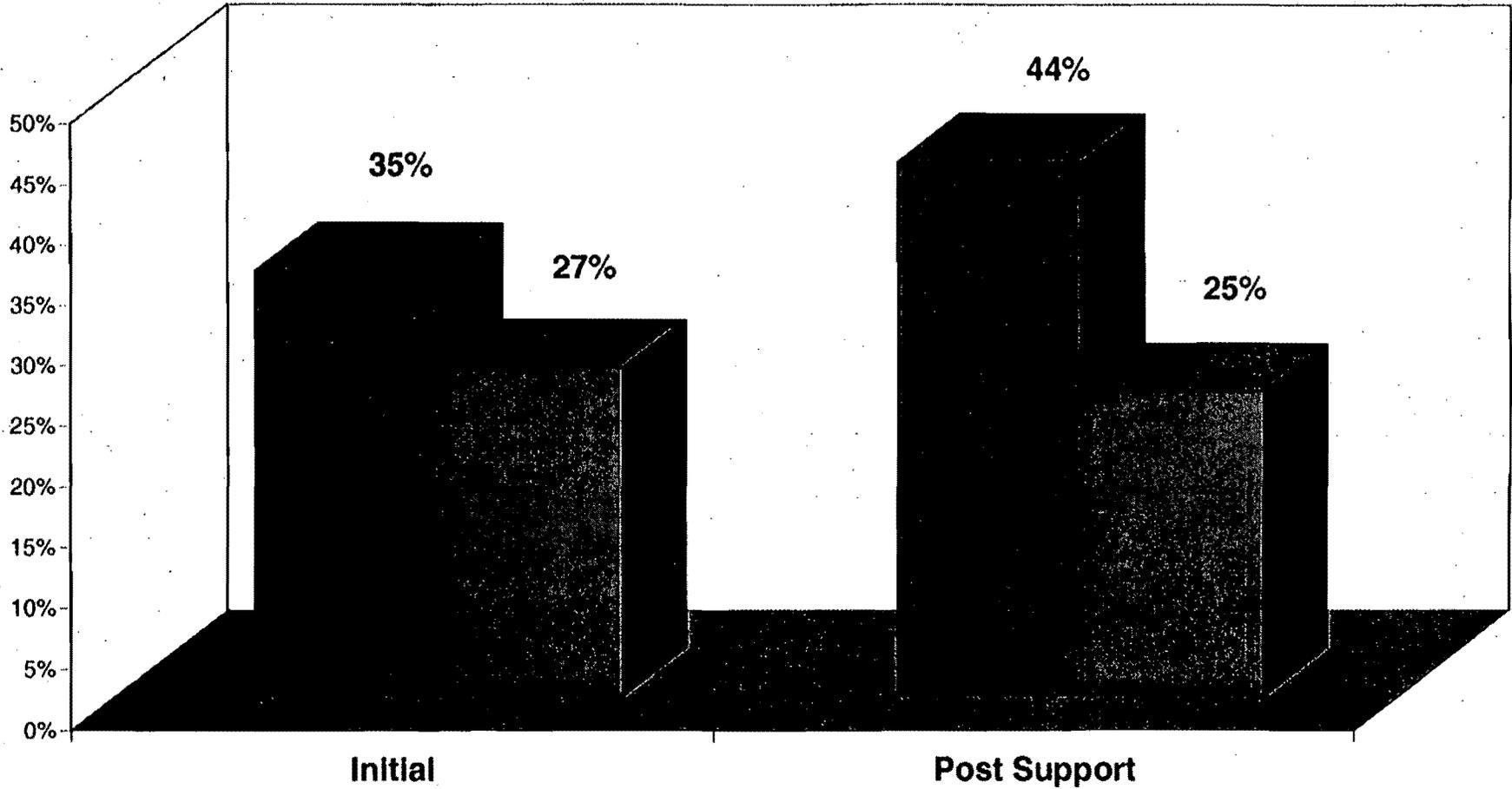


## Shift in Vote When Democratic Candidate Supports a National Education Program



National Education Association  
January 18-26, 2000

# Shift in Trust on Education When a Democratic Candidate Supports a National Education Program

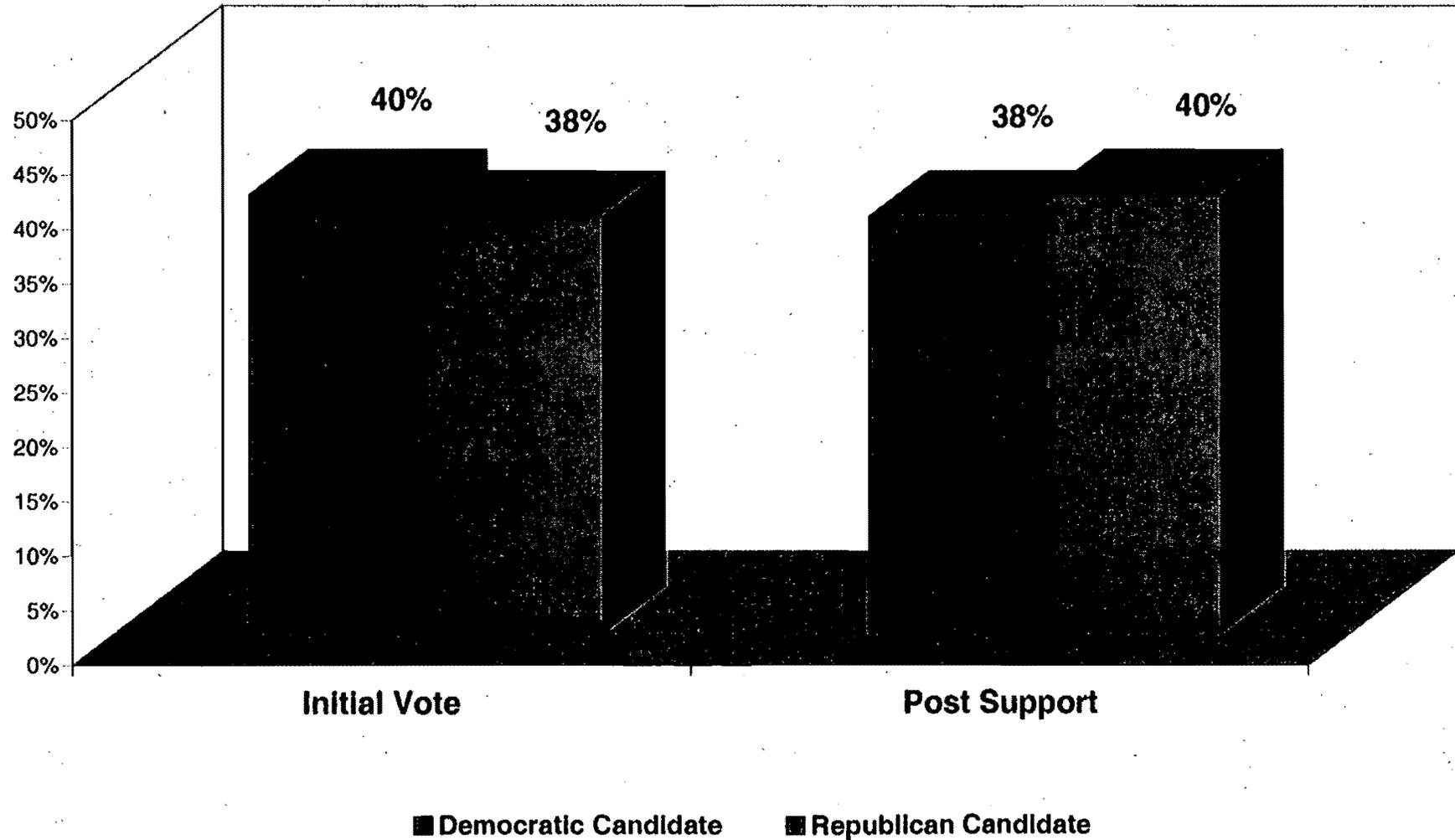


■ Democrats

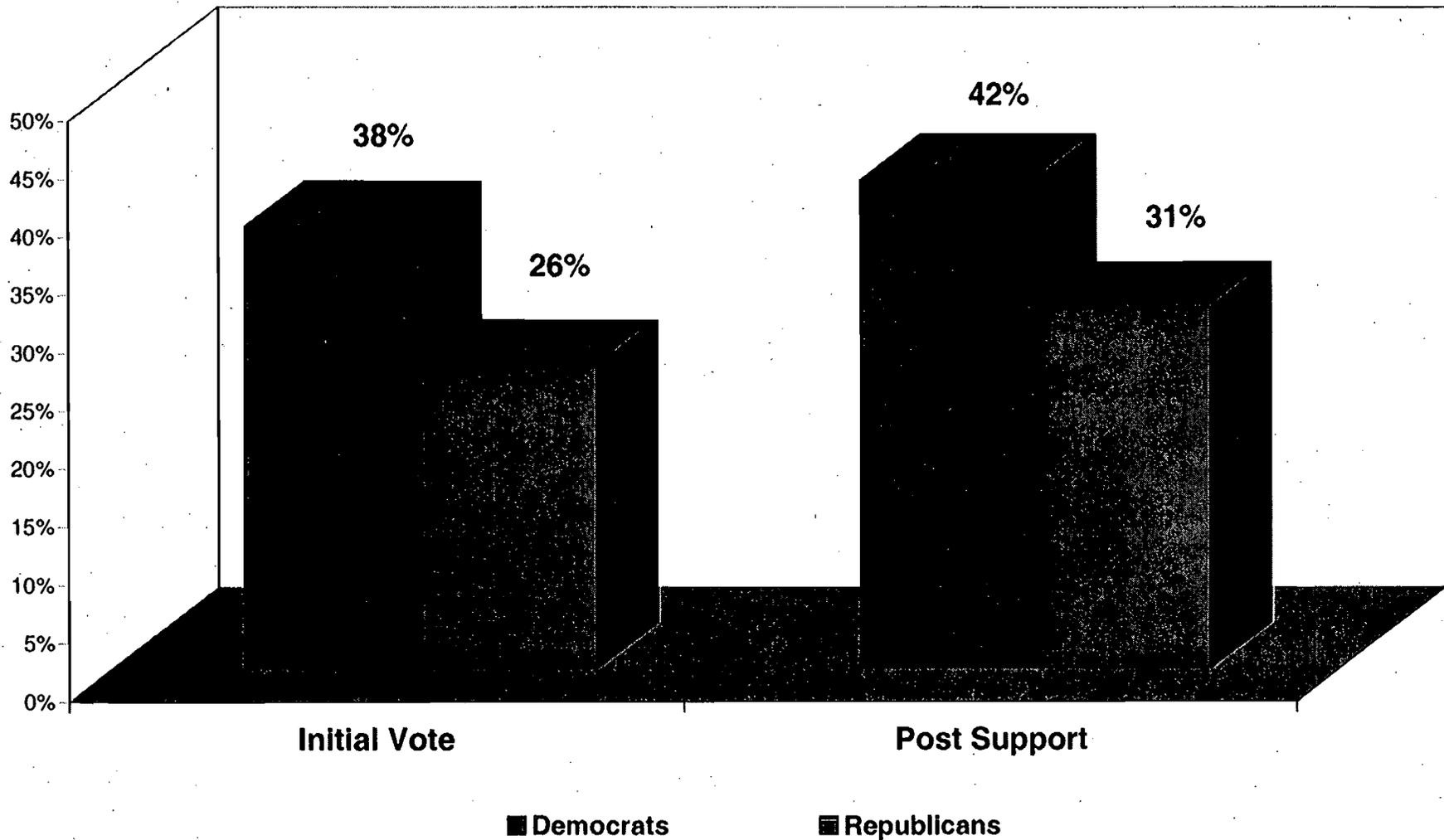
■ Republicans

National Education Association  
January 18-26, 2000

# Shift in Vote When a Republican Candidate Supports a National Education Program



# Shift in Trust on Education When a Republican Candidate Supports a National Education Program



NEA3-00.Q1  
January 18-26, 2000  
1002 Respondents

**FREQUENCY QUESTIONNAIRE**

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Q.2 First of all, are you registered to vote at this address?

	<b>Total</b>
Yes .....	100
No .....	-
(ref:JOHN)	

Q.4 Many people weren't able to vote in the 1996 election for president between Bob Dole, Bill Clinton, and Ross Perot. How about you? Were you able to vote, or for some reason were you unable to vote?

	<b>Total</b>
Voted .....	97
Ineligible/too young .....	3
Did not vote .....	-
(Can't remember/Don't know/Refused) .....	-
(ref:VOTE96)	

Q.5 I know its a long way off, but what are the chances of your voting in the November election for President - are you almost certain to vote, will you probably vote, are the chances 50-50, or don't you think you will vote?

	<b>Total</b>
Almost certain .....	93
Probably .....	7
50-50 .....	-
Will not vote .....	-
(Don't know/Refused) .....	-
(ref:WILLVOTE)	

Q.6 I am going to read you a list of concerns that people have. Please tell me which TWO of these you think the government in Washington should be paying the most attention to.

