



**PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES**

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# Tennessee Early Education Statewide Survey

**600 Voters Statewide +  
Oversample of Rural Voters (N=285)  
December 2022**

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#220849

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TURNING QUESTIONS INTO ANSWERS



# Methodology

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**Public Opinion Strategies presents the key findings from a survey of 600 voters with an oversample of 100 rural voters in Tennessee (N=285 total rural interviews).**

**The survey was conducted November 29-December 4, 2022 via landline, cell phone and on-line interviews. The poll has a margin of error of  $\pm 4\%$ .**

**Patrick Lanne was the primary researcher and pollster on the project. Chris Andrews was the project director and Liam Putz provided analytical assistance.**



## The **6** things you need to know

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- 1. Tennesseans continue to express concern about the public education in the state. For the fifth straight poll, a majority of voters believe public schools are headed on the “wrong track” and are not properly preparing students for the future.**
  - 2. Nearly all Tennessee voters agree that quality early education provides the building blocks of future success. Overwhelming majorities of Tennesseans endorse investments in early education programs.**
  - 3. Expansion of the state’s voluntary Pre-K program remains extremely popular with voters across the political spectrum and geographic region.**
  - 4. Tennesseans believe access to quality childcare is important for both children’s academic success and parents’ ability to work. Proposal to strengthen Tennessee’s childcare system and expand quality care access for parents, enjoy near universal support from voters.**
  - 5. Bi-partisan majorities of Tennesseans support programs to help foster and adoptive parents with health care coverage, childcare and Pre-K access.**
  - 6. Rural Tennesseans overwhelmingly support expanding voluntary Pre-K, investing in early education programs and strengthening Tennessee’s quality childcare system.**
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TURNING QUESTIONS INTO ANSWERS



## Key Findings

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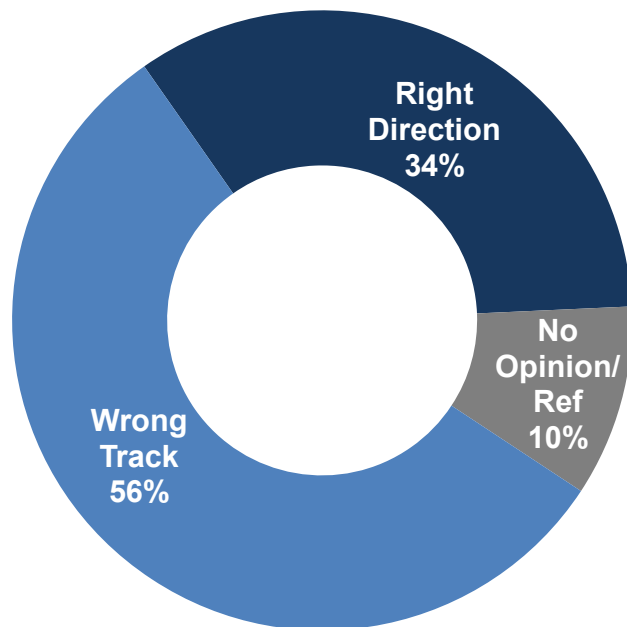
- 1) For the fifth straight poll, Tennesseans express significant concern about the state of Tennessee's public education system.**

**A majority (56%) of voters believe the state's public education system is headed off on the wrong track. The wrong track sentiment cuts across every demographic subgroup in the poll and all the state's geographic regions.**

**Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Tennesseans believe the public education system is NOT preparing young people for the future – a sentiment shared by all major subgroups in the poll.**

# Tennesseans continue to believe public education is off on the wrong track.

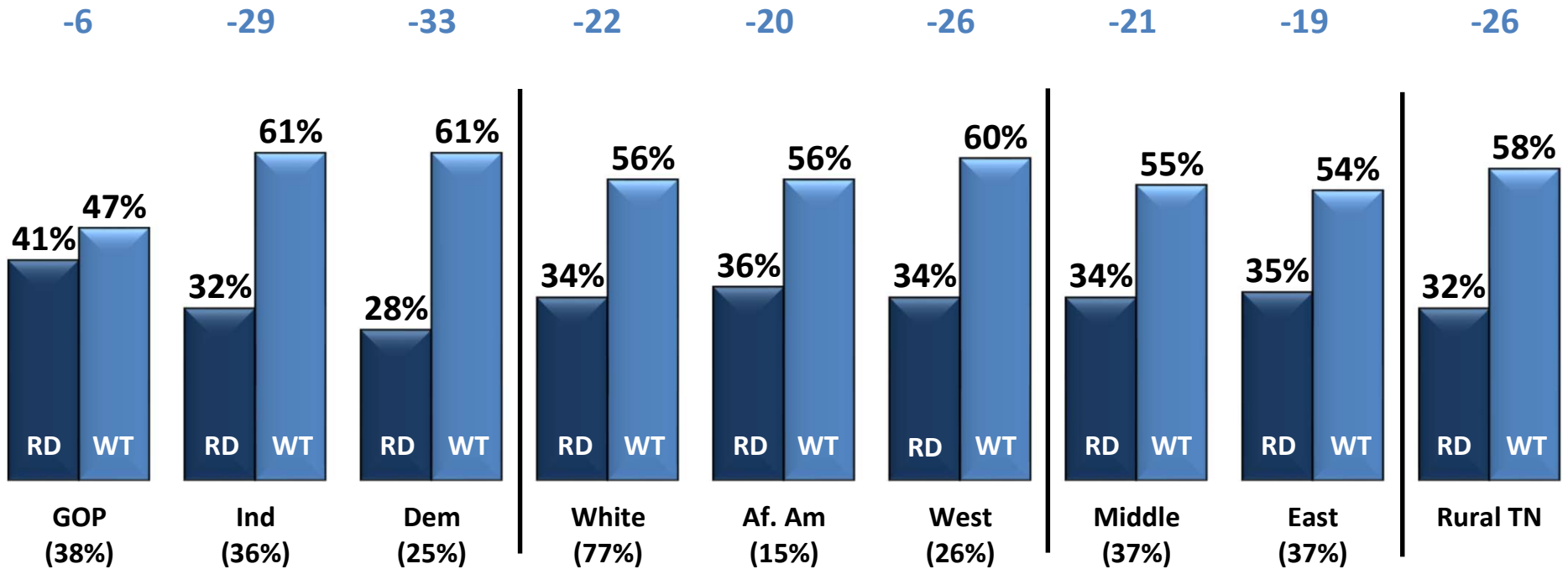
*Would you say that public education in Tennessee is on the right track, or has it gotten off on the wrong track?*



