



# FEBRUARY 2024 SLU/YOUGOV POLL: EDUCATION RESULTS

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# February 2024 SLU/YouGov Poll: Education Results

What do likely Missouri voters think about education policy issues?

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## Introduction

Since 2020, Saint Louis University (SLU) has worked with YouGov to poll Missouri citizens on current issues in politics and education. The PRiME Center funded a poll presented to 900 likely Missouri voters from February 14–February 26, 2024 to inform stakeholders on public opinion on political and education-related policy issues. In this report, we dive into the most recent results. The complete results, original data, and expert analyses of key issues can be found at [slu.edu/poll](https://slu.edu/poll).

## Key Points

- **Perceptions of public schools across the State of Missouri are declining**, as rankings of ‘good’ decrease (29% to 20%) and those of ‘poor’ have increased (17% to 31%) since June 2020.
- A plurality of Missouri voters (47%) agreed **school district funding should be based on enrollment more than attendance**, a stance that varied across nearly all demographics.
- Most voters indicated they believe the school funding formula should provide **more funds for each student** receiving free and reduced-price lunch (63%) or with special education needs (81%). However, only 44% agreed with providing more funding for students learning English as a non-native language.
- There was support (62%) for using **more recent property taxes in the calculation of the school funding formula**, a change from the fixed 2005 values currently used.
- A majority (59%) of poll respondents **support or strongly support open enrollment**, or students enrolling in public schools outside of the school district in which they live.
- More than three-fourths (77%) of likely voters support or strongly support **allowing students to remain enrolled in a district’s school if they have since moved out of district boundaries**.
- Missouri voters were **less sure of the funding logistics** associated with open enrollment with 40% of Missouri voters responding that all local tax revenue should remain in the residential district and another 40% feeling least part of the revenue should transfer with the student to their new school district.
- Less than half of likely voters (44%) are in favor of making **Education Savings Accounts (ESAs)**, or “school vouchers,” available to all students. There is greater support for providing ESAs to students in low-income households (64%) or students with special education needs (58%).

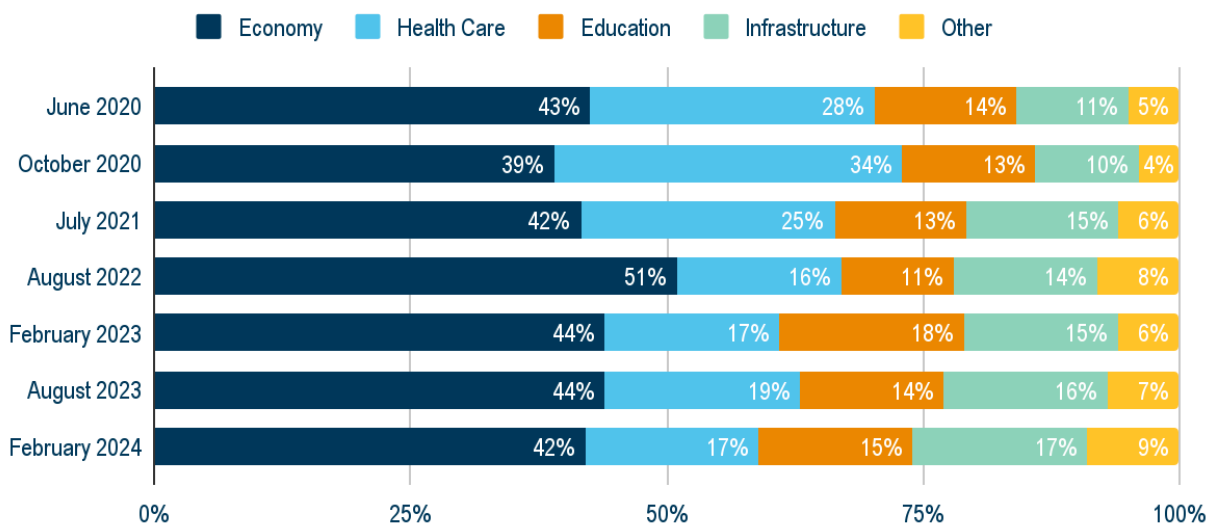
# 1. State of Education

The February 2024 poll marked the 7th iteration of the SLU/YouGov poll since 2020. Some questions are asked on each poll, allowing us to track public opinion over time. Three of those questions concern education specifically. These findings provide significant insights into trends in likely voters' values over time as they relate to the priorities of the state, as well as voters' perceptions of their own school districts and the school districts in Missouri.

Since the first iteration of this poll in June of 2020, respondents have been asked what they feel should be considered the top priority of the Missouri state government: the economy, health care, education, infrastructure, or something else not listed. Since June 2020, likely voters have maintained a consistent top priority, the economy, with an at least 39% plurality, and even a 51% majority in August 2022 (Figure 1). Health care was consistently second most favorable for the first three polls, but has moved to a near three-way tie with education and infrastructure as we move further away from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Education has maintained between 11 and 18% of responses for what should be the top priority of the Missouri state government.

**Figure 1. Which of the following do you think should be the TOP priority of the Missouri state government?**

See Individual Poll Results for Margins of Error



Likely voters' responses to "Which of the following do you think should be the TOP priority of the Missouri state government?": June 2020, 43% Economy, 28% Health Care, 13% Education, 11% Infrastructure, 5% Other; October 2020, 39% Economy, 34% Health Care, 13% Education, 10% Infrastructure, 4% Other; July 2021, 42% Economy, 25% Health Care, 13% Education, 15%

*Infrastructure, 6% Other; August 2022, 51% Economy, 16% Health Care, 11% Education, 14% Infrastructure, 8% Other; February 2023, 44% Economy, 17% Health Care, 18% Education, 15% Infrastructure, 6% Other; August 2023, 44% Economy, 19% Health Care, 14% Education, 16% Infrastructure, 7% Other; February 2024, 42% Economy, 17% Health Care, 15% Education, 17% Infrastructure, 9% Other.*

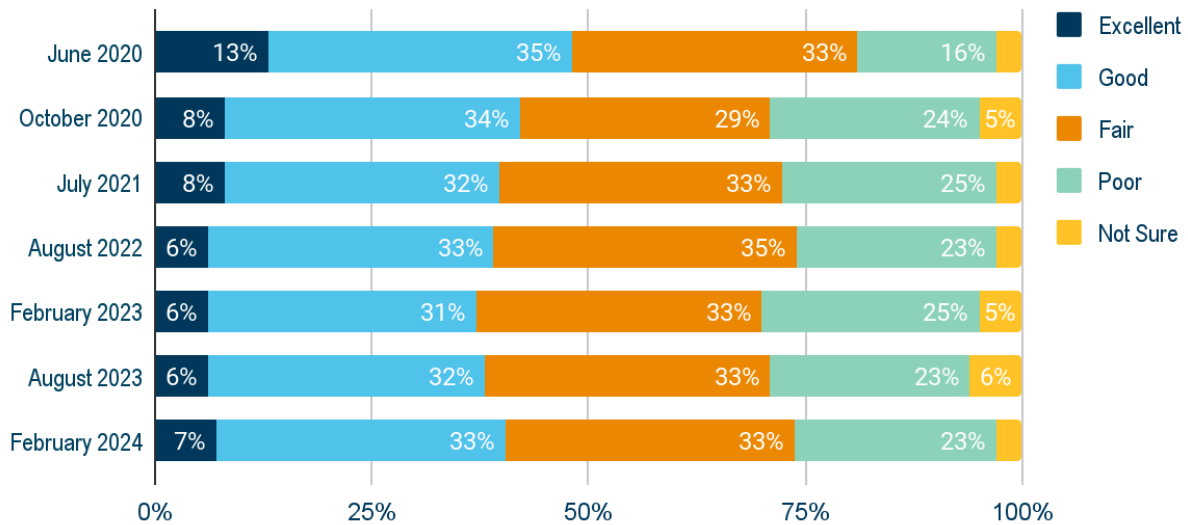
The prioritization of education differed across demographics. In the most recent survey, February 2024, 21% of Democrats and 22% of Independents ranked education as their top priority, in comparison to the 7% of Republicans that did so. This made education the second most prioritized category for Democrats and Independents, tying with health care amongst the Democrats, and coming in as the last in priority for Republicans. Education was also ranked a top priority by 21% of four-year college graduates and 25% of those with postgraduate degrees, both of whom placed education as the second-most important priority only to the economy. This was more than double the rate that likely voters with a high school education or less (10%) and some college (11%) rated education as the top priority.