	<b>Total</b>
Education .....	38
Social Security and Medicare .....	35
Health care .....	31
Taxes .....	17
Crime .....	15
Moral decline .....	14
The national debt .....	12
The economy .....	10
The environment .....	9
(None) .....	1
(Don't know/Refused).....	1

(ref:DCCONC)

Q.7 When you think about the federal budget next year, which TWO of the following areas would you most like to see more money devoted to?

	<b>Total</b>
Education .....	42
Health care .....	37
Social Security and Medicare .....	33
Tax cuts .....	20
Paying down the national debt .....	20
Crime .....	13
Defense .....	12
(None/No increases/Leave as is) .....	0
(Don't know/Refused) .....	0

(ref:BUDGET)

Q.8 In this year's election for U.S. Congress, do you plan to vote for the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate in your district?

	<b>Total</b>
Democratic candidate .....	33
Lean Democratic candidate .....	7
Republican candidate .....	31
Lean Republican candidate .....	6
(Undecided) .....	22
<b>Total Democratic candidate .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Total Republican candidate .....</b>	<b>38</b>

(ref:GC1)

Q.10 Do you think the federal government is spending too much, too little or about the right amount on education?

	<b>Total</b>
Too much .....	11
About the right amount .....	23
Too little .....	61
(Don't know/Refused) .....	5
(ref:SCHOOLS1A)	

Q.11 Do you think your state government is spending too much, too little or about the right amount on education?

	<b>Total</b>
Too much .....	7
About the right amount .....	27
Too little .....	63
(Don't know/Refused) .....	3
(ref:SCHOOLS2B)	

Q.12 Do you think the local government in your area is spending too much, too little or about the right amount on education?

	<b>Total</b>
Too much .....	9
About the right amount .....	34
Too little .....	51
(Don't know/Refused) .....	5
(ref:SCHOOLS3A)	

Q.13 When you think about the role of the federal government in education, do you think the federal government should take on a larger role in education, maintain its current role, or take on a smaller role in education?

	<b>Total</b>
Much larger role .....	23
Somewhat larger role .....	15
Somewhat smaller role .....	16
Much smaller role .....	19
Maintain it's current role .....	24
(Don't know/Refused) .....	3
<b>Total larger role .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Total smaller role .....</b>	<b>35</b>
(ref:FEDROLE)	

Q.14 And what is your overall perception of the state of public schools in the United States? That schools are in bad shape and not getting better, that schools are in bad shape but are starting to improve, that schools have improved and need to continue to do so, or that schools are in pretty good shape?

	<b>Total</b>
Schools are in bad shape and not getting better .....	30
Schools are in bad shape but are starting to improve .....	30
Schools have improved and need to continue to do so .....	29
Schools are in pretty good shape .....	8
(Don't know/Refused) .....	3
(ref:SCHOOLS4)	

Q.15 Thinking about education nationally, is it important for our society to have strong PUBLIC schools where every child gets a free, quality education OR is it NOT important to have strong public schools, as long as all kids get a good education in either public, private or religious schools?

	<b>Total</b>
Important to have strong public schools .....	79
Not important .....	18
(Don't know/Refused) .....	3
(ref:STRNGSCHL)	

Q.16 Thinking about the problems facing public schools, please tell me which of these groups or individuals are really trying to make things better.

	<b>Total</b>
Parents at your school .....	41
Individual teachers .....	39
Teacher's Associations .....	27
Your local school board .....	27
Community groups .....	17
Principals .....	16
The Governor .....	12
The President .....	9
The State Department of Education .....	7
State Legislators .....	7
The U.S. Department of Education .....	5
The U.S. Congress .....	2
(All) .....	3
(None) .....	1
(Don't know/Refused) .....	3
(ref:PROBBETTR)	

Q.17 I am going to read you a list of potential problems in public schools today. Please tell me whether each one is a very big problem, a serious problem, a minor problem, or not much of a problem at all

	Very Big	Ser- ious	Min- or	Not Much	Don't Know	Big/ Ser	Minor/ Not Much
17 Students who are undisciplined and disruptive. ....	53	30	13	3	1	83	16
18 Overcrowded classrooms. ....	38	27	22	10	3	65	32
19 Unequal educational opportunity for all students. ....	29	28	23	18	3	57	41
20 A lack of academic standards for promotion and graduation. ....	34	31	22	10	3	65	32
21 Unruly classrooms and poor pay that make it difficult to attract and keep good teachers. ....	45	32	14	5	2	78	20
22 Outdated schools with inadequate facilities. ....	32	29	25	12	2	61	37
23 Teachers who lack the necessary training and qualifications. ....	33	26	27	11	3	59	38
24 Parents who are not involved in their child's education. ....	56	31	9	2	1	87	12
25 Students' not being trained in computers and technology. ....	22	21	36	18	4	43	54
26 People teaching a subject for which they do not have the qualifications or training to teach. ... (ref:PROB1)	33	29	24	9	5	62	33

Q.27 Now I am going to read you a list of education proposals currently being discussed in the U.S. Congress. For each, I want you to tell me how important it is for Congress to enact this proposal on a scale of zero to ten, with ten meaning it's the most important proposal, zero meaning it's not important at all, and 5 meaning it's somewhat important, the higher the number the more important the proposal.

	Mean	0-2	3-4	5	6-7	8-10	DK
27 Reduce class sizes to eighteen students in grades one through three. ....	6.92	9	7	20	13	50	1
28 Establish national academic standards and tests for students. ....	6.84	9	8	17	16	49	1
29 Modernize and rebuild schools and wire all classrooms for computers and the Internet. ....	6.72	9	9	16	17	46	1
30 Establish national certification standards for teachers. ....	7.38	8	5	13	14	59	1
31 Create Educational Savings Accounts, like IRA's, to help parents pay for education expenses for children, like tuition for public, private or religious schools, transportation, text books, and other educational expenses. ....	6.17	15	10	19	18	37	1
32 Increase teacher salaries. ....	6.93	8	6	19	16	50	1
33 Train teachers in technology, computers, and the Internet. ....	7.13	7	7	15	18	53	1
34 Provide parents with taxpayer-funded tuition vouchers to help pay to send their child to any public, private, or religious school. .... (ref:EDIMPROV)	5.35	25	10	21	12	31	1

Q.35 Now let me read you two statements about one of the proposals called Education Savings Accounts. Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view.

