



**PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES**

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# Tennessee Early Education Statewide Survey

**600 Voters**  
**August 29-September 1, 2021**

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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 in Tennessee. The survey was conducted August 29-September 1, 2021, and 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 Aminah Al-Jaber provided analytical assistance.**



# The **5** things you need to know

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- 1. Tennessee voters believe the COVID-19 pandemic is the most important problem facing Tennessee's Pre-K through third grade classrooms, and an overwhelming majority are worried that too many children fell behind due to school disruptions.**
  - 2. Voters express little confidence in the public education system's ability to prepare children for the future. They believe early care and education (birth through third grade) provides the building blocks for all future learning.**
  - 3. Voters support investments in early literacy, math and early workforce skills to help get students back on track.**
  - 4. Expansion of the voluntary Pre-K program has broad bi-partisan support.**
  - 5. A bi-partisan majority of Tennesseans believes quality child care is essential to kindergarten readiness and long-term success, and they endorse initiatives to strengthen child care programs and expand access to working families.**
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# Key Findings

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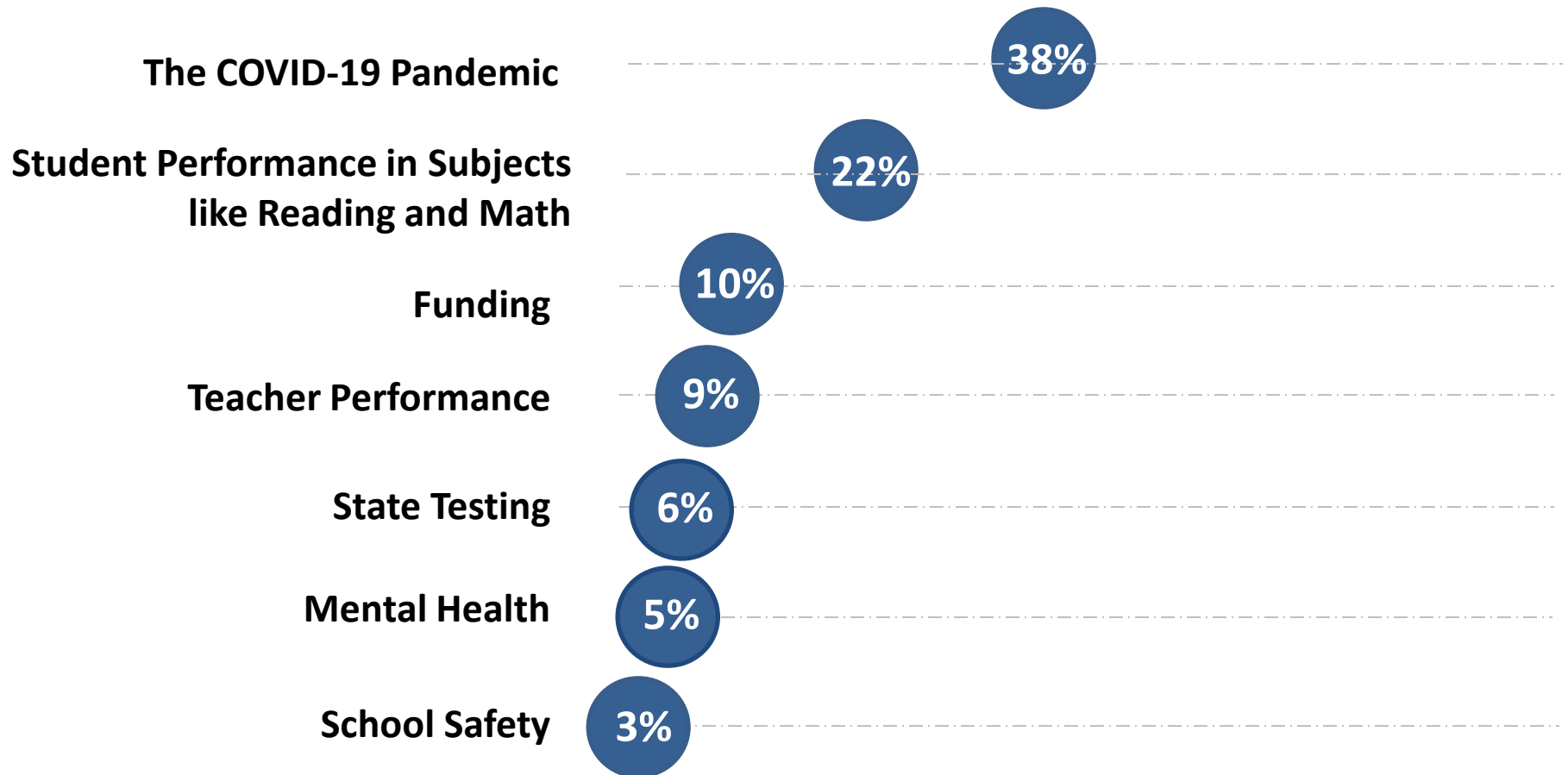
1. Tennessee voters name the COVID-19 pandemic (38%) as the most important issue facing Pre-K through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classrooms in the state. COVID is the top issue in every region of the state and across partisan lines.

Voters recognize the pandemic has resulted in learning loss among Tennessee students. Fully 79% of voters agree with the statement: ***“Too many Tennessee school children fell behind in math and reading proficiency due to school disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic.”*** Concern about learning loss cuts across every demographic and geographic subgroup in the state.

To mitigate learning loss and accelerate academic achievement, voters strongly endorse proposals which build off the initiatives passed by the Governor and Legislature earlier this year.

# Voters name COVID as the most important problem facing Tennessee's Pre-K – 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade classrooms.

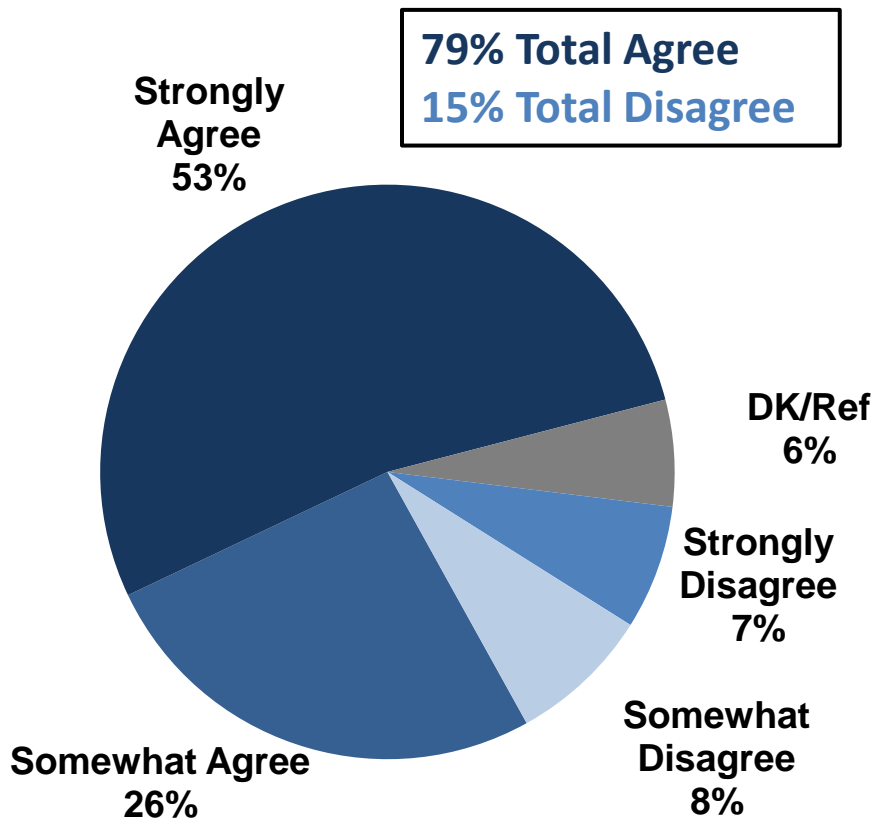
*And, which ONE of the following do you believe is the most important problem facing Tennessee's Pre-K-3rd grade public school classrooms? Is it...*



