

To: MTA Leadership  
From: Echo Cove Research & Consulting  
Date: May 20, 2021  
Re: Public Education Study – Key Findings

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The findings in this memorandum are based on a public opinion survey of 600 Massachusetts residents 18 years of age and older. Data was collected online between March 26 and April 5, 2021, and some telephone surveys were also conducted. Sampling methodology was employed to ensure that the respondents matched the demographic profile of Massachusetts residents. Statistical weighting was used to further ensure the accuracy of the sample. The margin of error is no greater than +/- 4.0% (at the 95% confidence level).

## Overview

As Massachusetts residents grow more hopeful about a post-pandemic return to normalcy, this study reveals important facts to bear in mind regarding students and public education, from prekindergarten through college.

First, almost all parents are concerned about the academic and emotional toll of the pandemic on their children. Parents and non-parents alike believe that special programs must be created to help their children cope and eventually recover. They also recognize that students in lower-income areas and communities of color will need special support because they have suffered disproportionately from the disruption of the last year.

Second, they believe these programs should not be narrowly focused on academic achievement, but that they also need to include social and emotional elements. And this focus on the "whole child" should reshape our public schools for the future. Residents support a reimagined school system that includes programs that go beyond the basics to inspire interest in music, art and other areas.

Third, most residents are deeply appreciative of how educators have responded to the pandemic. Most believe that the teaching models used in 2020-2021 have made their jobs harder. They also have a more favorable view of educators than they did a year ago. Support for educators extends to their unions. An overwhelming majority support the MTA's leadership position in calling for CDC conditions to be met before a return to full-time in-person classes.

Fourth, there is overwhelming support (80%+) for increasing funding for preK-16 education, taking students from childhood through their college years. This support extends to fully funding the *Student Opportunity Act* and passing the *Cherish Act*. This level of support for public education funding is unprecedented; it has increased significantly in the past two years.

*Please note that some percentages in the charts do not add up precisely to 100 due to rounding.*

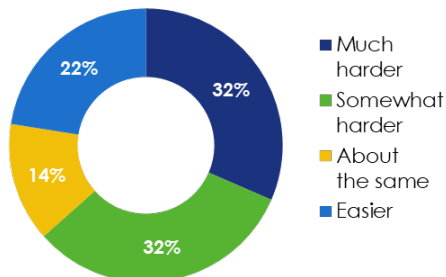
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## Key Findings

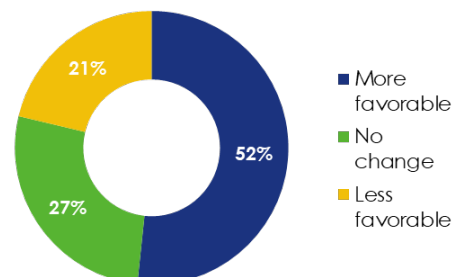
**1. Residents of Massachusetts are deeply appreciative of the role that educators have played during the COVID-19 pandemic, both in terms of their teaching efforts and in fighting for the health and safety of students, their families, and their communities. Parents recognize that remote learning has meant that educators have had to work harder during the pandemic, and most of them now have an improved perception of educators in general.**

- 76% approve of how public school teachers/educators have responded to the pandemic; 24% disapprove.
- 63% believe that educators' jobs have been harder during the pandemic, compared to 23% who feel they have gotten easier (14% think they have stayed the same).
- 52% have a more favorable view of educators than before the pandemic, while 21% have less favorable views.

Do you think educators' jobs have been easier, harder or about the same as before the pandemic?



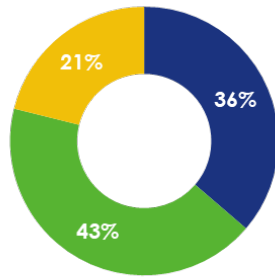
How has your impression of public school educators changed based on how they have handled teaching during the pandemic?



**2. Throughout the pandemic, public school educators and the Massachusetts Teachers Association have played a leadership role in opposing a full-time return to classrooms until conditions are safe. The public strongly believes that this was the correct position.**

- 79% agreed with the MTA's position that CDC conditions must be met before schools return to full-time in-person learning.
- 63% disagreed with Governor Charlie Baker's mandate that public schools fully reopen starting in April, believing that decisions should be made locally by city/town officials.
- As of the first week in April (when the survey was conducted), 64% were either very or somewhat worried about the health and safety of students when they returned to school full time.

**Agreement with the MTA's position on school reopening**



■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree

Over this school year, educators' unions have exercised leadership in saying that CDC conditions must be met before schools return to full-time in-person classes. This not only protects educators and students but also keeps the community safe by limiting the spread of the coronavirus.

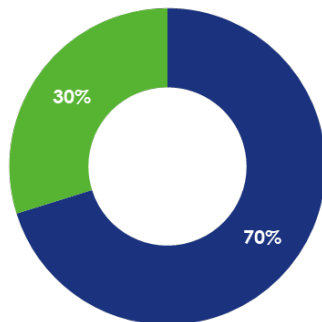
**3. As we begin to emerge from the pandemic and see a possible return to normalcy, the public recognizes that it will take a great deal of effort and a sustained commitment for children to recover fully.**

- 75% of parents are concerned about their children's emotional well-being and 73% are concerned about their academic progress (58% are worried about both).
- 58% believe that students "... will need dedicated programs to help them recover and get back on track," as opposed to 42% who believe "... children are resilient and will bounce back without a lot of special programs."

**4. Parents and non-parents alike do not believe the public schools should return to the "old normal." They believe that changes must be made to help students recover emotionally, socially, and academically.**

- **First**, the public is firmly against administering the MCAS this spring.

