

Every Child a Graduate



Voters' Views on the Nation's Public High Schools and ESEA Reauthorization

A Nationwide Survey of 1,000 Likely Voters

Commissioned by Alliance for Excellent Education

July 2010



Survey Methodology

Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research designed and administered this survey for the Alliance for Excellent Education. The survey was conducted via telephone by professional interviewers. The survey reached a total of 1,000 likely voters nationwide. The survey was conducted June 15-23, 2010.

Data were weighted slightly by age, education, race, political affiliation, and marital status to reflect the attributes of the actual population. The margin of error for the survey is +/- 3.1% percentage points. In interpreting survey results, all sample surveys are subject to possible sampling error; that is, the results of a survey may differ from those which would be obtained if the entire population were interviewed. The size of the sampling error depends upon both the total number of respondents in the survey and the percentage distribution of responses to a particular question.



Strategic Summary

- Voters believe the nation's public high schools are in urgent need of improvement.
- Improving the quality of public high schools through reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is a voting issue for over eight in ten voters. Over half say failure to act this year will impact their vote decision for current elected officials in the upcoming 2010 Congressional elections.
- Solid majorities of voters across party lines say it is personally important to them for Congress to change ESEA to improve public high schools this year.



Key Findings: State of High Schools

Voters believe the nation's public high schools are in urgent need of improvement, more so than elementary or middle schools.

- Seventy-three percent say it is urgent that we improve public high schools (42 percent extremely urgent), compared to 67 percent for middle schools and 63 percent for elementary schools.

Nearly seven in ten voters say a high school diploma is not enough to get a good-paying job in today's world. Additionally, nearly as many voters believe a diploma does not prepare students for success in college, as believe it does.

- Sixty-nine percent say that a diploma from America's public high schools does not prepare graduates to get a good-paying job. Forty-five percent say a high school diploma prepares graduates to succeed in college, and 45 percent say it does not.



Key Findings: Links to the Economy

Two-thirds of voters say the high school drop out rate has a significant impact on the nation's economy and on America's ability to compete in the global economy.

- Nearly eight in ten voters find it highly concerning that each year high school dropouts cost the nation over 319 billion dollars and cost individual communities millions of dollars in lost wages, taxes, and productivity over those students' working lifetimes (79 percent extremely or very concerning).
- The fact that 30 percent of high school students fail to graduate with their peers is highly concerning for a wide segment of voters (82 percent extremely or very concerned), and similar proportions are highly concerned that as many as half of African-American and Latino students fail to graduate with their peers on top of the 30 percent drop out rate (79 percent extremely or very concerned).



Key Findings: Attention to Education

Majorities say Congress is not paying enough attention to the state of public high schools, and around half of voters say governors and President Obama are not paying enough attention.

- Two-thirds say Congress is not paying enough attention to the state of public high schools — a sentiment expressed across party lines.
- Half of voters think their governors are not paying enough attention to the public schools (53 percent). Nearly half believe President Obama is not paying enough attention to public high schools (49 percent).
- Voters believe President Obama is most likely to “get something done” to improve public education and public high schools (54 percent likely), followed by Democrats in Congress (46 percent), governors in their state (45 percent), Congress overall (38 percent), and Republicans in Congress (36 percent).



Key Findings: No Child Left Behind & ESEA

Eight in ten voters want to see NCLB changed in reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), only 11 percent believe it should stay the way it is now. Overall, voters give mixed reviews to No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

- A majority of voters believe that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has done just a fair (25 percent) or poor job (27 percent) for public schools in their community, compared to one quarter who say it has done either a good (22 percent) or excellent job (5 percent).
- Voters are solidly in favor of seeing changes made to NCLB when Congress renews ESEA, but more are interested in seeing Congress keep the main elements of NCLB and only making modest changes to the law to fix schools (46 percent) than in entirely replacing NCLB and taking a different and new approach to fix schools (33 percent). Only 11 percent say Congress should leave the law as is and make no changes.
- Over three-quarters of voters (78 percent) say it is personally important to them that Congress change ESEA to improve the quality of public high schools (52 percent very important); and three-quarters (74 percent) say it is important for Congress to do it this year (48 percent very important). This is personally important for solid majorities of voters across party lines.



Key Findings: ESEA Reauthorization

Improving the quality of public high schools through ESEA reauthorization is a voting issue for over eight in ten voters. Over half say failure to act this year will impact their vote decision for current elected officials.

- Eight in ten voters say they would be more likely to support a candidate who would support renewing ESEA in a way that gives significant attention to improving the quality of public high schools (81 percent more likely; 39 percent much more). This vote intent crosses all party groups.
- This support continues even when tax increases are introduced, although not surprisingly intensity is weaker in a scenario involving increased taxes: Two-thirds of voters (68 percent) say they would be more likely to support a candidate who favors renewing ESEA in a way that gives significant attention to improving public high schools even if it means increasing taxes (23 percent much more likely).
- Additionally, over half of voters say that if Congress takes no action this year to reform education and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act it will be a highly important factor in their decision to vote for a current elected official in the 2010 Congressional elections (52 percent one of the most or very important), with an additional 26 percent saying it will be a somewhat important factor.



Key Findings: ESEA Reauthorization

Voters send a clear message to Congress: Bipartisanship is important but should not hold up ESEA reauthorization; do not let elementary or middle school policy debates tie up passage of policies to improve high schools.

- Three-quarters of voters would be more likely to support a candidate who says Democrats and Republicans should do everything they can to work together to renew the ESEA (77 percent more likely; 46 percent much more likely). At the same time, two-thirds of voters would be more likely to support a candidate who calls for Democrats and Republicans to work together, but that passage of ESEA should not be delayed if both sides cannot reach agreement (66 percent more likely; 31 percent much more likely).
- Six in ten voters, including Democrats, independents and Republicans, would support moving ahead with ESEA to improve public high schools even if Congress cannot agree on policy changes for elementary or middle schools (63 percent more likely; 22 percent much more).



Context: America's Public High Schools

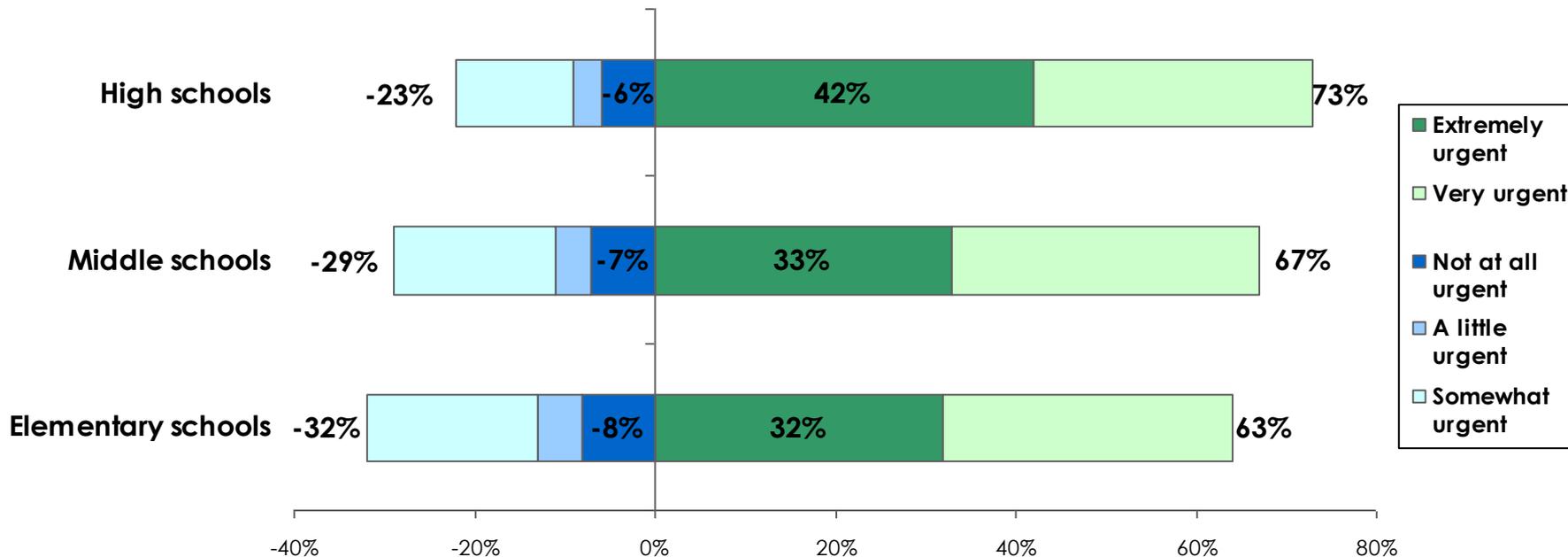
Voters exhibit strong concerns about the state of the nation's public high schools and link quality of high schools with the nation's economic health.