Across all subgroups, wide majorities of Tennesseans agree the pandemic resulted in learning loss.

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

***Too many Tennessee school children fell behind in math and reading proficiency due to school disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic.***



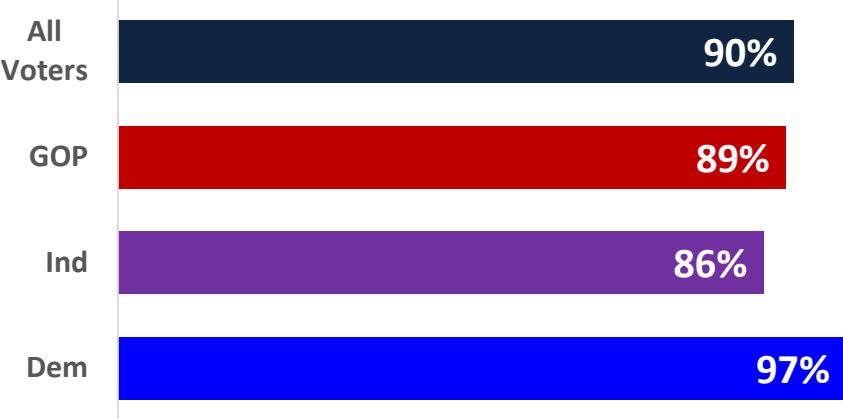
| <i>Subgroup</i>           | <b>Agree%-<br/>Disagree%</b> |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>GOP (39%)</b>          | <b>85%-10%</b>               |
| <b>Ind (35%)</b>          | <b>75%-20%</b>               |
| <b>Dem (23%)</b>          | <b>78%-16%</b>               |
| <b>White (77%)</b>        | <b>80%-14%</b>               |
| <b>Af. American (15%)</b> | <b>77%-18%</b>               |
| <b>West (26%)</b>         | <b>81%-16%</b>               |
| <b>Middle (37%)</b>       | <b>79%-16%</b>               |
| <b>East (37%)</b>         | <b>79%-14%</b>               |
| <b>Men (46%)</b>          | <b>77%-16%</b>               |
| <b>Women (54%)</b>        | <b>82%-15%</b>               |

# An agenda to speed recovery from COVID's learning loss and accelerate academic achievement is popular.

**Invest in school counselors to help children struggling with mental health and to combat school violence**



**Invest in school nurses to reduce chronic absenteeism and improve the health of kids with illnesses like asthma and diabetes**



**Invest in tutoring for children to help them catch up to grade level proficiency in reading and math.**



**Invest in optional summer learning camps for K-3rd children not reading at grade level.**





## Key Findings

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- 2. The public education system in Tennessee continues to receive poor reviews from the state's voters.**

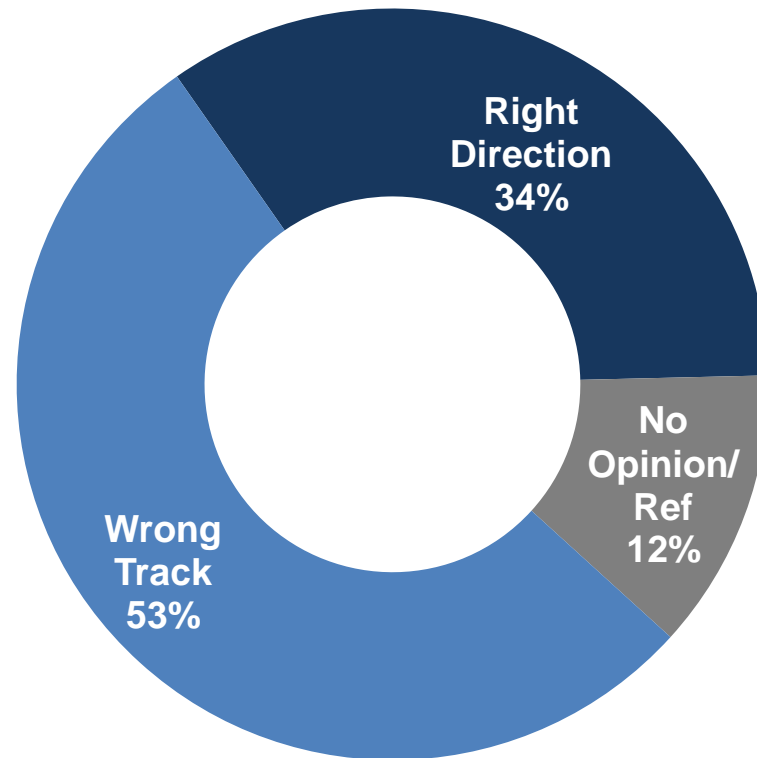
**For the fourth straight poll, a majority (53%) of voters see the state's public education system as being on the wrong track. The negative view on the direction of the public education system cuts across every demographic, political and geographic subgroup in the poll.**

**In addition, 62% of Tennesseans believe the state's public education system is NOT preparing children for future life. Majorities of voters across all subgroups share this pessimistic outlook.**