Trend	RD%-WT%
2021	34%-53%
2019	33%-58%
2018	35%-55%
2017	37%-58%

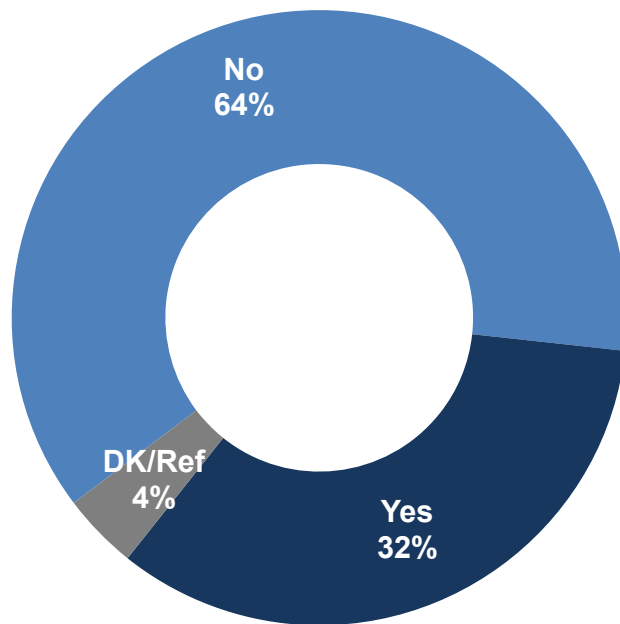
The sentiment cuts across all major subgroups.

*Public Education Sentiment By Key Subgroup*



Few voters think the public education system is preparing kids for future success.

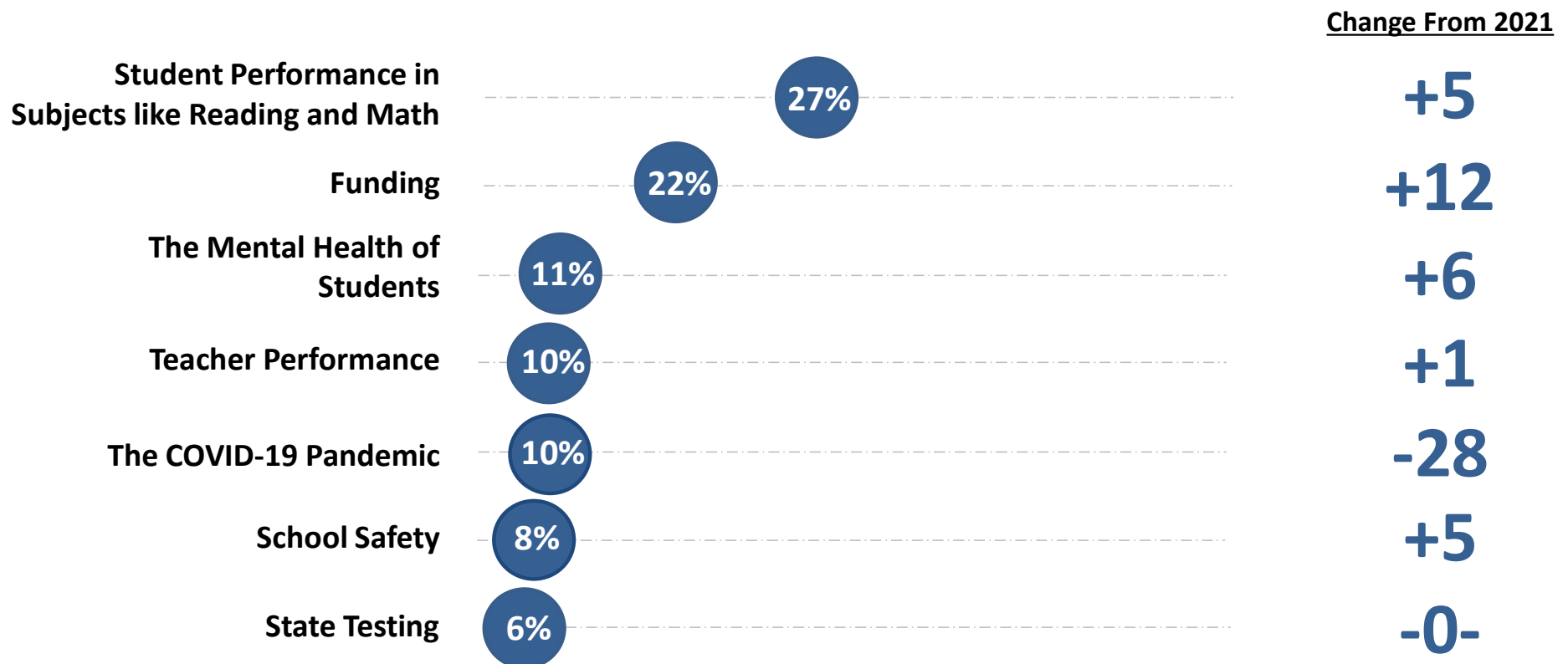
*Next, would you say young people in Tennessee are well-prepared for employment and adult life by the public education system?*



Subgroup	Yes%-No%
<b>GOP (38%)</b>	<b>40%-55%</b>
<b>Ind (36%)</b>	<b>26%-70%</b>
<b>Dem (25%)</b>	<b>29%-68%</b>
<b>White (77%)</b>	<b>34%-62%</b>
<b>Af. American (15%)</b>	<b>30%-70%</b>
<b>West (26%)</b>	<b>29%-67%</b>
<b>Middle (37%)</b>	<b>30%-65%</b>
<b>East (37%)</b>	<b>35%-60%</b>
<b>Men (46%)</b>	<b>31%-64%</b>
<b>Women (54%)</b>	<b>32%-64%</b>
<b>Rural O/S</b>	<b>31%-66%</b>

With pandemic concerns receding, voters are focused on performance and funding.

*Which ONE of the following do you believe is the most important problem facing Tennessee's Pre-K-3rd grade public school classrooms? Is it...*







## Key Findings

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- 2) **Tennesseans understand the important role early education plays in preparing children for future success.**

**Nearly all Tennesseans (88%) agree with the statement, “*Early education, from birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, provides the building blocks of all future learning.*” As we have seen in our previous polling, the importance of early education programs is an area of bi-partisan consensus -- fully 86% of Republicans and 95% of Democrats agree with the statement.**

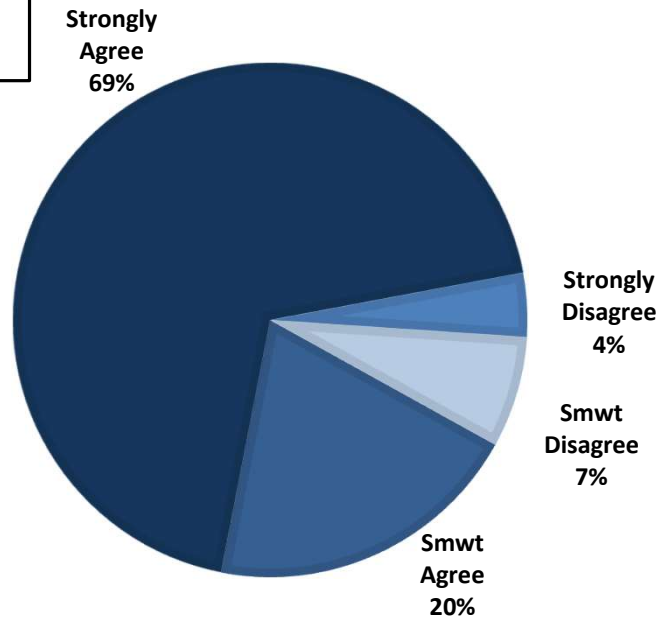
**Voters support a robust early education policy agenda. Four policy ideas we tested received near unanimous support (ranging from 87% to 92% total favor) with strong majorities across all major demographic, partisan and geographic subgroups.**