Seventy-three percent say it is urgent that we improve public high schools (42 percent extremely urgent), compared to 67 percent for middle schools and 63 percent for elementary schools.

Now I am going to ask you some questions about different types of public schools. For each one please consider everything you know or have heard about public education and tell me how urgent you think it is to improve this kind of school: Is it extremely urgent, very urgent, somewhat urgent, a little urgent, or not at all urgent?

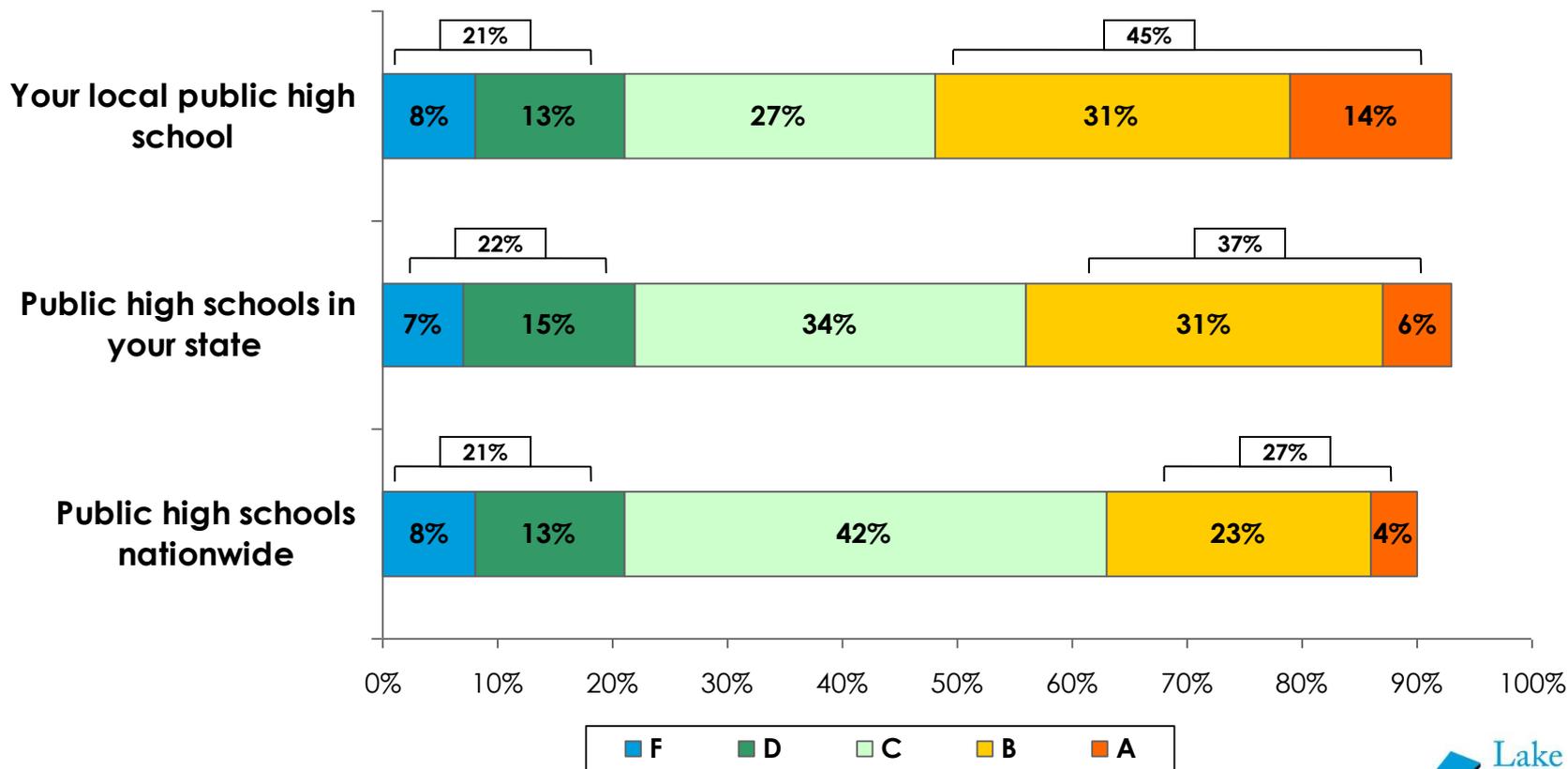
Urgency for Improving Schools



Rural and urban voters are more likely than suburban voters to place high levels of urgency on improving high schools.

Just one in four voters give the nation's high schools a good (B) or excellent (A) rating, while 42 percent give them a "C" and one in five a poor (D) or failing (F) grade. Closer to home, voters give their own public high schools better grades.

Now I'd like to ask you some questions specifically about high schools... For each one of the following areas I'd like you to give me a grade for the job they are doing in education -- A for excellent, B, C, D, or F for fail..



*Split-sampled questions

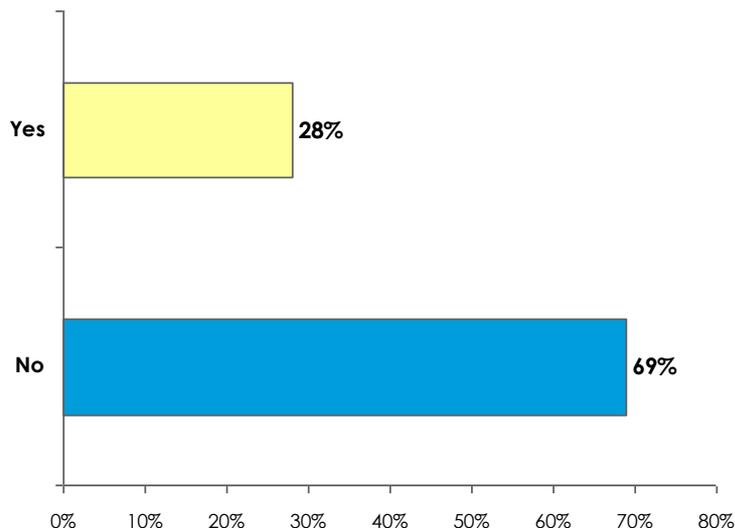


Voters firmly believe that a diploma from an American public high school does not prepare a graduate to obtain a good-paying job. Voters are more divided about whether a high school diploma prepares graduates for succeeding in college.

Does a Diploma from America's Public High Schools Prepare Graduates to?.....

