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NEW STATEWIDE POLLING SHOWS WISCONSIN DEMOCRATS HUNGRY FOR STRONGER EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY – AND FAR MORE OPEN TO SCHOOL CHOICE THAN THE PARTY'S CURRENT DIRECTION SUGGESTS

Wisconsin voters support school choice by a 2-to-1 margin, and 80% say they are more likely to back a candidate who would hold all publicly funded schools accountable for outcomes

MILWAUKEE – A new statewide survey of 1,658 likely Wisconsin voters by City Forward Collective and CFC Action Fund finds Wisconsin voters deeply concerned about the performance of the state's public schools and ready to support candidates who treat accountability and outcomes as the central education issue heading into the 2026 election cycle.

"Wisconsin voters are sending a clear signal, and it isn't a partisan one," said Colleston Morgan Jr., CFC's Executive Director. "They want schools that prepare kids for real jobs and real futures. They want accountability: public dollars tied to public results. The candidate for office - Democrats and Republicans alike - who listen to this signal early, especially the ones still introducing themselves to primary voters, will have an opening to lead on an issue that matters to our state's future."

Half of voters statewide say the state provides too little K-12 funding. At the same time, 63% say Wisconsin's academic standards are too low, and 63% oppose the Department of Public Instruction's 2025 decision to update school report-card benchmarks. Just 26% of Wisconsin voters believe their public schools are doing a good job preparing students for jobs and careers.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Accountability is the highest-leverage education message tested.** 80% of Wisconsin voters say they are more likely to support a candidate for governor who would hold all publicly funded schools accountable for student outcomes. Only 6% say less likely.
- **Voters reject the lowering of academic standards.** 63% oppose DPI's 2025 decision to update school report card benchmarks, with 38% strongly opposed. Just 18% support the change.

- **Undecided Democrats more supportive of school choice.** Nearly half of Democratic primary voters have yet to pick a candidate, and 43% of undecided Democrats say they'd be more likely to support a candidate who backs school choice—compared to 37% of voters already committed to a candidate.
- **Wisconsin voters reject an abrupt elimination of parental choice programs.** A majority of Wisconsin voters support school choice. 57% of voters say they are more likely to support a candidate who supports school choice programs. By contrast, a candidate who supports an immediate elimination of the state's parental choice programs takes a 9-point net hit with voters.
- **Public charter school support surges after voters learn key facts.** Support for public charter schools specifically sits at 45% initially, but climbs to 60% once voters learn that charter schools are publicly funded, free, open to all students, and held accountable to academic standards.
- **Voters want the workforce question answered.** 93% of Wisconsin voters are concerned about whether students are being prepared for jobs in today's economy, and 92% are concerned about academic performance, both higher than concerns about funding or teacher pay.
- **The property tax backlash is real and statewide.** 61% of voters say their school property taxes are too high. The same voters who want more state K-12 investment are also signaling they have reached their limit on local tax burden.

Nearly half of likely Democratic primary voters remain undecided in the gubernatorial primary, and that undecided bloc is more open to school choice than voters who have already committed to a candidate. Among undecided Democrats, 43% say they would be more likely to support a candidate who backs school choice programs—compared to 37% of voters already committed to Hong, Barnes, or Rodriguez. Once provided information about public charter schools, support among undecided Democrats reaches 22%, though this trails the 29% support among committed Democratic voters. The gap suggests that education policy—particularly on school choice—could be a differentiating factor as candidates compete for the nearly half of Democratic primary voters still deciding which candidate to vote for in the August 11 primary.

ABOUT THE POLL

The survey was conducted by [Change Research](#) from April 24 through May 1, 2026, among 1,658 likely 2026 Wisconsin voters. The margin of error is plus or minus 2.5%.

City Forward Collective envisions a city where every Milwaukee child receives an excellent education that prepares them to thrive at a high-quality school of their choice. We advance our mission to secure Milwaukee's future through informing, engaging, and catalyzing transformation across Milwaukee's K12 school ecosystem.

Learn more about our work at www.cityforwardcollective.org

CFC Action Fund is a 501(c)(4) organization whose mission is to secure Milwaukee's future by electing champions and advancing policies to ensure that every Milwaukee child receives an excellent education at a high-quality school of their choice. For more information, visit our website at www.cfcactionfund.org

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