Throughout the last four years of polling, fewer than 20% of likely voters believed education should be the top priority of the Missouri legislature. But since October 2020, almost 25% of respondents have continually rated the public schools in their own community as ‘poor’ (Figure 2). In the last seven surveys, 31 to 35% of likely voters rated the schools in their communities as ‘good,’ and 29 to 35% rated them as ‘fair.’ Apart from the 13% of respondents in June 2020, only 6–8% of respondents found the schools in their communities to be ‘excellent.’

These results also varied across demographics, with 36% of white respondents rating the public schools in their own community ‘good,’ while only 17% of Black respondents and 18% of all non-white respondents echoed the sentiment. Likewise, 42% of Black respondents and 46% of all non-white respondents rated their schools ‘poor,’ while only 20% of white respondents said the same. Results concerning likely voters’ perception of the public schools in their own communities have seen little change over time, but that is not necessarily the case where respondents’ perceptions of all public schools across the state of Missouri are concerned.

## Figure 2. How would you rate the following...public schools in your community?

See Individual Poll Results for Margins of Error



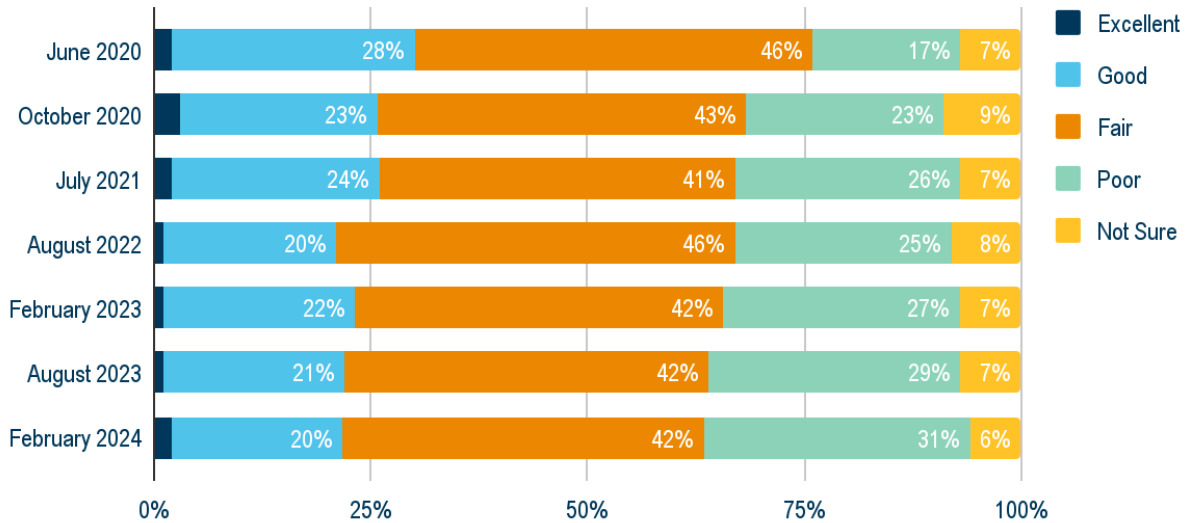
*Likely voters' responses to "How would you rate the condition of the following...Public schools in your community?": June 2020, 13% Excellent, 35% Good, 32% Fair, 16% Poor, 3% Not Sure; October 2020, 8% Excellent, 34% Good, 29% Fair, 24% Poor, 5% Not Sure; July 2021, 8% Excellent, 32% Good, 33% Fair, 25% Poor, and 3% Not Sure; August 2022, 6% Excellent, 33% Good, 35% Fair, 23% Poor, 3% Not Sure; February 2023, 6% Excellent, 31% Good, 33% Fair, 25% Poor, 5% Not Sure; August 2023, 6% Excellent, 32% Good, 33% Fair, 23% Poor, 6% Not Sure; February 2024; 7% Excellent, 33% Good, 33% Fair, 23% Poor, 3% Not Sure.*

When asked to rate the public schools more broadly across the state of Missouri, respondents are less likely to rate them as 'excellent,' hovering between 1 and 3% of the votes each year (Figure 3). This figure is consistently less than half of the respondents (6-13%) that rate the schools in their own communities as 'excellent'. Additionally, 0% of likely voters with a highschool diploma or less rated public schools in the State of Missouri as 'excellent.'

The most consistent response regarding Missouri public schools has been 'fair,' maintaining anywhere from 41 to 46% of the responses, a plurality in every year of the poll. Additionally, it seems that while many voters, 31 to 35%, find the schools in their own communities to be 'good,' only 20% rated all public schools in Missouri as 'good' on the most recent poll (down from 28% in June 2020). In correspondence, **likely voters rating of Missouri public schools as 'poor' has increased from just 17% in the first survey in June 2020 to 31% in the most recent February 2024 results.**

### Figure 3. How would you rate the following...public schools in the state of Missouri?

See Individual Poll Results for Margins of Error



*Likely voters' responses to "How would you rate the condition of the following...Public schools in the State of Missouri?". June 2020; 2% Excellent, 28% Good, 46% Fair, 17% Poor, and 7% Not Sure; October 2020, 3% Excellent, 23% Good, 43% Fair, 23% Poor, 9% Not Sure; July 2021, 2% Excellent, 24% Good, 41% Fair, 26% Poor, 7% Not Sure; August 2022, 1% Excellent, 20% Good, 46% Fair, 25% Poor, 8% Not Sure; February 2023, 1% Excellent, 22% Good, 42% Fair, 27% Poor, and 7% Not Sure; August 2023, 1% Excellent, 21% Good, 42% Fair, 29% Poor, 7% Not Sure; February 2024, 2% Excellent, 20% Good, 42% Fair, 31% Poor, 6% Not Sure.*

Looking across the results from June 2020 to February 2024, it appears as though likely voters believe the quality of education in Missouri public schools is declining, but the quality of the schools in their own communities has remained relatively stagnant, and, for the most part, 'good' or at least 'fair.' Less than half of the respondents that claim their own community's public schools are 'excellent' believe, too, that public schools across the State of Missouri are 'excellent.' Both graphs do, however, depict likely voters' perception of the public schools in their own communities as well as those across the state as decreasing in value from the first survey in 2020 to now, which can be seen in **the decline of public schools ranked "good" and in the incline of public schools ranked 'poor'.**

## 2. School Funding

Public schools in Missouri are funded using a combination of local, state, and federal funding. State funding—which comes from general state revenues such as income taxes, sales tax, gaming, lottery, and other miscellaneous taxes—is distributed to public schools using a funding formula which takes specific district factors into account. The formula is meant to ensure adequacy (i.e., the minimum cost of educating a student is met) and equity (i.e., fairness) by providing additional funding to districts that have a harder time raising local property taxes and who have children living in poverty, with special education needs, or who are learning English as a non-native language.