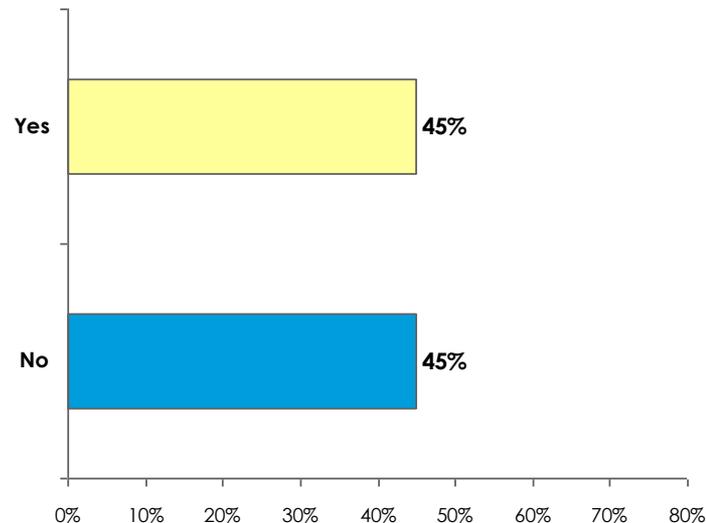
*Split-sampled questions

Get a Good-Paying Job*



Do you think a diploma from America's public high schools prepares graduates to get a good-paying job?

Succeed in College*



Do you think a diploma from America's public high schools prepares graduates to succeed in college?

Older women (51%) and white women (50%) are disproportionately more likely to say that a high school diploma does not prepare graduates for success in college.

Voters under age 30 (59%), African Americans (53%) and Latinos (67%) are disproportionately more likely to say a high school diploma does prepare graduates for college success.

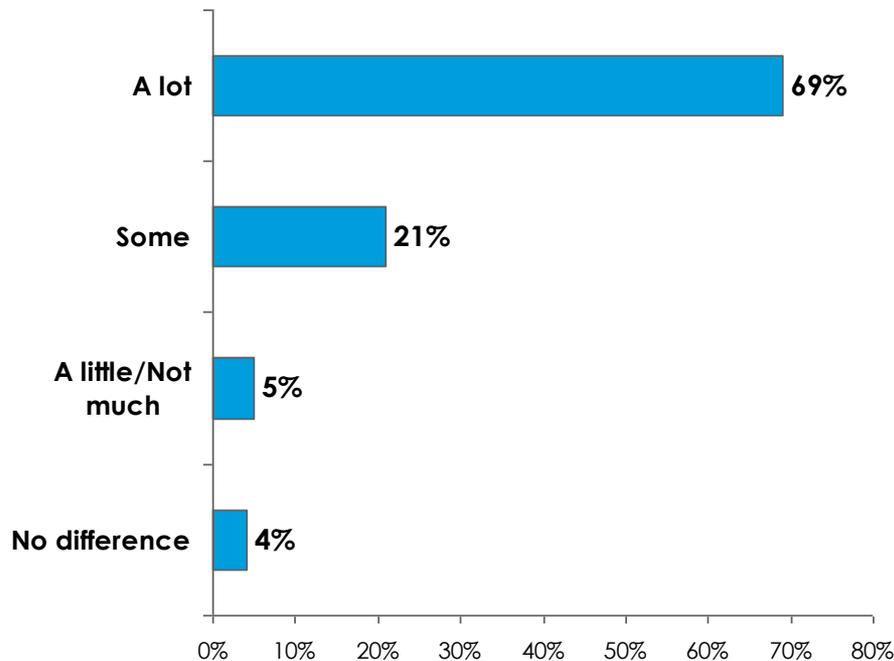


Voters believe the high drop out rate in America's high schools has a deep impact on the nation's economy, as well as on the country's ability to compete in the global economy.

What impact does a high drop out rate have on.....

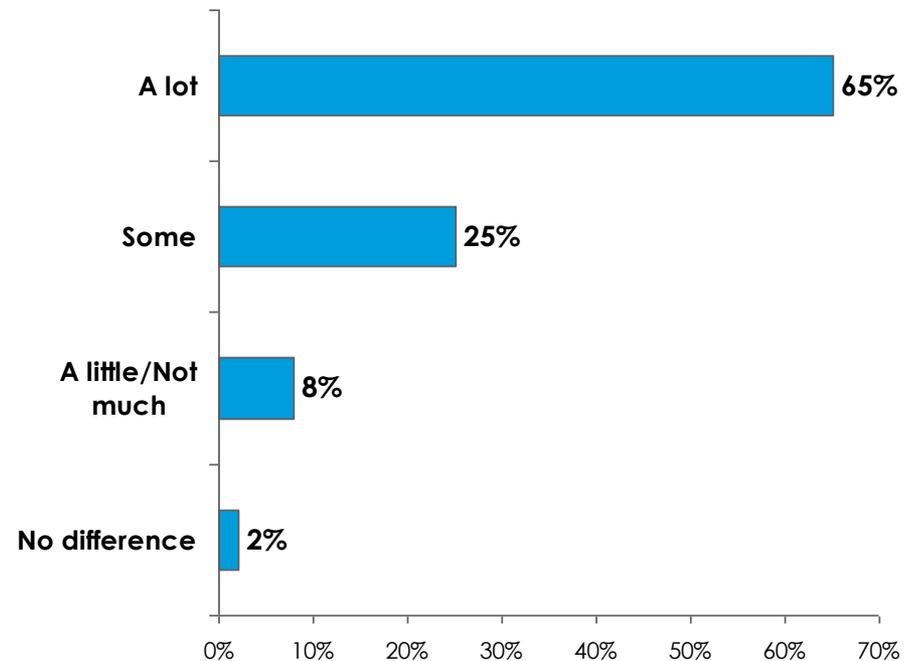
*Split-sampled questions

The Nation's Economy*



*What impact does a high drop out rate have on the nation's economy, does it have a lot of impact on the economy, some, a little, not much, or will it make no difference on the economy?

America's Ability to Compete in the Global Economy*



*What impact does a high drop out rate have on America's ability to compete in the global economy, does it have a lot of impact on global competition, some, a little, not much, or will it make no difference on America's ability to compete globally?



Voters exhibit strongest concerns about the economic impacts of remediation because high schools are not teaching students the skills they need, high drop out rates, and the steep economic costs of the drop out rate. Racial inequality in drop out rates is also a very strong concern for voters, as is the high percentage of high school graduates who earn a diploma but are unprepared for college or a career.

Now let me read some items about high schools and for each one please tell me, if true, how concerned each item makes you – extremely concerned, very concerned, somewhat concerned, a little concerned, or not concerned at all?

