

Spring 2022

# Murmuration Politics of Education Benchmark Poll

It has been decades since we saw a political debate around the fundamental value of public education like the one we are seeing today. Schools and school boards have become a political battleground. School Choice is ascendant. And there's no doubt that the politics being forced into our public education system will be front and center this election year and in the years ahead.

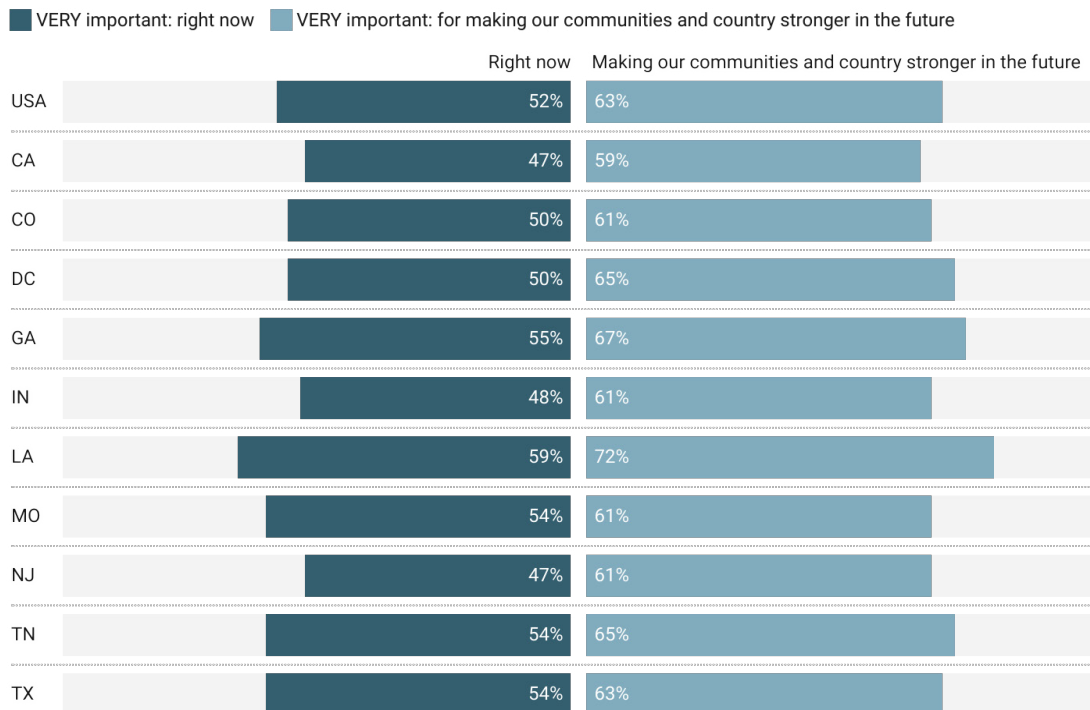
The contours of the debate emerged during the pandemic, when schools were shuttered and students were forced to learn remotely. Now that schools are open and administrators are wrestling with how to address learning loss, emerging mental health issues, and other challenges facing students, the fight is taking on a new shape. There is a new generation of parents who have different values. We know when it comes to education, voters are frustrated, skeptical, and tired - and these feelings will potentially drive the decisions voters make at the ballot box.

In March, Murmuration fielded a series of benchmark polls to better understand the state of education politics in the United States and voters' and parents' perspectives on a host of issues. This polling is part of Murmuration's public opinion research efforts that seek to help its partnership community and the larger education sector identify trends and viewpoints on the current political climate. These findings are meant to inform and complement the applied research work led by Murmuration's team of data scientists, which leverages a broad set of longitudinal data to build analytic products that help education advocates conduct more impactful and efficient campaigns. Some of the key findings include:

**A Majority of Voters Recognize K-12 Education as a Very Important Issue; It Gains More Prominence When Voters Are Asked to Consider the Future of their Communities and Our Country.**

A majority of registered voters consider K-12 education (52%), along with inflation (73%), jobs and the economy (73%), preserving individual rights and freedoms (71%), health care (67%), foreign policy (56%), and crime (61%), as very important issues right now. K-12 education is considered very important by at least 50% of voters in all but three of the ten jurisdictions (9 states plus DC) polled. The only exceptions are California, Indiana, and New Jersey, where between 47% and 48% consider this issue very important.