Missouri's current public school funding formula was built in 2005 and a number of issues have been criticized (Preis, 2022). Missouri education leaders have argued the formula has not kept up with inflation and, in June 2023, 35 school boards passed resolutions asking the State Board of Education to commission a study of the formula (Hanshaw, 2023). Moreover, Brad Pollitt (R-Sedalia) stated he believes the formula needs to be updated, though also admitted few understand the funding formula and updating it would be a heavy lift (Hanshaw, 2023).

### School Funding—Average Daily Attendance Versus Enrollment

One key critique of the formula is its use of average daily attendance (rather than the total number of students enrolled in the district) which critics argue penalizes poorer schools who typically have lower attendance. Chronic absenteeism—missing more than ten percent of school days—has been an ongoing problem in the state of Missouri and nationwide, but was only further exacerbated by the pandemic. Since the return to in-person instruction, nearly 30 percent of students in the United States were chronically absent (up over 13 percentage points since 2019). In Missouri, the percentage of chronically absent students rose from 12.7 percent in 2019 to 23.4 percent in 2023 (Vahle & Wallace, 2024).

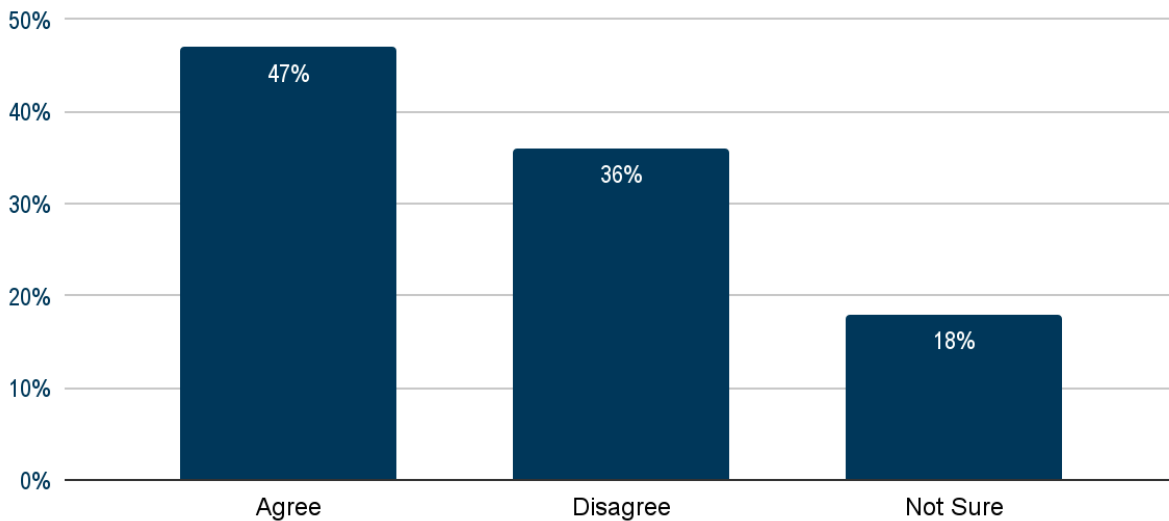
The February 2024 SLU/YouGov Poll asked Missourians about their views on enrollment versus attendance as a base of school funding (Figure 4). A plurality of Missouri voters (47%) agreed school district funding should be based on enrollment more than attendance, a divergence from the current funding formula structure, while 36 percent disagreed and 18 percent were unsure. Results differed along party lines with more Democrats than Republicans (61% vs. 36%) agreeing the funding formula should be based on enrollment. Differences in voter opinions also varied based on nearly all demographics. A majority of likely voters aged 18-44-years-old, who identified as non-White, and with incomes \$50,000+ agreed school district funding should be based on enrollment, as did those with some college,



post-graduate education, and Missourians from the northwest region. Overall, the results indicate support for use of enrollment as a base for school funding but also highlight there are several differences of opinion based on likely voter characteristics.

### Figure 4. Funding Formula: Base school district funding on enrollment more than attendance.

February 14 to February 26, 2024; 900 Likely Missouri Voters; MoE ±3.74%. Combined EDU 007a and 007b.



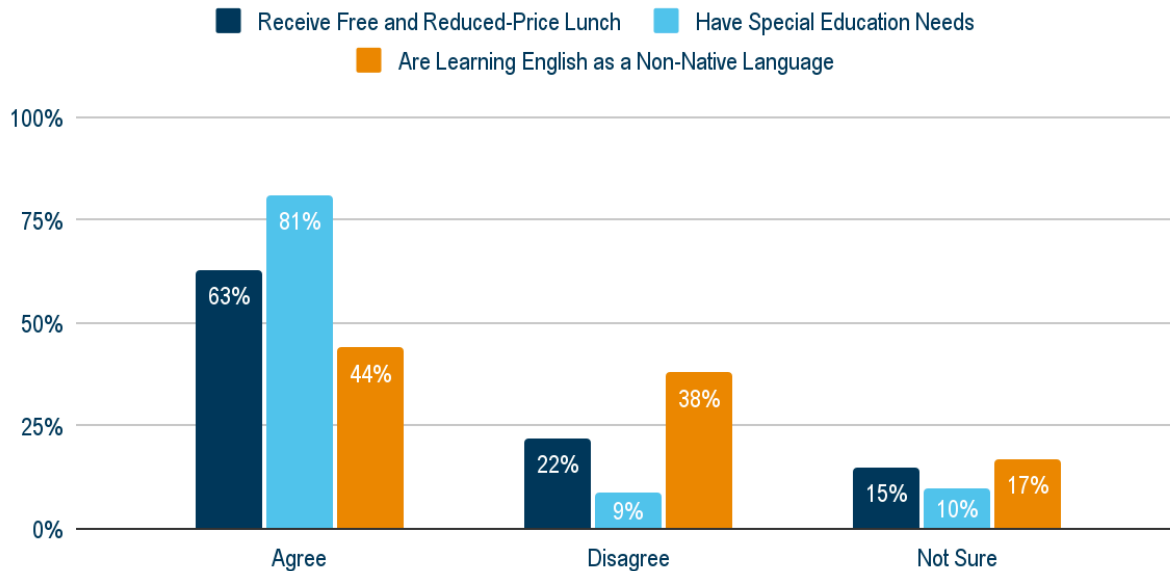
*Likely voters' responses to 'Do you agree or disagree that this funding formula should do the following...Base school district funding on enrollment more than attendance?': 47% Agree, 36% Disagree, 18% Not Sure.*

## School Funding—Weighting of Specific Student Populations

Another key battleground of the funding formula is its weighting of students who typically cost more to educate (e.g., low-income students, students with special education needs, students learning English). The current funding formula only provides extra funding for these students if a district exceeds a threshold for that population of students; districts with student populations who fall anywhere below the threshold do not receive any additional funding. Missouri voters again appear to disagree with this current operation of the funding formula. Sixty-three percent of voters indicated they agreed the funding formula should provide more funds for **each** student who receives free and reduced-priced lunch (i.e., low-income students). Similarly, 81 percent of voters indicated they agreed the formula should provide more funds for **each** student with special education needs (Figure 5). Both results were supported across all voter demographics.