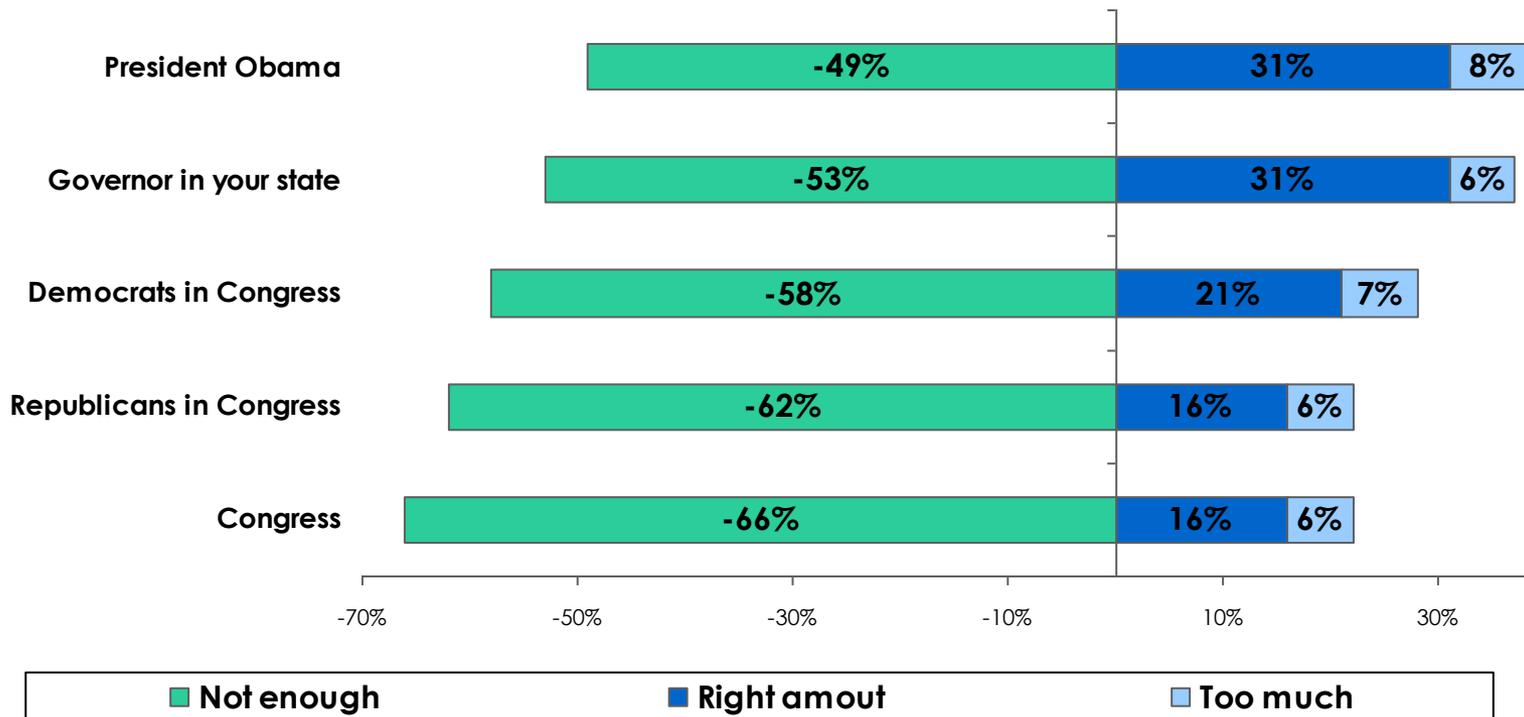
Ranked by % saying “very” + “extremely”	% saying “very” or “extremely” concerning” (% saying “extremely concerning”)
The nation loses more than \$3.7 billion a year in costs associated with having to catch up students because in high school they are not learning the skills they need*	85% (44%)
30% of students fail to graduate from high school with their peers*	82% (40%)
Each year, high school dropouts cost the nation over \$319 billion and cost individual communities millions of dollars in lost wages, taxes and productivity over those students’ working lifetimes*	79% (41%)
30% of students nationwide, and as many as half as African-American and Latino students, fail to graduate from high school with their peers*	79% (40%)
Almost one half of current high school graduates have earned a diploma but are not ready for college or a career*	78% (44%)

*split-sampled questions

Solid majorities of voters say Congress is not paying enough attention to the state of public high schools. Half of voters say their governors are not paying enough attention, and nearly half think the same of President Obama.

Please tell me if you think each of the following are paying too much attention, not enough attention or the right amount of attention to the state of public high schools in America?

Amount of Attention Paid to Public Schools*



A majority of Republicans (59%) and independents (52%) say Obama is not paying enough attention, while 38% of Democrats hold this belief.

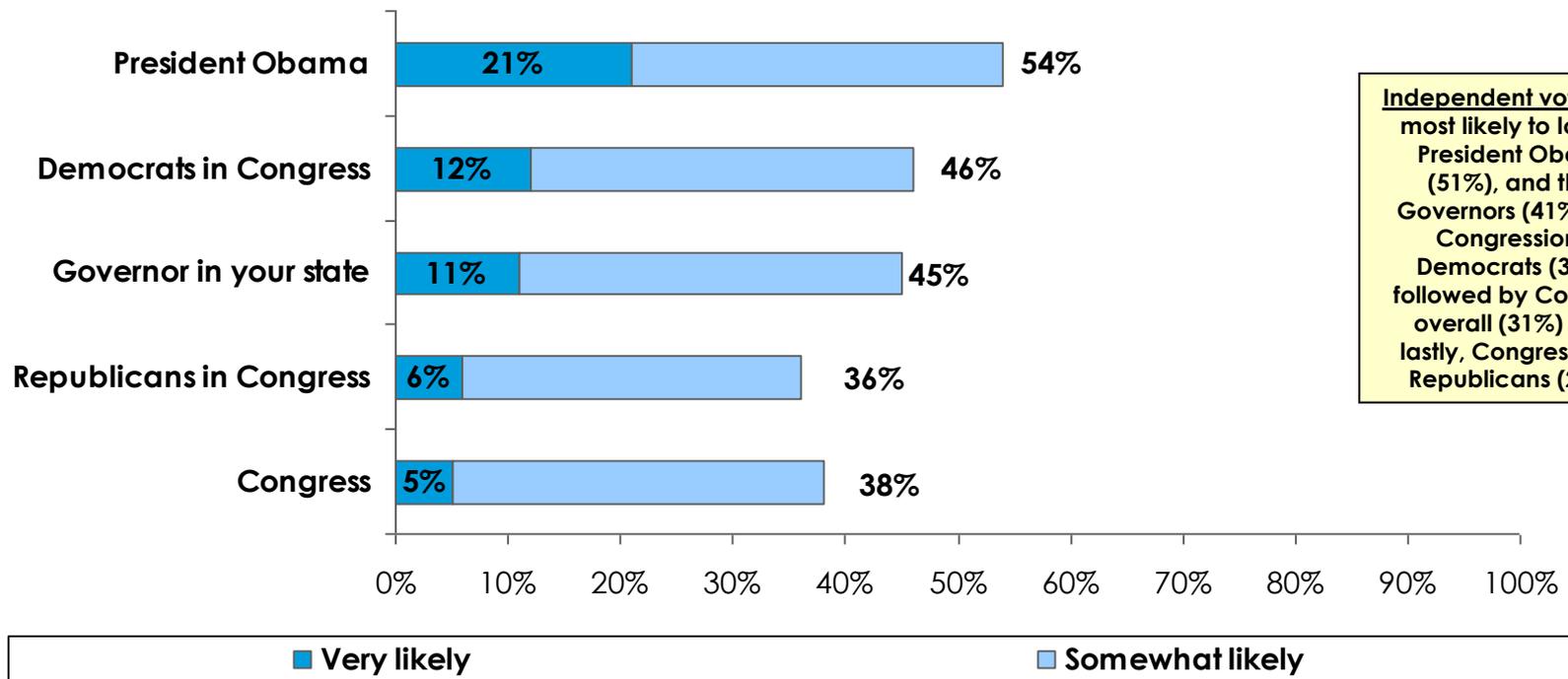
Majorities of Democrats, independents, and Republicans all believe Congress overall, Congressional Democrats, and Congressional Republicans are not paying enough attention to public high schools.

*Split sampled question

Voters are most likely to look to President Obama to get something done in public education and to improve public high schools, followed by Congressional Democrats and their state's governor, and then Congress overall and Congressional Republicans.

Now let me read you a list of people and institutions. For each one, please tell me how likely you think it is that that person or group of people will get something done on the issue of public education and improving public high schools – very likely, somewhat likely, a little likely, or not likely at all?

Likelihood of Getting Something Done to Improve Public High Schools*



Independent voters are most likely to look to President Obama (51%), and then Governors (41%) and Congressional Democrats (38%), followed by Congress overall (31%) and, lastly, Congressional Republicans (28%).