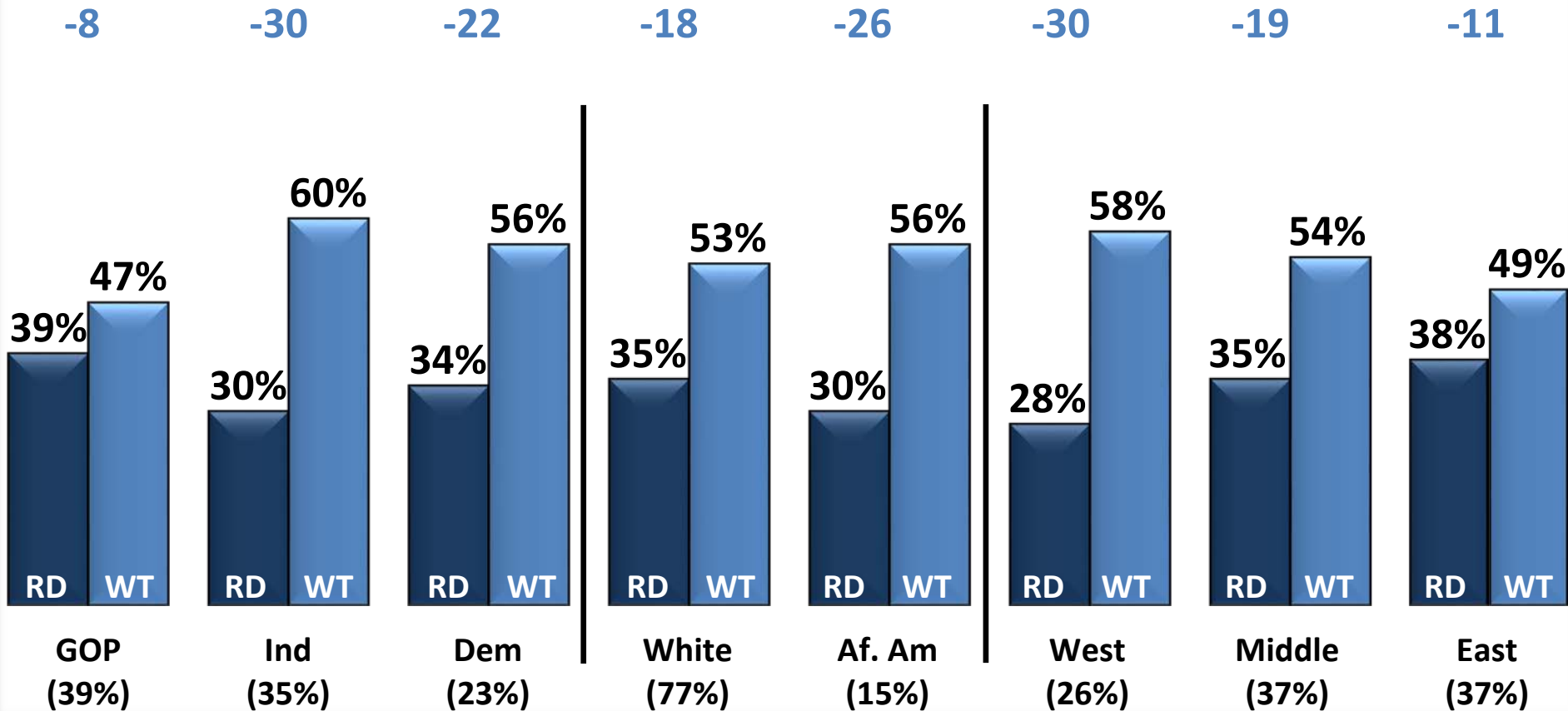
# Tennesseans believe public education is off on the wrong track.

*First of all, would you say that public education in Tennessee is going in the right direction, or has it gotten off on the wrong track?*



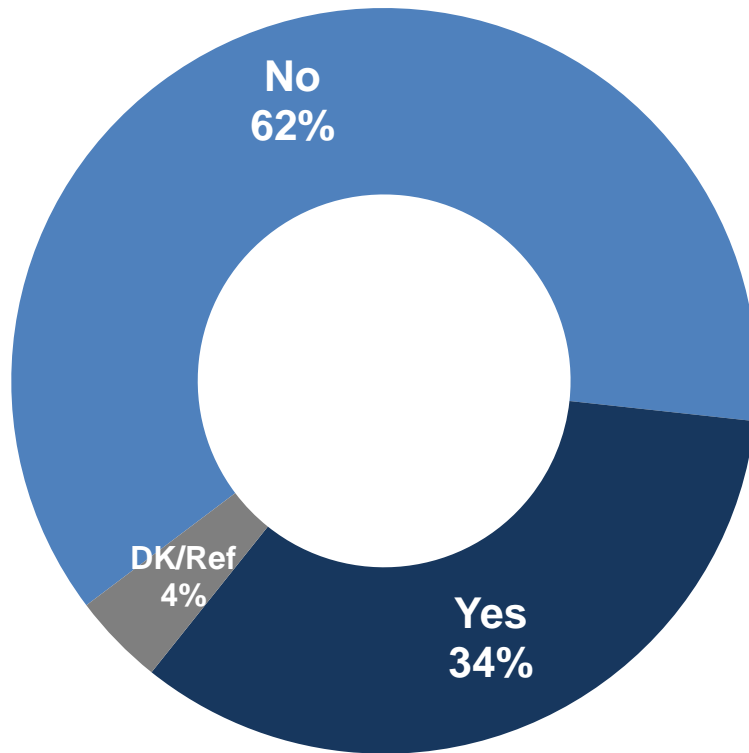
# Pessimism cuts across every major subgroup.

## Public Education Sentiment By Key Subgroup



Across the state, voters believe the public education system is failing to prepare young people for employment and adult life.

*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 (39%)</b>          | <b>38%-59%</b> |
| <b>Ind (35%)</b>          | <b>30%-66%</b> |
| <b>Dem (23%)</b>          | <b>31%-60%</b> |
| <b>White (77%)</b>        | <b>34%-62%</b> |
| <b>Af. American (15%)</b> | <b>38%-59%</b> |
| <b>West (26%)</b>         | <b>32%-66%</b> |
| <b>Middle (37%)</b>       | <b>35%-60%</b> |
| <b>East (37%)</b>         | <b>34%-61%</b> |
| <b>Men (46%)</b>          | <b>39%-58%</b> |
| <b>Women (54%)</b>        | <b>30%-65%</b> |



## Key Findings

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3. **Nearly every Tennessean recognizes the critical importance of early education programs to preparing children for future success.**

**Ninety-one percent (91%) of voters agree with the statement, *“Early education, from birth to 3rd grade, provides the building blocks of all future learning.”* In today’s polarized political world, it is rare to find a consensus across the partisan divide, still 90% of Republicans and 94% of Democrats agree with the statement above.**