*Some people say Education Savings Accounts are a good approach to helping people pay for education. They say parents are better off keeping their money so they can decide how best to spend money for their kids, rather than having government decide for them.*

*Other people oppose this proposal. They say the working families who need it the most won't be able to save enough money to make a difference for their kids' education and that this proposal will only help the rich, while taking money away from public schools.*

	<b>Total</b>
First statement much closer .....	31
First statement somewhat closer .....	18
Second statement much closer .....	24
Second statement somewhat closer .....	17
Both .....	3
Neither .....	3
(Don't know/Refused) .....	3
<b>Total First Statement.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Total Second Statement .....</b>	<b>42</b>
(ref:ESA1)	

Q.37 Let me ask you, do you think the Democrats or the Republicans would do a better job on education?

	<b>Total</b>
Dem much better .....	25
Dem somewhat better .....	12
Rep somewhat better .....	14
Rep much better .....	13
Both .....	10
Neither .....	15
(Don't Know) .....	12
<b>Total Democrats.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Total Republicans .....</b>	<b>27</b>
(ref:PARTISAN3)	

Q.38 Now let me read you two short proposals to improve education. Please tell me which comes closer to your own view.

*Democrats say we need a new national commitment to public education so every student has the opportunity to learn and succeed. Democrats want to invest in the nation's public schools by reducing class sizes to 18 in every school and hiring more teachers. They propose national academic standards for student performance. Democrats call for modernizing and rebuilding schools and wiring them for computers and the Internet so every child is prepared to succeed.*

*Republicans say students learn best when education decisions are made at the local level. Republicans support increased funding for education, but they believe spending decisions should be made at the local level with few federal government restrictions. Republicans favor holding low performing schools accountable and propose giving parents tuition vouchers so their children can go to the public, private, or religious school of their choice.*

Q.39 Now please tell me which proposal, the Democrats' or the Republicans', comes closer to your own view.

	<b>Total</b>
Democrats much closer .....	36
Democrats somewhat closer .....	16
Republicans much closer .....	23
Republicans somewhat closer .....	10
Both .....	7
Neither .....	5
(Don't know/Refused) .....	2
<b>Total Democrats .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Total Republicans .....</b>	<b>33</b>
(ref:PROPSLS)	

Q.40 Now for something a little different. Some people believe that if taxpayer funding is used to help pay for private or religious schools, standards should be set for those schools. I am going to read you some of the standards people have mentioned, for each one please tell me whether you would favor or oppose it.

	Strng Favor	Some Favor	Some Opp	Strng Opp	DK/ Ref	Tot Favor	Tot Opp
40 They should be required to publicly release financial records and account for all expenditures...	61	20	9	7	3	81	16
41 They should be required to admit students regardless of race, religion, or a disability. ....	73	16	5	5	2	88	10
42 They should be required to maintain the same academic standards and testing as are required for public schools in that state. ....	69	18	6	5	2	87	11
43 They should be required to hire only teachers who are certified by that state.....	58	19	12	9	2	77	20
44 They should be required to meet the needs of at-risk students and those requiring special education services. .... (ref:STANDRDS)	58	23	9	6	3	81	16

Q.45 Now let me read you some specific areas of education and for each one, please tell me who should take primary responsibility for each one -- the federal government, state government or both?

	Fed Govt	State Govt	Both	Neither	DK/ Ref
45 Establishing the curriculum, textbooks and learning materials for classes .....	13	53	30	3	1
46 Setting performance standards for teachers .....	22	41	34	2	1
47 Setting performance standards for students .....	18	46	34	2	0
48 Funding programs to provide additional assistance to disadvantaged students and those who need special attention .....	21	33	44	1	1
49 Funding programs to provide additional assistance to low performing schools .....	20	39	38	2	2
50 Funding programs to provide extra tutoring and assistance to students who have poor basic skills .....	13	46	37	2	1

	Fed Govt	State Govt	Both	Neither	DK/Ref
51 Funding for modernization and wiring of classrooms for computers and the Internet .....	23	31	42	3	1
52 Training and certifying teachers ..... (ref:INCHARGE)	14	52	32	1	1

Q.53 Now let me read you some specific proposals that are part of a national program to improve public education. For each one, please tell me whether you favor or oppose that specific proposal.

	Strng Favor	Some Favor	Some Opp	Strng Opp	DK/Ref	Tot Favor	Tot Opp
53 Provide 3 billion dollars over 10 years to help local school districts renovate, modernize and rebuild schools. ....	47	31	10	9	3	78	19
54 Increase funding to local school districts with large populations of disadvantaged and poor students to improve student achievement.....	50	32	10	6	2	82	16
55 Provide additional funding to ensure that students with learning disabilities and special needs receive additional attention. ....	60	28	7	4	2	88	11
56 Hire 100,000 new, qualified teachers to reduce class sizes.....	45	30	13	9	4	75	22
57 Provide financial incentives, including bonuses and tax incentives, to help local school districts attract and keep top quality teachers. ....	51	31	10	6	2	82	16
58 Establish national certification standards for all teachers, regardless of where they teach .....	53	27	11	8	1	80	19
59 Provide funding to create more alternative schools for students who are disruptive or disorderly. ....	38	29	17	13	2	68	30
60 Offer scholarships to some of the best high school students to encourage them to enter the teaching profession. .... (ref:FAVOPP)	56	29	9	5	2	85	14

Q.61 Now let me read you some statements made by supporters of the national education program we just discussed. For each one, please tell me whether this is a very convincing, somewhat convincing, a little convincing, or not at all convincing reason to support this federal education program

	Very Conv	Smwt Conv	Little Conv	A Not at all Conv	DK/ Ref	Very/ Smwt Conv	Little/ Not Conv
61 This program will reduce class sizes and strengthen the connection amongst parents, teachers, and students that is often lost in today's huge schools. With smaller classes and smaller schools, students will receive more attention and parents will be encouraged to become more involved in their child's education. ....	42	35	11	11	1	77	22
62 This program will force schools to be accountable by establishing national academic standards for performance. By requiring schools to publish student test scores, this program will push schools to improve student performance. And students would be required to meet standards before they are promoted. ....	34	38	13	14	1	72	26
63 This program will help schools prepare children to succeed in a rapidly changing world. By modernizing and building schools, and wiring them for the Internet, this program can ensure that every child has the tools to meet the challenges of the future. ....	34	39	13	13	1	73	26
64 Our children deserve the best teachers in the world, and this program will help schools attract and keep great teachers. By raising teacher pay and providing the best training for new teachers, we can ensure that our children have the teachers they deserve. .... (ref:CONVINCNG)	39	38	11	11	1	77	22

Q.65 What stood out as the best reason to support this national program to improve public education?