## Figure 5. Funding Formula: Provide more funds for students who...

February 14 to February 6, 2024; 900 Likely Missouri Voters; MoE ±3.74%



*Likely voters' responses to 'Do you agree or disagree that this funding formula should do the following...Provide more funds for each student who receives free and reduced-priced lunch?': 63% Agree, 22% Disagree, 15% Not Sure.*

*Likely voters' responses to 'Do you agree or disagree that this funding formula should do the following...Provide more funds for each student with special education needs?': 81% Agree, 9% Disagree, 10% Not Sure.*

*Likely voters' responses to 'Do you agree or disagree that this funding formula should do the following...Provide more funds for each student who is learning English as a non-native language?': 44% Agree, 38% Disagree, 20% Not Sure.*

Missouri voters appear less supportive of the funding formula providing additional funds for students who are learning English as a non-native language (i.e., English language learners). Forty-four percent of voters agreed with additional funding while 38 percent disagreed. Democrats were more likely to support providing more funds for English language learners than Republicans (74% vs. 23%). A majority of likely voters aged 45+, those with a high school diploma or less, and those in the northwest and southeast regions of the state also disagreed with providing more funds for English language learners.

## School Funding—Property Values

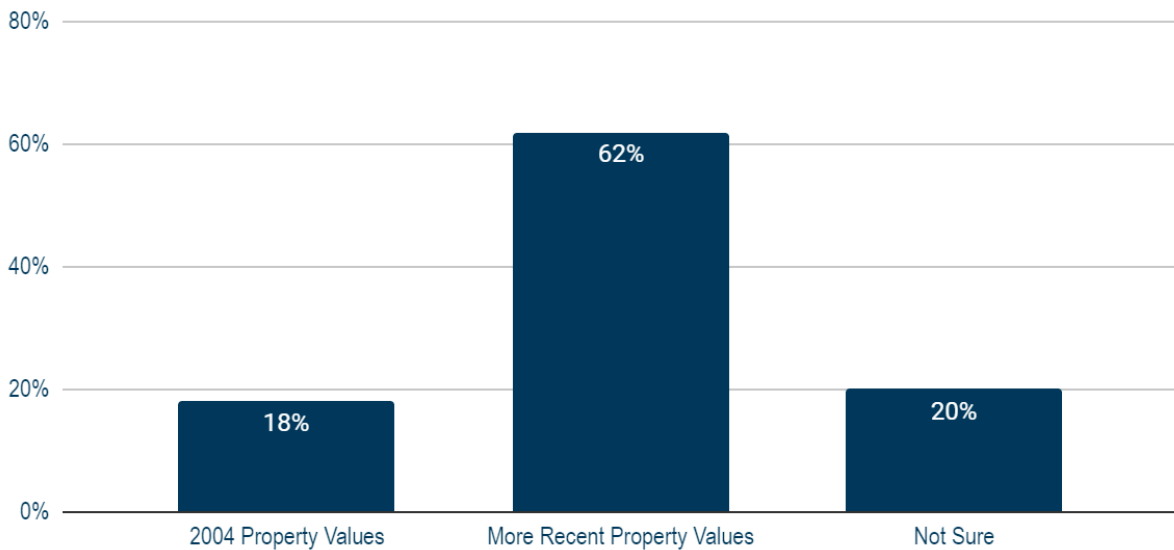
An additional area of debate for the funding formula is its “local effort” calculation, which is an estimate of how much money a district receives from local sources such as property taxes. Importantly, the funding formula subtracts the calculated local effort to determine the final amount of state support. The current

calculation of local effort is fixed and based on 2005 property values. In a recent PRiME publication, James Shuls (2024) reported using a fixed outdated property tax value lead to increased funding inequities.

The February 2024 SLU/YouGov Poll asked Missourians whether 2004 property values or more recent values should be used in the funding formula to determine local revenue. Sixty-two percent of likely voters indicated they believe more recent property values (such as those within the last five years) should be used when making local revenue estimates (Figure 6). This result was fairly consistent across voter demographics with the exception of race. While a plurality of likely Black voters agreed more recent property values should be used, nearly 30% of likely Black voters were unsure. This may indicate likely Black voters are worried about how use of more recent property values will affect funding for the schools their children attend.

### Figure 6. Funding Formula: Use 2004 property values or more recent property values.

February 14 to February 26, 2024; 900 Likely Missouri Voters; MoE  $\pm 3.74\%$



*Likely voters' responses to 'Should the school funding formula use 2004 property values or more recent property values (such as those within the last 5 years) when making these estimates?': 62% The formula should use more recent property values, 18% The formula should use more recent property values, 20% Not Sure.*

### 3. Open Enrollment

Open enrollment is a term used to describe the policies allowing students to transfer from their residential school district (i.e., the district that serves the address where they live) to another district outside of the boundaries of their current address (a nonresidential district). Allowing students to attend schools outside of their residential districts has been discussed by the Missouri state legislature for many years, with seven of eight of Missouri’s border states already having interdistrict open enrollment policies in place (Hall, Jeffers, Diemer, Heggie, & Switalski, 2023). In January 2024, an open enrollment bill passed in the Missouri House for the fourth consecutive year, sponsored by Representative Brad Pollitt (R-Sedalia) (Hanshaw, 2024). Proponents say open enrollment policies support school choice for people that do not necessarily want to move out of their districts to attend different schools, while others worry that it could lead to small rural districts fighting to stay open against districts that have more resources, forcing closures and consolidations (Kellogg, 2024).

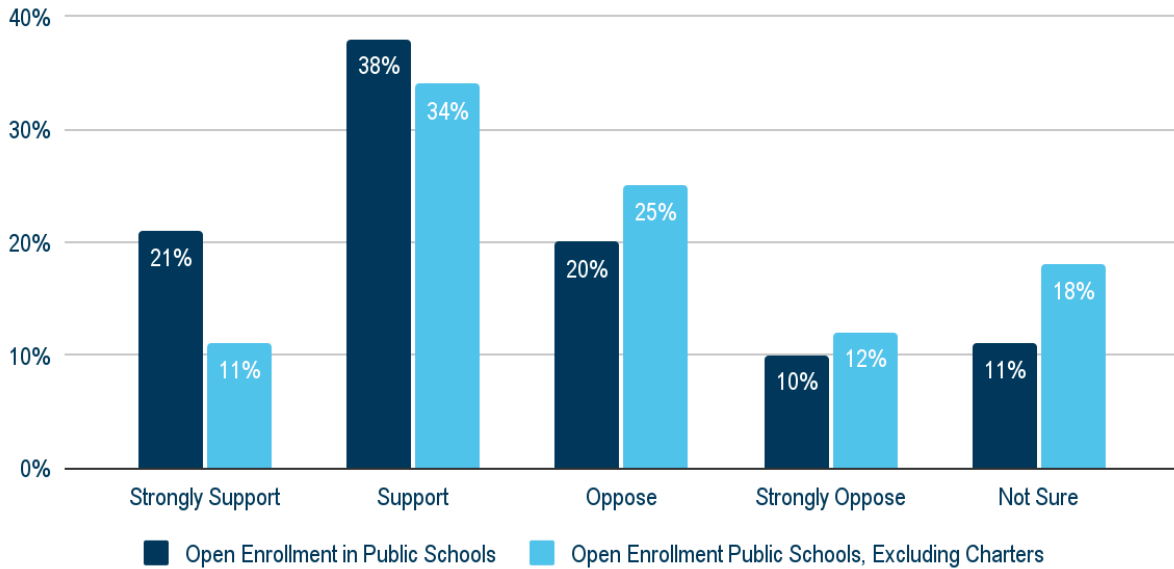
#### Open Enrollment—Choices for Students and Parents

The SLU/YouGov Poll asked likely Missouri voters if they support or oppose allowing students to enroll in public schools outside of the school district where they live. Fifty-nine percent support or strongly support this option overall, with more backing from Republicans (64% vs. 53%) (Figure 7). Younger respondents were also more likely to favor the open enrollment policy, with 72% of those ages 18–29 supporting or strongly supporting the measure. Support steadily decreased in each age bracket of likely voters with a 55% support rate from those 65 and older.