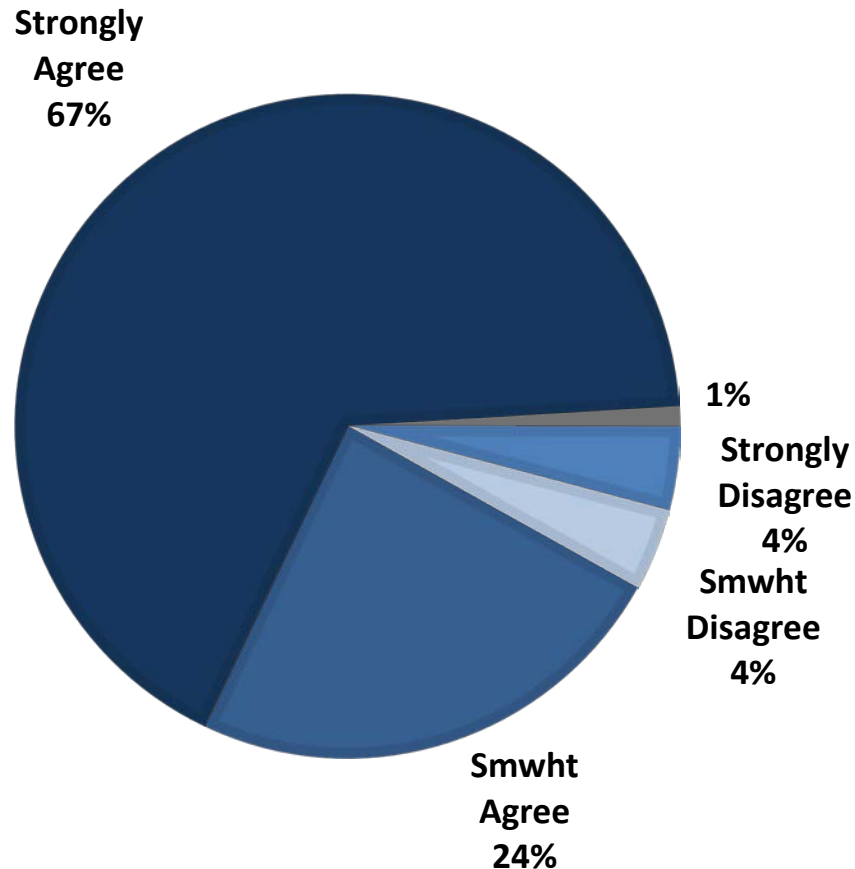
**An early education agenda is overwhelmingly endorsed by Tennessee’s voters. Six policy proposals we tested received near unanimous support (ranging from 89% to 93%) from voters with strong support levels among all subgroups.**

# Nearly every Tennessean agrees: early education is the building block for all future learning.

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

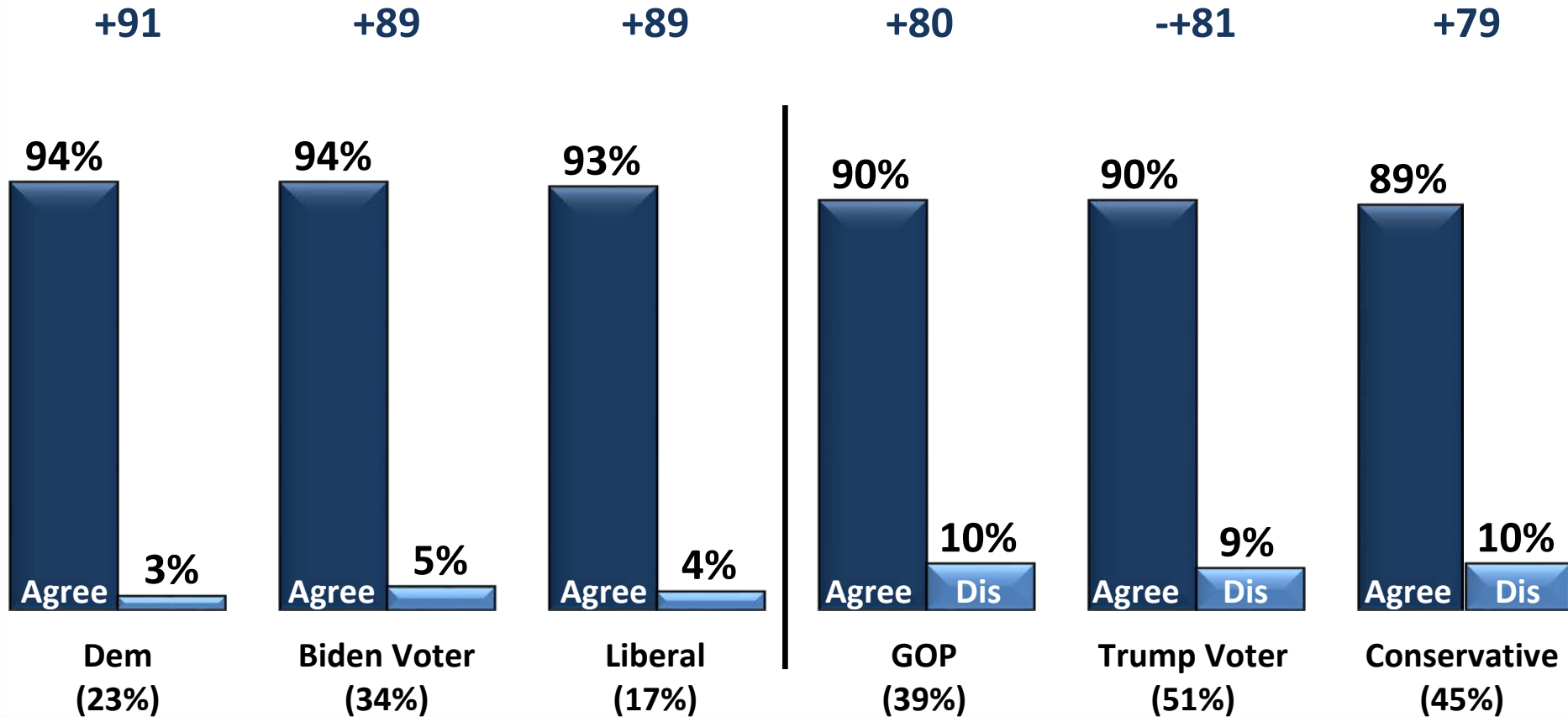
*Early education, from birth to 3rd grade, provides the building blocks of all future learning.*