How important are the following issues to you right now?.....Thinking ahead, how important are the following issues for making our communities and country stronger in the future? [K-12 Education]



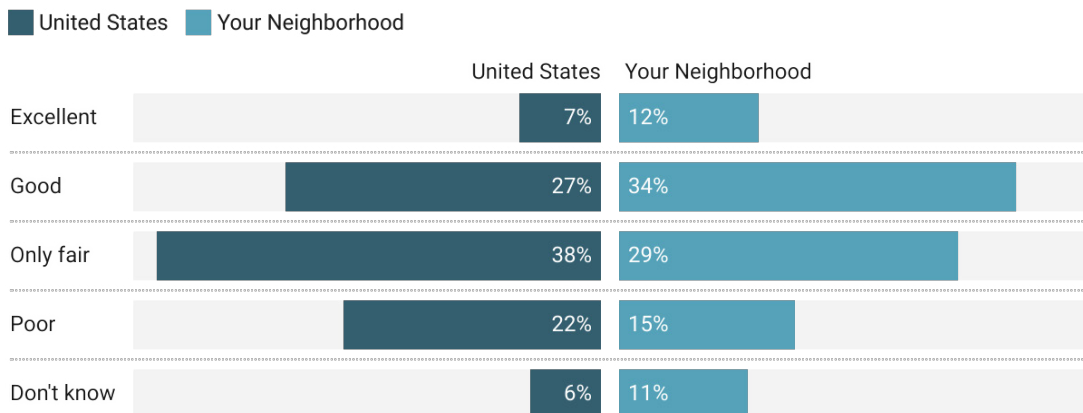
Murmuration; n=6,565 RV; March 6-14, 2022  
Source: SocialSphere, Inc.

## 2 There's a Broad Consensus Across the Electorate that Our Schools are Underperforming and as a Nation, We Need to Do More to Ensure Every Child Has Access to High-Quality Public Education.

Only 7-in-100 registered voters rate the performance of the U.S. education system as excellent; about three times that many (22%) rate it as poor. Overall, we find that about one-third rate our schools as either excellent (7%) or good (27%), while 60% see them as only fair (38%) or poor (22%); 6% declined to offer an opinion.

While voters are more likely to rate the public school system in the neighborhood where they live better than the nation's system, still only 12% rate their schools as excellent. In total 46% rate their local schools as excellent or good (34%), 29% as only fair, and 15% poor. Among parents, the ratings are slightly better as 54% rate them excellent (16%) or good (37%), and 42% only fair (31%) or poor (11%).

How would you rate the overall performance of the K-12 public school system in the United States / your neighborhood today?



Murmuration; n=1,075 registered voters US; March 6-14, 2022

Source: SocialSphere, Inc.

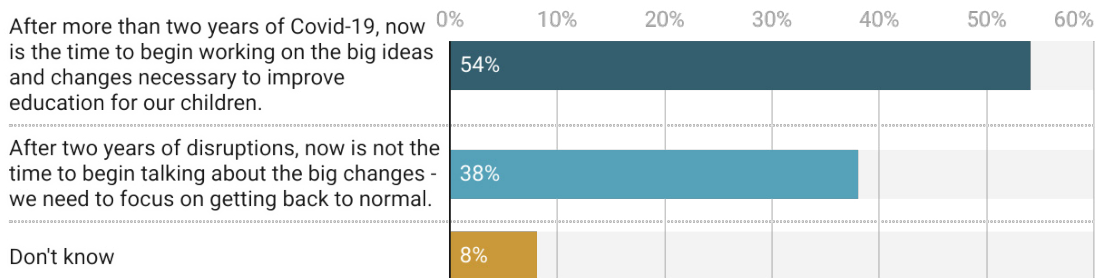
### 3 A Majority of School Parents – and Voters – Believe that Now is the Time to Work on Big Ideas and Changes to Improve Education.

The survey finds that two-thirds (67%) of voters believe that “we need to do more as a nation” to ensure that every child in America has an opportunity to receive a high-quality public education regardless of the color of their skin or the zip code they’re from. On this central issue, there is virtually no difference between white (67%) and non-white (62% Black, 67% Hispanic) segments; both Democrats (72%) and Republicans (60%) also strongly agree.

