

Statewide Survey of 500 Adults in Missouri on Charter Schools

Introduction and Methodology

the polling company™, inc. is pleased to present to the **Center for Education Reform** the results and analysis of a statewide telephone survey of 500 adults in Missouri and a national survey of 800 adults. Interviews were conducted January 5-11, 2005 at a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) facility by telephone and with live callers.

The survey sample was drawn utilizing a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) method where phone numbers were generated by a computer to ensure that every household had an equal chance to be surveyed. Once a household was selected for participation, a trained interviewer asked to speak with a person over the age of 18.

The original survey instrument contained 47 questions, including 2 open-ended and 21 demographic questions, and was approved by the client prior to data collection.

Interviewers administered the same survey to all participants. Sampling controls were used to ensure that a proportional and representative number of people were interviewed from such demographic groups as age, race, and gender. Topline data is attached as Appendix A.

The margin of error for the Missouri survey is $\pm 4.38\%$ at a 95% confidence interval, meaning that the data obtained would not differ by any more than 4.38 percentage points in either direction had the entire population of adults had been surveyed. The margin of error for the national survey was $\pm 3.5\%$. Margins of error for subgroups are higher.

Executive Summary & Analysis

When Asked about Charters, Missourians Have Little to Say... In an attempt to discover a baseline understanding of Missouri adults with respect to charter schools, survey respondents were asked, in open-ended fashion, to reveal the first thing that came into their minds upon hearing the term “charter schools.” They were then asked for their explanations and definitions of charters.

A considerable 38% of Missourians declined to answer admitted they “did not know” enough about charters to offer an explanation. Almost one-quarter (23%) of respondents attempted to define the **type of school** they believed charters to be—though none of them said “public school.” Descriptions of the **structure** of charter schools—both factual and imagined—were given by 14% of respondents. **Positive** mentions were offered by 10%, more than three times the number who made negative associations (3%) or who referenced **money** or **funding** (3%).

While some Missourians were fairly well-informed, generally their responses revealed a lack of reliable information and the preponderance of misconceptions surrounding charters.

Open-ended question: When you hear the term “charter schools” what is the first thing that you think of? How would you define or explain a “charter school”?

Selected Verbatim Responses of Interviewees in Missouri

“Charter schools are funded by the State but run by a private group.”

“I think of schools that are developed to help children that are having difficulty learning.”

“I think a charter school is a group of people who decided to get together to make this school better for their children. If your child goes there they have to pay to attend.”

“People who are unhappy with public schools send their child to charter schools.”

“I believe charter schools do not meet the standards that are required by law to stay open.”

“I think of innovation and flexibility from regulation.”

“Charter schools offer a better education and are smaller and more intimate. The teachers have better rapport with the children.”

“A charter school is public but has more parental involvement and more ‘out of the box’ thinking, with higher standards and accountability.”

“Charter schools are a source of siphoning money from the public school education.”

“I think highly of charter schools. They are very ‘pro student.’”

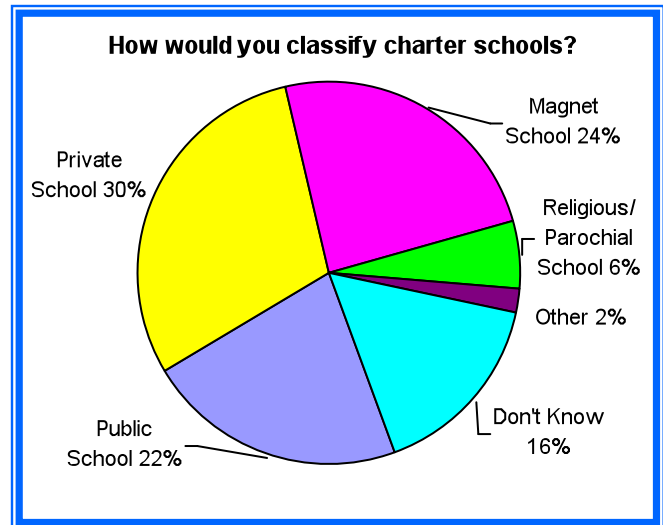
“Charter schools do not have the same standards as public schools.”

“They have programs that aren’t available at most schools.”

“I would think it would be a school that was self-supported by the students attending, with the parents paying the tuition.”

Faulty Knowledge on the Fundamentals of Charter Schools.

Just over one-in-five (22%) Missourians were able to correctly identify charters as public schools when presented with a list that also included private, magnet, and religious/parochial schools as choices. Three-in-ten (30%) believed charters to be private schools and 24% deemed them magnet schools. Missourians were clear that charter schools were not religiously affiliated—only 6% classified them as such. A full 16% declined to take a guess from the pre-given list of answer indicating a total lack of knowledge.



- Though Missourians generally were not well-informed about charter schools, there were some groups more likely than others to know the schools were **public**, including those earning greater than \$90,000 per year, urban dwellers, 45-54 year olds, college graduates, parents whose children attended private institutions, Catholics, executives, and registered Republicans.
- Those most inclined to believe charters were **private schools** were those earning between \$30,000 and \$69,999 per year, rural residents, white-collar workers, blue-collar workers, those who work part-time outside the home, students and those not registered to vote.
- More apt than most to name charters **magnet schools** included \$70,000+ per year earners, Blacks, suburbanites, 35-44 year olds, white collar workers and those who do not work outside the home.
- While residents of the “Show Me State” were about even with other adults nationwide in their identification of charters as **public schools** (22%-20%), they were considerably less likely to believe charters were **private schools** (30%-38%) and more likely to deem them **magnet schools** (24%-16%).

Harnessing the Power of Community Action. Though most Missourians were unable or unwilling to accurately describe charter schools at the start of this survey, after hearing a simple, straightforward explanation of the schools and their structure, a strong majority of Missourians voiced their support. **In fact, 73% of respondents supported “allowing communities to create new public schools—called charter schools—that would be held accountable for student results and would be required to meet the same academic standards/testing requirements as other public schools but not cost taxpayers any additional money.”** The intensity behind this support was solid, as 48% indicated they were “strongly” in favor of the idea. By comparison, 19% did not wish to give communities this power—making the margin of support nearly 4:1.

