

To: In the Public Interest & the Center for Popular Democracy

From: GBA Strategies

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## Illinois Charter School Reform Poll

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### Introduction

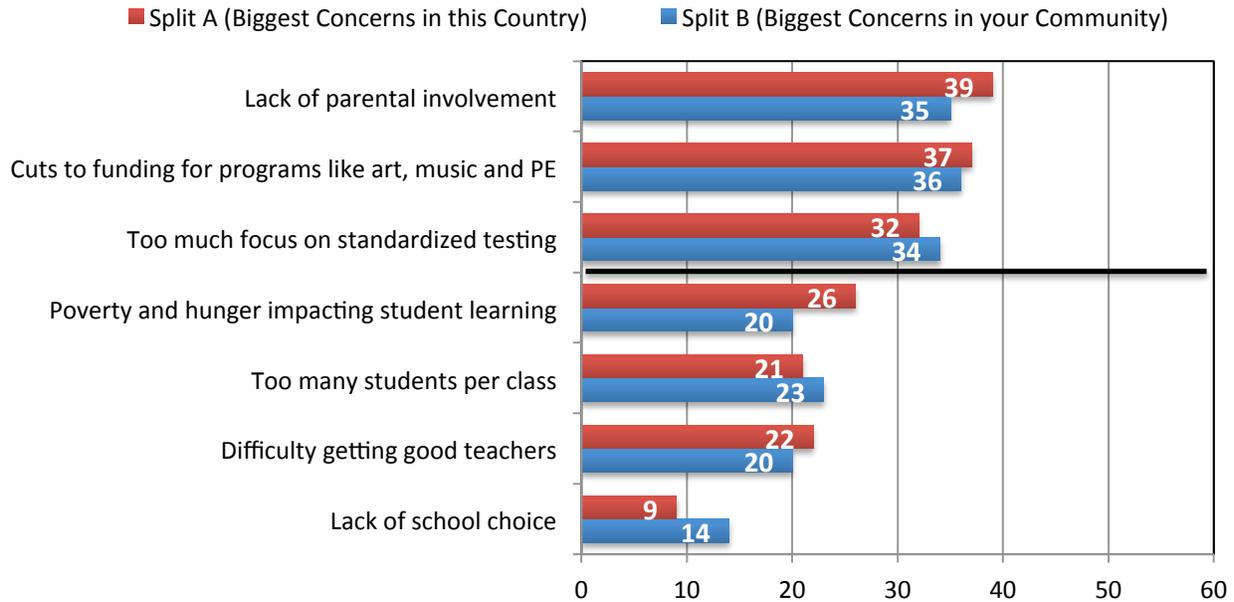
A new survey shows that Illinois voters overwhelmingly favor a series of proposals to reform charter schools. Proposals garnering broad support include initiatives to strengthen charter school accountability and transparency, improve teacher training and qualifications, prevent fraud, serve high-need students, require charter schools to have local school councils, and ensure that neighborhood public schools are not adversely affected.

The following are key findings from the Illinois poll of 700 registered voters, which was conducted March 25<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015:

### Key Findings

- **Voters have positive views of their public schools and public school teachers.** Sixty-six percent of voters rate the quality of education at public schools in their neighborhood excellent or good, while just 27 percent rate them fair or poor. Voters are more likely to say public schools in their neighborhood are getting better (32 percent) than getting worse (17 percent), while a 42 percent plurality are not seeing much change either way. By nearly 7:1, voters are more likely to have favorable than unfavorable views of public school teachers (70 percent favorable – 13 percent unfavorable).
  - *Among communities of color, a smaller 55 percent majority rates the quality of their neighborhood schools excellent or good (compared to 66 percent statewide). In Chicago, the ratings are lower – 47 percent excellent or good, 26 percent just fair, 16 percent poor.*
  - *Voters of color give teachers a positive 60 percent favorable – 16 percent unfavorable rating, while Chicago voters rate teachers 66 percent favorable – 13 percent unfavorable.*
- **Lack of school choice does not register as a top concern.** Voters focus on lack of parental involvement, cuts to school funding, and over-emphasis on testing as the biggest problems facing K-through-12 education. Lack of school choice ranks dead last on their list of concerns.

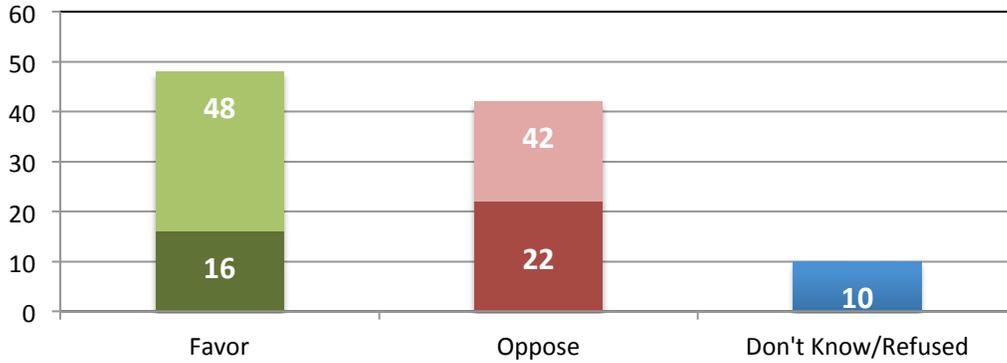
### Top Concerns: Lack of Parental Involvement, Funding Cuts, Standardized Testing