*Split sampled question



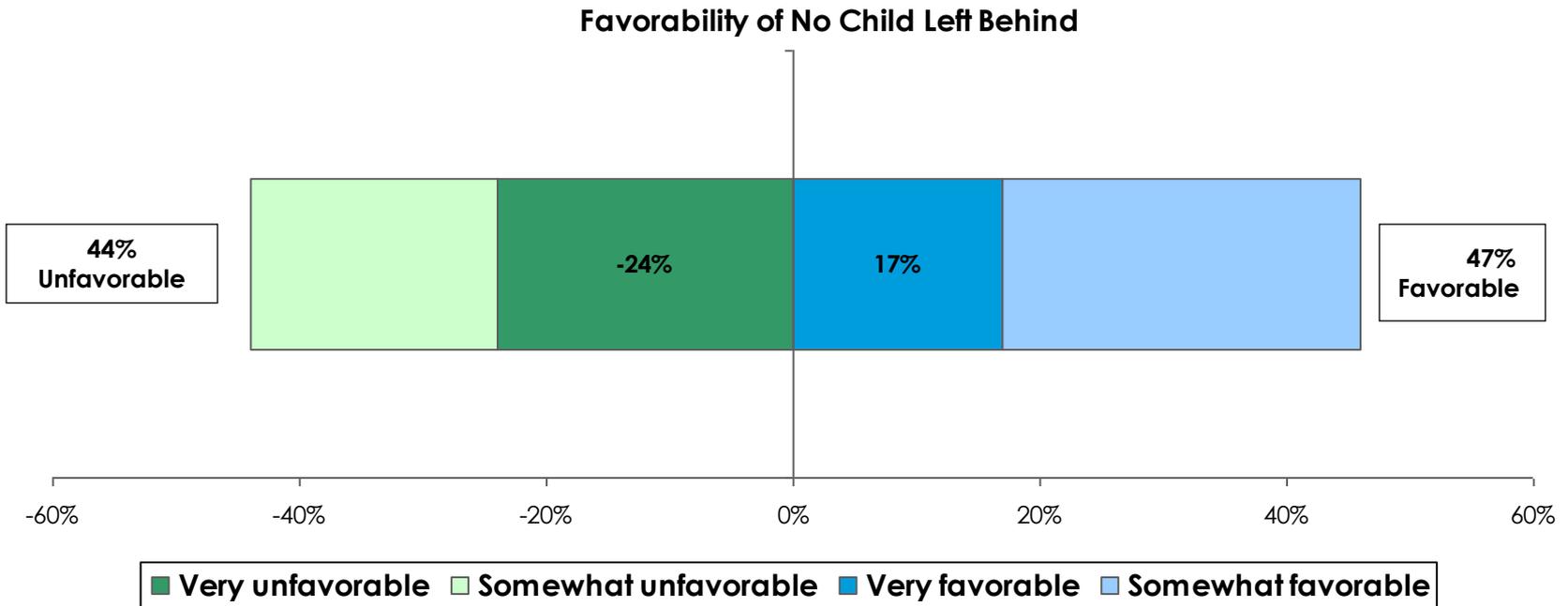
No Child Left Behind and ESEA Reauthorization

Voters send a clear message: They want to see changes made to NCLB in the ESEA reauthorization and want to see action this year.



Voters are give mixed reviews on No Child Left Behind (NCLB), but those who have strong opinions are more negative by a seven-point margin.

Would you say you have a very favorable opinion of the national education law called No Child Left Behind, a somewhat favorable opinion, somewhat unfavorable or a very unfavorable opinion of No Child Left Behind, or do you not know enough to say?

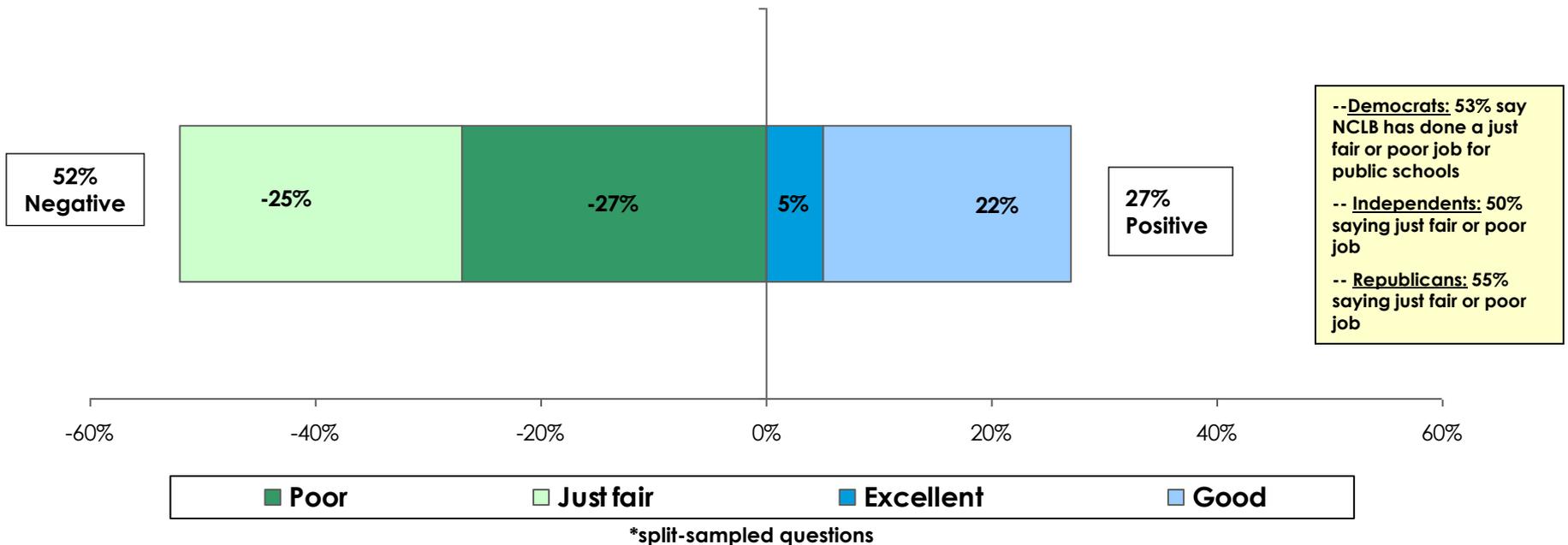


One in ten voters (10%) don't know enough to have an opinion on NCLB

A majority of voters (52 percent) believe No Child Left Behind has done just a fair or poor job for public schools in their community, compared to 27 percent who say it has done either an excellent or good job.

When you think of public schools in your community, how would you rate the job No Child Left Behind has done – excellent, good, just fair, poor, or aren't you sure?