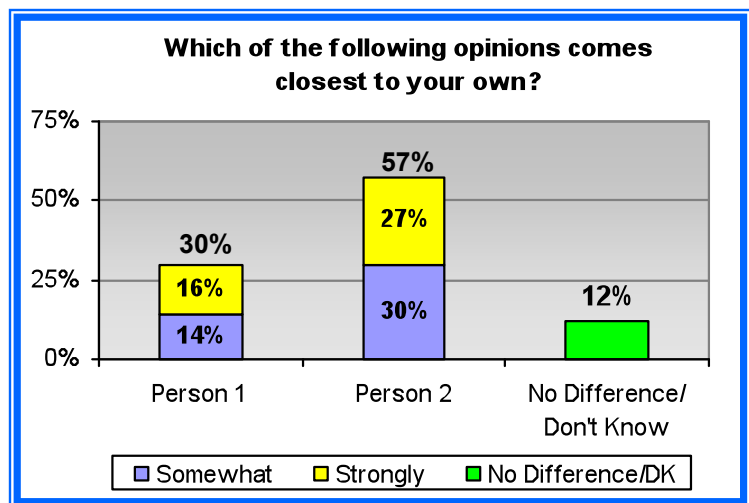
- Though non-parents were notably more supportive of the idea than their child-rearing counterparts (80%-72%), among the various parent groups, single moms (88%), parents of school-aged children¹ (80%), and those who sent their children to private (87%) or religious (79%) schools were most inclined to approve of community-formed charters.
- Others more likely than most to react positively to the idea of granting the power to form charters to the community included those earning \$70,000-\$89,999 per year, 18-44 year olds, respondents having completed some college, Catholics, yearly religious service attendees, those who work outside the home part-time or not at all, the unemployed, students, those not registered to vote and self-identified liberals.
- Missourians were a bit less supportive than Americans in general of allowing communities to create charters (73%-78%).

Separating Fact from Fiction. While those opposing alternatives to traditional public education have attempted to use the national media to sensationalize the results of some recent federal studies on charter schools, residents of Missouri have not bought into the hype. Instead, they indicated they would not make a definitive judgment until examining some other, non-government data.

After being told that, *“Recently there have been reports, based on information collected by the federal government, of students’ academic performance in conventional public and charter schools. These data show that students in charter schools are sometimes slightly behind students in other public schools academically,”* respondents were asked to give their opinions on the information by agreement with one of two statements:

Person 1: “Reports from the government that some charter school students are performing less well compared to conventional public school students concerns me when thinking about the quality of charter schools.”

Person 2: “There is other, more reliable information about charter schools besides government-based data that should be considered when thinking about the quality of such schools.”



¹ Children aged 4-18 years old.

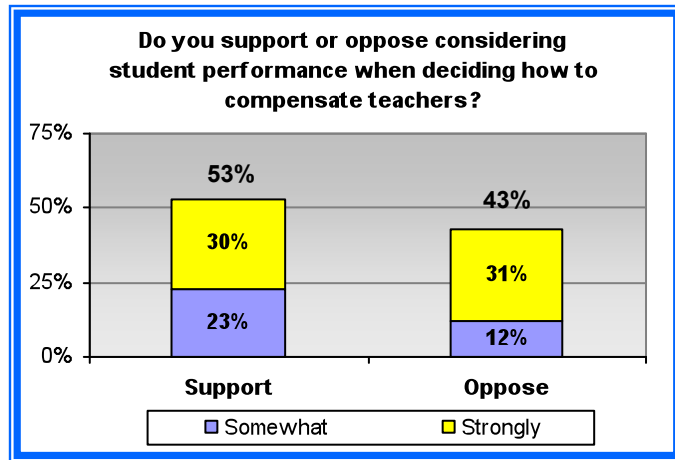
Missourians aligned themselves with Person 2 over Person 1, by nearly a 2:1 margin—**57% believed that sources more reliable than government data should be considered when evaluating the quality of charter schools** (Person 2), while **30% conceded that the government data about student performance in charter schools was worrisome to them** (Person 1). The intensity of the majority was mixed, however, as 27% allied themselves “strongly” with Person 2, while 30% did so just “somewhat.”

In their replies to this query, respondents proved that they are not the type to blindly accept so-called “facts”—even if they are provided by the federal government—without considering alternative findings offered by other sources.

Notable demographic distinctions arose within the crucial parent subgroup, including:

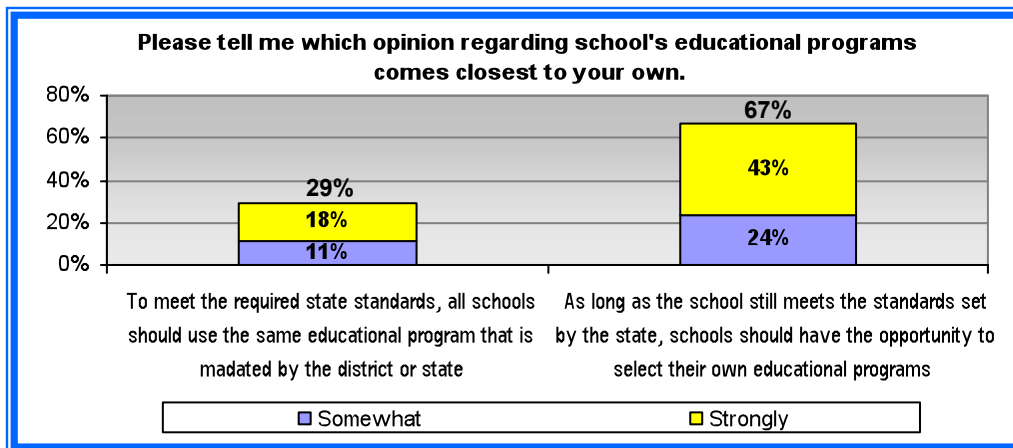
- Parents were 7-points more likely than non-parents to declare their intention to seek other, non-government data on charter schools (Person 2) (59%-52%). Meanwhile, non-parents were 9-points more likely than their child-rearing peers to express concern over the federal findings (Person 1) (38%-27%).
- Moms and dads most inclined to believe there was more reliable data on charters than those from the government study (Person 2) included divorced parents (78%), and those whose children attended private school (71%).
- Single parents generally and single moms specifically were among the parent groups most apt to be worried about the quality of charter schools by the government data (Person 1) (47% and 51%, respectively).
- *Across the broader demographic spectrum*, those more likely than average to remain unconvinced by the government studies’ findings (Person 2) included 35-44 year olds, blue-collar workers, part-time workers, registered Republicans and Independents (especially Independent men), and self-identified moderates.
- Groups more likely than most to indicate apprehension over the government findings (Person 1) included those earning \$70,000-\$89,999 per year, 18-34 year olds, respondents attending yearly religious services, white-collar workers, the unemployed, students, Missourians not registered to vote, and self-identified liberals.
- Residents of Missouri were even with their nationwide counterparts in their assessment of government data: the state split 57%-30% in favor of Person 2, while the national result was 55%-31% in favor of Person 2.

