



Florida Opinion Research

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TO: Interested Parties

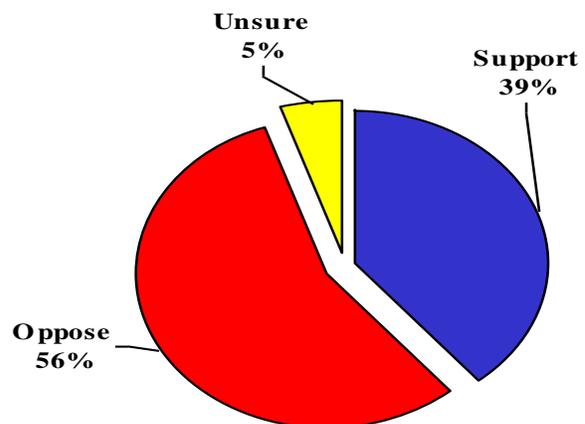
FR: Paul Fallon, Florida Opinion Research
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RE: Recent Survey Data on Florida S.B. 1676/.25 Mill Tax Increase for Schools

We have highlighted some findings from a recent survey conducted to gauge the voting public's reactions to Florida Senate Bill 1676, which gives county school boards the ability to implement a .25 mill property tax increase for one year, asks voters to approve such a tax increase for a period of five years or do a combination of both.

In order to test the policy, a telephone survey of registered voters was conducted in Lee County, Florida. Lee County was chosen as the "proving ground" to test the concept because it appears to be the county school system that is most assiduously considering implementation of Senate Bill 1676. Comparatively speaking, through news coverage, voters in Lee County may have more exposure to the concept than voters in other parts of the state and, therefore, may have more mature and developed opinions about it. These are, however, general findings that we believe are instructive for county schools boards throughout the state that are contemplating the implementation of the .25 mill property tax increase.

When asked about a .25 mill property tax increase implemented by their school board for up to one year to provide more operating funds for schools and education that would cost about \$19 dollars for every \$100,000 dollars of property value in Lee County, only 39% of respondents said they would support such an action, while 56% said they would oppose it. Despite the modest actual cost of \$19 for each \$100,000 of property value, a robust majority is against the idea, which signals that opposition may stem from principled objections, rather than pragmatic economic concerns. One promising note is that support among parents of children enrolled in Lee County's public schools reached 49%.



Would you support or oppose a .25 mill increase on property taxes in order to provide more operating funds for schools and education for up to one year that would cost about \$19 dollars for every \$100,000 dollars of property value in Lee County?

If a county school board decides to subsequently ask voters to extend the tax increase that it has implemented for an additional four years, it can expect virulent opposition! Only 27% of Lee County

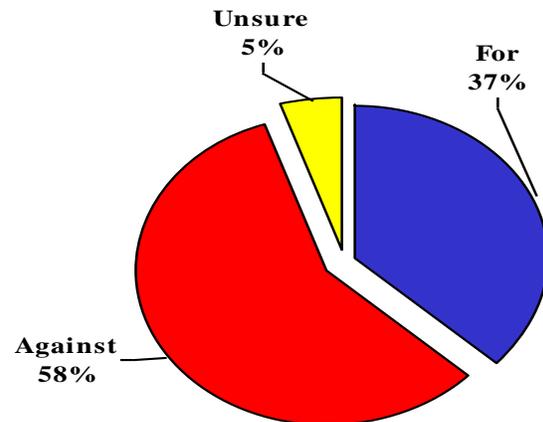
voters would vote for an extension, and 62% said they would vote against it. Foreshadowing even more potential discord, 50% of voters said that they would be less likely to re-elect a school board member who votes to impose a .25 mill increase on property taxes for up to one year without voter approval. Simply put, there may be a high political price to be paid for such a decision! Even more alarming, 41% of voters said that a .25 mill tax increase implemented by their school board would make them less likely to vote for future tax levies, including 35% of parents of children enrolled in Lee County's public schools. This indicates that a school board's decision to unilaterally implement a .25 mill increase on property taxes in order to provide more operating funds for schools and education for up to one year could have repercussions that extend well into the future, and potentially create long-term financial problems more severe than those that would be solved by a temporary infusion of funds.

When the Lee County School Board leaves the entire decision to voters about whether any money will be collected, 37% of voters say that they would vote for a .25 mill increase on property taxes in order to provide more operating funds for schools and education that would cost about \$19 dollars for every \$100,000 dollars of property value for a period of five years. In contrast, 58% of voters say they would vote against it. A glimmer of good news is that under this scenario support reaches 53% among parents.

Although, statistically speaking, the overall level of support among all voters for the .25 mill property tax increase is nearly equal, regardless of whether it is imposed by the school board or decided directly by voters, the obvious advantage to allowing voters to make the decision is avoiding the kind of ardent political backlash that could taint future education funding requests and make re-election campaigns for board members more rancorous.

Although these survey results may be understandably sobering, they do hold out hope that under the right circumstance – a high turnout election with more younger voters and parents, such as the 2008 U.S. Presidential election and, possibly, the upcoming 2010 Florida Gubernatorial election – a carefully-orchestrated and well-funded campaign might be successful. As the saying goes, "*timing is everything!*" For those school boards that do implement the tax, the data suggests that it should only be factored into their county school budgets for one year, because unilateral implementation may doom any chance of getting voters to subsequently extend it.

If you have any questions about the information included herein, please feel free to call Paul Fallon at 813-283-2665 or Rick Asnani at 561-689-9787. We will be glad to provide any additional insight that can be helpful to you.



If an election was held today, and you were asked to vote on it, would you vote for or against a .25 mill increase on property taxes in order to provide more operating funds for schools and education that would cost about \$19 dollars for every \$100,000 dollars of property value for a period of 5 years?

This information is based on survey research that was conducted through telephone interviews of 405 randomly-selected registered voters in Lee County, Florida that have valid residential telephone numbers. The interviews were performed during the period of May 26, 2009 to May 28, 2009. The overall estimated margin of sampling error is +/- 4.86%, based on a confidence level of 95%, although it varies for each individual question. This means that if this survey was repeated, 95 times out of 100 the results would be within plus or minus 4.86% of those provided herein. Further adjustments were made to proportionately weight the results toward the demographic and geographic characteristics of the county.