However, when asked about whether they would support or oppose allowing students to enroll in public school districts outside of their residential district, **excluding charter schools**, support dwindled from 59% to 45%, and leveled the partisan split. This measure was also more favored by younger likely voters. Currently, charter schools only operate in the St. Louis and Kansas City areas of Missouri. Recent legislation has made efforts to expand charter schools to three Missouri counties: St. Louis County, Boone County, and St. Charles County (Bitterman, 2024).

## Figure 7. Open Enrollment by the Numbers

February 4 to February 26, 2024; 900 Likely Missouri Voters, MoE  $\pm 3.74\%$

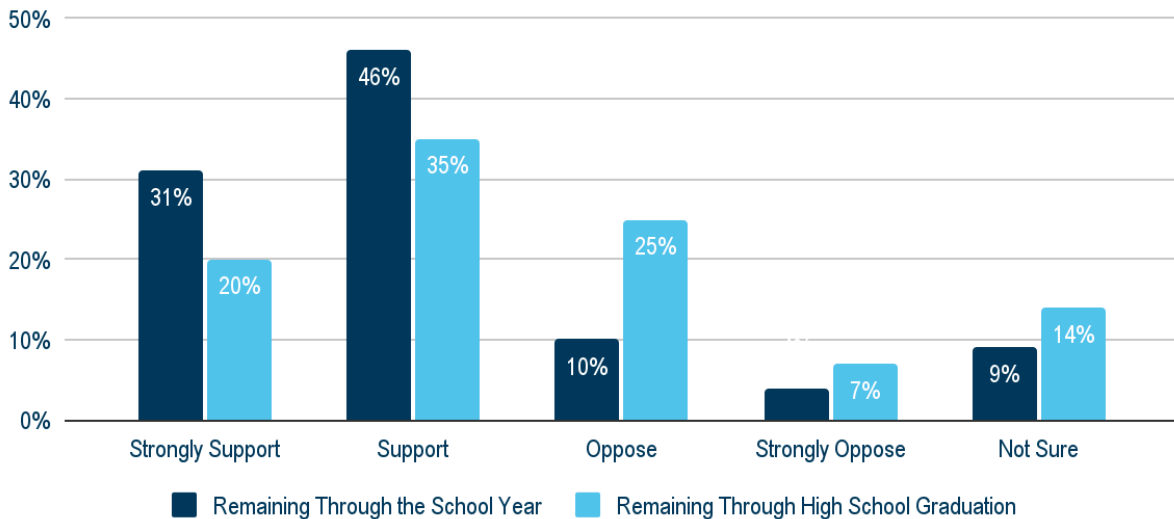


*Likely voters' responses to 'Do you support or oppose the following policies...allow students to enroll in public schools outside of the school district where they live?': 21% Strongly Support, 38% Support, 20% Oppose, 10% Strongly Oppose, 11% Not Sure. Likely voters' responses to 'Do you support or oppose the following policies...allow students to enroll in public schools, excluding charter schools, outside of the school district where they live?': 11% Strongly Support, 34% Support, 25% Oppose, 12% Strongly Oppose, 18% Not Sure.*

Student mobility (i.e., the rate at which students move schools) in the state of Missouri in 2023 was over 20% (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2024). Mobility can have many causes such as school choice or moving to an address outside of a school district's boundaries. Likely voters were polled regarding students who attend a residential school but then move out of the district boundaries. More than three-fourths (77%) of respondents said that they would support or strongly support allowing students enrolled in a district's school to remain in that district's school for the complete school year if they move out of the district (Figure 8). When asked about allowing students who move to remain in the district's schools until high school graduation, those who would support or strongly support this option dropped to 55%.

## Figure 8. Once in Always in? Remaining Enrolled in a District After Moving

February 4 to February 26, 2024; 900 Likely Missouri Voters, MoE ±3.74%



*Likely voters' responses to 'Do you support or oppose the following policies...allow students enrolled in a district's schools to remain in that district's schools for the complete school year, even if they move out of the district during the school year?': 31% Strongly Support, 46% Support, 10% Oppose, 4% Strongly Oppose, 9% Not Sure. Likely voters' responses to 'Do you support or oppose the following policies...allow students enrolled in a district's schools to remain in that district's schools until they graduate high school, even if they move out of the district?': 20% Strongly Support, 35% Support, 25% Oppose, 7% Strongly Oppose, 14% Not Sure.*

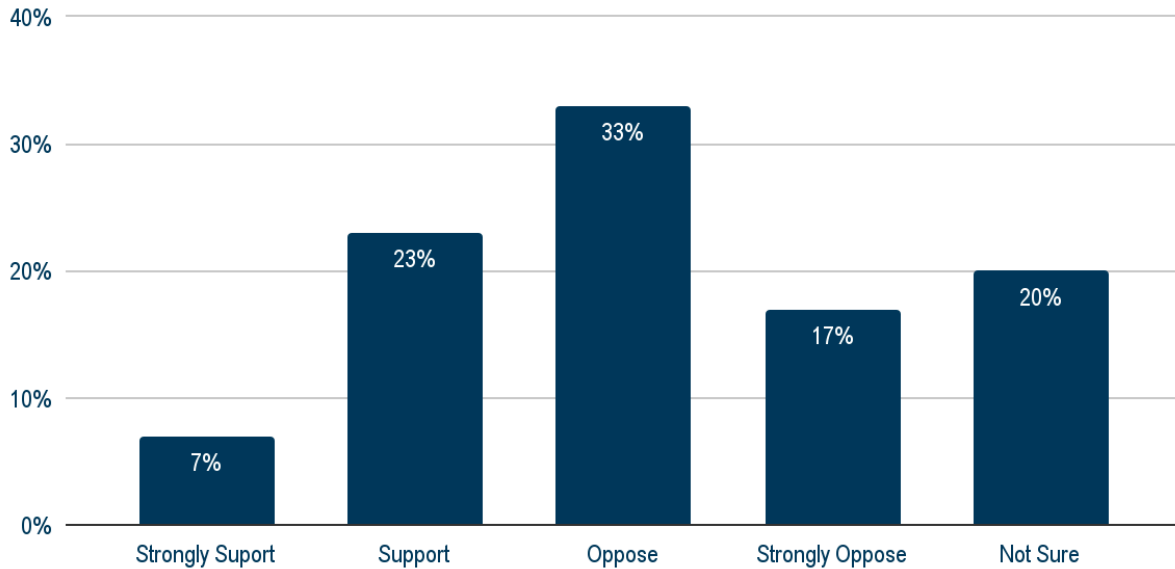
Both measures had nearly equal partisan support, but drastically more support from younger voters. Ninety percent of 18–29 year olds said they would support or strongly support allowing students to stay for the remainder of the school year, falling to 71% for those 65 or older. Support for allowing students to stay through high school graduation also dwindled as voter age increased (71% for 18–29 year-olds, 62% for 30–44 year-olds, 51% for 45–64 year olds, and just 45% for those 65+).