# Nearly all Tennesseans agree: Early education is the foundation of future learning.

Next, do you **AGREE** or **DISAGREE** with the following statement:

*Early education, from birth to 3rd grade, provides the building blocks of all future learning.*

**Stwd Rural**  
**88%** **88%** **Total Agree**  
**11%** **12%** **Total Disagree**

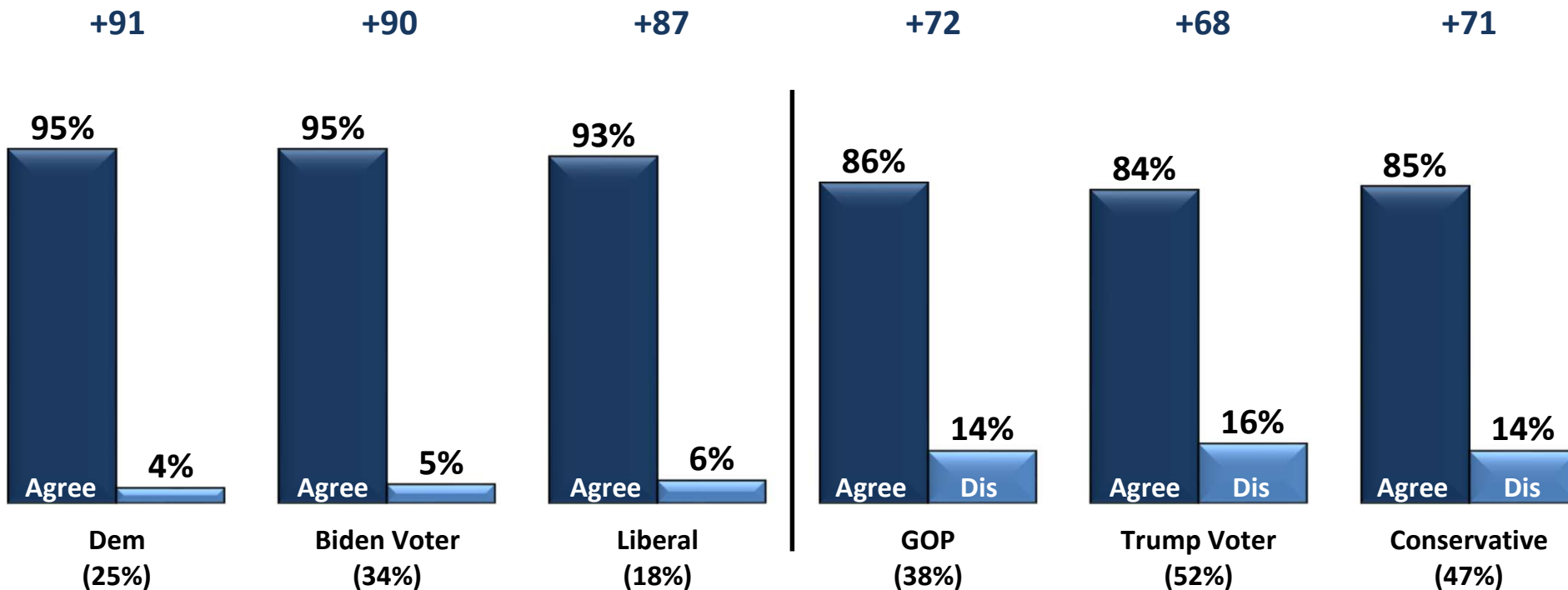


Trend	Agree%- Disagree%
<b>2021</b>	<b>91%-8%</b>
<b>2019</b>	<b>93%-6%</b>
<b>2018</b>	<b>92%-7%</b>
<b>2017</b>	<b>86%-13%</b>

# Voters across the partisan spectrum overwhelmingly agree.

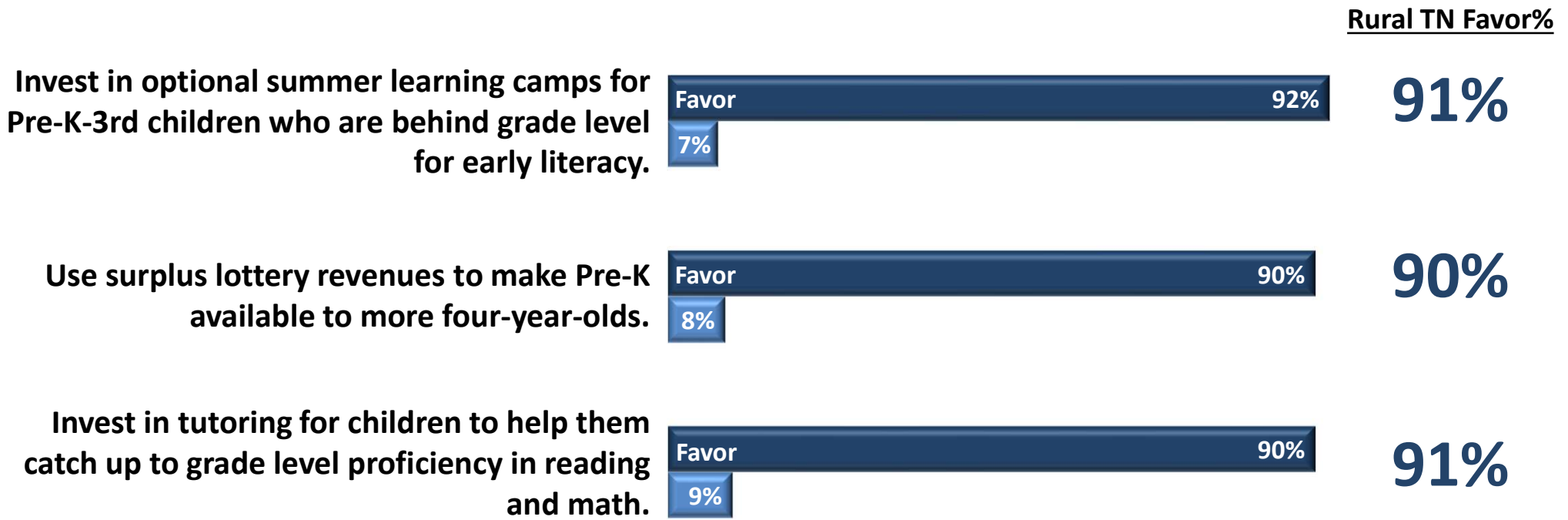
Next, do you **AGREE** or **DISAGREE** with the following statement:

*Early education, from birth to 3rd grade, provides the building blocks of all future learning.*



## Early education policy initiatives are very popular.

*Now, I'd like to read some more proposals being considered by the state legislature that deal with the issue of early education. After I read each proposal, please tell me if you favor or oppose that proposal.*



## Early Education Policy Initiatives (pt2)

Rural TN Favor%

Invest more state funding in teacher training and professional development to ensure pre-K through 3rd grade teachers have the knowledge and skills needed to effectively teach young children.