Performance of No Child Left Behind for Public Schools in Your Community*

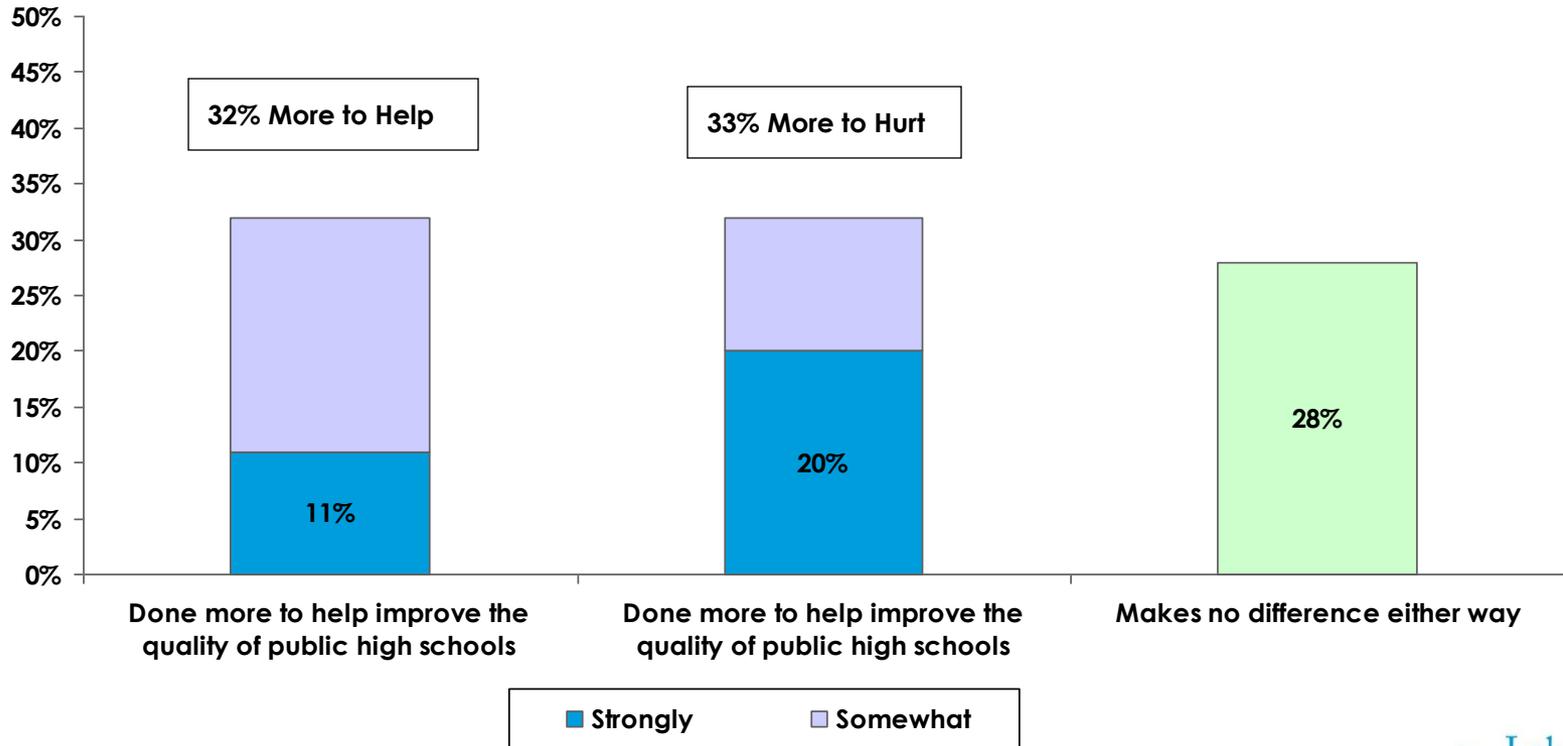


-- **Democrats:** 53% say NCLB has done a just fair or poor job for public schools
 -- **Independents:** 50% saying just fair or poor job
 -- **Republicans:** 55% saying just fair or poor job

Two in ten voters (21%) are unsure on this measure.

Opinions are not as well-formed on the specific impact that No Child Left Behind has had on public high schools. Just as many voters say NCLB has done more to help improve high schools (32 percent) as say it has done more to hurt high schools (33 percent), and one quarter thinks it has not made a difference either way. Yet, intense negative views outnumber intense positive views by a margin of two-to-one.

*Thinking specifically about public high schools, do you think that No Child Left Behind has, in general, done more to help improve the quality of public high schools, done more to hurt the quality of public high schools, or has it not made much of a difference either way?

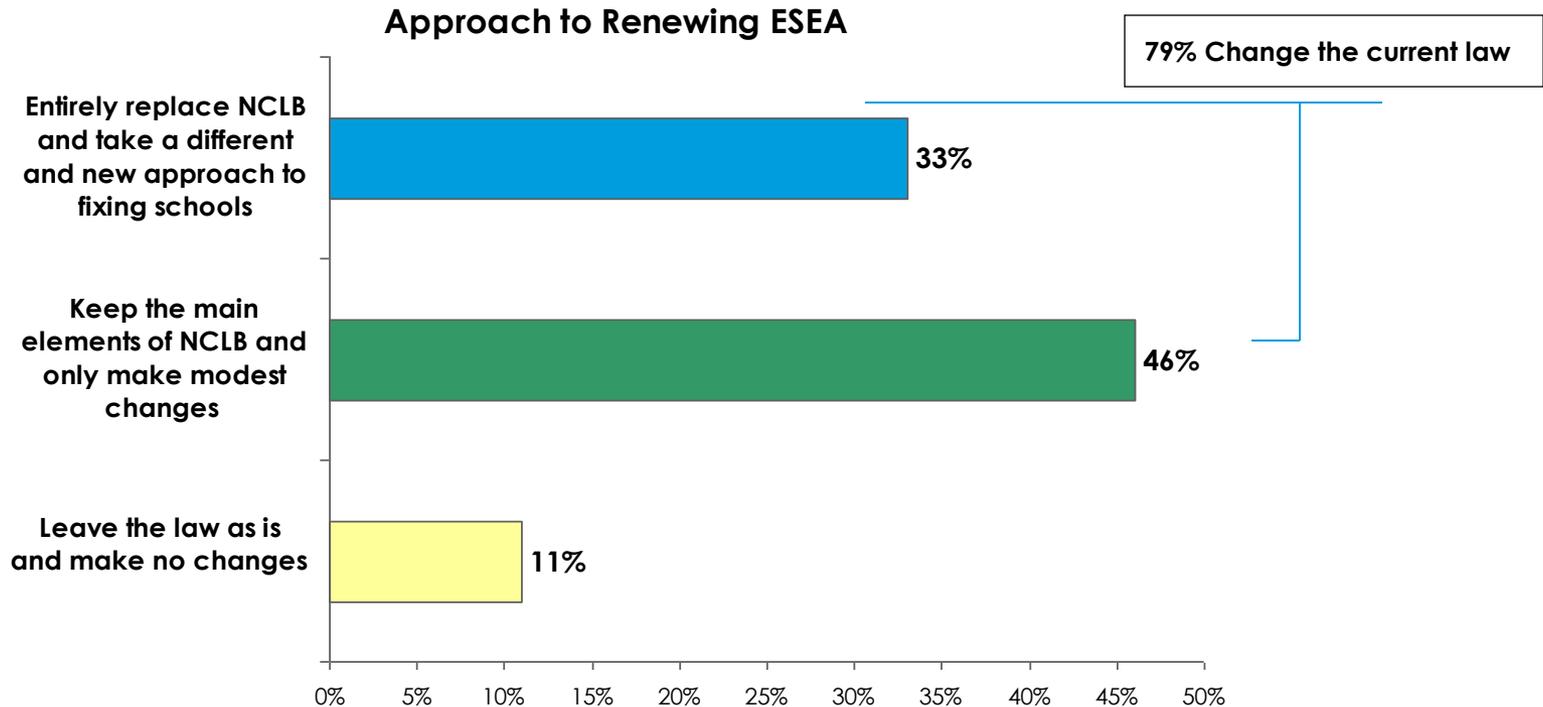


*split-sampled question



Almost eight in ten voters want to see changes made to NCLB when Congress renews ESEA, with only 11 percent in favor of Congress leaving the law as it is with no changes made. In terms of changes to make, voters are more interested in seeing Congress keep the main elements of NCLB and make only modest changes to fix the schools than they are in entirely replacing NCLB and taking a different and new approach to fix schools.

