



Poll: Education and water should be Arizona's top priorities

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Education and water rank as Arizonans' top two priorities among state residents, according to a new poll by ASU's Morrison Institute for Public Policy and the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

The inaugural Morrison-Cronkite Quarterly Poll surveyed 754 Arizona adults to assess resident attitudes and opinions about a variety of issues, from health care to law enforcement to arts and culture.

When asked to prioritize the K-12 system in the context of state spending – very high, high, low, or very low priority – nearly nine in 10 Arizonans (89 percent) responded very high (46 percent) or high (43 percent) in terms of funding consideration for education.

"This comes as no surprise," said David Daugherty, associate director of Morrison Institute and director of the statewide poll. "Researchers have consistently noted that Arizonans recognize their public school system's shortcomings and their desire to improve it."

Law enforcement and public safety ranked third (82 percent) in the poll, yet Arizona's prison system ranked lowest among the 11 listed priorities (42 percent).

In regard to state funding, nearly eight in 10 Arizona adults believe Arizona spends too little on K-12 education, with nearly two-thirds willing to put additional money into K-12 education, according to the poll.

While the vast majority of Arizonans is concerned about the state's kindergarten through 12th-grade education system, and believes further investment and improvements are critical, Arizona consistently hovers near the bottom of all 50 states in academic quality, achievement and per-pupil spending.

Meanwhile, among the 11 issues offered to respondents, "maintaining adequate water and water quality" ranks at that same level of importance (87 percent) as education.

"It's apparent that the importance of ensuring an adequate and quality water supply for Arizona's varied interests figures prominently on Arizonans' radar. This is a complex and dynamic issue, but clearly one that Arizonans understand as a priority that needs to be thoroughly examined and addressed," Daugherty said.

The second installment of findings from the Morrison-Cronkite Quarterly Poll will be released March 3 and include such topics as marijuana laws, water supply and care giving for people with disabilities.

Methodology

The survey of 754 randomly selected Arizona adults was conducted between Jan. 20-28, 2015. Interviews averaged 12 minutes in length with about 40 percent of interviews conducted via mobile phones. Respondents were given the choice of doing the interview in English or Spanish. To ensure results represent the general state population, data was weighted by using a post-stratification technique to scale the respondents to census population estimates, including geographic distribution. The margin of error for most items, prior to subsample breakdowns, is about 4 percentage points.

Morrison Institute for Public Policy is Arizona's premier think tank, examining critical Arizona and regional issues and a catalyst for public dialogue. A unit of the Arizona State University College of Public Service and Community Solutions, Morrison Institute uses nonpartisan research and communication outreach to help improve the state and region's quality of life. MorrisonInstitute.asu.edu

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Key Findings

Common Core

The Common Core curriculum is a lightning rod in the politics of education. Justified or not, its very name has become synonymous with federal overreach, as well as concerns by many that it makes math too complicated. This makes testing public approval or disapproval of Common Core somewhat difficult. So, in order to gauge Arizonans' stance on Common Core, the sample was split by separate inquiries.

Half of the respondents were asked the following question: "Do you favor or oppose the Common Core curriculum for Arizona public schools?"

The other half was asked: "Do you favor or oppose establishing a standard set of education concepts to be taught in public schools across the country, including Arizona, and then testing students on these concepts to assure that students receive a rigorous education and providing a system to allow outcomes to be compared from state to state and school to school?"

The findings are indicative of the political tinge related to Common Core. Fifty-five percent of those asked whether they favor or oppose Common Core said they oppose it as a curriculum for Arizona public schools. However, when the basic elements of Common Core are described to respondents without using the term "Common Core" nearly seven in 10 (69 percent) favor it.

"It appears to underline that the term 'Common Core' has become politicized," Daugherty said. "Yet when the basic elements – but not all – of Common Core are described, it receives positive reviews. Responses to the descriptive question clearly indicate that the majority of Arizona citizens favor some form of curriculum standards, common testing and the ability to compare across schools, districts and states."

Predictably, there are significant differences in opinions about Common Core by political party. Among those who identify themselves as Republicans, only 27 percent favor "Common Core" when identified as such and 73 percent oppose it. Among Democrats, 64 percent favor "Common Core" and 36 percent oppose it. Among Independents, 34 percent favor "Common Core" and 66 percent oppose. However, when Common Core is described, but not referred to as "Common Core," it is favored by 81 percent of Democrats, 56 percent of Republicans and 67 percent of Independents.

The K-12 System

Arizonans are not enamored of their K-12 public education system. Half believe Arizona's high school graduates are not as well prepared as graduates from most other states. In fact, only 11 percent believe Arizona grads are better prepared and 39 percent believe they are "about as well prepared."

The better educated the respondents, the more likely it is they believe Arizona high school graduates do not compare favorably with high school graduates from most other states.

While Republicans are slightly more positive about Arizona's high school graduates than are Independents or Democrats, they still give the system mediocre reviews (45 percent of Republicans believe Arizona high school graduates are not as well prepared as high school graduates from other states, 49 percent believe they are about as well prepared and only 5 percent believe they are better prepared).

Arizonans are less disappointed in their public universities. While the state's three universities don't receive a ringing endorsement, 21 percent overall believe graduates from Arizona's public universities are better prepared than public university graduates from most other states. Sixty-four percent believe they are about as well prepared and 15 percent believe they are not as well prepared.

Most Arizonans believe the state does not invest as many tax dollars in K-12 education as most other states, according to the poll. Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) believe Arizona invests fewer tax dollar than most other states while only 7 percent believe it invests more.

Furthermore, nearly eight in 10 Arizona adults believe Arizona spends too little on K-12 education, including 89 percent of Democrats, 71 percent of Republicans and 82 percent of Independents.

And, nearly two-thirds of Arizona adults say they are willing to put additional money into K-12 education. Sixty-two percent would be willing to pay an additional \$200 per year in state taxes to help support the K-12 education system, including 75 percent of Democrats, 53 percent of Republicans and 65 percent of Independents.

Finally, while data indicate there are significant differences in academic achievement by ethnicity, including an educational attainment gap for Arizona's booming Latino population, only 62 percent of Arizona adults agree that is true.

Prioritizing the Issues

According to Arizona citizens, how should the Legislature prioritize issues?

Respondents were asked how they prioritize 11 issues facing the state – as a very high priority, a high priority, a low priority, or a very low priority. The following shows how Arizonans prioritize some of the state's most pressing issues.

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