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To: Interested Parties

From: Celinda Lake, David Mermin, and Jeff Klinger; Lake Research Partners

Re: Pennsylvania Voters Support Restoring Funding for Public Schools[1]

Date: June 24, 2013

Executive Summary

- **Education and funding for public schools is the top issue that voters want the governor and state legislature to take action on**, along with economic development and jobs.
- Voters in Pennsylvania have a favorable impression of public schools in Pennsylvania, particularly schools in their own neighborhood, and **have serious concerns about cuts in funding to public schools.**
- Voters are concerned about increases in local property taxes. That said, voters **are supportive of new revenue from the state to fund public schools, even when it means increasing their own taxes**. Voters are more supportive of increasing their own taxes to restore public school funding when corporations share in the investment.
- After hearing arguments on both sides, **voters agree with an argument in favor of restoring funding for public schools by a 25-point margin** over an opposing argument that Pennsylvanians cannot afford a tax increase.

Key Findings

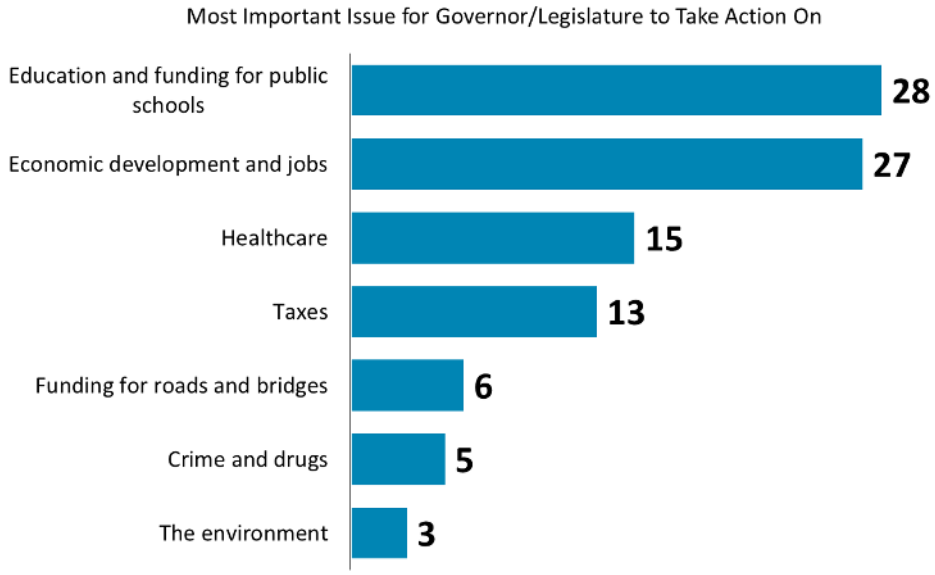
- **Nearly 8 in 10 (77%) voters are concerned about cuts in funding for public schools in Pennsylvania, including almost half of all voters (48%) who are very concerned.**
  - Concern about cuts in funding for public schools is even greater among women (85% concerned, 55% very concerned).

[1] On behalf of the Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center and Public Citizens for Children and Youth, Lake Research Partners conducted a telephone survey of 604 likely 2014 general election voters in Pennsylvania. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 4% and was conducted June 19-23, 2013.

- By a 21-point margin, voters have a favorable impression of public schools in Pennsylvania (56% favorable, 35% unfavorable). **Thinking about public schools in their own neighborhood, nearly 7 in 10 (69%) voters have a favorable impression.**

- Given a list of seven issues they might want the governor and state legislature to do something about, **voters rate education and jobs as their top two priorities**, with 28% and 27% rating them as their most important issue, respectively.

  - **Women rate education and funding for public schools as their highest priority** (30%), with jobs as 2nd most important (24%).



- **Voters' concern about funding for public schools has reached the point of a majority of them supporting proposals that would raise their own taxes in order to fund public schools. A majority of voters (55%) support a proposal that would include a small sales tax increase, combined with delaying a planned corporate tax cut[2].**

  - Nearly as strong is a proposal that only includes an increase in state income taxes[3], which has 54% support with 36% of voters opposed.

  - Support among women for both of these proposals is even stronger, 58% and 59% respectively.

[2] This proposal will restore one billion dollars in funding for public schools in Pennsylvania by increasing the sales tax rate from six percent to six and a quarter percent and delaying a planned corporate tax cut. This additional tax revenue will go into a dedicated trust, to be used only for funding public education in Pennsylvania.

[3] This proposal will restore one billion dollars in funding for public schools in Pennsylvania by increasing the state income tax rate from three point zero-seven percent to three point three percent. This additional tax revenue will go into a dedicated trust, to be used only for funding public education in Pennsylvania.

  - Both of these proposals stand up to attacks. After hearing arguments from both sides, voters continue to support these proposals (58% to 34% and 57% to 34% respectively).

- Even after hearing a statement against restoring funding for public schools, **voters prefer an argument for restoring funding by 25 points over one that argues Pennsylvanians cannot afford to raise taxes.**

  - **More than half (55%) agree more with an argument that schools are in crisis and action must be taken** to stop the layoffs, keep class sizes low, and end the need for school districts to continue to raise property taxes[4], compared to 30% who agree more with an argument that says Governor Corbett has already increased funding and Pennsylvanians cannot afford a billion dollar tax increase.[5]

    - Notably, 59% of women agree more with the argument in favor of restoring the school funding, compared to 23% who agree more with the opposing argument.

Voters in Pennsylvania are tax sensitive in the current economic climate, but a majority of voters view education as an issue that is too important to ignore. With thousands of public school employees being laid off across the state, schools closing, and class sizes going up, voters want to see action from Harrisburg. Voters have positive feelings toward public schools in Pennsylvania and are rightly concerned by funding cuts that jeopardize their children's and grandchildren's future.

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[4] Supporters of this proposal say Pennsylvania schools are in crisis. Across the state, 20,000 teacher and support staff positions have been eliminated in the past two years, while seventy percent of schools districts have raised property taxes at the same time. In Lancaster, libraries are being cut and class sizes are increasing. In Allentown, ninety-nine teachers were laid off this week. And seventy percent of school districts have had to increase class sizes since 2011. These are the consequences of cutting nearly one billion dollars from public schools over the past two years. We must restore this critical funding for our schools and for our children, the best long-term investment we can make.

[5] Opponents of this proposal say that we are facing tough budget decisions but education remains a top priority for Governor Corbett, who has increased education funding by one point two-five billion dollars since taking office. Separately, Pennsylvania received federal stimulus funding to support education three years ago. Now that the stimulus money is no longer available, tax and spend liberals are demanding that we raise taxes to permanently match those stimulus funds. We cannot afford that. While there have been lay-offs, the fact is that staffing levels are now back to pre-stimulus levels. We cannot afford a billion dollar tax increase on hardworking Pennsylvanians.