## Open Enrollment—Choices for Districts

As written, [House Bill 1989](#) would allow districts choices in regards to the number of students allowed to transfer **out of and into** their district. The current measure could allow districts to limit the number of students transferring out to 3% of the previous school year's total enrollment. A near-majority of Missourians (50%) were opposed or strongly opposed to allowing school districts to limit the number of transfers out of their district, although 1 in 5 voters were unsure about the measure (Figure 9).

## Figure 9. Limitations on Transfers Out of District

February 4 to February 26, 2024; 900 Likely Missouri Voters, MoE  $\pm 3.74\%$

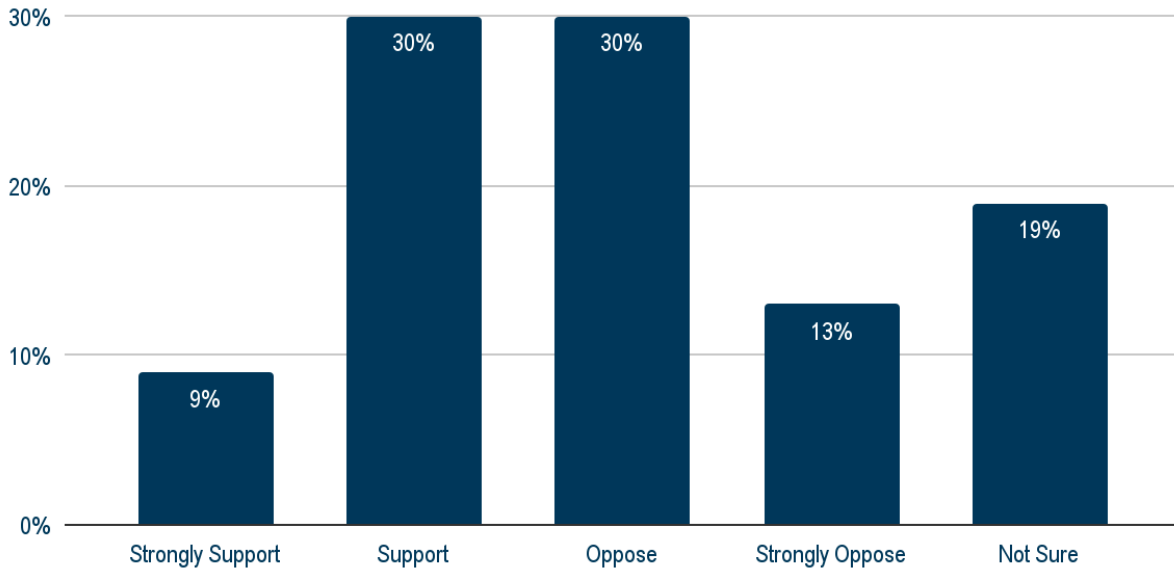


*Likely voters' responses to 'If Missouri allows students to enroll in public schools outside their residential school districts (that is, the district where they live), indicate whether you support or oppose the following... school districts may limit the number of students who transfer out of their district?': 7% Strongly Support, 23% Support, 33% Oppose, 17% Strongly Oppose, 20% Not Sure.*

Additionally, the current legislation would allow districts to decide how many transfer students they would be willing to accept in a school year, which includes the option to accept none. Likely voters were slightly more supportive of allowing districts to opt out of accepting transfers than to limit outgoing transfers (39% v. 30%), but a plurality (43%) opposed the limitation (Figure 10). Responses to limitations on incoming transfers were relatively level among parties, but limiting outgoing transfers was favored more by Republicans than Democrats (30% v. 45%).

## Figure 10. Districts' Ability to Opt Out of Incoming Transfers

February 4 to February 26, 2024; 900 Likely Missouri Voters, MoE ±3.74%



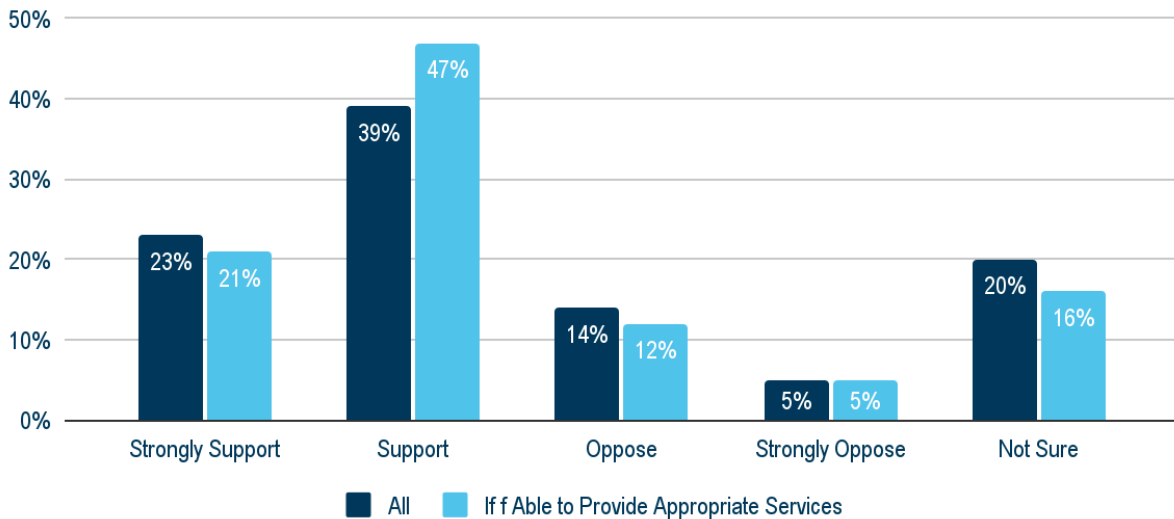
*Likely voters' responses to 'If Missouri allows students to enroll in public schools outside their residential school districts (that is, the district where they live), indicate whether you support or oppose the following... school districts may opt out of having students transfer into their districts?': 9% Strongly Support, 30% Support, 30% Oppose, 13% Strongly Oppose, 19% Not Sure.*

When polled about requiring districts to accept students who may cost more to educate, such as those with special education needs, likely voters offered support to open enrollment policies. A majority (62%), strongly support or support requiring schools to accept students transferring in with special education needs, with 68% supporting or strongly supporting this requirement if the incoming district determines it can provide appropriate special educational services.