**87%**

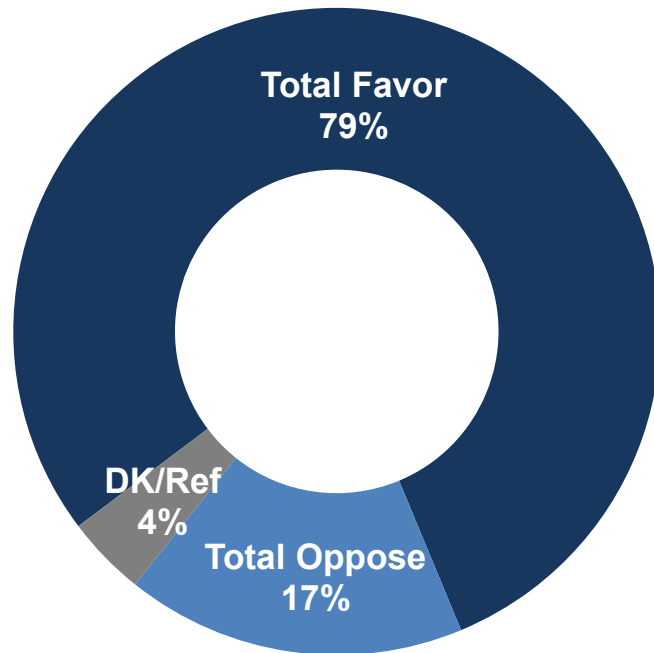
Prevent third graders from advancing to the fourth grade if they are not reading at grade level.



**76%**

When voters learn more about the benefits of voluntary home visits, they overwhelmingly support expanding such programs.

*Now, on a new topic... studies show voluntary home visiting programs help some parents to cope with parenting and personal challenges. In these programs, a social worker or nurse is made available at a parent's request and the results include improved parenting skills, reduced abuse and neglect, improved child and maternal health, and improved kindergarten readiness for children. In addition, studies found home visiting programs are cost effective and could generate a return of up to \$5.70 for every \$1 invested.*



Subgroup	Favor%–Oppose%
GOP (38%)	71%-25%
Ind (36%)	80%-15%
Dem (25%)	90%-6%
White (77%)	78%-19%
Af. American (15%)	89%-7%
West (26%)	79%-18%
Middle (37%)	82%-13%
East (37%)	77%-19%
Men (46%)	77%-19%
Women (54%)	81%-15%
Rural Tennessee	74%-21%



## Key Findings

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- 3) Expanding the state's voluntary Pre-K program remains extremely popular with Tennessee voters.**

**For the fourth straight poll, an overwhelming, bi-partisan majority (91%) of voters believes the Pre-K program should be available to every four-year-old in the state.**

**In addition, 86% of Tennesseans – including 86% of Republicans and 95% of Democrats – support increasing funding to ensure every disadvantaged child can attend a quality Pre-K program.**

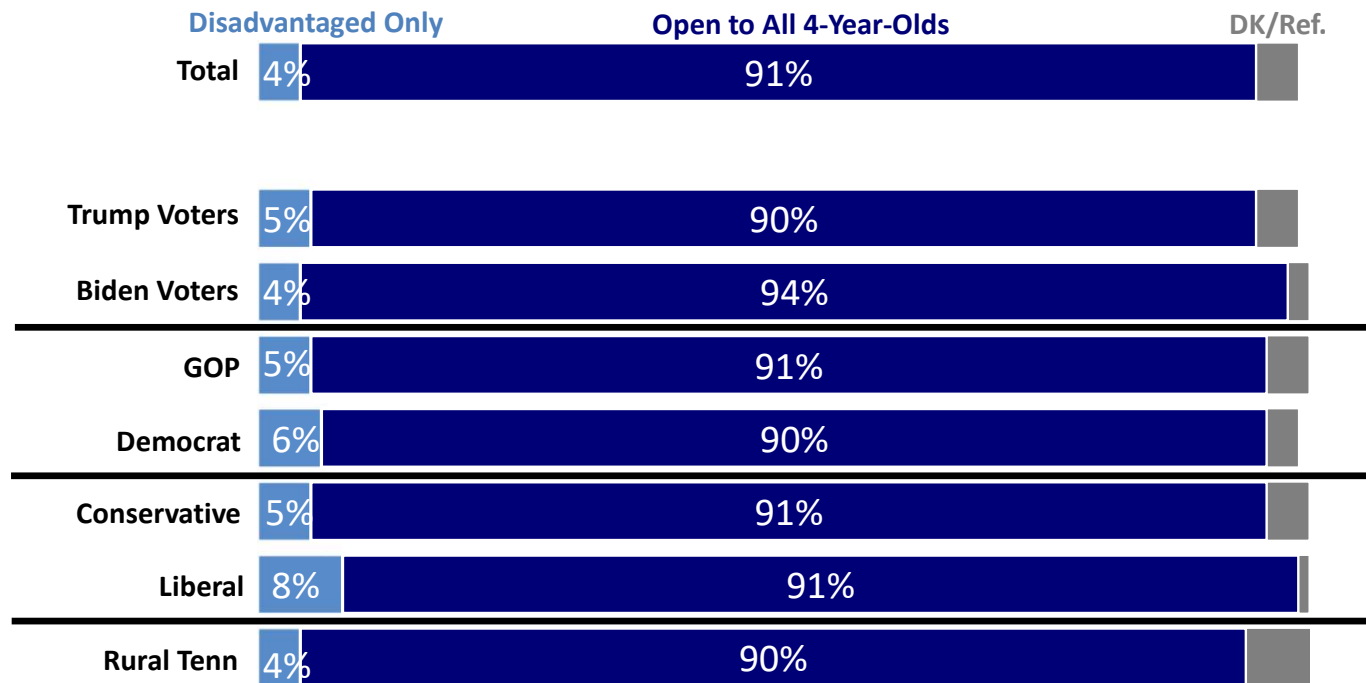
**Finally, 90% of Tennesseans support increasing funding to allow every 4-year-old in the state the option to attend Pre-K including 89% of Republicans and 95% of Democrats.**

**Legislators who support Pre-K expansion are viewed favorably by a majority (56%) of Tennessee voters including 51% of Republicans and 70% of Democrats.**

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## Nearly every Tennessean supports Pre-K expansion.