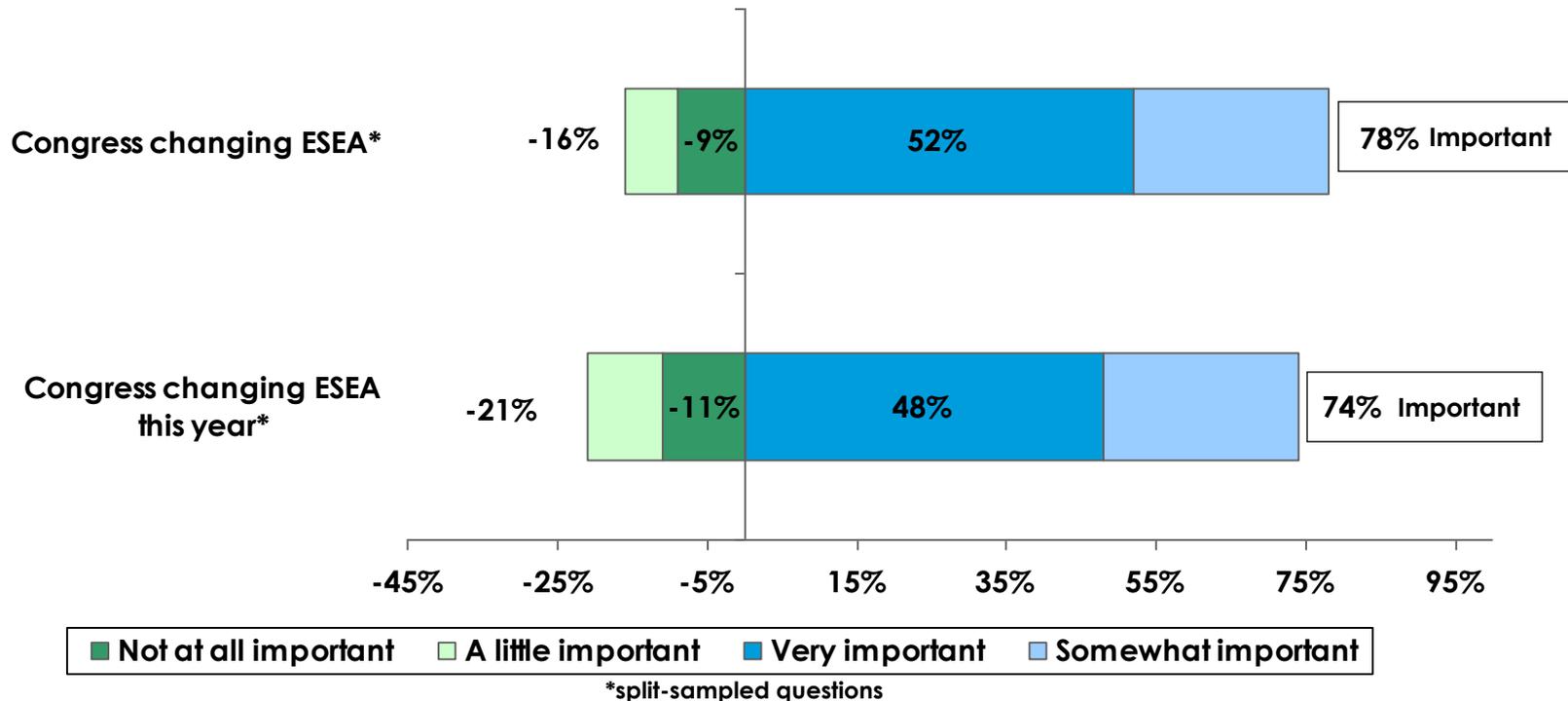
The current federal law that guides how all public schools, including high schools, are run is up for renewal in Congress. This federal law which is known as No Child Left Behind is formally called the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. When Congress considers renewing this law do you think it should entirely replace No Child Left Behind and take a different and new approach to fix schools; keep the main elements of No Child Left Behind and only make modest changes to the law to fix schools; or should Congress leave the law as it is and make no changes?



Over three-quarters of voters say it is personally important to them that Congress change ESEA to improve the quality of public high schools, and a majority say this is highly important. Further, another three-quarters say it is important for Congress to do it this year.

How important is it to you personally that Congress changes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as No Child Left Behind, to improve the quality of public high schools? How important is it to you personally that Congress changes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as No Child Left Behind, to improve the quality of public high schools THIS YEAR?

Personal Importance of Congress Changing ESEA to improve Quality of Public High Schools



Solid majorities across party lines say it is personally important for Congress to change ESEA to improve public high schools this year (86% of Democrats; 69% of independents; 70% of Republicans).



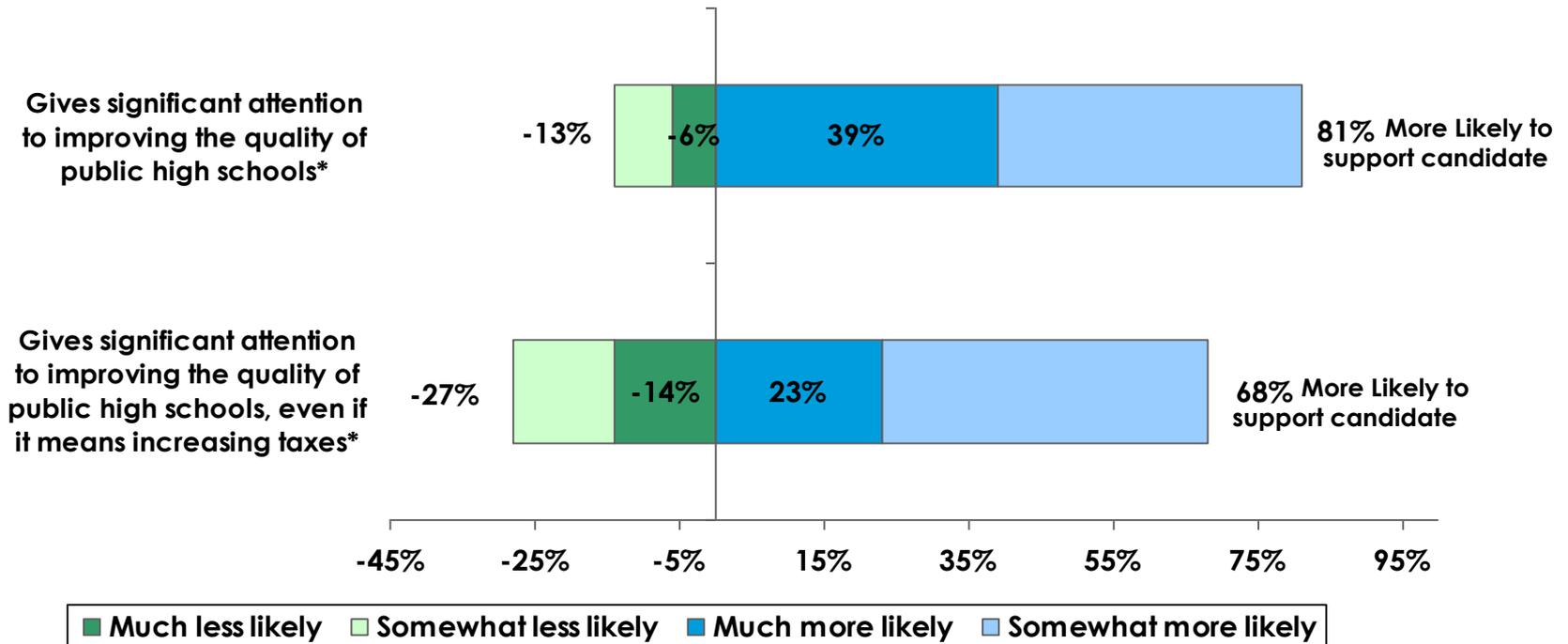
ESEA Reauthorization: A Voting Issue

Improving the quality of public high schools through ESEA reauthorization is a voting issue for wide segments of voters, and voters indicate that failure to act may impact their vote for incumbents in the upcoming Congressional elections.

Eight in ten voters say they would be more likely to support a candidate who would support renewing ESEA in a way that gives significant attention to improving the quality of public high schools. This support continues even when tax increases are introduced, although intensity is weaker in this scenario: Two-thirds of voters would be more likely to support such a candidate, even if it meant increased taxes.

Now I would like to read you some statements that may describe candidates running for office who are discussing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act -- the federal law that guides how all public schools, including high schools, are run. For each statement, please tell me if you would you be more or less likely to support a candidate who made this statement.

A Candidate who would support Renewing ESEA in a way that....