(Note: While Murmuration has longitudinal data that supports voters’ beliefs on this issue, it is important to note the smaller sample size of these demographics means there is a higher margin of error attached to these insights. Murmuration’s goal is to continue exploring these trends and to oversample demographic groups where possible to inform applied research and to provide valuable information to its partner community.)

When poll respondents were faced with choosing whether after two years of Covid-19, now is the time to begin working on big ideas and changes to improve education or whether now is not the time because “we need to focus on getting back to normal,” 53% of voters and 54% of parents of school-aged children agreed that the time for change is now. Less than two-in-five (38%) voters and the same number of parents believe that focusing on getting back to normal is preferred. Across gender, generation, race, and ethnicity, there was more support for implementing changes now and not waiting. While Democrats are more likely to see the urgency of change (+33), Republicans (+4) and independent (+2) voters still lean toward change versus focusing on a return to normal.

Which of the following statements is closest to your own view?



Murmuration; n=2,978 parents who are registered voters in US; March 6-14, 2022  
Source: SocialSphere, Inc.

### 4 Democrats and Republicans Divided on the Ultimate Impact of Covid-19 on Students

Across the national sample, a solid plurality (46%) of voters believe that the K-12 students whose education and social lives were interrupted because of Covid-19 over the last few years will be disadvantaged in the short term but will catch up. An additional 26% believe that they have been disadvantaged and may never catch up, while 17% are optimists believing they will be more resilient and better prepared for having lived through the pandemic.

The level of optimism that one has related to Covid-19 impact is correlated with partisanship. Republicans (32%) are twice as likely as Democrats (15%) to believe that students may never catch up. Among parents, the same trend holds: 25% of parents who are Republicans are unsure if students will catch up, compared to 11% of parents who are Democrats.

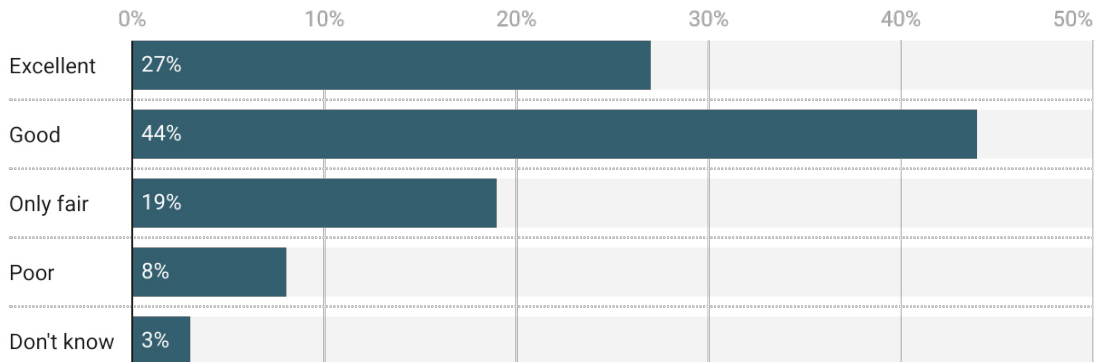
## 5 Parents Overwhelmingly Supportive of Teacher Performance During the Pandemic

Among the parents of school-aged children in the combined dataset, 70% rate the overall performance of their child’s teacher as either excellent (27%) or good (44%) during the pandemic, with little variance by subgroup. Slightly less than a fifth (19%) rated teacher performance as only fair while only 8% reported it as poor.

While white parents who reside in suburbs hold the most positive feelings for their teachers (76% excellent or good), still whites from urban districts (73%), whites in rural areas and small towns (69%), Blacks (67%), and Hispanics (67%) all rate their teachers favorably during this time. There are no gender or generational divides – and only minor differences by party (Democrat 75% excellent/good, Republican 70%).

Additionally, local teachers received the strongest favorability ratings among the 17 individuals and groups included in the survey. Nationally, local teacher favorability is 73% – and ranges from a low of 67% in California to a high of 78% in Missouri. Local teachers hold a favorability rating that is 12 points higher than the second-highest group tested, local public health officials (61% favorable).

How would you rate the overall performance of your child's (or children's) teachers during the pandemic?