	<b>Total</b>
Smaller classes .....	13
Better teachers/Quality teachers .....	12
Standards .....	6
Increase teacher pay/teacher incentives .....	6
Money/funding .....	6
Computers/Internet .....	5
Parental involvement .....	4
Better schools .....	4
Standards for child advancement or promotion/student accountability .....	4
Helping disadvantaged students .....	4
More academic programs .....	3
Less federal involvement/more local involvement .....	2
Higher teacher standards .....	2
More teachers .....	1
Bring bible back/morals .....	1
Make schools publish test scores .....	1
Repair/rebuild schools .....	1
National certification of teachers .....	1
None, nothing, no reason (neutral responses) .....	14
Don't know/Refused .....	4
All .....	4

(ref:OPEN1)

Q.66 What stands out and creates the biggest doubts about this national program to improve public education?

	<b>Total</b>
Federal government involvement (general) .....	6
More funding.....	6
Taxes/Where's the money going to come from .....	5
Local issue/Local control/Federal government shouldn't be involved .....	5
Where will the money come from.....	4
Better budget.....	3
Reducing class sizes.....	3
Teacher pay.....	3
Internet/Computer focus.....	3
Hiring of new teachers .....	2
Need better standards (general).....	2
Bureaucracy/run by bureaucrats.....	2
Publishing test scores .....	2
Oppose vouchers .....	1
Money won't improve anything.....	1
Schools for disruptive students .....	1
All talk, no action .....	1
Federal Government wont follow through.....	1
Can't get qualified teachers/won't find enough teachers .....	1
Too costly.....	1
Computers/Internet.....	1
Teachers who don't care .....	1
Teacher certification.....	1
Govt. says one thing, does another.....	1
Testing/Standardized tests.....	1
Standardized tests not reliable/no good.....	1
Teacher performance standards.....	1
Need religion in schools.....	1
Too much money.....	1
Federal Govt. won't get cooperation.....	1
Disagree with Federal Government.....	1
Need discipline in schools.....	1
State should provide funding.....	1
Congress won't do anything.....	1
Other.....	13
None, No Reason .....	10
Don't know/refused.....	8
All.....	1

(ref:OPEN2)

**[501 Respondents]**

Q.67 Now let's say that the Democratic candidate for Congress voted in favor of a national program to improve public education that we just discussed. In this year's election for U.S. Congress, do you plan to vote for the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate in your district?

	<b>Total</b>
Democratic Candidate .....	44
Lean Democratic Candidate .....	3
Republican Candidate .....	27
Lean Republican Candidate .....	5
(Undecided) .....	20
<b>Total Democratic Candidate .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Total Republican Candidate .....</b>	<b>32</b>
(ref:PARTISAN4)	

**[501 Respondents]**

Q.69 Let me ask now; do you think the Democrats or the Republicans would do a better job on education?

	<b>Total</b>
Democrats much better .....	30
Democrats somewhat better .....	15
Republicans somewhat better .....	13
Republicans much better .....	12
Both .....	8
Neither .....	12
(Don't know/Refused) .....	11
<b>Total Democrats .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Total Republicans .....</b>	<b>25</b>
(ref:PARTISAN6)	

**[501 Respondents]**

Q.70 Now let's say that the Republican candidate for Congress voted in favor of a national program to improve public education that we just discussed. In this year's election for U.S. Congress, do you plan to vote for Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate in your district?

	<b>Total</b>
Democratic candidate .....	32
Lean Democratic candidate .....	6
Republican candidate .....	34
Lean Republican candidate .....	6
(Undecided) .....	22
<b>Total Democratic candidate .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Total Republican candidate .....</b>	<b>40</b>
(ref:PARTISAN5)	

**[501 Respondents]**

Q.72 Let me ask now; do you think the Democrats or the Republicans would do a better job on education?

	<b>Total</b>
Democrats much better .....	31
Democrats somewhat better .....	11
Republicans somewhat better .....	18
Republicans much better .....	12
Both .....	7
Neither .....	10
(Don't know/Refused) .....	10
<b>Total Democrats .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Total Republicans .....</b>	<b>31</b>
(ref:PARTISNA6)	

Q.73 Finally, I would like to ask you a few questions for statistical purposes. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or what?

	<b>Total</b>
Strong Democrat .....	20
Weak Democrat .....	18
Independent-lean Democrat .....	7
Independent .....	12
Independent - lean Republican .....	7
Weak Republican .....	15
Strong Republican .....	17
(Don't know/refused) .....	2
(ref:PTYID1)	

Q.76 In what year were you born?

	<b>Total</b>
18-24 .....	5
25-29 .....	7
30-34 .....	8
35-39 .....	11
40-44 .....	10
45-49 .....	12
50-54 .....	10
55-59 .....	8
60-64 .....	7
Over 64 .....	20
(Don't know/Refused) .....	1
(ref:AGE)	

Q.77 What is the last year of schooling that you have completed?

	<b>Total</b>
1 - 11th grade .....	7
High School graduate .....	25
Non-college post H.S. ....	2
Some college .....	28
College graduate .....	26
Post-graduate school .....	12
(Don't know/refused) .....	0
(ref:EDUC)	

Q.78 Thinking in political terms, would you say that you are: Conservative, Moderate, or Liberal?

	<b>Total</b>
Conservative .....	41
Moderate .....	40
Liberal .....	16
(Don't know/Refused) .....	3
(ref:IDEO1)	

Q.79 How would you describe the area in which you live--Do you live in a city with over a million people, in a smaller city, in a suburban area outside a city, in a small town, or in a rural area?

	<b>Total</b>
City (1 million +) .....	13
Smaller city .....	16
Suburban area .....	26
Small town .....	28
Rural area .....	17
(Don't know/Refused) .....	0
(ref:CITYSIZE)	

Q.80 What is your religion?

	<b>Total</b>
Protestant .....	55
Catholic .....	23
Jewish .....	1
(Other/None/Refused) .....	21
(ref:RELIG1)	

Q.81 Are you married, single, separated, divorced, or widowed?

	<b>Total</b>
Married .....	60
Single .....	18
Separated/divorced .....	11
Widowed .....	11
(Don't know/refused) .....	0
(ref:MARITAL)	

Q.82 Do you have any children 18 years of age or younger living in your household?

	<b>Total</b>
Yes .....	33
No .....	66
(Don't know/refused) .....	0
(ref:CHILD)	

[335 respondents]

Q.83 Do your children attend public schools, private schools, private parochial or Christian schools, or do you have children attending both public and private schools?

	<b>Total</b>
Public schools .....	70
Private schools .....	6
Private parochial or Christian schools .....	6
Both public and private .....	5
Home schooling .....	2
(Other) .....	11
(Refused) .....	1
(ref:SCHOOL)	

Q.84 Are you a member of a labor union? (IF NO) Is any member of your household a union member?