## Figure 11. Districts' Acceptance of Transfer Students With Special Education Needs

February 4 to February 26, 2024; 900 Likely Missouri Voters, MoE  $\pm 3.74\%$



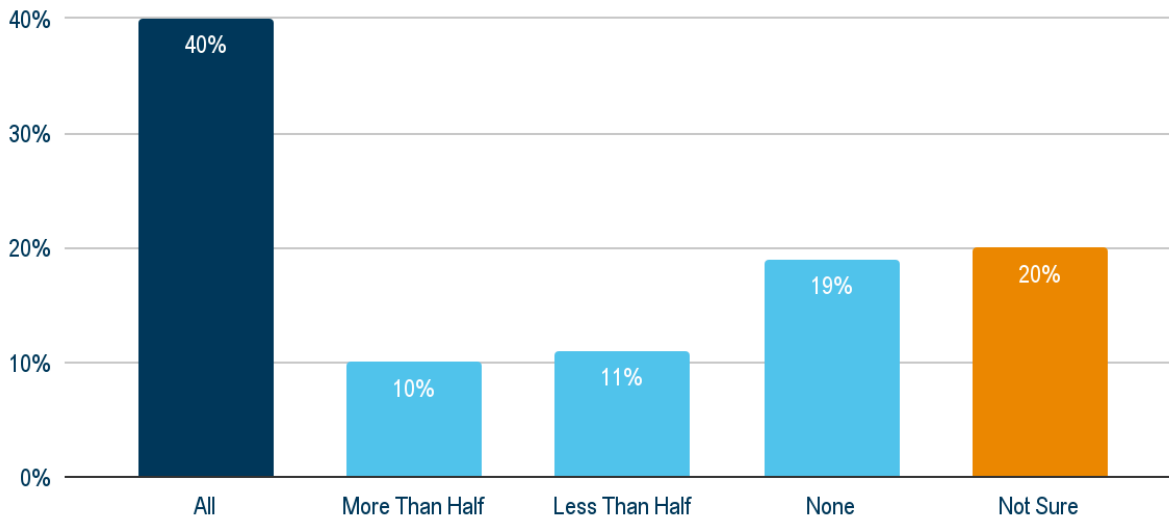
*Likely voters' responses to 'If Missouri allows students to enroll in public schools outside their residential school districts (that is, the district where they live), indicate whether you support or oppose the following...school districts must accept transferring in students who have special education needs?': 23% Strongly Support, 39% Support, 14% Oppose, 5% Strongly Oppose, 20% Not Sure. Likely voters' responses to 'If Missouri allows students to enroll in public schools outside their residential school districts (that is, the district where they live), indicate whether you support or oppose the following...school districts must accept transferring in students who have special education needs only if the receiving school district determines it can provide appropriate special educational services?': 21% Strongly Support, 47% Support, 12% Oppose, 5% Strongly Oppose, 16% Not Sure.*

## Open Enrollment—Funding

Likely voters were polled on how local tax revenue that supports a student's education would be allocated if open enrollment policies were in place. The most common response (40%) was that all tax revenue should remain in the residential district, and was equally supported across parties. Another 40% of voters felt that at least part of the local tax revenue should transfer with the student to the new district (36% of Democrats, 41% of Republicans). About 1 in 5 voters were not sure how much local tax revenue should stay in the resident district. While likely voters seem to support open enrollment policies, there is less certainty around funding the measures.

## Figure 12. How Much Local Tax Revenue Should Stay in Resident District?

February 4 to February 26, 2024; 900 Likely Missouri Voters, MoE ±3.74%



*Likely voters' responses to 'If Missouri allows students to enroll in public schools outside of their resident school districts (that is, the district where they live), how should local tax revenue designated for a student's education be allocated for students who attend school outside of the district where they live?': 40% All, 10% More than half, 11% Less than half, 19% None, 20% Not sure.*

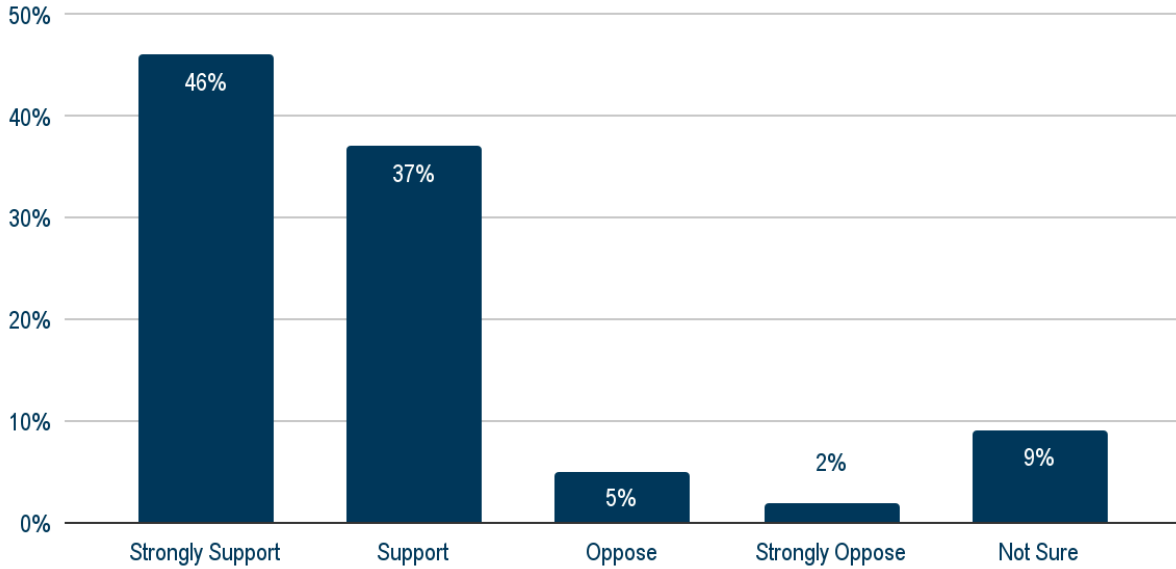
## Open Enrollment—Transportation

Bus routes and district transportation considerations are designed to serve those who live within a school district's boundaries. If those boundaries are opened, the burden to transport the students living outside of the boundaries will need to be provided by alternative sources. Respondents overwhelmingly felt guardians (or the students themselves) should be responsible for their own transportation to and from nonresident districts (83%; 46% strongly support and 37% support) (Figure 13). This opinion was more popular in older voters (30+) and white voters than in the youngest group of voters (18–29) and non-white voters, respectively.

For students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch or special education services, responses were more split, with 49% of respondents supporting the State of Missouri reimbursing the receiving school district for the associated transportation costs of nonresident students with these qualifications, 34% opposed, and 18% not sure (Figure 14).

### Figure 13. Guardians Responsible for Children's Transportation

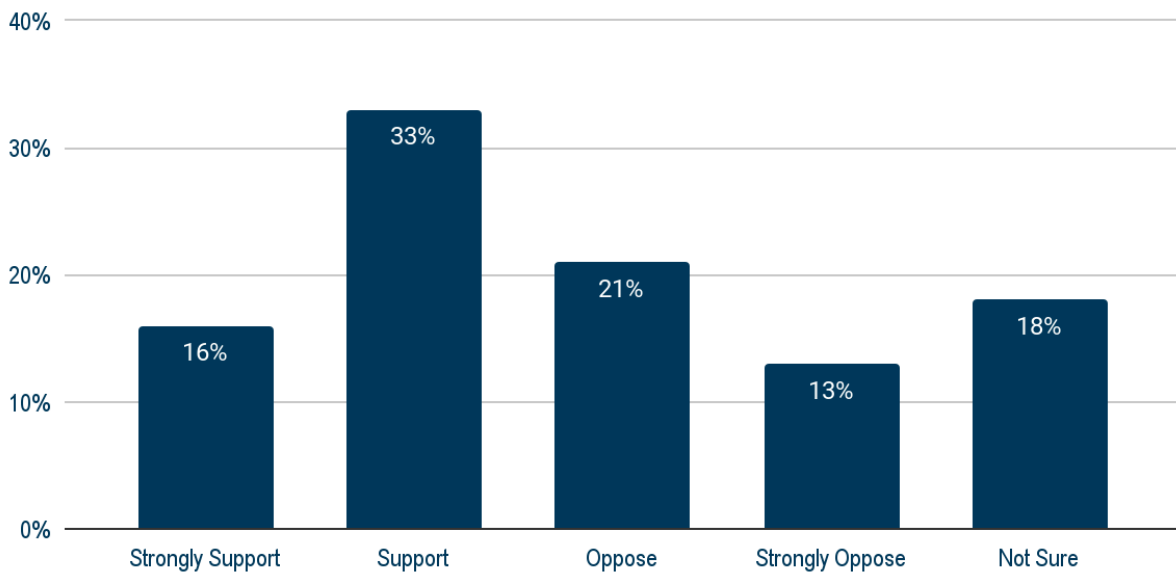
February 4 to February 26, 2024; 900 Likely Missouri Voters, MoE ±3.74%



Likely voters' responses to 'If Missouri allows students to enroll in public schools outside their residential school districts (that is, the district where they live), indicate whether you support or oppose the following... transferring students or their guardians should be responsible for transportation to and from nonresident districts?' 46% Strongly Support, 37% Support, 5% Oppose, 2% Strongly Oppose, 9% Not Sure.