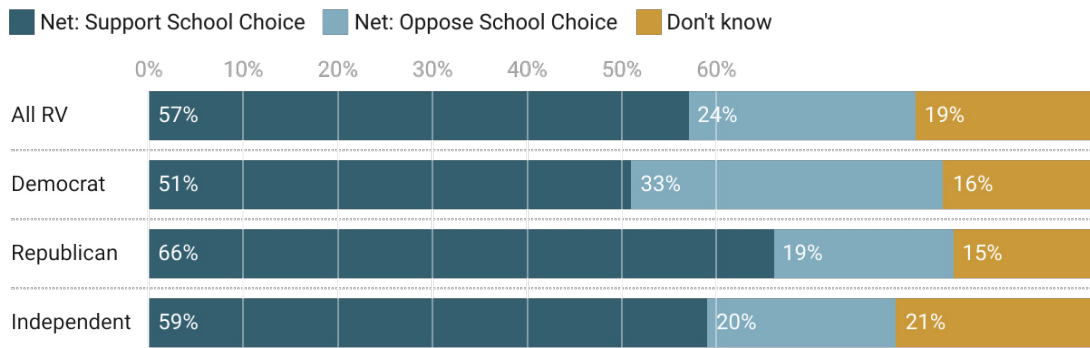


Murmuration; n=1,848 parents who are registered voters US; March 6-14, 2022  
 Source: SocialSphere, Inc.

## 6 A Solid Majority of Voters Nationally, and at Least Half in Every State, Support School Choice After Being Introduced to Arguments Representing Both Sides.

Nearly three-in-five (57%) voters support advocates of school choice who make the claim that “too many schools are underperforming, and families deserve to have the freedom to choose the educational environment that serves their children best, regardless of financial ability or home address.” This compares to 24% of voters who oppose school choice and agree with the statement that “it can go too far by taking money and students from the public school system and undermines the value of public education by allowing tax money to be used for private, religious, and homeschooling.”

Advocates of school choice say that too many schools are underperforming, and families deserve to have the freedom to choose the educational environment that serves their children best, regardless of financial ability or home address.....Opponents of school choice say that it can go too far by taking money and students from the public school system and undermines the value of public education by allowing tax money to be used for private, religious, and home schooling.....Do you support or oppose school choice?



Murmuration; n=1,075 RV; March 6-14, 2022  
Source: SocialSphere, Inc.

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### For Democrats, Generational Divide Overpowers Partisan and Ideological Divides on School Choice.

The school choice position is widely favored in the national sample across gender, generation, race, ethnicity, and party lines. While the argument of school choice advocates in our survey is preferred over opponents 52% to 31% (+21) among all Democrats – there is a stark difference between Gen Z / millennials (18-41 years old) and the baby boomer and Silent generation cohorts (57 and older), even when controlling for race.

**61%** of Gen Z and millennial Democrats support school choice, 21% do not (+40);  
**54%** of Gen X Democrats support school choice, 26% do not (+28); and  
**38%** of baby boomer and Silent generation Democrats support school choice, 44% do not (-6).

The net 46-point difference among members of the same political party illustrates a shifting set of generational values that is present even when controlling for race and ethnicity among Democrats (where the same 46-point net differential exists). For example, among our sample of white Democrats, we find:

- **White Gen Z and millennial Democrats support school choice, 55%-27% (+28)**
- **Gen Xers support school choice, 48%-33% (+15); and**
- **Baby boomer and Silent generation Democrats oppose school choice, 33% to 51% (-18).**