	<b>Total</b>
Yes: Respondent belongs .....	11
Household member .....	4
No member belongs .....	84
(Don't know/refused) .....	1
(ref:UNION)	

Q.85 What is your race?

	<b>Total</b>
White .....	82
Black .....	9
Hispanic .....	5
Asian .....	1
Other .....	1
(Don't know/refused) .....	1
(ref:RACE)	

Q.3 Sex of respondent

	<b>Total</b>
Male .....	48
Female .....	52
(ref:GENDER)	

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**AN EDUCATION-LED AGENDA FOR MICHIGAN**  
**A Statewide Survey of Michigan Voters**

Sponsored by  
The Michigan Education Association

Conducted by  
Greenberg Research  
Epic/MRA

March 4, 1997

This statewide survey on education comes at a special moment. We now know from the experience of the 1996 election that education matters. According to post-election surveys, it was the single biggest issue in how people decided to vote for president and Congress. Education has always been an important concern, but it has rarely played such a role in a national election. But the 1996 presidential debates politicized and nationalized the issue.

This Michigan survey, conducted in mid-February, shows that education is the single biggest issue in Michigan, chosen by 22 percent of the electorate (out of an eight-item battery). That is even higher than last year when education proved decisive. That level of concern with education in Michigan is 6 points higher than the level of concern nationally (Citizen Action January survey). Moreover, among all voters, Democrats have an 11 point advantage over the Republicans on which party in Michigan would do a better job on education -- making education the Democrats's strongest issue in Michigan. Clearly, any strategy for the coming legislative session and for the 1998 elections begins with education.



## **An Education-Led Agenda**

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### **The Issue Landscape**

The Democrats in Michigan "own" three issues — education (chosen by 22 percent, the top-ranked issue), health care (14 percent, the 4th ranked) and jobs (mentioned by only 8 percent). On each of these issues, the voters that chose them as their biggest concern prefer the Democrats to handle them by more than two-to-one. The Republicans "own" the public's worries about moral decline (mentioned by 16 percent, the 3rd ranked) and government spending and taxes (13 percent, 5th ranked). The voters who chose the Republicans on these issues prefer them to the Democrats by more than two-to-one.

That leaves the two parties fairly evenly matched in Michigan, with the Democrats enjoying a small advantage at the legislative level (4 point net advantage on party thermometer scores) and the Republicans a small advantage at the gubernatorial level (Engler has a 53 percent positive job performance). But there are big issues and important segments of the electorate that remain contested and they will prove important in the year ahead.

On the issue front, neither party is dominant on crime and drugs or on the economy. Crime is the second most important concern for Michigan voters, mentioned by 20 percent, and Democrats currently enjoy a modest 4 point advantage. That is an impressive result, given the Democrats's traditional standing on social issues, but Democrats still must make further gains if they are to move ahead in Michigan. The Democrats's opportunity on crime is part of an improved climate on social issues generally. The public is evenly divided on whether the



## An Education-Led Agenda

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Democrats or Republicans would do a better job on strengthening families. The family is now a battleground for the parties where the Democrats begin credibly.

The economy is mentioned by only 6 percent, ironically, because the economy is doing so well. Those still concerned with lagging growth split evenly on which party to look to, but that is misleading. When we asked all voters to choose which party was better on the economy, the Republicans emerged with a 9 point advantage (32 to 41 percent), likely reflecting Engler's association with the Michigan recovery. That potential Republican strength on the economy tilts the playing field toward the Republicans.

The electoral battleground also includes a growing number of voters disaffected with both parties. About a third of the Michigan electorate says they trust the Democrats to handle the issue that concerns them most; about a third trust the Republicans; and most important, a third *volunteer* that they trust "neither" party. This anti-party group tends to be older, but not retired; it is disproportionately composed of union households (41 percent). The anti-party group is concerned, above all, with education (23 percent), crime (18 percent) and moral decline (17 percent).

Further, over a fourth of the electorate is comprised of uncertain voters who could choose not to participate in 1998. Many did not vote in 1994 when Democrats had a difficult time nationally and in Michigan, these uncertain voters lean Democratic. But above all, they are education voters: 28 percent say it is their most important concern.

**The survey suggests a Democratic agenda led by education and centered on crime, with possible initiatives on health care — 3 of the 4 top issue concerns of the Michigan**



## **An Education-Led Agenda**

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**electorate. Democrats are credible on all three and in a position to speak broadly to the Michigan electorate.**

Education has broad support in the electorate, opening up, in particular, more upscale and younger segments of the electorate. Concern with education is greatest with the college-educated, particularly college-educated women. Concern is greatest with voters under 40, though particularly voters under 30 and younger women. These are all important segments of the electorate where Democrats can make important gains.

It is worth remembering that as the presidential campaign in the last month turned to education and away from Medicare, Clinton increased his support with younger voters while he lost important ground with retirees. That suggests that an education-led agenda must contain other elements.

Crime is the second most important issue and Democrats begin marginally ahead on the issue. Concern with crime is evident with all groups in the electorate and all ages, though it is pronounced with African-Americans and Detroit voters and with the high-school educated. Crime is both a broad and base issue for Democrats.

A health care agenda opens up downscale and older segments of the electorate. Concern is strongest with the high-school educated, non college and older women, and those who have been separated, divorced or widowed. For these voters, health care is a critical economic issue.



## An Education-Led Agenda

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### The Players on Education

The players with the highest standing in Michigan are the *teachers* and the *local public school districts*. The teachers receive a thermometer score rating of 76 degrees (with 100 being the highest, zero the lowest, and 50 neither hot nor cold), with 67 percent offering warm-favorable responses (over 50 degrees). The schools receive a score of 72 degrees and 61 percent warm responses. In Detroit, support for the local schools is much lower (only 40 percent warm), but overall teachers and local schools have a unique standing. People simply value their teachers and value their local public schools. Amidst all the political debate, sometimes we forget what matters to ordinary people.

The Chamber of Commerce receives a quite positive score of 64 degrees. The two major unions in the state -- the Michigan Education Association and the UAW -- each receive quite positive scores of 57 degrees. (Teachers unions in general receive a somewhat lower rating of 53 degrees which is produced by a slightly larger group of people offering negative reactions.) Both the MEA and teachers unions get their warmest reaction from college-educated women, voters under 40, single people, African-Americans, voters in both Detroit and the Detroit suburbs. Further, education clearly provides an opening with Republican women.

John Engler has a major education problem. The Governor has a respectable overall job-performance rating: 53 percent saying he is doing an excellent or pretty good job. But confidence in Engler's performance plummets 13 points once one mentions the word education. On education, only 40 percent give Engler a positive job performance rating, while 55 percent rate him negatively.



