

Poll: Michigan voters favor investment in children even if taxes increase

By Tracie Mauriello Sep 20, 2021, 7:36pm EDT



Michigan voters are willing to pay higher taxes for more investment in children, according to a new poll commissioned by Michigan's Children and The Skillman Foundation.

Valaurian Waller / Bridge Detroit

Most Michigan voters want more investment in children even if it means higher taxes, according to a [new poll](#).

Respondents most want to see more spending on career exposure, job training, skill building, mental health resources, child care, expanded learning time, and programs to reduce the number of youth in the criminal justice system.

[Lake Research Partners](#) surveyed 800 likely voters. The poll was commissioned by the nonprofit advocacy group [Michigan's Children](#) and the Detroit philanthropy [The Skillman Foundation](#), a [Chalkbeat funder](#).

The organizations presented the findings Monday at the Detroit Regional Chamber's annual Mackinac Policy Conference.

Policymakers and politicians have been trying for years to increase funding for schools. Despite recent gains, the state still falls well short of what researchers say is necessary to provide adequate education.

But 62% of respondents said they favor more investment in children, and 58% said they would favor it even if their taxes go up. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.46%.

"It's one thing to say investing in kids is great," said Angelique Power, The Skillman Foundation's new president and CEO. "It's another when you say, 'Yes, you can raise my taxes.' That was shocking to me."

There is a consensus among Michigan voters that the state isn't doing enough for its children, said pollster Celinda Lake.

Michigan voters feel more strongly about improving equity and equality than residents of other states, said Lake, who has conducted similar polls in other parts of the country.

"Michigan really wants to provide opportunity to every child, and that really unites rural Michigan and Detroit, suburban Michigan and Grand Rapids," she said. "It's a really unifying theme across the state, and it's stronger in Michigan than it is nationwide."

The poll was conducted a month after the state Legislature's approval of a landmark school funding bill that brought education spending to record levels with the biggest boost going to historically underfunded schools. It also came as Michigan began spending \$6 billion in federal COVID relief funds being disbursed over three years.

That makes the poll results even more remarkable, Power said.

"Michiganders are insightful about those dollars, and they understand they don't begin to address the deeper needs that will take a longer period of time and will take more investment," she said. They see the new funding as "a short-term fix to a long-term problem," she said.

Majority support for investment in children held across demographic groups.

"There are not many issues where you'll see across the geographic spectrum of Michigan that you'll see support for one type of investment or one particular area of focus, so this is very encouraging," Gillard told policy conference attendees in a ballroom at the Grand Hotel.

Power, the Skillman Foundation president and CEO, agreed.

"Despite polarizing times, Michiganders across race, ethnicity, gender, economics, and geography are loudly saying we must invest in all children," she said. "To me, this isn't a

request but a full-throated mandate.”

Pollsters were not immediately able to provide a data breakdown by political party on Monday but Gillard said Republicans were far less likely than Democrats to support tax increases to invest in children.

“The political divide exists in Michigan just like it does everywhere else,” said Gillard, a former Democratic state representative. “When you talk about public investment you’re going to see higher levels of support from Democrats.”

Overall, 87% percent of respondents said they are concerned about children falling behind in school because of the pandemic, 82% are concerned about children living in households that struggle to afford basic needs, 81% are concerned about children’s exposure to trauma in their homes and communities, 79% are concerned about children’s mental health, and 78% are concerned that not every child is getting the learning support they need.

Responding to these needs could reduce abuse and neglect, better prepare students for the workforce, improve the state economy, improve mental health, and reduce racial and economic inequality, respondents told pollsters.

“Voters can envision a brighter future for our state and Michigan’s economic prosperity if we start making wise investments in the next generation of citizens today,” Gillard said. “This is a message ringed with urgency and hope to improve prospects and outcomes for all Michigan’s children.”

Gillard and Power expect the poll results to inform public policy decisions and shape the work of advocacy groups such as Launch Michigan, which recently released its own poll showing most Michigan residents believe schools are underfunded.

They know it won’t be as easy to find consensus on where to target investments in children.

“That’s where I hope we can build from this survey and build this conversation ... but it’s important to everybody so we’ve got to figure it out,” Gillard said. “The fact that people understand ... that it’s going to take some self-sacrifice for us to solve these issues, I think can be a game changer in a lot of political discussions.”