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## Summary

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## Majority of Oregonians Want School Choice, Think Money Should Follow the Child

By Kathryn Hickok and Steve Buckstein

Nearly nine out of ten Oregonians would opt out of regular public schools if they could, according to a scientifically representative [public opinion poll](#) released this month. Yet, ninety-one percent of Oregon children currently attend a regular public school, usually the one assigned to them based on their home address.

This startling poll of 1,200 likely Oregon voters was conducted on behalf of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice and cosponsored by Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research organization.

Among the key findings of this poll is that school choice is not a partisan issue among Oregonians. Alternatives to conventional public school education are overwhelmingly supported across every political, ethnic and religious affiliation and regardless of age, income and geographic location. Similar percentages of Democrats, Republicans and Independents support school vouchers, tax-credit scholarships, charter schools, and personal-use tax credits and deductions for education expenses.

Fifty-eight percent of the survey respondents rated Oregon public schools as poor or fair. Voters say accountability, poor student discipline and school safety issues are major challenges for Oregon’s public school system.

When asked what type of school they would select in order to obtain the best education for their child, 44 percent of respondents chose private schools. Twenty-four percent selected charter schools, 14 percent would homeschool, 13 percent chose regular public schools, and 5 percent preferred virtual schools.

Why the stark contrast? Most people cannot afford to pay taxes for public schools and tuition for private schools at the same time. Even though more than 5 billion tax dollars a year go toward educating Oregon’s school-aged children, virtually all of that money goes to public school districts, not to parents or students. If you send your children to public schools, their education is “free.” If you want to make a different choice, you forfeit what is currently a \$10,000-per-child-per-year entitlement to a public education. Taxpayer funding stays in the public system, even if your child is being educated somewhere else.

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If 87 percent of Oregonians want to send their children to other than a regular public school, yet only nine percent actually do so, don't the rest deserve an opportunity to make the choices they think are best for their children? As the 2009 legislative session begins, at least one bill will move in that direction. Known as the Oregon Education Tax Credit Bill (ORED), it would provide personal income tax credits of \$1,000 per child for educational expenses, \$1,000 tax credits for taxpayers to support tuition scholarship organizations that help low-income students or students with disabilities, and up to \$8,000 credits for Oregon businesses to support such organizations.

In a nutshell, the ORED Tax Credit Bill would...

- Ensure that our most vulnerable children in Oregon get the high-quality education they deserve;
- Generate millions of new dollars for the education of Oregon's children voluntarily contributed by Oregon corporations;
- Help every family in Oregon that is spending money to educate their children.

Are you:

- Paying for a tutor for your student?
- Searching for a scholarship so your child can attend a different school?
- Struggling to pay private school tuition?
- Homeschooling your child?
- Interested in directing \$1,000 of your state income taxes to helping a low-income or disabled student?

If you answered yes to any one of these questions, then you would benefit from the ORED Tax Credit.

At least six states currently offer some form of tax credit for K-12 education. Oregon could become the seventh.

Oregonians clearly want to be able to choose where their children go to school. It is time our lawmakers gave them that choice by letting at least some tax money follow the child, so that parents can make the educational choices that they believe are in the best interests of their children.

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***“Oregon voters indicate a wide disconnect between their schooling preferences and actual school enrollments. While 44 percent of Oregon parents said they would like to send their child to a private school, only about 7 percent of Oregon’s K-12 students actually attend private schools.”***

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