*First, do you think Tennessee's voluntary Pre-K program should be limited to children from economically disadvantaged families, or should it be an option for any Tennessee 4-year-old whose parents want them to attend?*





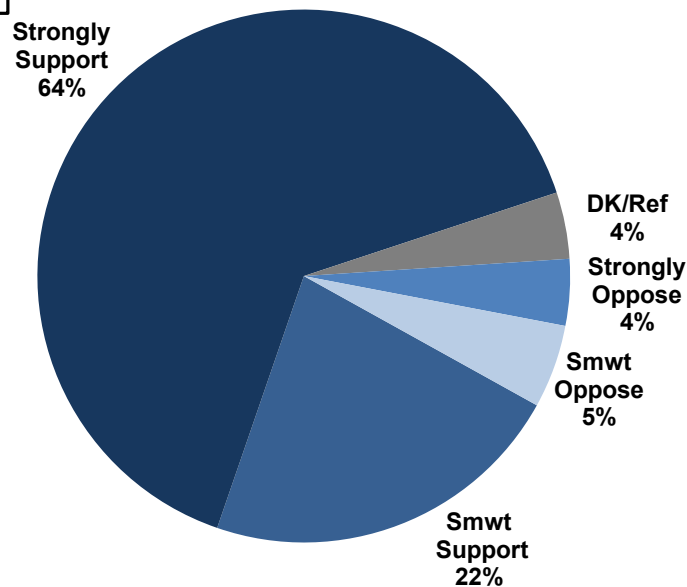
# A strong bi-partisan majority supports expanding the Pre-K program to ensure it serves all disadvantaged children.

*Next, would you support or oppose increased state funding for Tennessee's voluntary Pre-K program to ensure enough slots for all disadvantaged children to attend?*

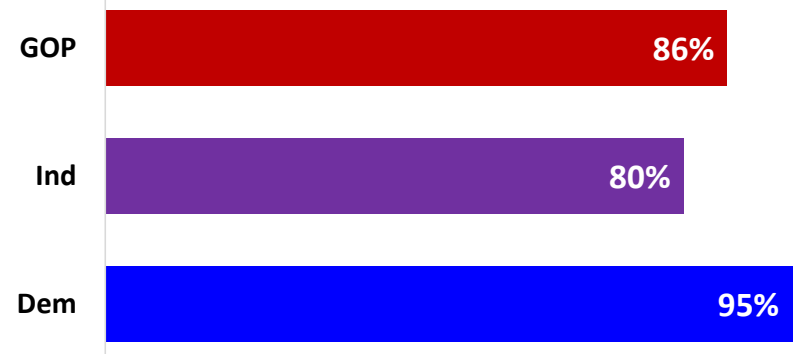
### Stwd Rural

86% 85% Total Agree

10% 10% Total Disagree



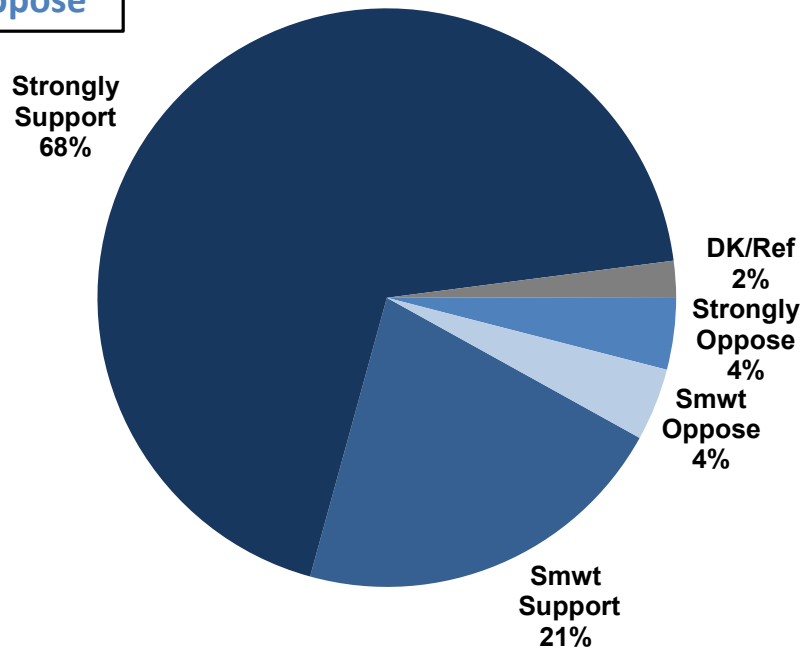
### *Support By Partisanship*



## Expanding Pre-K for every 4-year-old enjoys near universal support.

And, would you support or oppose increased state funding for Tennessee's voluntary Pre-K program to allow every 4-year-old the option to attend, if their parents want them to?

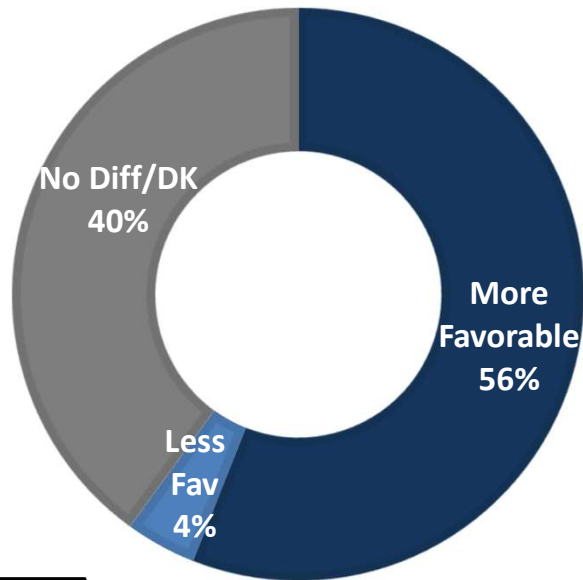
**90% Total Support**  
**8% Total Oppose**



Subgroup	Supp%-Opp%
<b>GOP (38%)</b>	<b>89%-9%</b>
<b>Ind (36%)</b>	<b>86%-10%</b>
<b>Dem (25%)</b>	<b>95%-2%</b>
<b>White (77%)</b>	<b>89%-9%</b>
<b>Af. American (15%)</b>	<b>94%-3%</b>
<b>West (26%)</b>	<b>95%-5%</b>
<b>Middle (37%)</b>	<b>88%-10%</b>
<b>East (37%)</b>	<b>87%-9%</b>
<b>Men (46%)</b>	<b>89%-8%</b>
<b>Women (54%)</b>	<b>90%-8%</b>
<b>Rural TN</b>	<b>90%-8%</b>