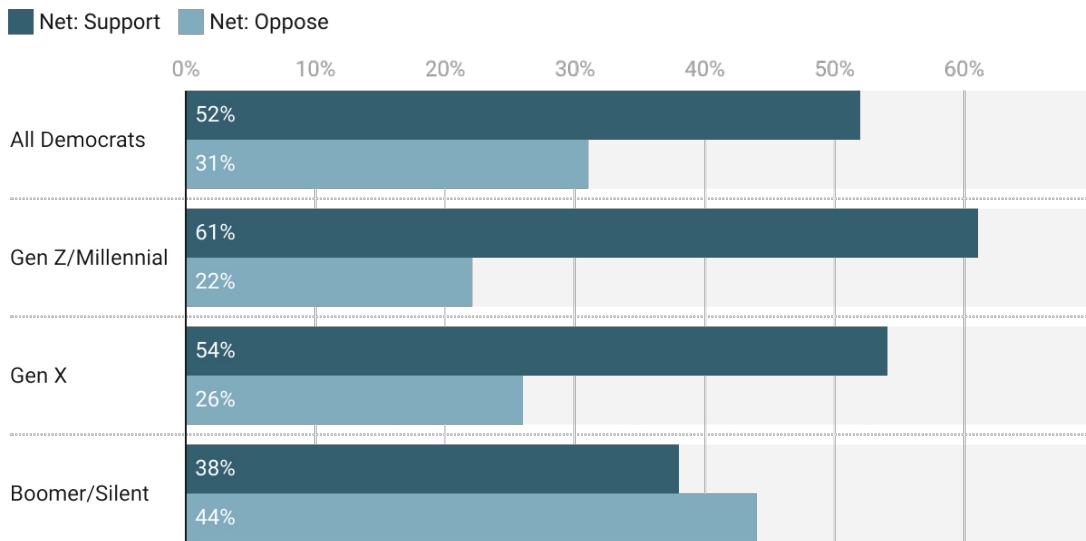
**When we shift the lens to look at white progressives by generation, we find:**

**52%** of white Gen Z and millennial progressives support school choice, 28% oppose (+24);  
**48%** of white Gen X progressives support school choice, 38% oppose (+10); and  
**19%** of white baby boomers and Silent generation progressives support school choice, 68% oppose it (-49).



Among Republicans in the survey, generational differences are non-existent: between 63% and 65% across all generations support school choice while between 17% and 18% oppose it.

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Murmuration; n=2,752 Democrats; March 6-14, 2022  
Source: SocialSphere, Inc.

**8** The difference between a Gen Z or millennial generation Democrat and Republican (65% support, 18% oppose; net difference is +47) on this issue is net 7 points, the difference between a Gen Z or millennial Democrat and baby boomer and silent generation Democrats is net 46.

**For Republicans, Gaping Generational Divide Emerges Over Critical Race Theory Instruction.**

While the values of Democratic parents of young children are quickly evolving on school choice issues relative to their parents and grandparents, a similar phenomenon is underway among Republicans on issues related to Critical Race Theory (CRT). In our national survey, and across every state there is overwhelming support (66%) for the position that states “public schools should develop age-appropriate lessons that teach all aspects of American history – and specifically the legacy of slavery and racism and how this history impacts our laws, institutions, and society to this day” compared to 24% who believe that “public schools should ban these kinds of lessons, which some call critical race theory because White students should not be made uncomfortable about their perceived advantages or the disadvantages of others.” The net difference between these two positions nationally is +42 percentage points.

**MURMURATION POLL RESULTS**

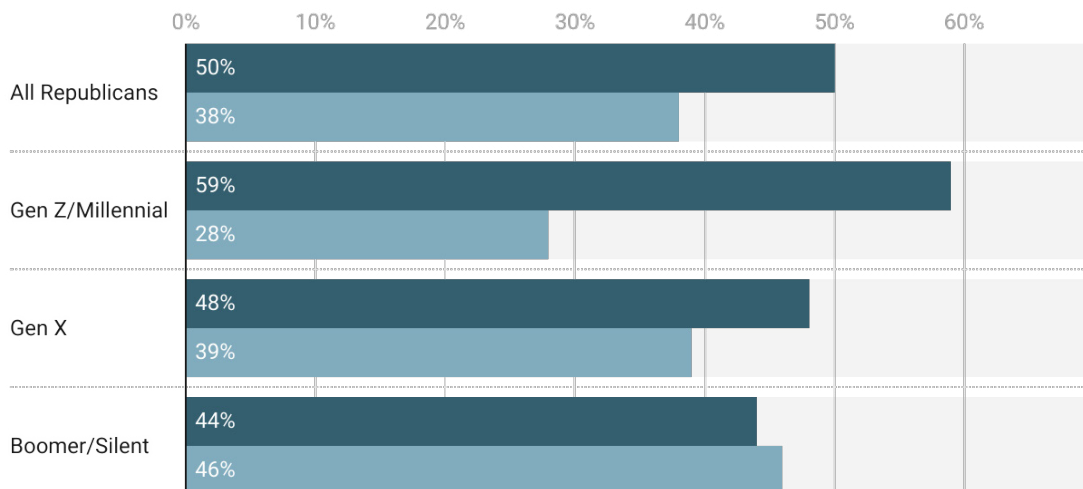
Among the Republicans in the combined and weighted national sample, support for “teaching all aspects of American history,” especially the legacy of slavery and racism reaches 50% which compares favorably to the 38% who believe that such lessons should be banned (+12). When we compare opinions of Republicans by generation, we find:

- 59%** of Gen Z and millennial Republicans support teaching history related to systemic racism, 28% believe in banning lessons like this (+31);
- 48%** of Gen X Republicans support teaching this history, 39% believe it should be banned (+9);
- 44%** of baby boomer and Silent generation Republicans support teaching this history, 46% believe it should be banned (-2).

Similar to the Democrats' generation gap on school choice, Republicans have a 33-percentage point generation gap on issues related to teaching all aspects of American history, including the parts where White students may feel “uncomfortable about their perceived advantages or the disadvantages of others.”

**Which statement do you agree with most?**

■ Public schools should develop age-appropriate lessons that teach all aspects of American history - and specifically the legacy of slavery and racism and how this history impacts our laws, institutions, and society to this day. ■ Public schools should ban these kinds of lessons, which some call critical race theory, because White students should not be made uncomfortable about their perceived advantages or the disadvantages of others.



Murmuration; n=2,179 Republicans; March 6-14, 2022  
Source: SocialSphere, Inc.

## 9 National and Local Teacher Unions Viewed Favorably by Voters; Generational Differences Emerge Among Republicans

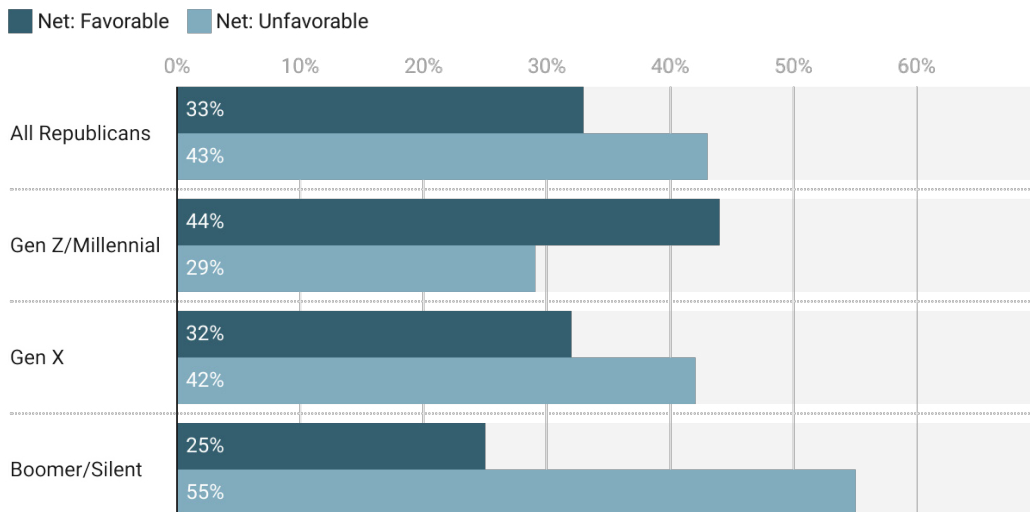
Fifty percent (50%) of voters view local teacher unions favorably (27% unfavorably) and 48% say the same about national teacher unions (32% unfavorable). As many would expect, support for both types of unions is much stronger among Democrats than Republicans. Nearly 7-in-10 Democrats (69%) rate local teacher unions favorably, compared to only 36% of Republicans who do the same. For national unions, 68% of Democrats hold favorable views compared to 32% of Republicans.

As we have seen in other areas of education politics, younger Republicans and their elders hold significantly different views on this topic:

- The net favorability of national teacher unions among Gen Z and millennial Republicans is +15 (44% favorable, 29% unfavorable);
- The net favorability of national teacher unions among Gen X Republicans is -10 (32% favorable, 42% unfavorable); and
- The net favorability of national teacher unions among baby boomer and Silent generation Republicans is -30 (25% favorable, 55% unfavorable).