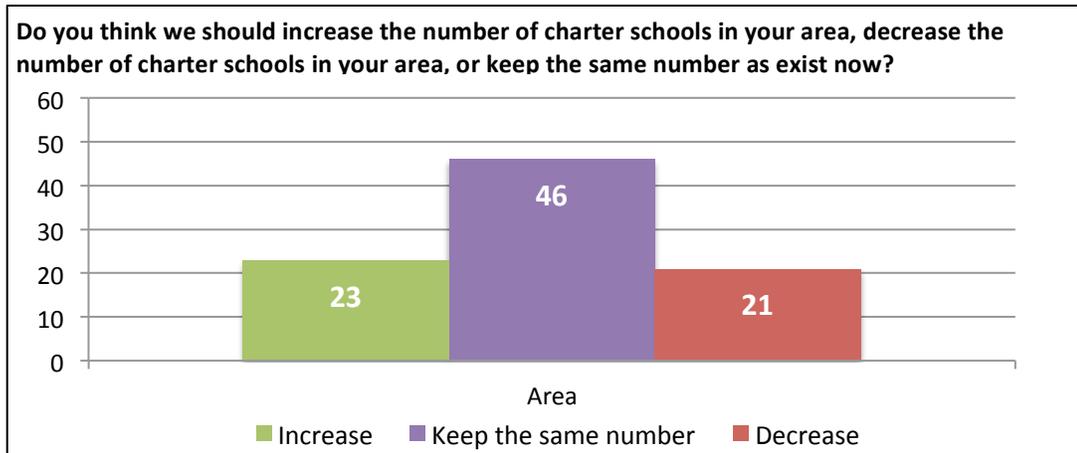


- *Lack of school choice is the lowest concern among communities of color, with just 16 percent rating it as one of their top two education concerns. Lack of parent involvement (41 percent), funding cuts to programs like art, music and PE (39 percent) and the heavy focus on standardized testing (31 percent) are their top concerns.*
- *Similarly, in Chicago, only 17 percent name school choice as a top education concern, while the leading concerns are lack of parental involvement (34 percent), funding cuts (32 percent) and poverty and hunger (30 percent).*

- **Illinois voters have limited awareness of charter schools, little clarity on whether they are public and while they express mixed views on support for charter schools, they do not want them expanded.** When simply asked their opinion about charter schools, 37 percent favor charter schools, 21 percent oppose them and 42 percent do not have enough information to form an opinion. At the same time, 67 percent want to keep the number of charter schools the same or reduce the number of charter schools in their area, while 23 percent want to increase the number of charter schools in their area. And 51 percent believe charter schools are not public schools, while 34 percent think they are public schools.

As you may know, the vast majority of charter schools are taxpayer-funded schools that are privately managed by for-profit companies or non-profit organizations. They operate independently of the public school system and are not required to follow some of the laws and regulations that public schools are required to follow. From what you've heard, do you favor or oppose charter schools?





- Chicago voters have the highest awareness of charter schools with 57 percent saying they have heard a great deal or some about them, compared to just 42 percent statewide.
  - Chicago voters are somewhat more supportive of charter schools (49 – 26 percent favor-oppose initially, 53 – 38 percent after a flat explanation, yet only 27 percent would like to see the number of charter schools expanded, while 66 percent would like to see the number shrink or remain the same – similar to statewide numbers).
  - Among communities of color, a flat explanation of charter schools produces significant concern, moving them from an initial 43 – 22 percent support for charter schools to 48 – 44 percent support. They would also like to see the number of charter schools shrink or state the same (65 percent).
- **Voters overwhelmingly favor charter school reform proposals.** Huge majorities of voters favor proposals to strengthen transparency and accountability, teacher training and qualifications, anti-fraud measures, ensuring high-need students are served, requiring charter schools to have local school councils, and making sure neighborhood public schools are not adversely affected.
    - As the following table illustrates, support for these proposals is strong among voters in Chicago and communities of color.

	Total Support %	None-white voters	Chicago
<b>Transparency &amp; Accountability</b>			
Require companies and organizations that manage charter schools to <b>open board meetings</b> to parents and the public, similar to public school board meetings	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>93</b>
Require companies and organizations that manage charter schools to release to parents and the public <b>how they spend taxpayer money</b> , including their annual budgets and contracts	<b>84</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>85</b>
Require state officials to conduct <b>regular audits</b> of charter schools'	<b>84</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>77</b>

finances to detect fraud, waste or abuse of public funds			
<b>Protect Neighborhood Schools</b>			
Ensure that <b>neighborhood public schools do not lose funding</b> when new charter schools open in their area	<b>78</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>81</b>
Before any new charter school is approved, conduct an <b>analysis of the impact</b> the school will have on neighborhood public schools	<b>77</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>82</b>
Require charter schools to have <b>Local School Councils</b> , comprised of parents, community members and school staff, similar to the school councils neighborhood public schools have	<b>83</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Protect Taxpayer Funds</b>			
Stop the creation of new charter schools if state officials have not shown the ability to <b>prevent fraud and mismanagement</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>72</b>
Prohibit charter school board members and their immediate families from <b>financially benefiting from their schools</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Serving High Need Students</b>			
Require all teachers who work in taxpayer funded schools, including neighborhood public schools and charter schools, to meet the <b>same training and qualification requirements</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>
Require charter schools to <b>serve high-need students</b> such as special education students, at the same level as neighborhood public schools	<b>79</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>76</b>

## Methodology

GBA Strategies conducted a poll in Illinois of 700 registered voters March 25 – 29, 2015 on behalf of In the Public Interest and the Center for Popular Democracy. The sample is subject to a margin of error of +/- 3.7 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

The sample was pulled from a Illinois voter file and phone numbers were selected randomly, providing a statistically representative sample. The poll was administered by professional interviewers via telephone with respondents being reached on cell phones and landlines.