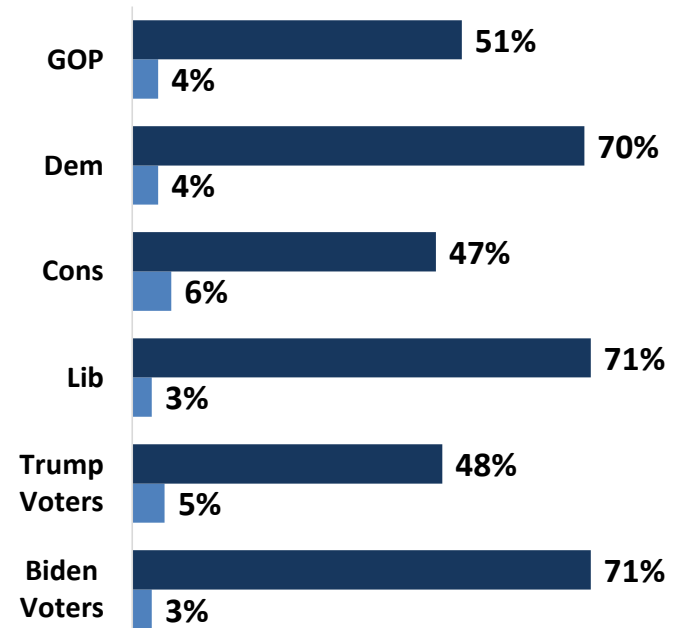
# Across party lines, voters have a positive view of pro-early education legislators.

*If your state legislator supported making Pre-K an option for more 4 years old in Tennessee, would you have a more favorable impression of him or her, less favorable impression or would it not affect your opinion much one way or the other?*



**Rural TN**  
56% Total More Fav  
6% Total Less Fav  
38% No Opin/DK

## By Partisanship





## Key Findings

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- 4) Tennessee voters across the political spectrum understand the role quality childcare plays in preparing children for both short-term academic successes. Voters are nearly unanimous (90%) in their belief that childcare has a major impact on children’s kindergarten readiness.**

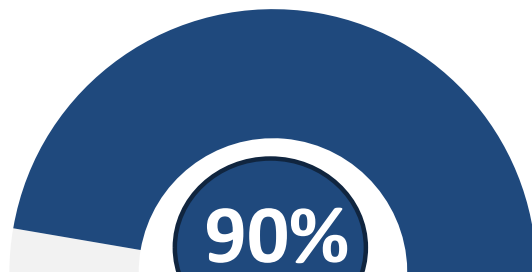
**In addition, Tennessee voters see quality childcare as essential to children’s future development. Eighty-two percent (82%) of voters – including nearly equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats -- believe quality childcare has a major impact on children’s long-term well-being and future job success.**

**Ninety-four percent (94%) of Tennesseans believe access to affordable childcare is important to parents’ ability to work.**

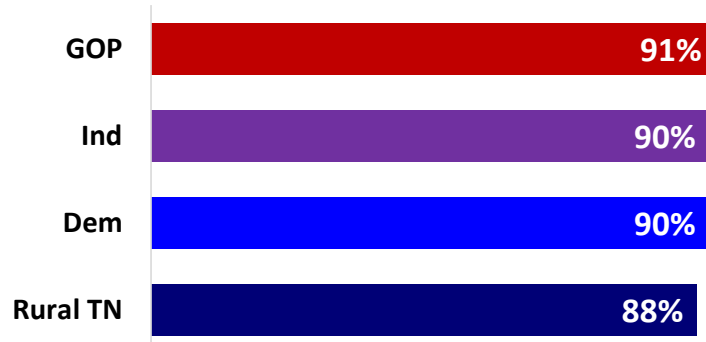
**Strong bi-partisan majority of voters endorse policy ideas to strengthen the state’s childcare programs and expand access to more working families. Support for the four ideas we tested ranged from 86% to 89% total favor.**

# Tennesseans see quality childcare as critical to children's near and future success.

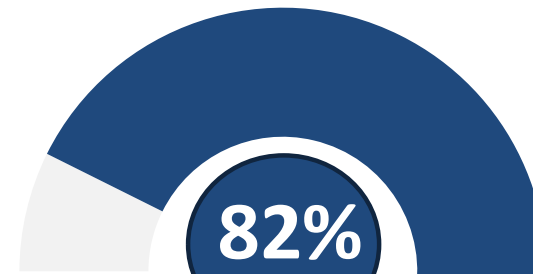
*First, do you think that childcare quality has a major impact on children's kindergarten readiness?*



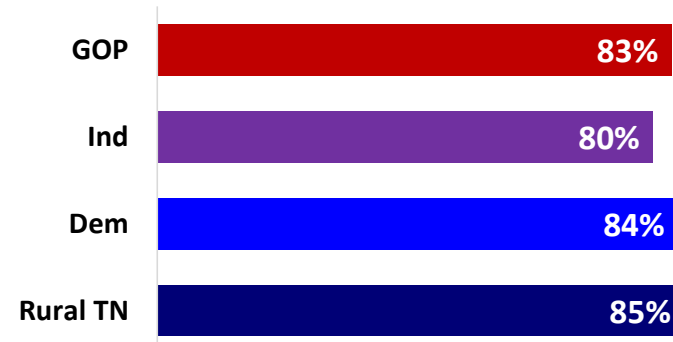
**Total Yes**



*Next, do you think that childcare quality has a major impact on children's long-term well-being, and on their future job success?*



**Total Yes**



# Tennesseans overwhelmingly support a quality childcare agenda.

*Now, I'd like to read some proposals that state policymakers may consider to address the issue of childcare. After I read each proposal, please tell me if you favor or oppose that proposal.*

**Provide financial incentives to employers who offer childcare benefits such as onsite childcare or financial aid for childcare to their employees.**



Rural TN Favor%

**90%**

**Expand state financial aid for childcare to cover more low and middle-income families so that parents can afford to work.**



