



5 JANUARY 2016

## Education Tops Public's Legislative Agenda for Second Straight Year

**E**ducation is still atop the voters' to do list for legislators, although the issue was seen as less pressing than it was last year. One-third of voters interviewed for this *Elway Poll* (33%) volunteered public education issues as the "most important" thing the legislature should be working on in the upcoming session. That is down from 42% year, but enough to keep education at the top of the public's agenda.

Economic concerns were close behind at 32%, the same percentage that named the economy last year. Either education or the economy have been named as the top issue in 9 of the last 10 years.

Taxes and spending, social services and transportation made up the second tier of issues voters think legislators should focus on. Social services issues jumped to 12% from 3% last year. Mention of taxes and spending issues decreased slightly since last year, as did mention of transportation issues.

The propensity to name education as the top legislative issue rose with respondents' own level of education, as well as with their income:

- From 32% of those with high school education to 40% of those with graduate degrees; and
- From 26% of those with incomes under \$50,000 to 42% with incomes over \$75,000.

Education was a relatively high priority for both Democrats and Republicans, but with markedly different amounts of emphasis:

- Democrats were *predominantly* concerned with education (44%) with the economy second (36%) and social services well back at #3 (18%).
- Independents' focus was similarly concentrated, but they had the economy #1 (33%) just ahead of education (30%), with taxes a distant third (14%).
- Republicans put equal emphasis on economy (24%), taxes (24%) and education (23%).
- 18% of Democrats named social services, compared to only 5% of Republicans; while
- 24% of Republicans named taxes, compared to only 7% of Democrats; and
- 14% of Republicans named government and spending, compared to only 2% of Democrats.

### FUNDING THE EDUCATION MANDATES

There is still no consensus on how to pay for public education increases. Survey respondents were presented with three funding strategies prior to the 2015 session and again this year. They were split on all three options, with no majority in support of, nor opposed to, any of the three. Just like last year. ►

### "MOST IMPORTANT" ISSUE FOR THE LEGISLATURE: 2006-2016

Cell entries are % who volunteered an issue in that category.

Shading indicates the top-ranked issue for that year.

	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
Education	33%	42%	19%	22%	27%	14%	11%	15%	20%	31%	23%
Economy	32%	32%	46%	43%	59%	44%	49%	43%	18%	15%	16%
Taxes	14%	19%	14%	12%	12%	12%	10%	6%	15%	11%	17%
Social Services	12%	3%	4%	5%	4%	3%	6%	9%	5%	4%	8%
Gov't /Budget	12%	15%	17%	24%	41%	30%	25%	23%	7%	12%	18%
Transportation	11%	17%	8%	2%	5%	5%	2%	10%	33%	20%	20%
Public Safety	5%	4%	1%	*	1%	1%	5%	1%	3%	3%	5%
Health Care	6%	7%	11%	4%	12%	13%	14%	10%	16%	13%	15%
Environment	5%	6%	2%	2%	*	1%	1%	1%	6%	5%	4%

# Sample Profile

500 registered voters, selected at random from voter lists in Washington state, were interviewed Dec 28-30, 2015 by live, professional interviewers. 21% of the interviews were conducted on cell phones. The margin of sampling error is ±4.5% at the 95% level of confidence. This means, in theory, had this same survey been conducted 100 times, the results would be within ±4.5% of the results reported here at least 95 times.

## REGION

King County .....	30%
Pierce/Kitsap .....	14%
No. Puget Sound .....	17%
Western WA .....	20%
Eastern WA .....	20%

## GENDER

Male .....	47%
Female .....	53%

## PARTY IDENTIFICATION

Democrat .....	34%
Republican .....	22%
Independent .....	44%

## AGE

18-35 .....	8%
36-50 .....	20%
51-64 .....	40%
65+ .....	31%

## EDUCATION LEVEL

High School or Less .....	17%
Some College / Voc-Tech .....	26%
College Degree .....	35%
Graduate School .....	20%

## HOUSEHOLD INCOME

<\$50,000 .....	26%
\$50-75,000 .....	23%
\$75-100,000 .....	17%
\$100,000+ .....	22%
No Answer .....	12%

## VOTE HISTORY

0 votes in last 4 elections .....	11%
1-2 votes .....	35%
3 votes .....	20%
4 votes .....	34%

# The Elway Poll

The Elway Poll is an independent, non-partisan analysis of public opinion in Washington and the Northwest.

**PROPRIETARY QUESTIONS:** Each quarter, space is reserved in the questionnaire to allow for proprietary questions. The fee for proprietary questions is \$1000 per question. You will receive the results of your question(s) with full crosstabulations within two days after the interviews are completed.

The Elway Poll  
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► The three options were:

- 1) Doing as much as possible for education without deep cuts to other programs and without raising taxes;
- 2) Funding education first, then funding the rest of state government with remaining revenue;
- 3) Increasing taxes as necessary to fund the mandates without cutting other programs.

For each option, respondents were asked if they:

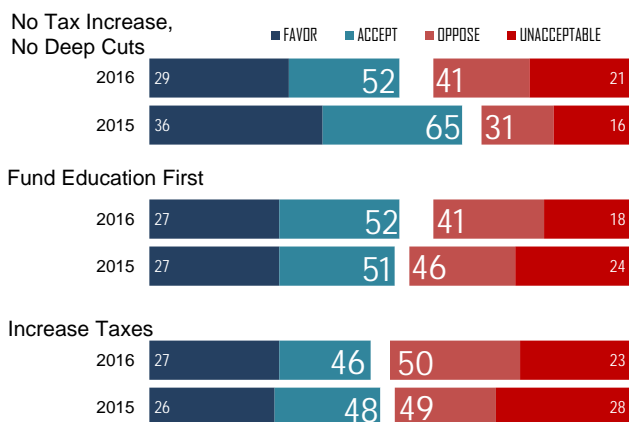
- 1) favored that approach; 2) found it acceptable;
- 3) opposed it; or 4) found it unacceptable.

The only significant movement since last year was the erosion of support for the “no cuts/no taxes” option, which dropped from 65% to 52% finding it at least acceptable.

There may be a solution in here somewhere: 87% found one or more options to be “acceptable” and 50% said two or more were acceptable; while only 8% opposed all three.

These findings indicate that voters are open to solutions to a problem they have been pointing to for a long time. But they are not going lead the way.

## FUNDING THE EDUCATION MANDATES



### QUESTION WORDING:

One of the issues the legislature will face is public education. There are two mandates for public education that must be dealt with. First, the State Supreme Court ruled that the state is not fully funding basic education, and must do so. Second, voters passed an initiative last year to reduce class size in public schools. Paying for both of these mandates would add at least \$3.5 billion dollars to the state budget.

The following are some general approaches being proposed. As I read each one, tell me whether you would: 1) be inclined to Favor that approach; 2) think it could be Acceptable; 3) be inclined to Oppose that approach; or 4) find it Unacceptable. I realize you don't have all the details, but how are you inclined? The first one is...

- 1) Fund public education first with existing revenue. Then fund the rest of state government with the money remaining - even if that means cutting other programs and services.
- 2) Increase taxes necessary to fund the supreme court and voter mandates to reduce class size without making further cuts to other programs and services
- 3) Do as much as possible to fund education and reduce class sizes without raising taxes and without deep cuts to other programs -- even if that means we do not fully fund education or reduce class sizes to the levels in the voter initiative.