**91% Total Agree**  
**8% Total Disagree**



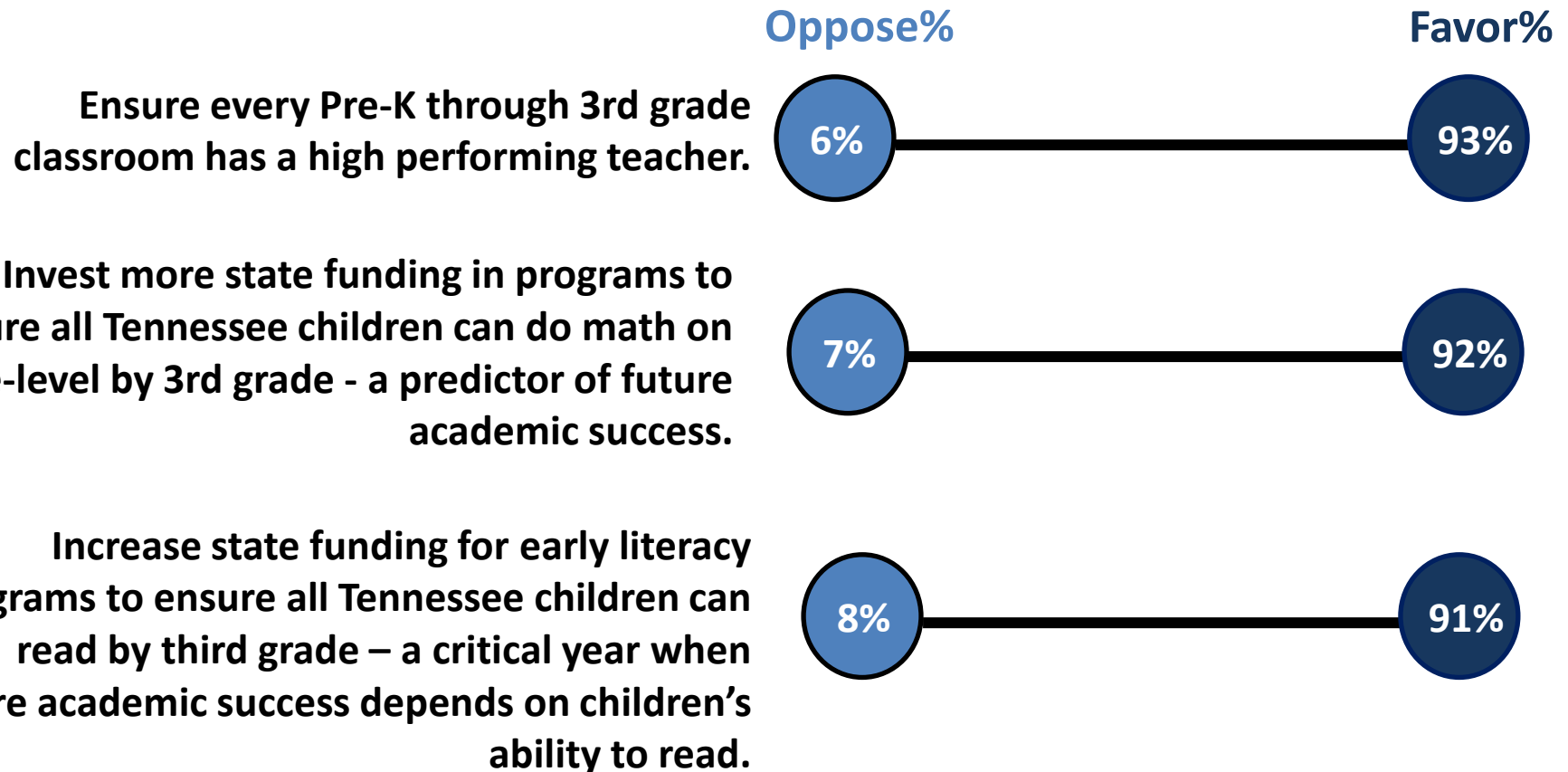
# Both parties overwhelmingly agree.

*Next, do you AGREE or DISAGREE with the following statements:  
Early education, from birth to 3rd grade, provides the building blocks of all future learning.*



# Voters voice near unanimous support for early education policies.

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



# Early education proposals – Part 2.

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

**In addition to early math and literacy, ensure children pre-k through third grade learn early-workforce skills such as problem solving, cooperation, sharing, taking turns, maintaining focus on a task, understanding rules and following instructions.**



**Increase the number of 4 years olds who can attend Pre-K by expanding programs in the rural counties that are the most economically distressed.**



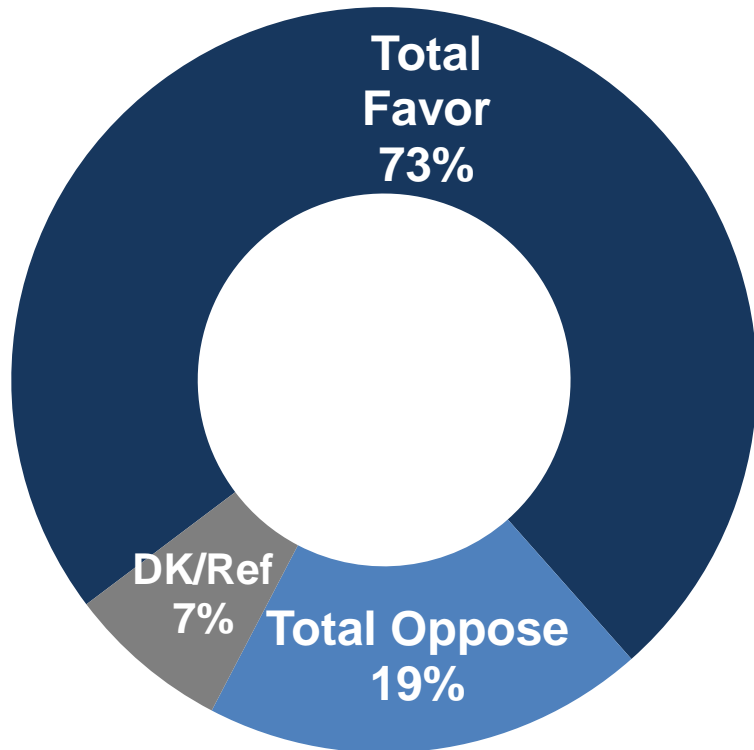
**Invest more state funding in teacher training and professional development to ensure pre-K through 3rd grade teachers have the knowledge and skills needed to effectively teach young children.**





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

*Now, on a new topic, studies show home visiting programs where a social worker is sent to help struggling parents cope helps to strengthen parenting skills, reduce abuse and neglect and get children ready for school. In addition, studies found home visiting programs are cost effective and could generate a return of up to \$5.70 for every \$1 invested. Would you FAVOR or OPPOSE a proposal to expand home visiting programs that support parents and families of young children?*



| Subgroup                  | Favor% – Oppose% |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| <b>GOP (39%)</b>          | <b>66%-29%</b>   |
| <b>Ind (35%)</b>          | <b>71%-19%</b>   |
| <b>Dem (23%)</b>          | <b>90%-5%</b>    |
| <b>White (77%)</b>        | <b>69%-19%</b>   |
| <b>Af. American (15%)</b> | <b>79%-19%</b>   |
| <b>West (26%)</b>         | <b>77%-18%</b>   |
| <b>Middle (37%)</b>       | <b>78%-15%</b>   |
| <b>East (37%)</b>         | <b>66%-24%</b>   |
| <b>Men (46%)</b>          | <b>73%-20%</b>   |
| <b>Women (54%)</b>        | <b>74%-19%</b>   |



## Key Findings

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- 4. Expanding the state’s voluntary Pre-K program is another policy receiving wide bi-partisan support across Tennessee. Fully, 89% of Tennesseans – including 89% of Trump voters and 90% of Biden voters - believe the program should be available to all Tennessee 4-year-olds.**