## An Education-Led Agenda

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The biggest education drop-off for Engler is evident among baby-boomers (36 to 55 years of age), the employed, middle-class households with incomes between 50 and 100 thousand dollars and those living in the Detroit suburbs. These are the voters and areas where Engler faces deep reservations on education.

This discussion suggests a number of *target audiences* for the education and political debate:

- The Engler education drop-off voters (16 percent)
- Weak Engler supporters (36 percent)
- Anti-party voters (trust neither, 30 percent)
- Weak partisans (50 degree score on GOP, 36 percent)
- Uncertain voters (inconsistent turnout, 28 percent).

For every one of these target audiences that will prove critical in the year ahead, education is the top issue, though crime is nearly as strong in every case. The party that emerges ascendant on education and crime has a strong leg up in the battles ahead. The concern with moral decline is usually the third most important issue for these target groups, followed by health care and government spending and taxes.

### **The Education Issue in Michigan**

The concern with local education in Michigan begins with the *break down of the traditional order of the school*. (See Table 1 below.) In open-ended responses, people express the greatest worry about the lack of discipline and the presence of drugs; they also worry about violence and drop-outs; they worry about parents not being involved. Overall, 37 percent of the



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public is looking for the restoration of the traditional order of the school, and that is where the education agenda must begin.

**That is why the public expresses its greatest support for policies that *restore order* — policies that introduce strong discipline into the schools (65 percent), that free schools of drugs (63 percent) and that require the teaching of character and values (63 percent).**

The second tier of voter worries on education center on the *shortage of resources*, mentioned by 19 percent in the open-ended question. Above, people are talking about the lack of money, but also the overcrowding and the deterioration of facilities. The third tier involves problems around teachers and teaching (10 percent) and problems around school administration and school boards (8 percent).

**Worries about resources and teaching and school administration leads the public to an education agenda focused on *raising education standards*. The public is extremely supportive of policies that require high academic standards (59 percent), produce the best training possible for teachers (59 percent), and smaller class size and greater individual attention (59 percent).**

LOCAL EDUCATION CONCERNS (Percent mentioning)		
Breakdown of Traditional Order		37
Lack of discipline	14	
Drugs	11	
Parental involvement	5	
Violence	4	
Attendance/drop outs	3	



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LOCAL EDUCATION CONCERNS (Percent mentioning)		
Lack of Resources		19
Lack of money	11	
Overcrowding	5	
Facilities	3	
Teachers		10
Better teachers	7	
Teachers union	3	
School administration		8
Administration/school boards	8	
Others		
Curriculum/vocational	6	

On taxation and funding of education, the distribution of public thinking offers a formula for stasis that will not easily shift in some new direction. There are no clear majorities for any particular new direction, though there are large minorities that want to move in sharply divergent directions. And there are a lots of voters in Michigan who are internally conflicted, wanting to increase spending and cut taxes at the same time.

In Michigan at this time, there is a small majority of 52 percent that is against any increase in total state and local spending for education. Whatever goals people have for education, they do not combine it with a commitment to adding significant new funding resources. At the same time, there is a small majority of 53 percent that is against cutting taxes for education. Thus,



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opponents of education will not find a large audience for depriving schools of resources by cutting education. Thus, for the public, this sounds like a formula for maintaining current commitments.

But there is a big minority (40 percent) that wants to increase spending, and a big minority (42 percent) that wants to cut taxes. So we can surely expect attempts to move in these contradictory directions, even as the state lacks clear majorities for changing the status quo, either way.

The situation is further confused by the fact that the constituencies for increased school spending are also the constituencies for cutting taxes. The following groups -- voters under 35, younger non-college voters, union households and African Americans -- want to both increase spending and cut taxes. In Detroit, for example, 63 percent want to increase spending but 51 percent think taxes for schools are too high.

The results on funding and taxes are consistent with national polling conducted for the National Education Association by Diane Feldman. Her survey found a plurality of 48 percent are opposed to increased spending for the local schools. However, that same study showed voters were more inclined to support increases in spending at the federal and particularly the state level. Later in this report we will discover that voters are looking for an expanded state role on education and that may include increased resources for the right purposes.

### **The Philosophic Battle on Education**

The advantages that Democrats bring to the education issue are rooted in major philosophic, values and policy differences. It is in the Democrats's interest to highlight those



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differences because, frankly, voters are much more comfortable with the direction pro-education Democrats want to take the state.

**The Democratic approach to education, as measured in this survey, centers on *order and renewal*. The Republican approach, as articulated by the Governor, centers on *competition and innovation*.**

The Democrats say that education is the biggest challenge facing Michigan families, and we need a renewed commitment to invest in education and raise standards. They support a required academic core curriculum to improve reading, writing, science and math skills, and they support a major new bonding effort to modernize our aging schools and make computers available to every student.

The Republicans say Michigan needs schools that prepare our young people for the jobs of the future. They say schools must be pushed to compete and innovate. That's why they support more flexibility and authority for local schools, more charter schools and schools of choice so parents can decide which school will give their children the best education.

By a wide margin, 50 to 34 percent of voters prefer a Democratic approach that seeks to restore standards and invest in the educational infrastructure. Voters are clearly looking for a restoration of the more traditional school environment and for increased educational capacity. They are looking for the state to lead in the process of restoring order and raising standards.<sup>1</sup> (We have no doubt that the Democratic approach would have proved stronger yet had it included an emphasis on drug free schools and tough measures against violent students.)

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<sup>1</sup> The Democratic approach also proved dominant, 47 to 40 percent, even when the wording was "mandated statewide core curriculum."



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The Republican approach emphasizing competition, choice and charter schools is not compelling when counterpoised to a Democratic approach centered on order and renewal. Indeed, it could be argued that the Democrats are offering a more conservative approach to improving education -- insisting on standards and values and the quality of local schools and teaching -- while the Republicans are offering marketization as their primary approach. To underscore that point, 40 percent of cautious Engler supporters prefer the Democratic approach on education.

**The public is overwhelming supportive of efforts to have the state government promote higher standards and a core curriculum and push all schools to a higher level -- which is the opposite of the approach taken by the present governor. The following proposal is supported by 87 percent of the electorate, 71 percent strongly:**

A statewide requirement that every school district follow a required academic core curriculum -- a curriculum that would seek to raise reading, writing, math and science skills in all districts across the state.

The support level sits at 82 percent even when the wording is unequivocal -- a "mandated statewide core curriculum." And among the weak Engler supporters, 78 percent support the idea, suggesting that standards rather than markets are the conservative, pro-education posture in Michigan.