Linking Wages with Work Ethic. Missourians want the educators to whom they are entrusting their children to be held accountable for the achievement, or lack of achievement, of their students. **Over half of those surveyed (53%) supported the idea of “considering student performance when deciding how to compensate teachers.”** Under this plan, a teacher whose students actually perform well would receive a higher salary and additional financial rewards,” and **30% did so with intensity.** However, just 10-points separated the supporters from the opposition as a sizeable 43% rejected this method of teacher compensation—31% of them strongly.



- **The chasm between parents and non-parents on this issue was tremendous.** While those raising children were divided 57%-39% in favor of performance-based pay for teacher, those without children split 61%-37% against the idea.
- Among parents, those most likely to support linking teachers’ paychecks to the achievement of their students included divorced parents (70%), single parents (63%), those with school-aged children (59%), and those whose children attended private (60%) or religious (74%) institutions.
- **Across the broader demographic spectrum,** groups most apt to advocate performance-based pay for teachers were those earning \$30,000-\$49,999 per year, 45-54 year olds, seniors aged 65 years and older, respondents with less than a high school education, Catholics, white-collar and blue-collar workers, the unemployed, those not registered to vote, and self-identified conservatives.
- Those more inclined to oppose this method of calculating teachers’ pay included those earning \$50,000-\$89,999 per year, Blacks, urban dwellers, 18-34 year olds, college graduates, executives, part-time workers, students, registered Democrats—in particular, female Democrats, and self-identified moderates.
- These Mid-Westerners were less supportive than Americans overall of considering student performance when deciding how to compensate teachers: Missourians endorsed the concept 53%-43% (a 10-point divide), while adults nationwide were more stalwart in their approval at 59%-34% (a 25-point divide).

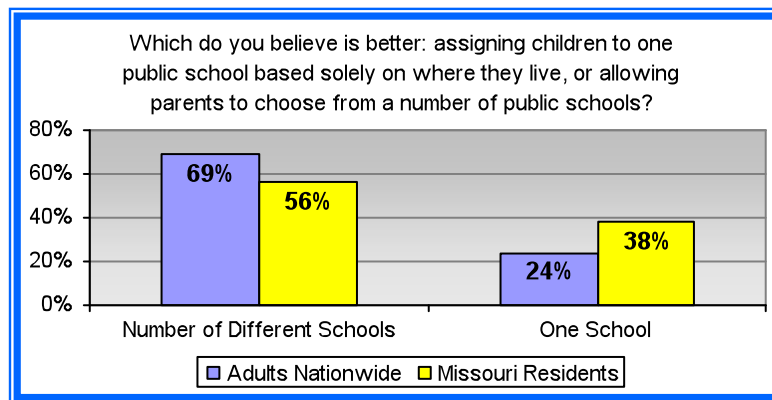
Rallying Against “Cookie-Cutter” Curricula. Though not willing to compromise on educational standards, Missourians were extremely agreeable to allowing schools to reach said standards by whatever method best suits their students. **In fact, more than two-thirds (67%) of respondents agreed that “as long as the school still meets the standards set by the state, schools should have the opportunity to select their education programs based on what might be best for the students, even if it differs from other schools in their area,” with 43% feeling so “strongly.”** Less than half that number (29%) felt that “in order to meet the required state standards, all schools should use the same educational program that is mandated by their local district or state so that there is continuity among schools and students.”



- Among parent groups, those whose kids attended private (79%) or religious (72%) institutions, parents of school-aged children (74%), and single moms (72%) were most supportive of allowing flexible curricula.
- Others more likely than most to advocate giving schools the power to set their own educational programs included those earning \$50,000-\$89,999 per year, Blacks, 18-34 year olds, college graduates, Catholics, executives, part-time workers, the unemployed, students, registered Republicans, and self-identified moderates.
- Those more apt than most to support a single, district-mandated curriculum to be used by all schools included Junior Seniors (aged 55-64), senior citizens, those having completed some college coursework, yearly religious service attendees, white-collar workers, retirees, and those not registered to vote.
- Missouri residents were slightly more willing than other adults across the country to allow schools to choose their own educational programs (67%-63%).

“Addressing” Public School Restrictions. In determining which public school is the best match for their children, parents generally have little say in the decision. Missourians, as a whole, do not find this situation acceptable. After hearing that, *“currently, children attending public schools are assigned to the school they attend by the school district based on where they live. Some have suggested, however, that parents should have the option to send their children to a number of different public schools, with no additional cost, based on which is the best match for the child,”* **56% of respondents believed that “allowing the parent to choose from a number of public schools” was the more desirable option.** By comparison, 38% preferred the status quo of “assigning students to one public school based on where they live.”

- Though when taken as a whole, parents did not differ much from the overall results, many parent sub-groups separated themselves from the pack. Those most likely to clamor for choice included single parents generally (82%) and single moms specifically (78%), divorced parents (68%), and those whose children attended private schools (64%).
- Others more likely than most to support giving parents the option of choosing from a number of different public schools when deciding where to send their child were those earning \$30,000-\$49,999 per year, Blacks, 18-44 year olds, high school graduates, blue-collar workers, those who work outside the home just part-time or not at all, the unemployed, students, registered Independents, and those not registered to vote.
- Those more likely than respondents overall to believe assigning each child to one school based on his or her address was the superior method included those earning greater than \$90,000 per year, Junior Seniors, senior citizens, Missourians who had completed some college, Catholics, retirees, and registered Democrats.
- As the nearby chart demonstrates, Show Me State residents were decidedly less enthusiastic about this aspect of school choice than their national counterparts: 56% of Missourians supported giving parents the option to pick from multiple public schools compared to 69% of adults nationwide, and 38% were in favor of assigning children to a single public school based on address compared to just 24% of other Americans.



Serious Situations, Difficult Decisions. At the core of the alternative education movement is the fundamental right of parents to educate their child at the public school that best meets the child’s needs. Parents need a reprieve from the bureaucratic entanglements that effectively force some of them to send their children to public schools which are unable to fully address the children’s unique strengths and weaknesses.

The situations that may lead a parent or guardian to remove a child from a school encapsulate a wide range of possible scenarios. In order to evaluate these situations, respondents were asked to imagine a child they knew or cared for in each of nine common situations and individually evaluate the likelihood that such a circumstance would lead them to pull that child from a particular school.

Each interviewee was asked to consider each hypothetical situation separately, which were rotated to avoid order bias. What follows is an analysis of all nine situations, rank-ordered from highest to lowest in terms of the number of respondents who would transfer a child after learning that information about his or her school.

Parental Threshold

Question: Please think for a moment about the public schools in your area. For each of the following statements, please tell me whether knowing this fact would make you very, somewhat, just a little bit or not at all likely to move your child out of that school after learning this information. If you do not currently have children, please imagine a niece, nephew or child of a friend...

