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Poll: Likely Michigan voters support giving schools more of this

Posted by MNA Staff on August 15th, 2018

MICHIGAN — Nearly 70 percent of Michigan residents who participated in a June poll support a plan that would boost school funding, giving backers of that plan some strong ammunition as they look to influence the November elections.

"We need to make school funding an unavoidable issue in the current election cycle and beyond," said Wanda Cook-Robinson, superintendent of Oakland Schools, the intermediate school district for Oakland County.

Cook-Robinson is a member of the School Finance Research Collaborative, a bipartisan group of business and education experts aiming to ensure fair and equitable funding for schools across the state.

The group, formed in 2017, commissioned a first-of-its-kind study about school funding in Michigan that — when released earlier this year — called for the state to increase the base amount it spends per pupil to \$9,950, an increase of \$1,500.

Additional money was recommended for students who are more costly to educate, including special education students, high-poverty students, English language learners and students enrolled in career and technical education programs.

The base amount doesn't include transportation, food service and capital costs.

The statewide poll of 601 likely voters in the November general election — conducted from June 12-18 — found the following:

60% of poll participants said they supported the plan when given basic information about it.

Support rose to 67% when participants were given more information, particularly details about how the proposal would benefit the more costly-to-educate students.

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70% believe Michigan's schools are not adequately funded

63% said Michigan's current school funding system isn't fair.

Support for fixing Michigan's school funding system crossed partisan and geographic boundaries.

The poll results, "should be a wake up call to policymakers on both sides of the aisle, and anyone running for elected office," Cook-Robinson said. She hopes the study and its recommendations will be used "as a road map for a new, fair school funding system."

"The timing is right now for this to be part of the election dialogue," said Matt Gillard, CEO of Michigan's Children and also a member of the school finance group.

The results had an overall margin of error of plus or minus four percentage points, said Ethan Smith of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, which conducted the poll.

Michael Addonizio, professor of education policy studies at Wayne State University and a member of the group, said the poll results make it clear Michigan residents see the current system as "failing our students."

Per-pupil funding varies widely in the state. In metro Detroit, for instance, a number of districts and charter schools received the bottom amount of \$7,631 during the 2017-18 school year and the two highest-funded districts — Birmingham Public Schools and Bloomfield Hills Schools — received slightly more than \$12,000 per pupil.

"Michiganders want a new school funding approach that meets the wide ranging ... unique needs of all students," Addonizio said.

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