**84%**

**Increase state payments for subsidized childcare so providers can afford to hire well-qualified teachers.**

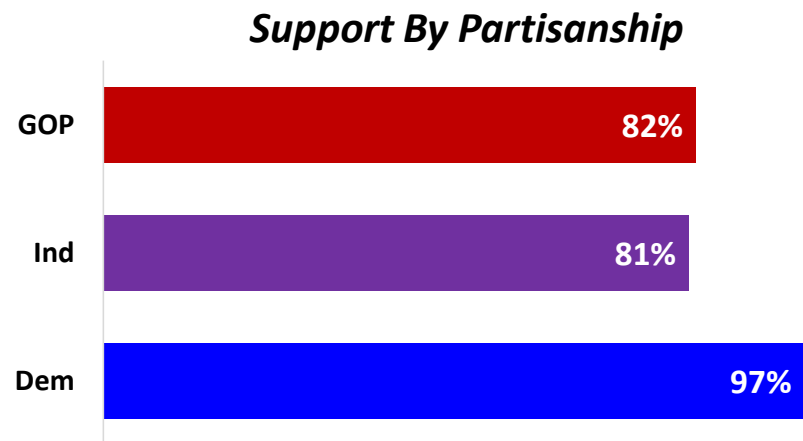
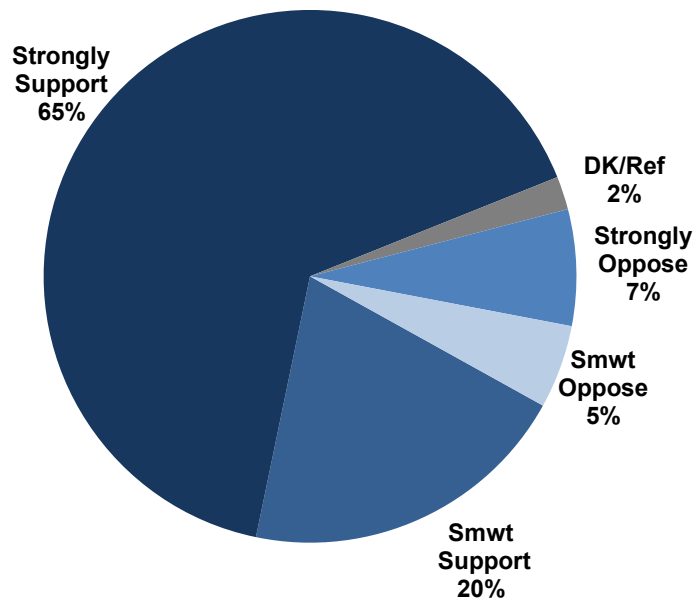


**83%**

# Increasing the mental health workforce draws a wide bi-partisan majority.

*Tennessee policymakers are considering proposals to address the mental health needs of children and adults. One challenge is the shortage of mental health professionals. Would you support or oppose the state making investments to increase the mental health care workforce?*

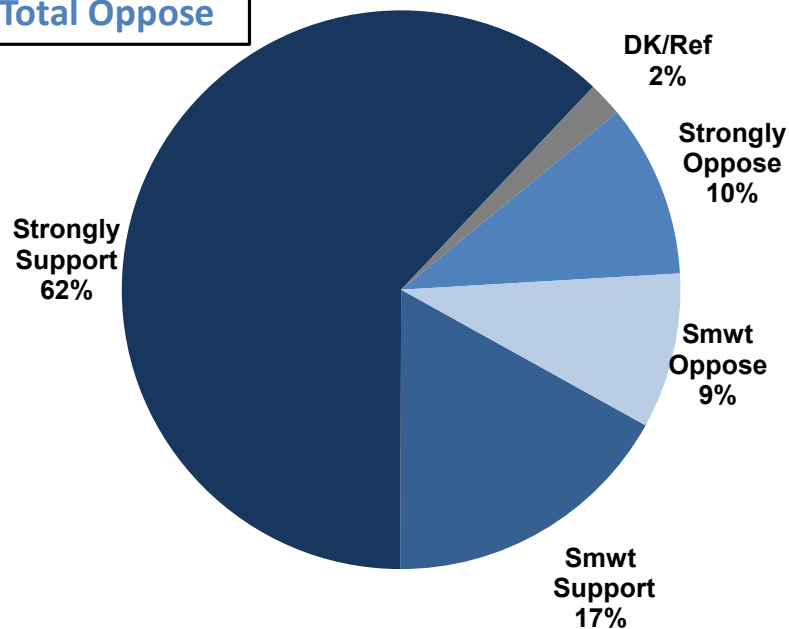
**Stwd Rural**  
85% 84% Total Support  
12% 11% Total Oppose



## Automatic re-enrollment in TennCare is very popular.

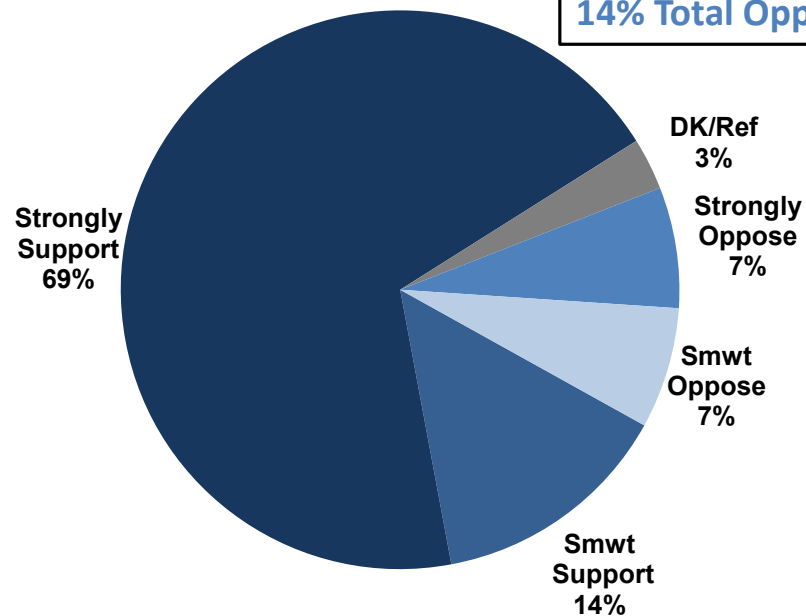
As you may know, the state's health insurance program, TennCare, provides health care coverage for low-income children. Every year, some children lose their insurance coverage when it's time to re-enroll because a parent missed the deadline or they moved and did not get their mail. Would you support or oppose a proposal to automatically re-enroll low-income kids in the TennCare program annually?

**79% Total Support**  
**18% Total Oppose**



As you may know, the state's health insurance program, TennCare, provides health care coverage for low-income children. Every year, some children lose their insurance coverage when it's time to re-enroll because a parent missed the deadline or they moved and did not get their mail. Would you support or oppose a proposal to automatically re-enroll low-income kids who are five years old or younger in the TennCare program annually?