- The child feels unsafe while at school.
- The school is not meeting the standardized test score requirements set by the government.
- You are not able to regularly communicate with the teachers.
- The school building and facilities are not well-maintained or in need of repair.
- The child is performing poorly academically.
- The child expresses an interest in changing schools.
- There is negative media coverage of the school.
- Other parents are transferring their children to different schools.
- There are not enough after-school activities.

I. “The child feels unsafe while at school.” 79% Likely to Transfer

Recognizing that children cannot possibly learn and grow in a place they fear for their safety, Missourians refuse to send children to a school where they feel threatened. **In fact, nearly eight-in-ten (79%) of respondents would transfer a child out of a school where he or she felt unsafe and 60% would be “very likely” to do so.** Fewer than two-in-ten (18%) did not believe this circumstance warranted action.

- Non-parents were more likely than their child-rearing counterparts to declare they would remove a child from a school where he or she felt insecure (85%-77%). Parent groups most likely to transfer included single parents and those whose children attended religious institutions (each 91% likely).
- Groups more likely than most to transfer a child who felt unsafe included those earning less than \$30,000 per year or \$50,000-\$69,999 per year, Blacks, urban dwellers, respondents who had completed some college, yearly religious service attendees, white-collar, blue-collar, and part-time workers, and students.

- Amongst Whites, likelihood of transfer trended downward as the respondents aged. Amongst Blacks, however, those most apt to transfer were at the bookends of the age spectrum—18-34 year olds and those aged 55 years or older.
- Missouri respondents agreed with others across the nation that a child feeling unsafe at school was a clear reason to move him or her to a different school (79%-78%).

II. “The school is not meeting the standardized test score requirements set by the government.” 66% Likely to Transfer

While not always the most accurate way to judge the quality of a school, standardized testing scores are certainly one of the easiest and most scrutinized. **Two-thirds (66%) of Missourians felt the failure of a child’s school to meet the score requirements set by the government was reason enough to move a child out of that school, with 38% of them believing so with intensity.** Less than half that many (29%) were not convinced that low test scores required parental intervention.

- Parents were eight-points more likely than non-parents to deem this situation justification to remove a child from his or her present school (68%-60%), with single moms (84%), divorced parents (73%), those raising one child (73%), and those whose children attended private (72%) or religious (81%) schools leading the charge.
- Those most inclined to feel a failure to meet testing requirements warranted transfer included those earning between \$50,000 and \$69,999 or more than \$90,000 per year, Blacks (most notably Blacks aged 45 or older), urbanites, 35-54 year olds, white-collar and blue-collar workers, and the unemployed.
- While registered Republicans and Democrats as a whole basically mirrored the responses of respondents overall, within the two parties there were noticeable divides: Republican women were 13-points more likely than Republican men to transfer (75%-62%), and Democrat women were 11-points more likely than Democrat men to do the same (69%-58%). There was not a significant difference between male and female Independents.
- Missourians were even with Americans overall in their resolve to transfer a child out of a school not meeting test score requirements (66%-65%).

III. “You are not able to regularly communicate with the teachers.” 65% Likely to Transfer

Most parents are not able to personally monitor the hours their children spend at school. As such, they rely on regular reports from the child’s teacher to ensure that any issues are promptly addressed and any problems handled. **So vital is this communication, that 65% of Missouri respondents would remove a child from a school where it was lacking with 38% certain to do so.** By comparison, 31% of respondents did not feel difficulty tracking down a child’s teacher justified moving the child to another school.

- Parents clearly placed higher emphasis on regular contact with a child’s teacher than non-parents (67% of parents would transfer vs. 57% of non-parents). Among the parent groups who were most adamant about their intention to transfer included those whose children attended religious schools (82%), single parents (80%), and those with one child (73%).
- Other groups most likely to remove a child from a school with inaccessible educators included those earning \$30,000-\$69,999 per year or greater than \$90,000 per year, Blacks, urban dwellers, white-collar workers, those who worked outside the home part-time or not at all, students, and self-identified liberals.
- Among Blacks, those most likely to transfer in this circumstance were those earning greater than \$50,000 per year. Among Whites, however, those earning \$30,000-\$49,999 were most apt to take this action.
- Residents of the Show Me State did not prioritize an open line of communication with school teachers as highly as did their national counterparts (65%-70%).

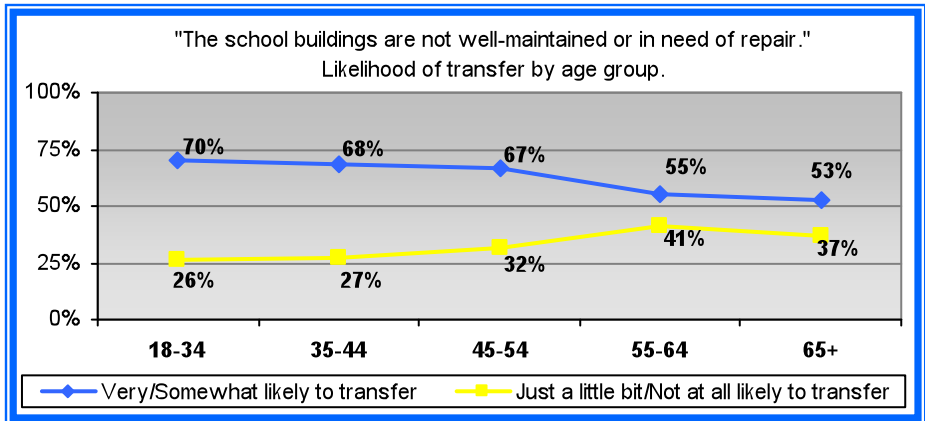
***IV. “The school building and facilities are not well-maintained or in need of repair.”
65% Likely to Transfer***

Just as Missourians wouldn’t want to live in a home or work in an office that was falling into ruin, neither do they want their children to go to school in such a place. **In fact, 65% of respondents declared their intention to transfer a child out of a school that was in obvious need of maintenance or repair.** This is more than twice the number who did not feel crumbling buildings and leaky roofs justified such an action.

While a majority of Missourians would move a child out of a school that had issues with maintenance, the intensity of that majority was decidedly mixed. While 30% indicated they would be “very likely” to transfer a child in this situation, 35% were just “somewhat likely.”

- Parents and non-parents were about even in their assessment of the situation (65%-64%). Parents whose children attended private (73%) or religious (74%) institutions, divorced parents (70%), and those raising school-aged children (70%) were the parent groups most likely to take action.
- Demographic groups more inclined than most to move a child out of a school that had not been well-maintained were those earning less than \$30,000 per year or between \$50,000 and \$69,999 per year, Blacks, 18-34 year olds, Missourians who had completed some college, those who attended religious services a few times per year, white-collar workers, those who worked outside the home part-time or not at all, students, and self-identified moderates.

