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ARIZONA VOTERS PRIORITIZE EDUCATION OVER POLITICS

Voters Share their Priorities for Education, Encourage Candidates & Policymakers to Address Key Education Issues

ARIZONA –June 14, 2022 – Arizonans continue to prioritize education and want every school to have great teachers and leaders, according to a recent statewide survey of 500 likely voters.

Education Forward Arizona conducted a poll of Arizona voters to better understand voters’ priorities for education. The survey complements and is intended to go deeper on the findings in the Arizona Voters’ Agenda, in coordination with the Center for the Future of Arizona. The survey was conducted May 10-17, 2022 by HighGround Public Affairs on behalf of Education Forward Arizona, a statewide nonprofit and nonpartisan organization.

The survey found that, generally, Arizona voters have a sense of pessimism about the state’s overall direction, with 50.6% of Arizona voters saying it is headed in the wrong direction, the highest since the COVID-19 pandemic. When it comes to education specifically, 68% of Arizona voters said it is heading in the wrong direction.

“Despite this overall sense of pessimism, voters want something to be done to support education,” said Rich Nickel, President and CEO of Education Forward Arizona. “Voters continue to prioritize education and want to see their candidates discussing and taking action on the issues that matter most to improving student outcomes.”

As part of the survey, Arizona voters were asked an open-ended question about what they believe the biggest issues are facing education. The majority of the responses showed that voters are concerned that teachers are underpaid and schools are underfunded. Voters also demonstrated concerns for Arizona’s ongoing teacher shortage and a lack of qualified teachers in the state.

When voters were asked about teacher pay, specifically if the salaries K-12 teachers receive are too high, too low, or just about right, 78.2% of voters said that they believe salaries are too low. Additionally, 66.2% of voters believe that school funding is too low.

What Voters Prioritize as Top Issues During the Election Season

The survey responses revealed Arizona voters prioritize these top issues:

1. Every school having quality teachers and principals (90.2% strongly support)
2. Making sure students are proficient in math (88.2% strongly support)
3. Making sure students can read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade (88.2% strongly support)
4. Increasing opportunities for Career and Technical Education (84.8% strongly support)
5. Providing support and resources to fix underperforming schools (69.6% strongly support)
6. Helping working adults build their job skills and earn a diploma or degree (64% strongly support)
7. Providing scholarships to Arizona low-income students to go to college (55.8% strongly support)
8. Increasing the number of school counselors (51.4% strongly support)

These statements above received “strongly support” responses from at least 50% of all political parties and age groups.

“This research demonstrates that Arizona voters are prioritizing important education issues that will move the needle on the goals in the Arizona Education Progress Meter and meet our state’s Achieve60AZ attainment goal,” said Nickel. “It’s clear that voters want to see candidates prioritizing and offering solutions to address our teacher shortage, to help our kids learn key subjects and ensure they have opportunities to pursue pathways that lead to education attainment and good careers.”

What Issues Voters Do Not Support

The survey also showed that a majority of likely Arizona voters do not support the following issues:

- Banning critical race theory
- Restricting discussions of gender identity and sexual orientation during sex education
- Closing failing schools

These issues did not have “strong support” at a level of 50% or higher or receive support from each political party and age group at 50% or above.

What Education Issues are Important for Candidates to be Talking About in This Year’s Election

Voters were also asked what the most important education issues are for candidates to be discussing. With more than a dozen options presented, Arizona voters prioritized: ensuring every classroom has a qualified teacher, raising teacher pay, increasing school funding, and fostering more opportunities for Career and Technical Education for Arizona students.

What Else Voters Value

Several value statements were also tested with voters as part of the survey. The statements receiving more than a 50% “strongly agree” sentiment and at least 50% support from all political parties and age groups include:

- Even though Arizona has a teacher shortage, it is still important that we maintain standards for high quality teachers (89.2% strongly agree)
- Improving the quality of our education system will improve our economy and quality of life for all Arizonans (77.2% strongly agree)
- The quality of a teacher is the most important factor to increase student achievement (57.8% strongly agree)
- Schools should be provided additional funding and resources to support their low-income students such as tutoring, counseling, transportation, extra meal services, dental and health screenings (55% strongly agree)
- Arizona should provide scholarships to low-income students who would otherwise not be able to afford to go to college (50% strongly agree)

“It is heartening to see the value the Arizona voters give to our teachers and their commitment to ensuring that we have high quality teachers in our classrooms,” said Nickel. “It is also encouraging to see that voters prioritize actions that would close achievement gaps, including providing additional funding and resources to schools to support their low-income students and scholarships for low-income students to go to college.”

Voters Value Education Attainment

The statements receiving a 50% “strongly agree” sentiment and at least 50% support from all political parties and age groups include:

- Every student in Arizona should have the opportunity to pursue education or training after high school. (67.8% strongly agree)
- Access to college, a university or advanced training after high school sets a student up for future success in their life or career (64.8% strongly agree)
- Increasing the number of Arizonans with a degree or credential (such as a nursing degree, or relator's license) will lead to a stronger economy and quality of life for Arizonans. (55% strongly agree)

Voters' Advice for the Legislative Session

When it comes to this year's legislative session, voters were asked two key questions:

- **How would you spend the state's funding surplus?** Voters were asked if they would invest in education, prefer a tax cut, or use it for a different purpose. More than half of Arizona voters would invest more funds into education (54.4%), 17.6% would offer a tax cut, 13.2% would use it or a different purpose, and 11.2% would do use it for multiple purposes.
- **If you had \$1B to support education, how would you spend it?** Voters said their top funding priority would be supporting Arizona's teachers by raising teacher pay (22.8%) and ensuring every classroom has a quality teacher (13.6%).

About the Survey

This survey of 500 likely Arizona voters was conducted May 10-17, 2022, by HighGround Public Affairs. It was balanced to model the likely turnout of voters across party, age, region and gender, with a margin of error of $\pm 4.9\%$. This poll was coordinated with and expands upon recent survey research conducted by the Center for the Future of Arizona as a part of their Arizona Voter's Agenda that shows education is a top issue for Arizona voters. Learn more: ArizonaFuture.org/ArizonaVotersAgenda. This work is supported in part by the Helios Education Foundation, Pharos Foundation, Rodel Foundation of Arizona, Thomas R. Brown Family Foundation, and Southern Arizona Leadership Council.

About Education Forward Arizona

[Education Forward Arizona](https://EducationForwardArizona.org) champions P-20 education attainment as critical to advancing the state's economy and improving the quality of life of its residents. We do this by advocating for solutions, implementing innovative programs and services, and using our voice to drive progress towards the goals in the Arizona Education Progress Meter. Learn more at EducationForwardArizona.org.

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Media Note: To interview a spokesperson from Education Forward Arizona, or obtain survey graphics, b-roll or photos that can accompany this survey data, contact Kristy Jozwiak at kristy@dualitypr.com or (602) 741-5161 (mobile).