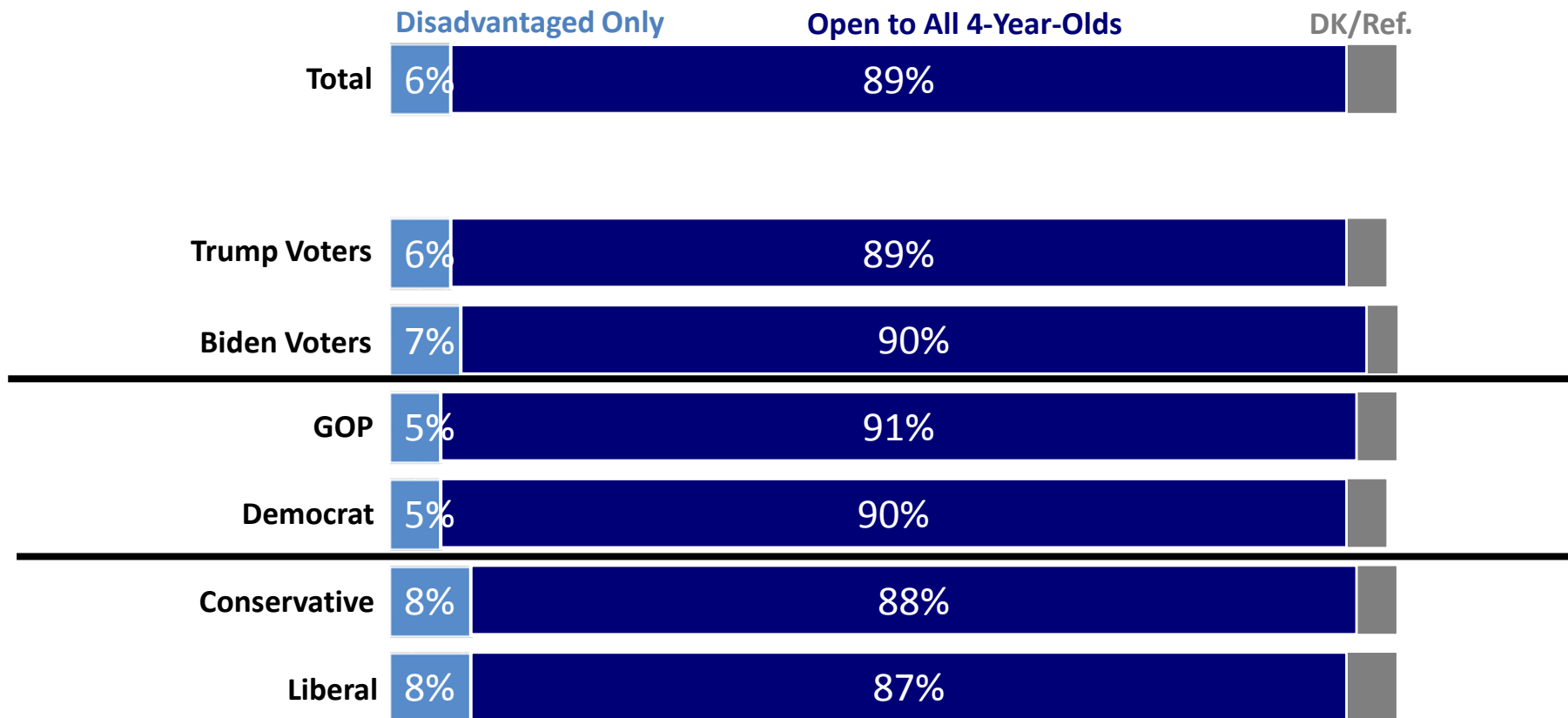
**Additionally, 85% of voters – including 81% of Republicans and 93% of Democrats - support increasing state funding for the voluntary Pre-K program to ensure slots for all disadvantaged children.**

**And, 87% of Tennessee voters support increasing state funding for the voluntary Pre-K program to allow every 4-year-old the option to attend. Large majorities of every subgroup endorse Pre-K expansion.**