- There was an interesting trend across the age spectrum: as the nearby chart demonstrates, the older the respondent, the less likely he or she was to remove a child from a school in need of repair.



- Respondents hailing from Missouri were slightly less likely (though still within the margin of error) than respondents nationwide to be concerned by school buildings needing repair (65%-68%).

V. "The child is performing poorly academically." 51% Likely to Transfer

While most would probably agree that a child's poor academic performance was a problem to be addressed, Missourians were not absolutely certain that changing the child's school was the best remedy. **A very slight majority (51%) deemed the situation a compelling reason for transfer, but only 23% would be "very likely" to take action while 28% would be just "somewhat."** A sizeable 39% did not feel a child's poor performance reason enough for him or her to switch schools and 29% of them noted they would be "not at all" likely to transfer.

- Though the difference was within the margin of error, non-parents were slightly more likely to feel compelled to transfer a child who was having difficulty in school (54%-51%). Single parents generally (76%), single moms specifically (72%), and those whose children attended private (60%) or religious (62%) institutions were among the part groups most likely to take action in this situation.
- Groups more likely than average to believe a child's poor academic performance justified transferring the child to a different school included women, those earning \$30,000-\$49,999 or greater than \$90,000 per year, Blacks, 18-34 year olds, Catholics, those attending religious services on a yearly basis, white-collar workers, those who work outside the home part-time or not at all, Missourians not registered to vote, and self-identified moderates.
- Those more apt than respondents overall to say they would not transfer a child who was not doing well in school included men, those earning \$70,000-\$89,999 per year, rural residents, 35-44 year olds, those attending weekly religious services, and students.
- Missourians were similar to other adults in the country in their likelihood to remove a child from a school where he or she was performing poorly (51%-53%).

VI. “The child expresses an interest in changing schools.” 48% Likely to Transfer

Though not completely deaf to the wishes of their children, neither do Missourians feel compelled to act on their children’s every whim. **Less than half of respondents (48%) would be likely to move a child out of a school as a result of the child expressing interest in doing so.** The intensity of these respondents was notably lacking as just 16% would be “very likely” to transfer compared to 32% who would be just “somewhat.” A strong 44% noted they would not move the child to another school, with 30% declaring themselves “not at all” likely.

- While parents and non-parents were even in their evaluation of a child’s judgment (49% of each group would be likely to transfer), some parent groups were more inclined to consider the child’s wishes—most notably those without the assistance of a co-parent including single parents generally (73%), single moms specifically (66%), and divorced parents (63%). Those whose children attended private (60%) or religious schools (64%) were also more likely to consider transferring a child who expressed interest in changing schools.
- Those more likely than respondents overall to report being likely to transfer a child who wished to change schools included Blacks, urban dwellers, 18-34 year olds, those with less than a high school education, Catholics, white-collar and part-time workers, the unemployed, students, those not registered to vote, and self-identified moderates.
- Some groups were more apt than most to assert they would not transfer a child in this situation including those earning \$50,000-\$69,999 per year, rural residents, Protestants, executives, and self-identified liberals.
- While Republican and Independent women were more likely than the men in their respective parties to consider the child’s wishes in this situation, Democrat men were more likely than Democrat women to do the same.
- Embracing the idea that parents know best, Missouri respondents were less likely than other Americans to transfer a child at the child’s behest—48% of Missourians would move the child and 44% would not, while 53% of national respondents would move the child and just 38% would not.

VII. “There is negative media coverage of the school.” 37% Likely to Transfer

Perhaps wearied by the recent spate of media mistakes and retractions, Missourians do not seem to hold the press in very high regard. A majority of respondents (54%) would not remove a child from a school that was receiving negative media attention and 37% claimed they were “not at all” likely to do so. **In fact, the number of Missourians most certain in the assertion that they would not act on the advice of the press equaled the total number who would: 37% of respondents reported they would transfer a child out of such a school, but only 12% of them did so with intensity.**

- Non-parents revealed themselves to be more susceptible to the sensationalism of the media than their child-rearing counterparts (42%-36% likely to transfer). Divorced parents (43%) and those whose children attended religious schools (54%) were the only parent groups significantly more likely than respondents overall to transfer a child from a school criticized in the press.
- Those more likely than respondents overall to be concerned by negative press coverage of their child's school included those earning \$50,000-\$69,999 per year, Blacks, 18-34 year olds, those who seldom or never attend religious services, white-collar workers, and those who work outside the home part-time or not at all.
- Groups more inclined than most to believe negative press coverage did not justify transfer included those earning \$30,000-\$49,000 or \$70,000-\$89,999 per year, 35-44 year olds, college graduates, respondents who attend weekly religious services, the unemployed, students, and registered Democrats (female Dems in particular).
- The Show Me State evidently regards the media with significantly lower esteem than does the rest of the country, as only 37% of Missourians would transfer a child from a school receiving negative media coverage versus 48% of adults across the nation (53% of Missourians *would not* transfer compared to 42% of Americans overall).

***VIII. "Other parents are transferring their children to different schools."
32% Likely to Transfer***

Community cohesion and collective action therein is one thing but, "monkey see, monkey do" among parents is a different "creature" all together. This may explain why **only 32% of Missourians say they would be likely to transfer a child out of a school from which other parents were doing the same (with a meager 9% "very likely" to do so).** Nearly twice that many, 61% claim they would not be influenced by this "parental peer pressure" with 49% doing so with marked intensity. Whether Missourians really care so little for the opinions of other parents or simply do not want to admit looking to others when making decisions about their own lives is hard to say, but clearly the argument that "everybody's doing it" would not be a winner in the Show Me State.

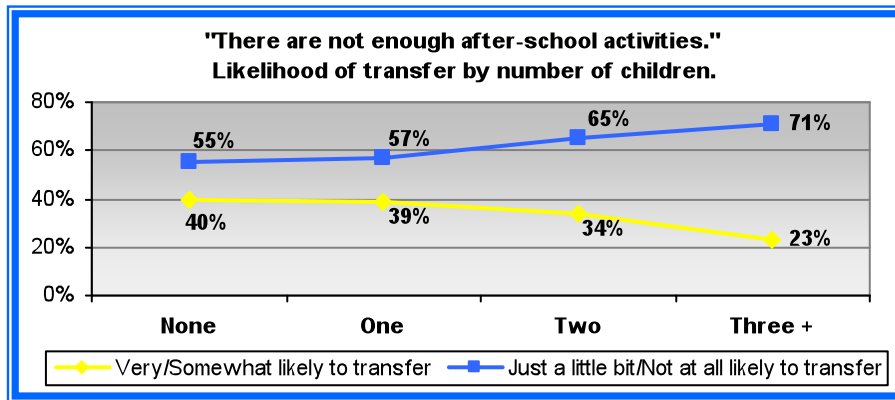
- Parents and non-parents were fairly even in their likelihood to follow the lead and transfer a child in this circumstance (32%-34%). Divorced parents (46%) and those whose children attended private (44%) or religious (42%) schools were the only parent groups to notably distinguish themselves from respondents overall.
- Groups more likely than most to take under advisement the actions and opinions of other parents included those earning \$30,000-\$49,999 per year, Blacks, suburbanites, Junior Seniors, respondents who had completed some college coursework, Catholics, white-collar workers, those who stay at home, students, and self-identified moderates.
- Respondents more inclined to report other parents transferring children would not impact their own decision included 35-44 year olds, seniors, those with less than a high school education, executives, the unemployed, and registered Democrats.