National teacher unions are also viewed favorably by 46% of Republican parents of school-aged children; 33% of this cohort hold unfavorable views (+13). Among Democrats, there are no significant generational differences – Zoomers/millennials, Gen X, baby boomers, and Silent generation all hold favorable views of 66% to 67%.

Please indicate whether you have a favorable or unfavorable view of the following people, groups, and institutions. [National Teacher Unions]

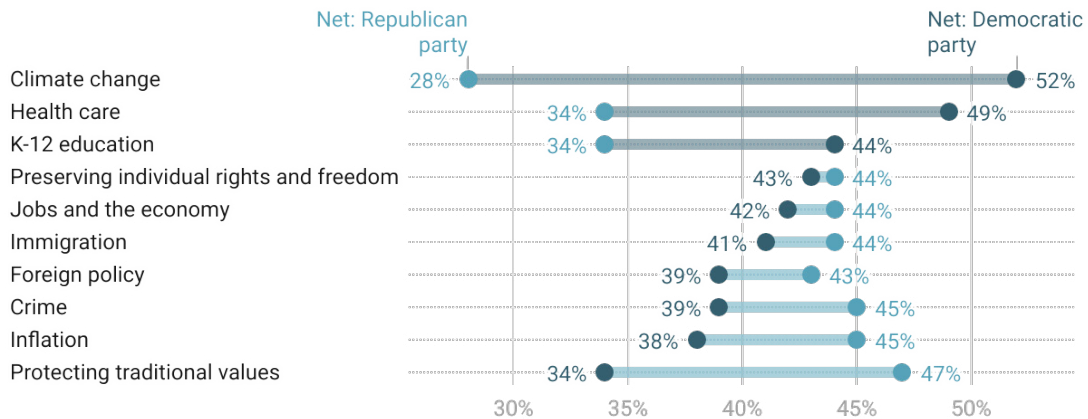


Murmuration; n=2,179 Republicans; March 6-14, 2022  
Source: SocialSphere, Inc.

## 10 More Voters Believe the Democratic Party's Values Align More Closely with their Own on K-12 Public Education

On a national basis, Democrats hold a ten-point advantage today over Republicans when voters are asked “which party’s values are most aligned with yours” on K-12 education issues; 44% select Democrats, 34% Republicans, while 22% are unsure. Across the ten jurisdictions polled, Democrats hold advantages in California (+29), Colorado (+17), Washington, DC (+66), Georgia (+7), New Jersey (+26), and Texas (+10). Republicans hold advantages in Louisiana (+5) and Missouri (+5) -- while Indiana (+2 Republican) and Tennessee (+1 Democrat) are within the margin of error. Parents of school-aged children (+5 Democrat), males, females, and Americans across every generation indicate alignment with Democrats, but disparities by race and ethnicity persist across the electorate. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of whites believe their values align more closely with Democrats, 42% with Republicans – while Democrats hold significant double-digit margins among both Black and Hispanic cohorts.

To the best of your knowledge, which party’s values are most aligned with yours on the following issues? If you don’t know one way or the other - please indicate that.



Murmuration; n=1,075 registered voters US; March 6-14, 2022

Source: SocialSphere, Inc.

## Final Thoughts

The politics of this moment are particularly important. Anger currently manifesting in death threats for school board members and burning of books threatens to further undermine people's faith in public education and political engagement generally. And if people's faith in public education erodes then it will be harder to pursue necessary changes. If school boards are taken over by people who choose to push narrow interests, or invest in solutions that only benefit some children, it could take decades to reverse the impact of those actions. That is why it is critical to engage in school boards and other key races now, and invest in the organizing and advocacy work needed to sustain forward momentum over time.

The 2022 cycle has already begun and it is clear that education will be one of the issues that voters use to determine our path forward as a nation.

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## Methodology

These findings are from a series of benchmark surveys on education politics conducted on behalf of Murmuration. Between March 6 and 14, 2022, SocialSphere completed a national survey online of n=1,075 registered voters, and also individual surveys in California (n=611), Colorado (n=604), Georgia (n=599), Indiana (n=588), Louisiana (n=594), Missouri (n=585), New Jersey (n=574), Tennessee (n=569), Texas (n=626), and Washington, DC (n=481). The national survey carries a 95 percent credibility level of +/-2.9 percentage points. A topline questionnaire with results from the national survey and ten jurisdictions is available [here](#).