*split-sampled questions

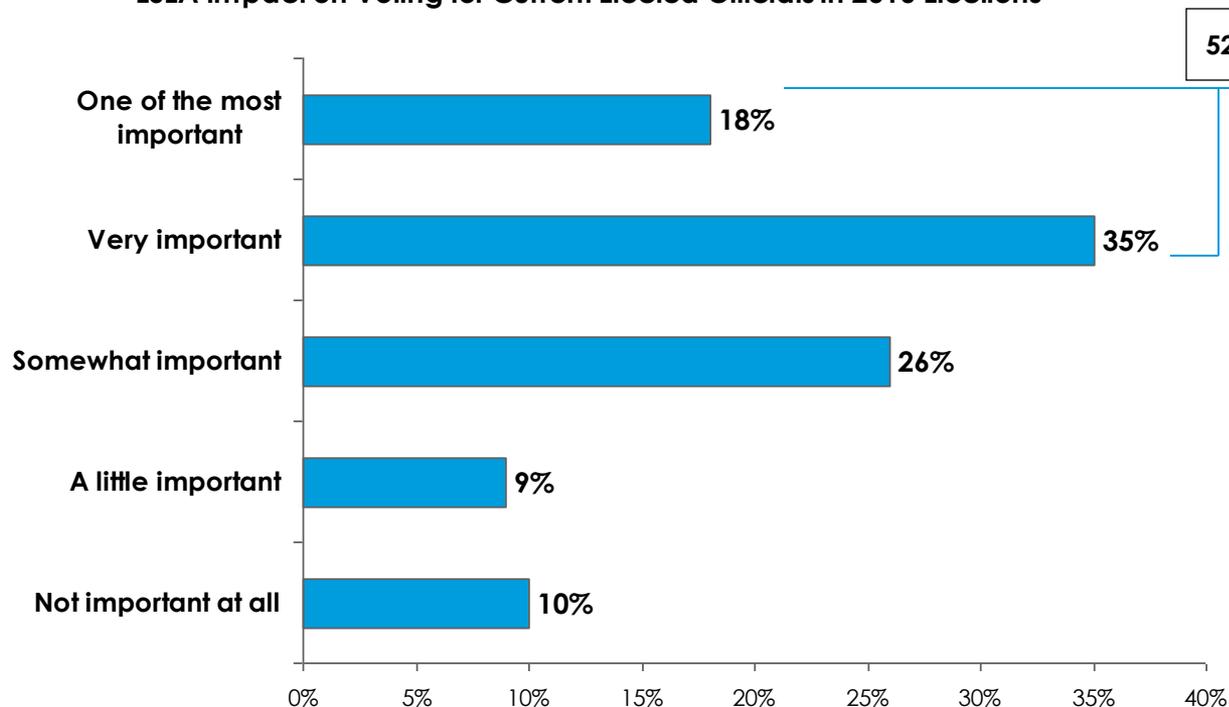
With the introduction of tax increases, some partisan divisions emerge but, even so, majorities across political affiliations say they would be more likely to support such a candidate, even if it meant increased taxes (Democrats: 76% more likely, 30% much more; independents: 67%, 19%; and Republicans: 62%, 20%).



Over half of voters say that if Congress takes no action this year to reform education and ESEA, it will be a highly important factor in their decisions around voting for a current elected official in the 2010 elections.

If Congress takes no action this year to reform education and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, how important will that be in your decision to vote for a current elected official in the 2010 Congressional elections -- will it be one of the most important, very important, somewhat important, a little important, or not important at all?

ESEA Impact on Voting for Current Elected Officials in 2010 Elections

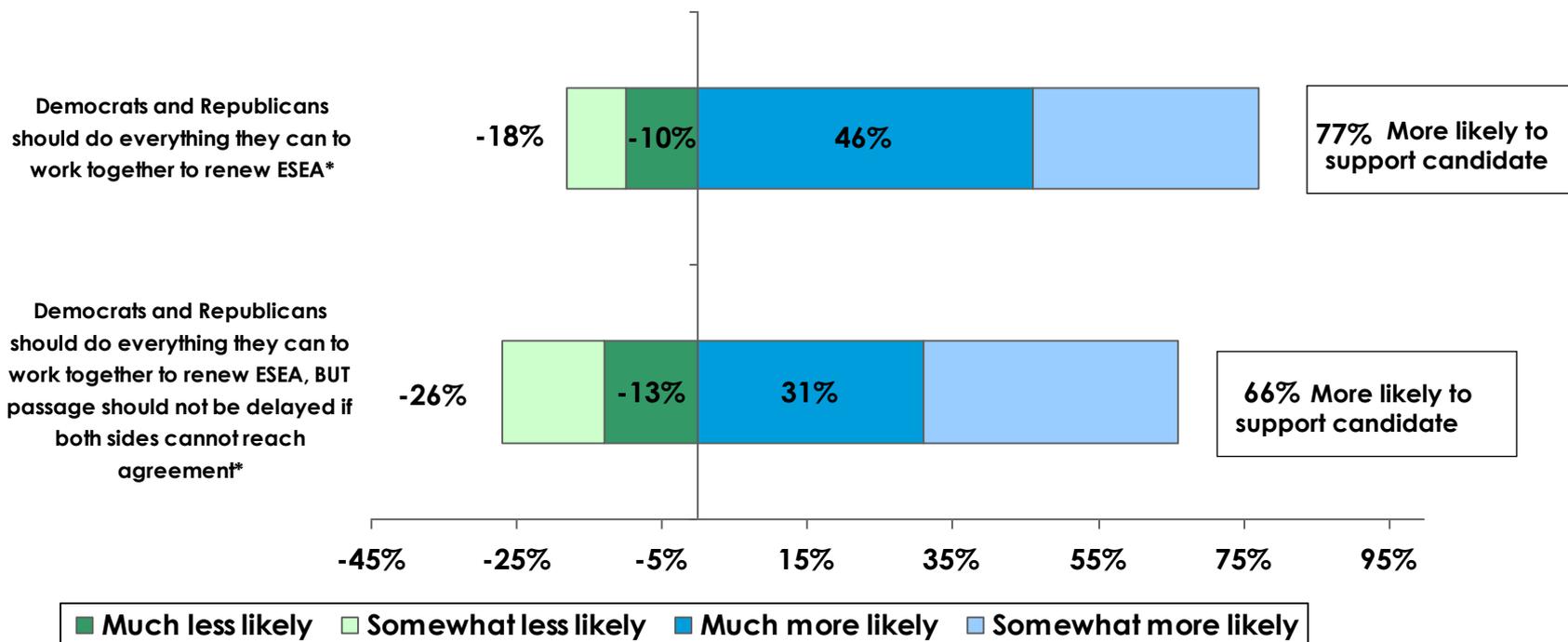


Voters most likely to say failure to take action on ESEA this year would impact their voting for current politicians in the upcoming elections are: mothers (65%), independent women (66%), parents with children ages 13-18 (66%), public school parents (60%), African Americans (69%) and Latinos (74%).

Three-quarters of voters would be more likely to support a candidate who believes Democrats and Republicans should do everything they can to work together to renew ESEA. Two-thirds of voters would be more likely to support a candidate who calls for bi-partisanship but also asserts that passage should not be delayed if both sides cannot reach agreement.

Now I would like to read you some statements that may describe candidates running for office who are discussing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act -- the federal law that guides how all public schools, including high schools, are run. For each statement, please tell me if you would you be more or less likely to support a candidate who made this statement.

A Candidate who would says that....



*split-sampled questions

The urgency for action carries across party lines as well. Strong majorities of Democrats (76%), independents (60%), and Republicans (62%) are more likely to support a candidate who calls for bipartisanship but also asserts that passage should not be delayed if both sides cannot reach agreement.



Six in ten voters would support moving ahead with ESEA to improve public high schools, even if Congress cannot agree on policy changes for elementary or middle schools.

Now I would like to read you some statements that may describe candidates running for office who are discussing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act -- the federal law that guides how all public schools, including high schools, are run. For each statement, please tell me if you would be more or less likely to support a candidate who made this statement.

A Candidate who would....