- Missourians were less likely than other adults in the country to bow to this “parental peer pressure” as just 32% deemed other parents transferring their children a justification to transfer their own, compared to 39% of Americans generally (61% of Missourians did not believe transfer was called for in this situation versus 53% of adults across the nation).

IX. “There are not enough after-school activities.” 32% Likely to Transfer

By a margin of 2:1, Missourians declared that a lack of after-school activities was not a compelling reason to transfer a child to another school. **While 64% noted they would not be likely to transfer under these circumstances (and 50% “not at all likely”), just 32% reported they would be likely to do so (but only 8% of them “very likely”).** Respondents were not necessarily negating the value or importance of extra-curricular pursuits, they simply do not believe the absence of them justifies an action as drastic as pulling a child out of school.

- Those without children were 10-points more likely than those with them to remove a child from a school lacking after-school activities (40%-30%). In fact, as the nearby chart demonstrates, as the number of children a respondent had increased, his or her likelihood to transfer decreased.

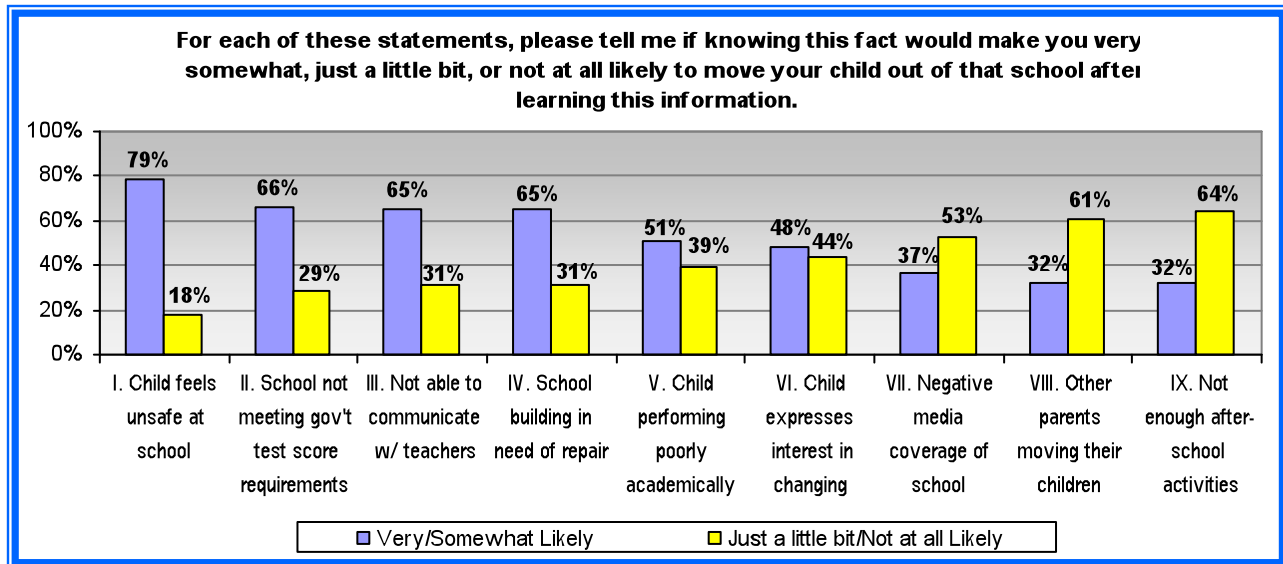


- Parent groups most apt to move a child to another school in this situation were those without a co-parent to share in childcare duties: divorced and single parents (40% and 38%, respectively). Those whose children attended private or religious institutions were also more likely than most to transfer (45%).
- Groups more likely than most to believe this situation warranted transfer included those earning \$70,000-\$89,999 per year, Blacks, urbanites, 18-34 year olds, respondents having completed some college, Catholics, yearly religious service attendees, white-collar workers, those who stay at home, the unemployed, registered Democrats, and self-identified liberals.
- Those more likely than respondents overall to reject the notion that a dearth of after-hours programs justified moving a child to another school were rural residents, seniors, respondents with less than a high school education, college graduates, Protestants, part-time workers, retirees, registered Republicans and self-identified conservatives.

- Respondents to the Missouri survey placed significantly lower emphasis on after-school activities than did their national counterparts: just 32% of Missourians would remove a child from a school lacking these programs compared to 43% of Americans overall and 64% of Missourians *would not* transfer compared to just 51% of adults nationwide.

As the nearby chart demonstrates, Missourians seemed to arrange the nine situations into four basic groups:

- **Urgent Action Required (I):** 79% Transfer Rate. The threat to the child’s personal safety necessitates immediate attention.
- **High Importance (II-IV):** 66%-65% Transfer Rate. A failure of the child’s current school to meet his or her needs that can be attributed specifically to that school.
- **To Be Considered (V-VI):** 51%-48% Transfer Rate. The source of the problem may be external to the child’s specific school and may persist even after a child switches schools.
- **Non-Critical (VII-IX):** 37%-32% Transfer Rate. The perceived influence of these situations on the child’s ability to get a quality education is small.



Finding the Message to Transform Apathy into Action. Though two words may share the same basic definition, their accompanying associations and connotations can potentially be very different. That is why devising a clear-cut message that both informs and inspires is so important to the Charter School movement.

In order to uncover the fine distinctions that will convert those sitting on the sidelines into active contributors, respondents were asked to evaluate nine “buzz” words attached to the alternative education movement and indicate whether they would feel favorably or unfavorably towards a public school that emphasized the concept.

Every respondent evaluated each of the nine terms, which were rotated to avoid any order bias. Following are analyses of each term, rank ordered from highest to lowest by “favorability.”

Level of Impact of “Buzz” Words

Question: I am now going to read to you a list of descriptive terms. For each, please tell me if you would feel favorable or unfavorable towards a public school that emphasized it.

