

**SURVEY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY VOTERS
REGARDING EDUCATION**

MAY 5-8, 2007

This survey of South Carolina Republican Presidential Primary voters finds that, while they believe that the country and state are headed in the right direction, they have concerns about public education, as well as what the future holds for their children. These voters believe that improving public education is the government action that would most improve the children's future, and this survey shows support for a wide variety of general education reform proposals, as well as for changes to the No Child Left Behind law.

Perhaps most importantly, this survey shows that, while Republican and Democratic primary voters fundamentally disagree on many issues, including the directions of the country and state, and George W. Bush's performance as President, They are united in the belief that improving education is the best way to invest in children's future, and in their concern about this issue.

Summary of Findings

1. These Republican voters are decidedly mixed in their attitude about the future of South Carolina's children, but are unified in saying that improving the quality of education would most improve their prospects. Forty-nine percent of these voters are optimistic and hopeful about what the future holds for South Carolina's children, while 48 percent are more worried and concerned. Democratic voters are more pessimistic, being more worried and concerned by a 69 to 25 percent margin.

When asked what actions the federal government could take to most improve the children's future, improving the quality of education dominates the list with 59 percent, followed by reducing crime at 35 percent, eliminating the federal budget deficit at 28 percent, expanding access to health care at 20 percent, and helping families move out of poverty at 15 percent. Improving education is also the dominant response among Democratic voters, at 65 percent.

2. A significant majority of Republican voters is very concerned about public education in both the United States as a whole and South Carolina in particular. Fifty-eight percent of these voters are "very concerned" about public education in both the U.S. and in South Carolina, while another 31 percent are "somewhat concerned." Only 11 percent are not concerned about public education in the U.S., compared to only 10 percent in the state. Again, these numbers are similar to those seen among Democratic voters, 78 percent of whom are "very concerned" about public education in the U.S. and in South Carolina.

3. Most South Carolina Republicans are familiar with the No Child Left Behind law, and while they generally approve of it, a plurality says that it needs major changes. Twenty-seven percent of these voters have heard a great deal about the No Child Left Behind law, while 49 percent have heard a fair amount, 14 percent have heard just a little, and 9 percent have not heard much at all.

Voters approve of the law by a 53 to 39 percent margin, although intensity is even, with 23 percent strongly approving, and 21 percent strongly disapproving. When informed that the law is scheduled to be reviewed by Congress this year, 38 percent of voters say that the law needs major changes, while 36 percent say it needs minor changes, and 13 percent say it is basically okay as it is now.

The amount of knowledge a voter has about the No Child Left Behind Law is an important factor in his or her view of it. Voters who have heard a great deal about the law disapprove of it by a 54 to 43 percent margin. Those who have heard a fair amount about it, on the other hand, approve of it by a 59 to 39 percent margin, as do those who have heard just a little or not much at all about it, by a 55 to 21 percent margin.

4. Majorities of voters agree with nearly all of the tested statements about the No Child Left Behind law, be they positive or negative. Of the three positive statements, these voters agree with *“The No Child Left Behind law improves accountability for both teachers and schools”* by a 64 to 32 percent margin, and with *“The No Child Left Behind law has encouraged schools to spend more time working with struggling students”* by a 63 to 27 percent margin. They disagree with *“The No Child Left Behind law has improved the performance of weaker schools,”* however, by a slim 45 to 43 percent margin.

Of the four negative statements, voters agree with *“The No Child Left Behind law’s testing requirements force teachers to spend too much time teaching to the test instead of teaching other subject matter”* by a 64 to 25 percent margin, *“The No Child Left Behind law uses test scores alone to judge school performance, instead of using tests in combination with other indicators like graduation rates, classroom performance, and report cards”* by a 59 to 29 percent margin, *“The No Child Left Behind law does not give states the flexibility they need to identify struggling schools and decide best how to help them”* by a 53 to 35 percent margin, and *“Under the No Child Left Behind law the federal government labels and punishes struggling schools, instead of providing additional help to turn these schools around and reward student improvement over time”* by a 51 to 38 percent margin.

5. South Carolina Republican voters support a number of proposals that would improve the quality of the public schools. While these voters support a number of tested proposals to improve the schools, majorities believe that the following would improve the quality of the schools a great deal: *“Improving discipline”* (89 percent), *“Placing students who cannot speak English in intensive English language classes until they are ready to learn with other students”* (68 percent), *“Reducing class sizes”* (56 percent), *“Expanding career and technology education”* (53 percent), and *“Providing more ongoing teacher training”* (51 percent).

6. A solid majority of South Carolina Republican voters believes that a number of measures, not just testing, should be used when evaluating students and schools from year to year. Fifty-nine percent of these voters agree that “Test scores are not the best measure of whether children and schools are making progress from year to year. Testing students should

only be one factor along with graduation and attendance rates, classroom performance, report cards, and student enrollment in advanced programs,” while 36 percent say that “We need an objective measure of whether schools are making progress from year to year. Testing students is the best way to measure progress for students and schools because it is the only independent, external measure of what is going on in the classroom.”

7. South Carolina Republicans are optimistic about the direction of the United States in general, and South Carolina in particular. Fifty-four percent of these voters say that the country is headed in the right direction, while 34 percent say that things are off on the wrong track. They are even more positive about South Carolina, however, saying that the state is headed in the right direction by an overwhelming 75 to 19 percent margin.

Democratic voters, on the other hand, are not so positive. They believe that the U.S. is off on the wrong track by an overwhelming 85 to 9 percent margin, as is South Carolina, by a slimmer 48 to 32 percent margin.

8. South Carolina Republicans overwhelmingly approve of the job George W. Bush is doing as President. Eighty-six percent of these voters approve of the President’s job, while only 14 percent disapprove. This is nearly a mirror image of Democratic voters’ view, who disapprove of the President’s job by an 81 to 13 percent margin.

9. The Iraq War is the most important overall issue to these Republican voters, while dealing with illegal immigration dominates the list of domestic priorities. When asked to spontaneously name the most important issues when voting for President next year, 32 percent of voters say the Iraq War, while 19 percent say illegal immigration, 14 percent each say terrorism and the economy, 12 percent say health care, and 11 percent each say education and moral issues.

When asked to choose from a list of just domestic priorities, however, illegal immigration dominates the list at 52 percent, followed by energy and dependence on foreign oil at 34 percent, health care at 22 percent, the economy and taxes at 19 percent each, education at 18 percent, and the budget deficit at 12 percent.

Methodology

The sample for this survey consists of 500 likely Republican presidential primary voters selected randomly from a list of registered voters throughout the state. All respondents confirmed that they are registered to vote and are likely to vote in next year’s Republican presidential primary. Consistent with past Republican primary turnout, 49 percent of the respondents are male, and 51 percent are female. The margin of error is ± 4.38 percent.

Democratic primary results come from a survey of 801 likely Democratic presidential primary voters conducted April 9-12, 2007 by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. The margin of error for those results is ± 3.50 percent.