**Voters find policymakers who support Pre-K expansion very appealing.**

# Across partisan lines, Tennesseans endorse expanding voluntary Pre-K to ALL 4-year-olds.

*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?*

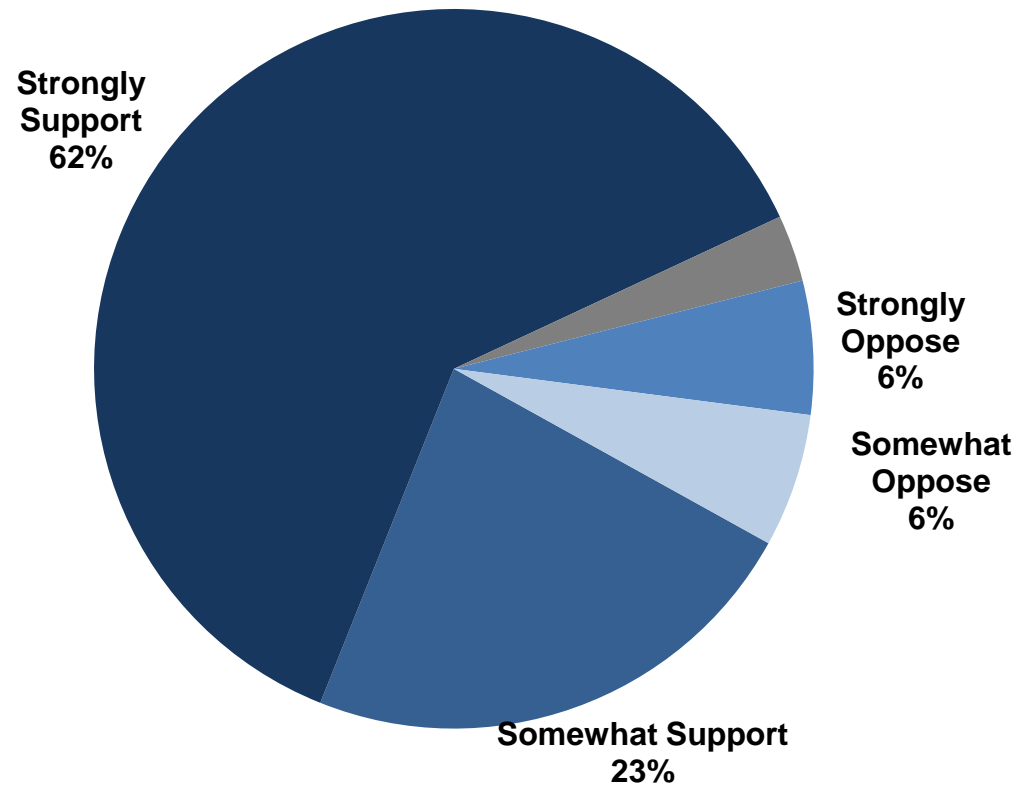


# Voters continue to overwhelmingly support investing more resources in the state's voluntary Pre-K program.

*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?*

**85%** Total Support

**11%** Total Oppose

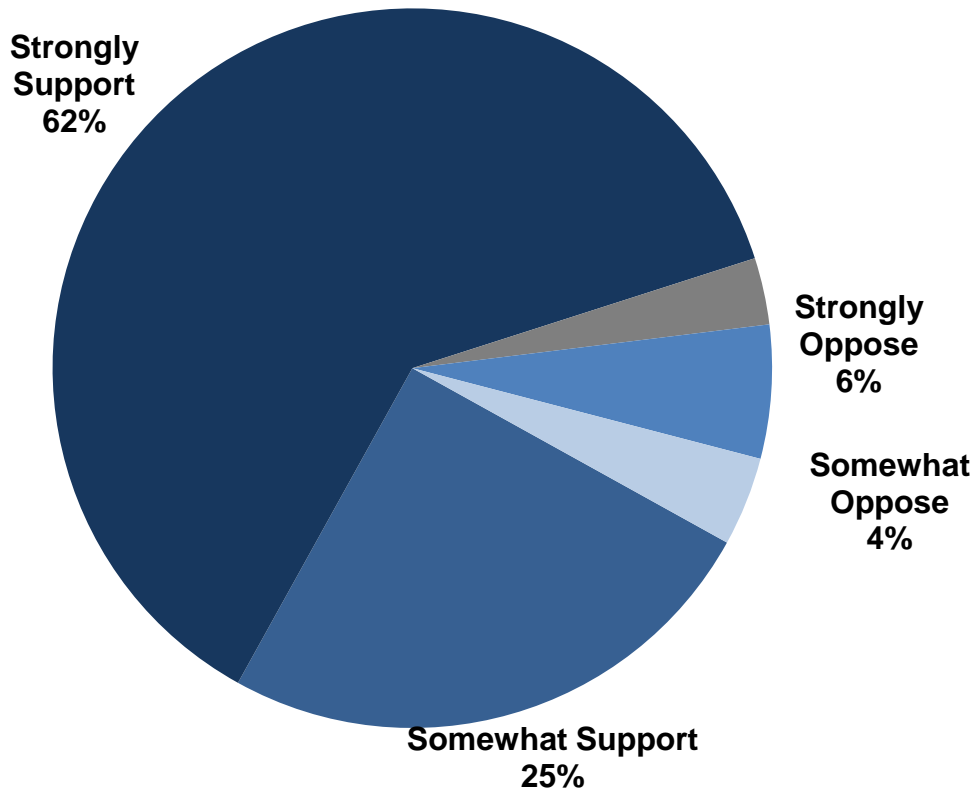


# Increasing funding to allow ALL 4-year-olds to attend is also very popular across the state.

*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?*

**87%** Total Support

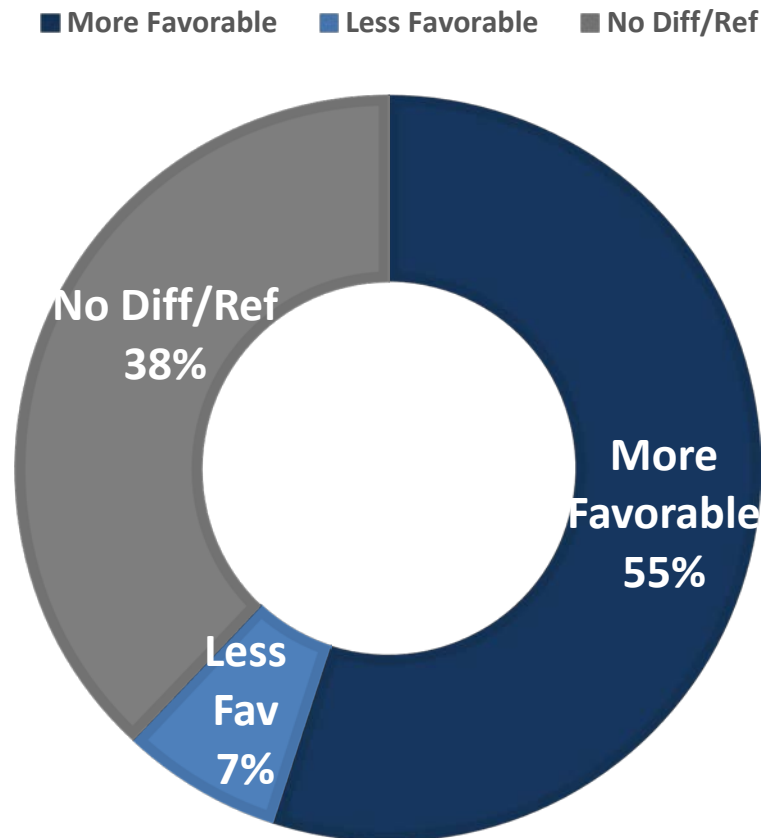
**10%** Total Oppose



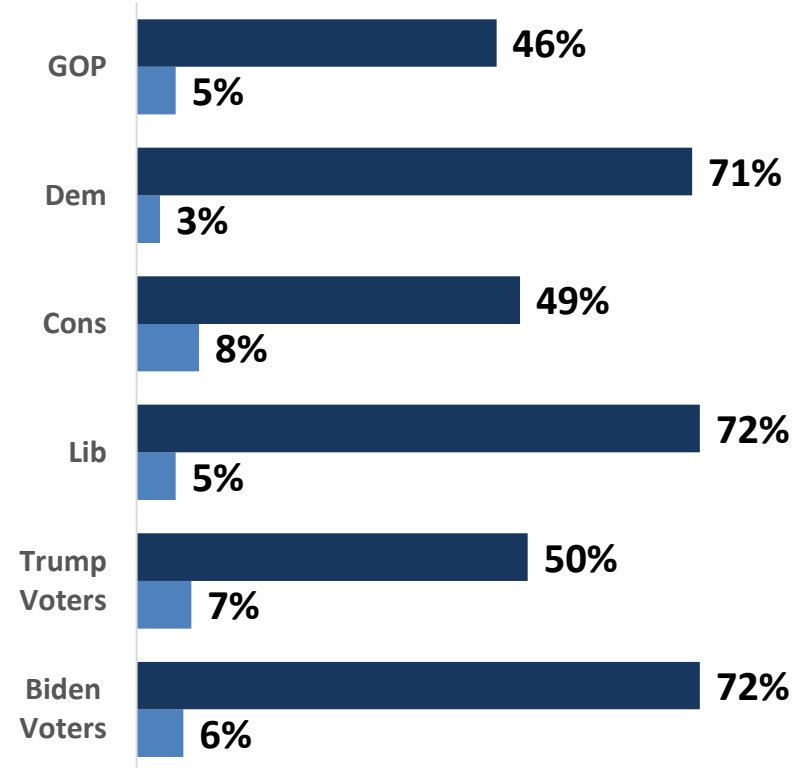
| Subgroup                  | Support%<br>Oppose% |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>GOP (39%)</b>          | <b>86%-12%</b>      |
| <b>Ind (35%)</b>          | <b>85%-12%</b>      |
| <b>Dem (23%)</b>          | <b>93%-5%</b>       |
| <b>White (77%)</b>        | <b>87%-10%</b>      |
| <b>Af. American (15%)</b> | <b>79%-19%</b>      |
| <b>West (26%)</b>         | <b>89%-12%</b>      |
| <b>Middle (37%)</b>       | <b>88%-10%</b>      |
| <b>East (37%)</b>         | <b>85%-10%</b>      |
| <b>Men (46%)</b>          | <b>87%-9%</b>       |
| <b>Women (54%)</b>        | <b>87%-10%</b>      |