We tested a range of proposals that legislators might advance in the year ahead which are presented in table 2 below. The proposals winning the strongest support overall and with target audiences emphasize first, *order*, second, *standards*, and finally *access to college*.



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<b>EDUCATION IDEAS</b>		
<b>Education Proposals</b>	<b>Strongly Support (Percent)</b>	<b>Overall Support (Percent)</b>
<b>Order</b>		
Zero tolerance on crime, expulsion of violent students	75	91
Require parents to attend parent-teacher conferences	68	84
<b>Standards</b>		
Required academic core curriculum -- writing, reading and math/ schools to higher level	74	92
Require all teachers meet rigorous certification standards, including those in charter schools	74	90
Increase funding for teacher training and update computer knowledge	56	82
<b>College</b>		
State tax credits against Michigan income tax to make college affordable for middle class	69	89
<b>Investment and Capacity</b>		
Restore full funding for adult education and literacy programs	56	77
State bonding initiative to invest billions to help with old schools and new computers	55	80
Require all school districts provide pre-school for all 4 and 5 year-olds	55	76
Provide after school day care in the local schools paid for by parent fees	55	78
Greatly increase funding for special programs to help children in poverty areas	55	78



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The starting point is the restoration of order. The public is strongly supportive of specific measures to reassert order in the schools, particularly zero tolerance and the expulsion of violent students (75 percent very good idea). They also favor measures that require parents to take up their responsibilities and become more involved in schools and with their children (68 percent). But close behind the restoration of order is the restoration of standards. The public is almost as supportive of measures to require the adoption of a core academic curriculum (74 percent) and to require rigorous teacher certification, even when moving to a charter school format (74 percent).

While college was not a main focus of this study, there is strong support for providing tax credits on state income taxes to help middle class families afford college (69 percent). The additional focus on college is particularly important for weak Engler supporters, non-party and uncertain voters.

While the investment and capacity building proposals gain considerably less support, there are nonetheless large majorities in the state that want to broaden greatly the state's commitment to education. In this survey, a clear majority was strongly supportive (and over three-quarter supportive) of increased funding for teacher training, state bonding to repair and rebuild old schools and provide computers, pre-school for 3- and 4-year olds and for after-school day care in the public schools, and for greatly increased effort to help children in poverty areas.

**Governor Engler's proposals for education focused on *choice* gain the support of modest and somewhat unenthusiastic majorities.** There is support for "choice" in Michigan,



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to be sure, particularly in Detroit, but the public shows much less interest in these proposals than in Democratic ideas to restore and renew education.

The most popular Engler proposal is "schools of choice," as described in the question formulation below:

There is a new Michigan law called "schools of choice." Under "schools of choice," parents are free to choose which public school district to send their children within the county or intermediate school district where they live, as long as the school district they choose participates in the schools of choice program and has room to accept more students. If a school district participates in this new law, it must accept students from other areas and also allow its students to attend other participating school districts.

A good majority of 61 percent supported this proposal, 36 percent strongly. But that is about 20 points lower than the level of support for the weakest of the Democratic proposals on education. Furthermore, most people have a fairly limited vision for the proposal, strongly preferring choice to being confined to one's own district or immediate neighboring district (60 percent). A majority of the public (57 percent) believes any such school choice proposal must include funding to help low-income students afford the transportation.

The idea of "schools of choice" wins more support in Detroit where the public is considerably less enthusiastic about the public schools. There, two-thirds support the initial idea, 43 percent strongly. And Detroit residents have a much more expansive view of how choice should work: 60 percent favor a choice formula that allows students to choose schools over multiple counties or anywhere in the state.



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Other proposals for expanding choice win small majorities or pluralities, again, well below the proposals offered by the Democrats. A small majority of 52 percent supports the idea of vouchers to allow students to go to any public or private school, including parochial and religious schools; 41 percent are opposed to the idea. When the idea of vouchers is debated -- with choice pitted against the depletion of support for public education -- support drops to 45 percent. Tuition tax credits begin with 48 percent support, with only 27 percent thinking they are a very good idea.

It will be difficult to galvanize support for vouchers and tax credits, given the distribution of support on the issue. In suburban Detroit as a whole, there is a decent level of support, but in Oakland County, these upscale voters are opposed to the idea. In fact, over 40 percent of weak Engler supporters are opposed to these choice proposals.

These choice proposals do not make Engler a pro-education governor. Indeed, he is extremely vulnerable on a range of actions that open him up to the charge of being anti-education. A number of these attacks are presented in Table 3.



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<b>ENGLER EDUCATION MEASURES</b>		
<b>Opposition</b>		
<b>Engler Education Proposals</b>	<b>Strongly Oppose (Percent)</b>	<b>Overall Oppose (Percent)</b>
Allowing non-certified teachers in the classroom	61	73
Cutting all state funding for teacher training	59	73
Cutting adult education by \$85 million, 40 percent of adult education funding	55	67
Taking state funds away from districts doing poorly on standardized tests	54	67
Eliminating authority of State Board of Education over charter schools and teacher certification	45	59
State take over of schools doing poorly on standard tests/drop outs, including Detroit, Pontiac, etc.	41	51

Engler has potential difficulty on the education issue for threatening to reduce standards in the schools by allowing unqualified teachers to teach and by denying the funding for teacher training. Those are the two issues of greatest exposure, since around 60 percent of the electorate believe those are bad ideas.<sup>2</sup> Around 45 percent are strongly opposed (almost 60 percent opposed) to

<sup>2</sup> When we debate the issue of teacher certification and make the case that people with special experience should be allowed in the classroom, the public remains opposed by better than two-to-one.



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stripping away the State Board of Education's authority to certify teachers and oversee public schools.

The public is also strongly opposed to major reductions in state spending, particularly on adult education: 55 percent strongly opposed.

Given the very cautious evaluations of John Engler on education, it should not be surprising that the public is opposed to allowing the state to pull away funds from poorly performing schools and to take over particular school districts, like Detroit, Pontiac, Lansing, Flint and Benton Harbor. In the electorate as a whole, 51 percent oppose the idea of the take over. In Detroit, three-quarters are opposed, two-thirds strongly. Residents of Detroit do not want John Engler's priorities to set the course in the area of education.

But for Engler, the problem is broader which is why Democrats have such an opportunity on education. Governor Engler's education philosophy focuses on competition and marketization. He has actively sought to eliminate state-imposed standards and reduce state regulation and resources. But that is not the philosophy that the public is looking for in education. They want to see a larger state effort to raise academic standards and restore order in the local schools. They want to see a larger state investment in teacher and school quality. They want the state to make it easier for middle class families to send their kids to college. This is a debate that Democrats should welcome.