**83% Total Support**  
**14% Total Oppose**

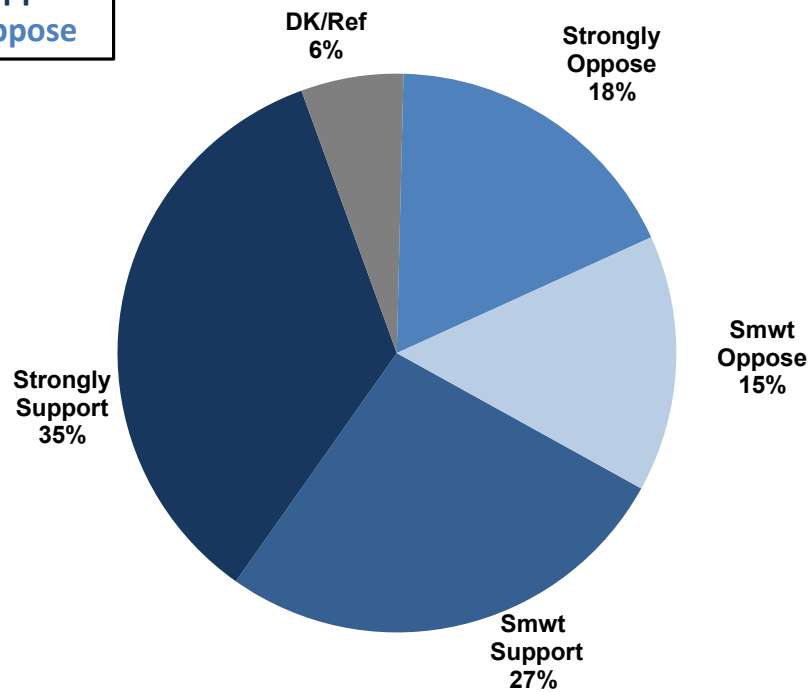




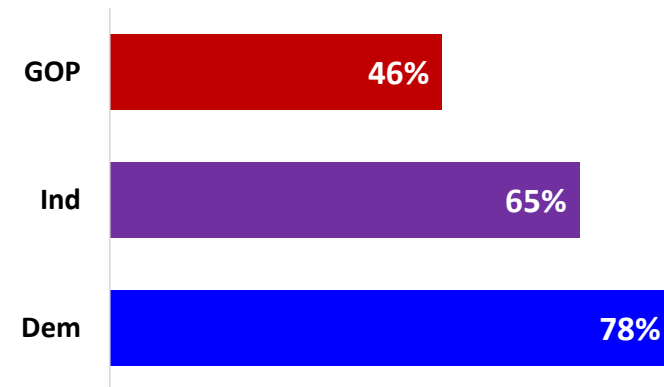
# Majorities continue to support the re-enrollment policy even if parents' income increased above the eligibility limit.

*And would you support or oppose this proposal if you knew that some low-income kids could be automatically re-enrolled in the program even though their parents' income increased to above the income eligibility limit?*

**61% Total Support**  
**33% Total Oppose**



## Support By Partisanship





## Key Findings

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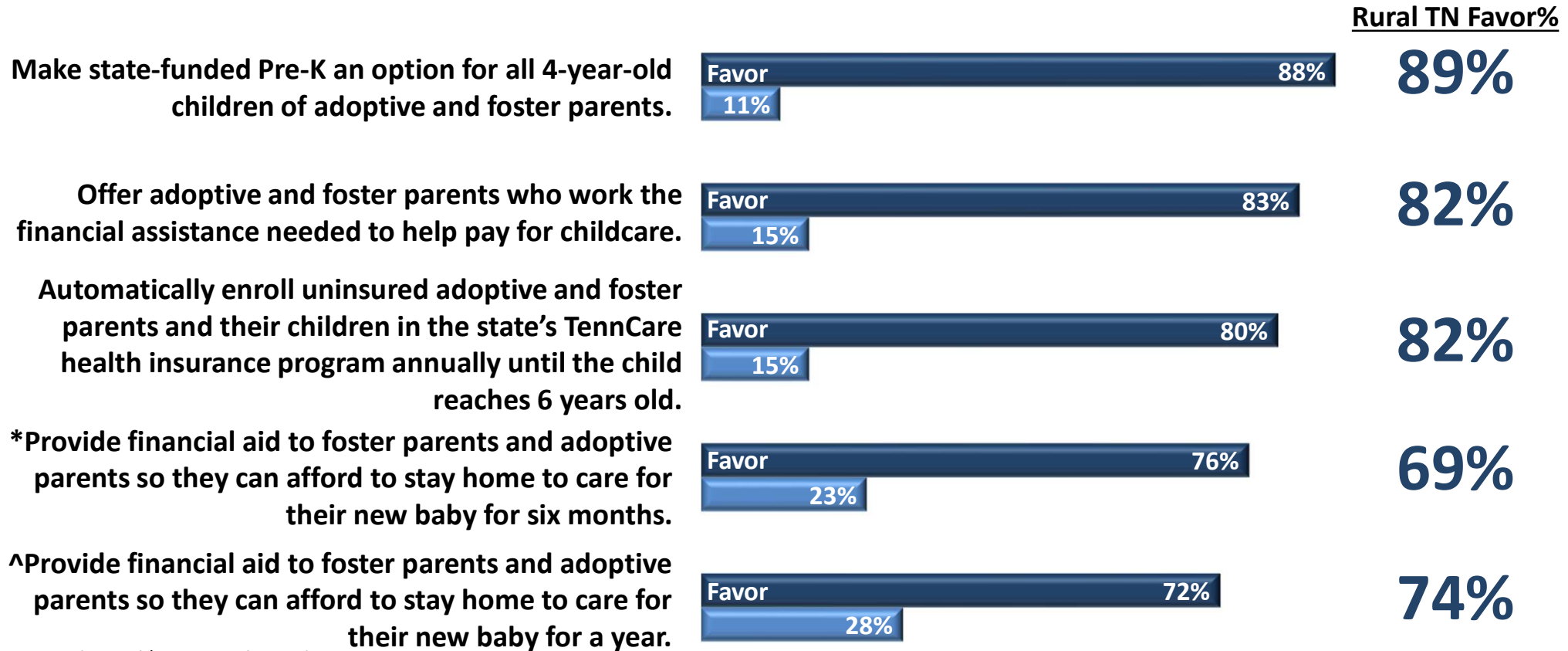
**5) Strong majorities of Tennessee voters support policy ideas to help foster and adoptive families deal with health care, childcare and Pre-K including:**

- **Automatically enrolling uninsured foster/adoptive families in the TennCare program (82% total favor)**
- **Offering financial support to foster/adoptive families pay for childcare (83%)**
- **Making state-funded Pre-K available (88%)**

**Each of the above policy ideas are supported by wide majorities of both Republicans and Democrats.**

# Tennesseans overwhelmingly favor policy ideas to support foster/adoptive families.

Now, I'd like to read some more proposals being considered by the state legislature that deal with the issue of early education. After I read each proposal, please tell me if you favor or oppose that proposal.



\*Sample A (N=302)/^Sample B (N=298)



## Key Findings

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**6) Finally, we completed additional interviews to help measure public opinion on the critical issues of early education policy, Pre-K expansion and childcare in Tennessee’s rural counties.**

**Across every issue, voters in rural Tennessee share similar opinions as voters in the state overall.**

- **88% agree early education provides the build blocks for future learning.**
- **90% believe Pre-K should be an option for every 4-year-old.**
- **Support for the five early education policy initiatives we tested ranges from 76% to 91%.**
- **90% support increasing funding to make Pre-K available to every 4-year-old.**
- **Every childcare policy idea we tested scored above 80% total favor.**
- **Additional support for foster/adoptive families was also extremely popular.**



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