“ACCOUNTABILITY”

“STANDARDS”

“INNOVATION”

“OPTIONS”

“CHOICE”

“FREEDOM”

“REGULATION”

“CONTROL”

“AUTONOMY”

I. “ACCOUNTABILITY” 92% Favorable

It is imperative to Missourians that schools be required to answer for the performance (or lack thereof) of their students. **An overwhelming 92% of respondents indicated they would feel favorably towards a public school emphasizing the concept of “accountability,” with 75% feeling “strongly” so.** A minute 5% would feel unfavorably—just barely above the survey’s margin of error.

- There were virtually no distinctions in the assessment of “accountability” either between parents and non-parents or within the parental subgroups.
- While the term enjoyed near universal appeal, there were some groups more likely than the rest to embrace the notion of “accountability” including 35-44 year olds, those who attend religious services a few times per year, part-time workers, students, and registered Republicans.
- While “accountability” enjoyed the support of 90% or more of members of all three political parties, within the ranks of each party there was a noticeable gender divide: Republican men were 4-points more likely than Republican women and male Democrats were 13-points more likely than female Dems to favor “accountability,” while Independent women were 6-points more apt than Independent men to do the same.
- Missourians agreed with other adults across the nation in their positive assessment of a school emphasizing “accountability” (both 92% favorable).

II. “STANDARDS” 89% Favorable

Not willing to accept a laissez-faire approach to education of their children, respondents were quick to embrace a school emphasizing “standards.” **Nearly nine-in-ten Missourians reported they would feel favorably towards a school prioritizing the concept with 67% of them feeling so “strongly.”** By comparison, just 6% of respondents did not share the majority’s enthusiasm.

- An impressive 96% of single parents and a whopping 100% of single moms would look favorably upon such a school, with those whose children attended private schools (95%) not far behind. There was no perceptible difference of opinion between parents overall and non-parents.
- Those most apt to look upon a school embracing “standards” with favor were those earning greater than \$70,000 per year, Blacks (a stunning 100%), 18-34 year olds, those attending religious services on a yearly basis, and students.
- Residents of the Show Me State matched the favorability rating of “standards” of their nationwide counterparts (89%-90%).

III. “INNOVATION” 86% Favorable

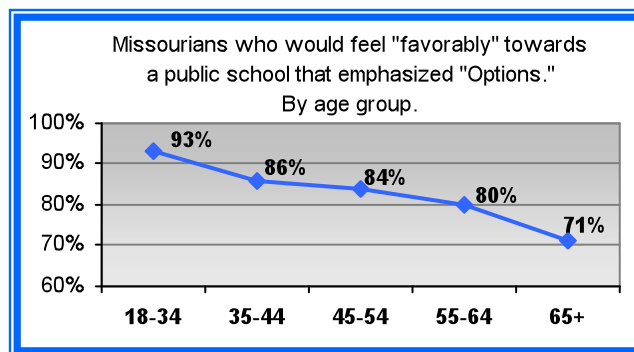
Cognizant that the methods of the past are not necessarily the best methods for the future, Missourians were clearly open to new and creative ideas in education. **Nearly nine-in-ten (86%) respondents would favor a school that embraced “innovation” and 58% with marked intensity.** Just 5% did not look kindly on change. Though not willing to relax their standards and insistent that schools be accountable for student achievement, respondents welcomed “outside the box” thinking in the public school system.

- Non-parents felt more favorably than their child-rearing counterparts towards a school emphasizing “innovation” (92%-85%). Parents raising their kids without the assistance of a partner, including divorced (92%) and single (96%) parents were the only notable parent groups more likely than respondents overall to react positively towards the concept.
- Groups most inclined to embrace “innovation” were those earning \$70,000-\$89,999 per year, Blacks (most notably Blacks aged 35-64 and those earning greater than \$30,000 per year), college graduates, those attending religious services a few times per year, students, and self-identified liberals.
- Those hailing from Missouri regarded a school emphasizing “innovation” equally with Americans overall (both 86%).

IV. "OPTIONS" 85% Favorable

Clear in their pronouncement that education is not a "one-size-fits-all" undertaking, Missourians were strongly behind the idea of "options." **By a margin of more than 9:1, respondents would look favorably on a public school incorporating the concept (85%-9%).** What's more, over half of respondents (52%) reported they would feel "strongly" favorably towards such a school.

- Non-parents felt significantly more favorably towards the concept of "options" in education than did those with children (91%-83%). Single parents (93%) were the only parent group more inclined to favor "options" than respondents overall.
- Groups responding more positively than most to a school embracing "options" included Blacks, 18-34 year olds, yearly religious service attendees, blue-collar workers, the unemployed, students, registered Independents (Independent women especially), and self-identified liberals.
- An interesting trend emerged across the age spectrum; as the nearby chart demonstrates, the older a respondent grew, the less likely he or she was to favor "options."
- Missourians again agreed with the evaluation of adults nationwide in their rating of "options" (both 85%).



V. "CHOICE" 83% Favorable

The purpose of message testing is to uncover the nuanced differences between words that seem to be interchangeable. "Choice" and "options" are two such words and in this particular instance, there was little perceptible disparity either in topline results or demographic analysis. **Overall, 83% of Missourians would feel favorably towards a school emphasizing "choice," and 51% of them would do so "strongly."** By comparison, just 7% would feel "unfavorably."

- Respondents without children were more likely than their child-rearing cohorts to favor "choice" (89%-81%). Divorced (90%) and single parents (91%) were among the parent groups more inclined than most to look positively upon "choice."
- Those more likely than respondents overall to favor "choice" in education included Missourians earning \$30,000-\$49,999 per year, Blacks, urban dwellers, 18-34 year olds, those attending religious services yearly, part-time workers, students, registered Independents, those not registered to vote, and self-identified liberals.
- Respondents to the Missouri survey were about even with other adults in the country in their preference for a school emphasizing "choice" (83%-84%).

VI. “FREEDOM” 80% Favorable

Among the most cherished values of American society are the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. According to Missourians, liberty, or “freedom” should also be a highly valued concept in education. **In fact, eight-in-ten respondents (80%) would feel favorably towards a school emphasizing “freedom,” with 49% doing so with intensity.** Only slightly more than one-in-ten (11%) would feel unfavorably.

It is important to note that, while “freedom” enjoyed substantial support among Missourians, some of the reluctance to embrace it as unabashedly as other “buzz” words tested may stem from a worry that too much freedom, or freedom given to the wrong audience would counteract themes of accountability and standards. As such, the term should be clearly defined as relating to greater flexibility for schools and parents in their pursuit of educational goals.