### Figure 14. Transportation Funding for For Qualifying Students

February 4 to February 26, 2024; 900 Likely Missouri Voters, MoE ±3.74%



*Likely voters' responses to 'If Missouri allows students to enroll in public schools outside their residential school districts (that is, the district where they live), indicate whether you support or oppose the following... The State of Missouri should reimburse the receiving school district for the transportation costs of nonresident students who qualify for free or reduced-price school lunch or special education services?': 16% Strongly Support, 33% Support, 21% Oppose, 13% Strongly Oppose, 18% Not Sure.*

## 4. Education Savings Accounts

Education Savings Accounts (ESAs), sometimes also referred to as “vouchers” or “school vouchers”, are available to some students to assist with tuition and other educational expenses (like tutoring, extracurricular programs, and textbooks). Currently, these ESAs are available only to students who reside in one of five charter counties<sup>1</sup> or in one of ten cities with a population over 30,000<sup>2</sup> and to whom one of the following applies: (1) the student has an individualized education plan (IEP) or (2) the student belongs to a household with an income that qualifies them for free and reduced-price lunches (Missouri State Treasurer, 2024). In the 2022–23 school year, 970 students participated in the program, and 50% of students in the state were eligible (EdChoice, 2023).

When asked which students, if any, should have access to these ESAs, less than half (44%) of likely Missouri voters were in favor of making them available to all students (Figure 15). Respondents were more in favor of making them available to students in low-income households (64%) and those with special education needs (58%). Only 12% of poll respondents said no one should receive ESAs. Voters aged 18–44, non-white voters, and higher income earners (\$50k+) supported ESAs for all students and for subgroups more than older, white, and lower-income voters, respectively.

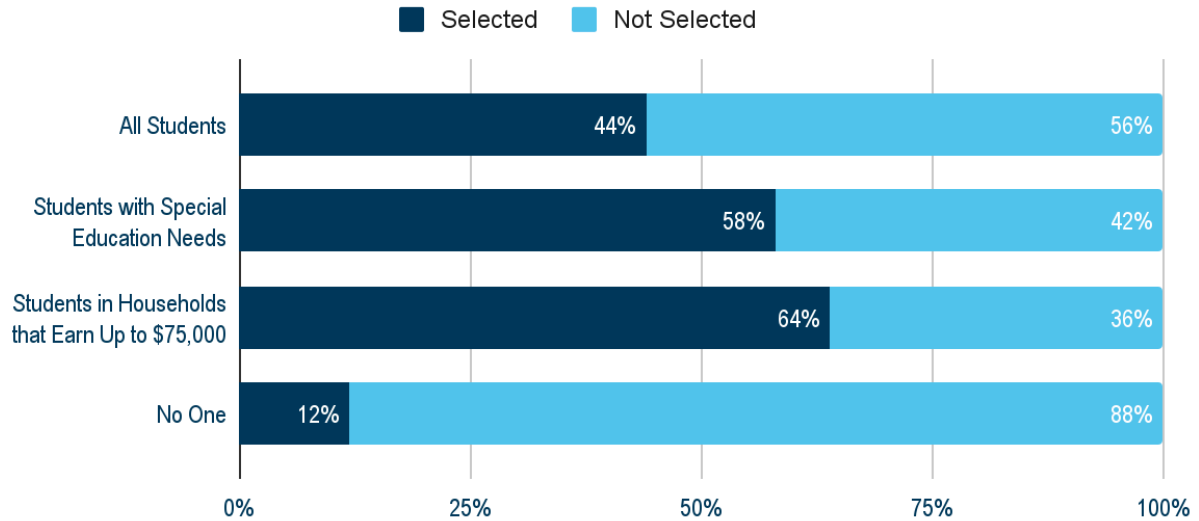
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<sup>1</sup> St. Louis, Jackson, St. Charles, Jefferson, or Clay County

<sup>2</sup> Kansas City, St. Louis City, Springfield, Columbia, Independence, Lee's Summit, St. Joseph, Joplin, Jefferson City, or Cape Girardeau

## Figure 15. Tax-Funded Education Savings Accounts Should Be Available To:

February 4 to February 26, 2024; 900 Likely Missouri Voters, MoE  $\pm 3.74\%$



*Likely voters' responses to 'Some states have tax-funded "Education Savings Accounts" that students can use to pay for tuition at K–12 private schools and other education expenses, such as tutoring, online education programs, or textbooks...in Missouri, tax-funded Education Savings Accounts should be made available to (check all that apply)...all students.': 44% Selected, 56% Not Selected; 'students with special education needs': 58% Selected, 42% Not Selected; 'students in households that earn up to \$75,000 (250% of the federal poverty level)': 64% Selected, 36% Not Selected; 'No One': 12% Selected, 88% Not Selected.*

## Conclusion

The SLU/YouGov poll has been administered seven times over the past four years, beginning in June of 2020, and most recently in February of 2024. Education has been in a near three-way tie for second place of what voters feel should be the top priority of the Missouri State government for the past five polls. Meanwhile, respondents also seem to find the quality of the schools in their community as well as those throughout the state to be declining, the latter even more so.

The results of the February 2024 SLU/YouGov Poll suggest likely voters support several changes to the Missouri funding formula, many of which align with prior opinions of its flaws. Using enrollment as a basis of funding, providing additional funding for low-income, special education, and ELL students, and using more recent property taxes in local revenue calculations were all supported by a plurality or majority of

Missourians. Notably, however, several of the results indicate a divergence in opinions based on likely voter demographics.

It is clear from the findings of the most recent SLU/YouGov poll that, overall, likely voters support open enrollment policies. However, what remains less clear are some of the associated logistical challenges, such as the allocation of local tax revenue for education purposes and how to appropriately determine limits on transfers in and out of a district. Although expanding school choice through public school open enrollment policies polled favorably, voters were less supportive of allowing all students to acquire ESAs, which can help defray the costs associated with private school tuition for qualifying students. Likely voters support ESAs for students with special education needs and those in low-income households, but allowing all students to acquire ESAs polled less favorably.

*Note:*

*Pieces of this manuscript were previously published on the SLU Poll website as expert analyses on specific topics. These brief reports can be found [here](#) (School Funding) and [here](#) (Open Enrollment).*

*All data for the figures presented here can be found at [slu.edu/poll](https://slu.edu/poll).*

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## Who we are

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The Policy Research in Missouri Education (PRiME) Center is a non-partisan research center housed in the Saint Louis University School of Education. Opened in the Spring of 2019, we are wholly committed to conducting and sharing research that leads to better policies, educational outcomes, and opportunities for all students.

## What we do

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We conduct and share research on education. We help lawmakers, educators, and families in the state of Missouri make decisions about education policy and practice. Our mission is to ensure that the people making decisions and building policies around education have the relevant data and evidence they need to build the best and most equitable educational systems possible.

## About the Author

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