# A pro-Pre-K expansion lawmaker appeals to voters across the state's partisan divisions.

*If your state legislator supported expanding Pre-K to more 4-year-olds 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?*



## By Partisanship





## Key Findings

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- 5. Finally, the impact of quality child care on children's short-term and long-term success is another area of bi-partisan consensus in Tennessee.**

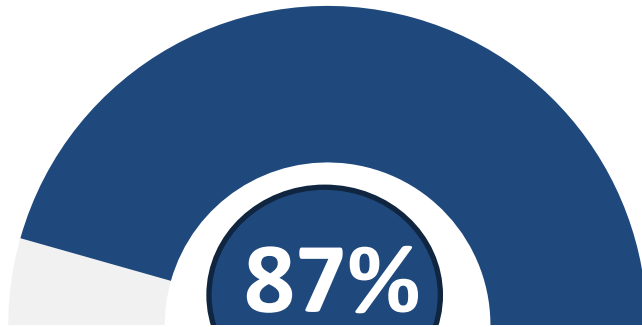
**Eighty-seven percent (87%) of voters believe child care has a major impact on a child's kindergarten readiness. Eighty-six percent (86%) of voters believe quality child care has a major impact on children's long-term well-being and future job success. Near equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats share these opinions.**

**Across partisan lines, Tennesseans overwhelmingly endorse investments in policy initiatives to strengthen child care programs and expand access to more working families.**

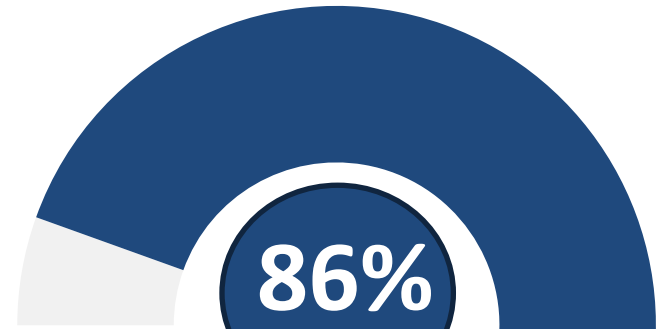
# Voters know quality child care is critical to children's short-term and long-term success.

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

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



**Total Yes**



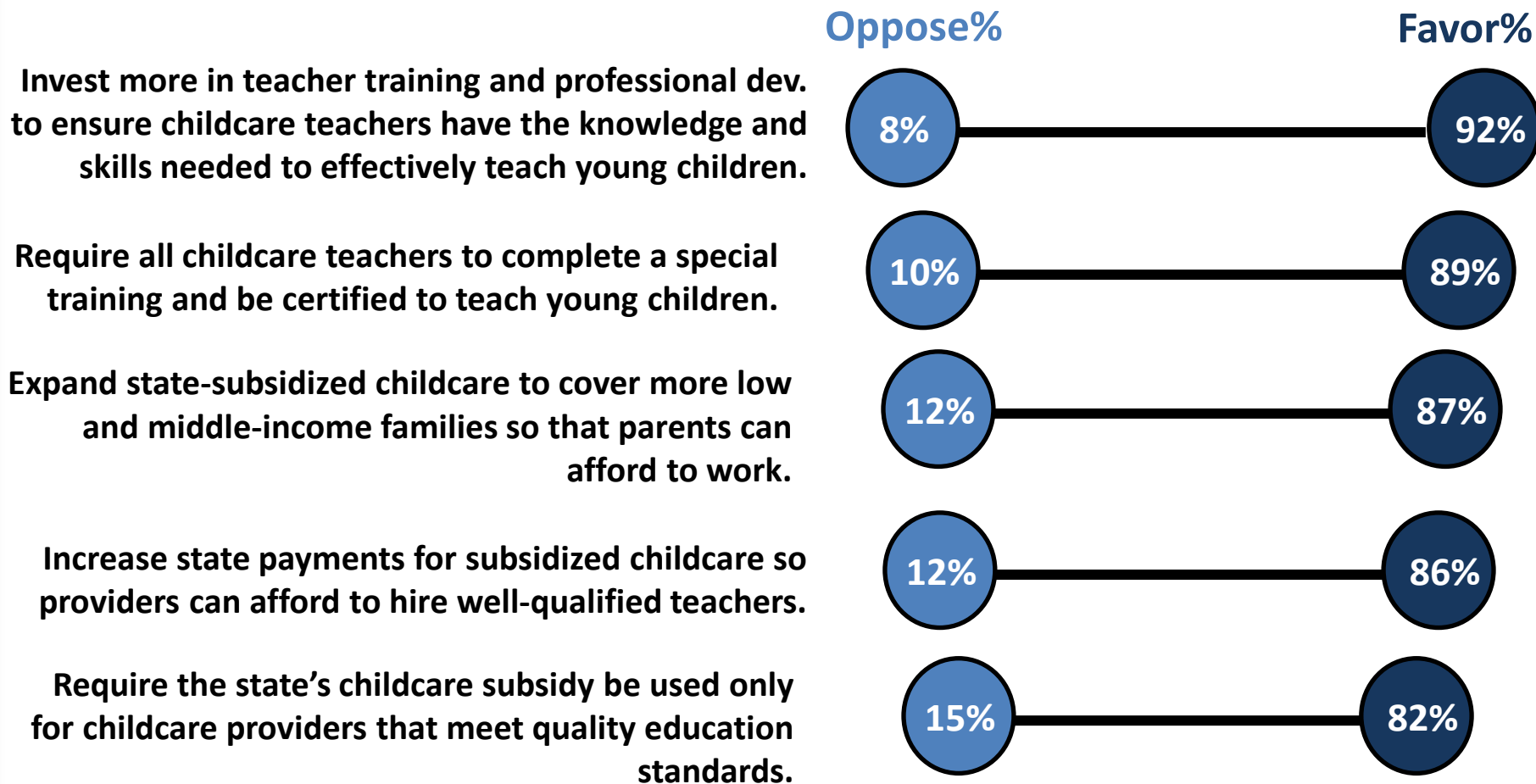
**Total Yes**





# Tennesseans overwhelmingly support a quality childcare agenda.

*Next, as you may know, more than 100 million in federal tax dollars is spent in Tennessee each year to subsidize childcare. A childcare provider can receive a license to operate by meeting required safety and health standards but is not required to meet educational standards. Now, I'd like to read some proposals that deal with the issue of childcare. After I read each proposal, please tell me if you favor or oppose that proposal.*





**PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES**

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