- Perhaps having experienced the reality that too much “freedom” can lead to chaos, parents were less likely to embrace the term than non-parents (79%-86%). Only single parents (91%) and those who were divorced (89%) were more likely than most to favor “freedom” in education.
- While not significantly more likely than respondents overall to feel favorably towards the concept, parents whose children attended public schools (81%) were more supportive of the concept than those whose children attended either private (73%) or religious (67%) institutions.
- Other demographic groups more likely than respondents overall to embrace “freedom” included those earning \$70,000-\$89,999 per year, Blacks, 18-34 year olds, those attending religious services a few times per year, executives, students, and self-identified liberals.
- An interesting trend developed across the age spectrum: the older the respondent, the less likely he or she was to feel favorably towards a school emphasizing “freedom.” In fact, there was a twenty-point spread between the survey’s youngest (18-34: 89% Favorable) and oldest (65 and older: 69% Favorable) respondents.
- Those living in the Show Me State matched the favorability judgment of “freedom” of their nationwide counterparts (both 80%).

VII. “REGULATION” 78% Favorable

Though many view government regulations as impinging on their free will, others recognize their usefulness in keeping the peace or promoting the greater good. When it comes to public education, respondents want reassurance that their children will be given the tools they need to succeed in the real world. **More than three-quarters (78%) of Missourians reported they would look positively upon a school emphasizing “regulation”—seven-times the number who would feel unfavorably (11%).** The intensity of support was pronounced as 46% would “strongly” favor such a school. *Though favored by a 7:1 margin, “regulation” seems to be lacking the connection with Missourians that other “buzz” words enjoyed—for example, “standards,” a term closely matching “regulation” by definition, was favored by a margin of nearly 15:1.*

- Though still within the margin of error, non-parents were slightly more likely than those with children to favor “regulation.” Single parents (85%), especially single moms (91%), and those whose children attended religious schools (85%) were the parent groups most likely to embrace the concept.
- Others feeling more positively about “regulation” than average included those earning \$30,000-\$49,999 per year, Blacks, and respondents who did not work outside the home.
- Though “regulation” enjoyed majority support across all major demographic groups examined, there were a few groups more likely than most to look “unfavorably” upon a school prioritizing the idea including those earning greater than \$90,000 per year, respondents who report seldom or never attending religious services, white-collar workers, part-time workers, students, and self-identified liberals.
- Missourians did not regard “regulation” quite as positively as other Americans (78%-83%).

VIII. “CONTROL” 74% Favorable

If left to their own devices, many children may not reap all the benefits an education is intended to afford them. Missourians recognized the importance of a school exercising a certain level of “control” over its students, with 74% indicating they would feel favorably towards a school that emphasized it, with 43% feeling so “strongly.” By comparison, 16% would feel unfavorably. **Though still supported by a clear and sizeable majority, the term “control” doesn’t seem to have quite the punch that other terms have; in fact, more respondents reported they would feel unfavorably towards a school embracing “control” than any towards any other “buzz” word tested in the survey.**

- Parents and non-parents were even in their favorability rating of “control” (both 74%). Only those whose children attended religious institutions were significantly more likely than others to favor the term (80%).

- Those more apt than respondents overall to embrace the theme of “control” in public education included those earning \$30,000-\$49,999 per year, Blacks, those whose children attend religious services a few times per week or more, retirees, and those not registered to vote.
- Some were more hesitant than others to support the concept of “control” including those earning less than \$30,000 per year, part-time workers, the unemployed, and students.
- Missouri respondents felt nearly as favorably towards a school prioritizing “control” as other adults in the country (74%-76%).

IX. “AUTONOMY” 66% Favorable

Even as Missourians have demonstrated their acceptance of self-determination and a less bureaucratic educational system, this survey did not provide evidence that the word “autonomy” conveys these themes to them. **A notable two-thirds (66%) of respondents would feel favorably towards a school that emphasized “autonomy,” but this majority was decidedly split in its intensity. While 33% would feel “strongly” favorably toward a school that placed a focus on “autonomy,” a matching 33% would feel so just “somewhat.”** And, while the number of respondents rejecting the term was small (14%), the “favorables” outnumber the “unfavorables” by a margin of less than 5:1— which is comparatively low when examining the other terms tested.

Indeed, the reluctance to more fully embrace the term “autonomy” may have less to do with the unfavorably feelings it engenders than the confusion it causes. One-in-five respondents (19%) volunteered that they simply “did not know” when asked for their evaluation of “autonomy”—8-points higher than the number who said so in response to any other “buzz” word.

- Though parents and non-parents overall were statistically indistinguishable in their evaluations of “autonomy” (67%-68% favorable), some parent groups were more likely than most to embrace the idea including those divorced (76%) or single (81%)—single moms in particular (85%)—and parents whose children attended private schools (73%).
- Groups more likely than respondents overall to feel favorably towards “autonomy” in public education included those earning \$30,000-\$49,999 per year, Blacks, 18-34 year olds, yearly religious service attendees, executives, the unemployed, students, registered Independents (Independent women, in particular), and self-identified liberals.
- An interesting trend emerged across the education spectrum: the higher the level of education attained by a respondent, the more likely he or she was to feel favorably towards a school emphasizing “autonomy.”
- Though still within the margin of error, Missourians seemed a bit less favorable than Americans overall towards the term “autonomy” (66%-69%).

Conclusions

- **Missourians Need to Learn the ABC's of Charter Schools.** Just over one out of every five respondents knew that charters were public schools and nearly two out of every five had nothing to say when asked for their definitions and explanations of charter schools. While some of those that *did* respond to the open-ended question showed some insight into the basics of charter schools, for the most part they revealed a lack of true understanding. Perhaps more troubling is the fact that many ascribed values and principles to charters—such as a lack of standards and open only to the wealthy—which are the very opposite of what the schools actually embrace.
- **Meeting the Implicit Demand of “Show Me State” Adults Could Lead to Greater Acceptance of Charter School.** When given a straightforward definition of charter schools, nearly three-quarters of Missourians indicated their backing of the schools. However, while a clear majority of respondents would support the formation for charters, both the scope and intensity of this support was the lowest among all populations surveyed. On a brighter note, respondents seemed largely unconvinced by government data criticizing charters and willing to look to other sources for more reliable information.
- **Support for Flexible Curricula is Strong.** Missourians were solidly behind allowing schools to set their own education programs. This pillar of the charter school movement emerged as the most strongly supported charter principle among respondents. While majorities also advocated both performance-based pay and giving parents the opportunity to choose from a number of public schools when deciding where to send their children, the margins of approval were notably narrower.
- **Using “Outside the Box” Thinking but Respect Tradition.** Respondents proved they are open to innovative methods in pursuit of stronger, more effective schools, but with the strict provision that these institutions are held accountable for meeting government standards of student achievement.