**Continue with or cancel MCAS testing this spring?**



■ Cancel ■ Continue

**Which of these statements do you most agree with?**

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**MCAS testing should be canceled.** This has been a year of emotional turmoil for students. They now need emotional support as they reconnect with educators and classmates. Also, many students are struggling emotionally, and this is not the time to create more anxiety.

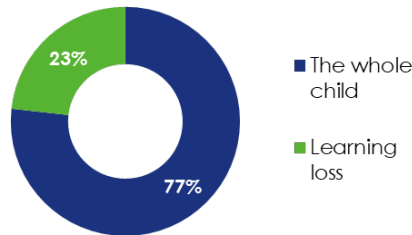
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**MCAS testing should be continued.** Testing ensures that all students in the state achieve a minimally adequate level of knowledge before graduating. This is especially important now, given the disruptions and loss of learning caused by the pandemic. Now is the time to return to normal, and that includes testing.

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- **Second**, there is widespread agreement that programs created to help students cope with the pandemic must focus on the "whole child" rather than be limited to academic achievement. This belief is understandable since more than 70% of parents are concerned about their children's emotional well-being.
- **Third**, this focus on the "whole child" should extend beyond simply helping students cope with the pandemic. The past year has shown that children need much more than academic instruction from public schools, and two-thirds of those surveyed believe that we should take this opportunity to reimagine our school system.

Programs to help students cope should focus on ...

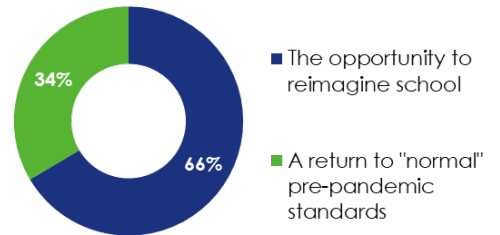


**Which of these statements do you most agree with?**

Schools should focus on the **whole child**, creating a welcoming atmosphere that rebuilds relationships among educators and students and focuses on social and emotional learning as well as positive academic outcomes.

Schools should focus **on learning loss** and create rigorous academic programs involving intensive tutoring, with the results designed to be measurable on standardized tests.

The resumption of school this fall provides ...



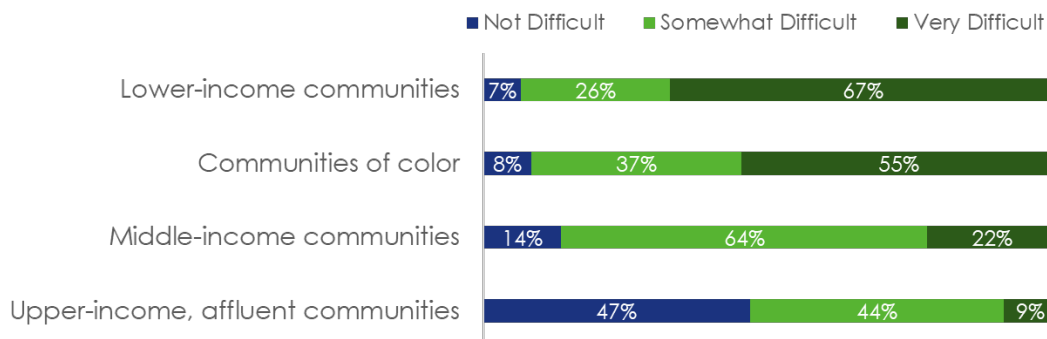
**Which of these statements do you most agree with?**

We have an opportunity this fall to **reimagine school**, meet students where they are, provide the support needed to nurture resilience, and help children adjust to a post-pandemic world. We should change our curriculum and practice to be more reflective of **meaningful learning** for our students.

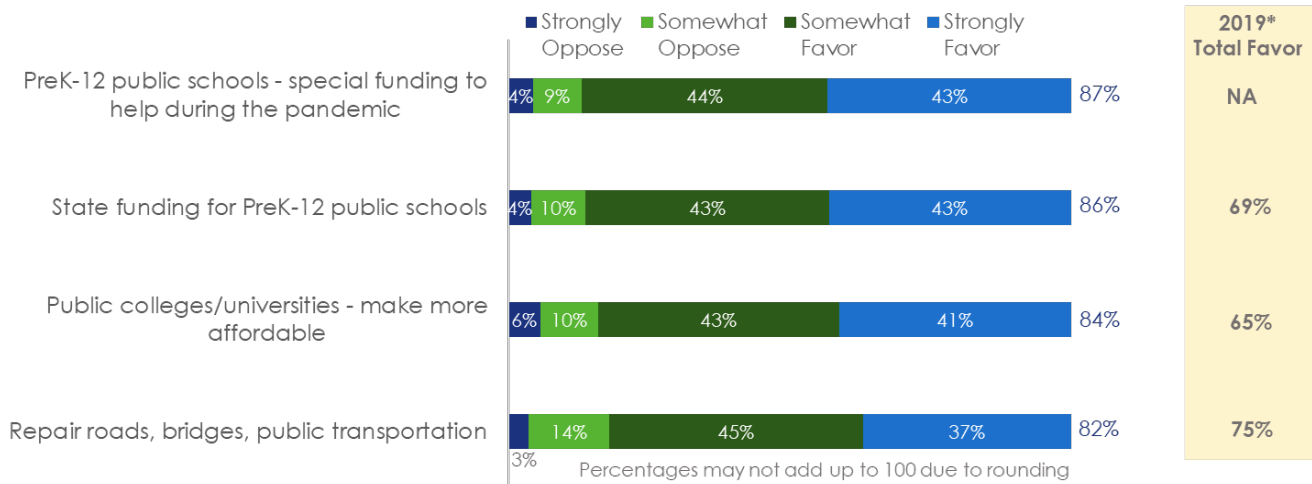
School should resume this fall with **"normal" pre-pandemic standards**, frameworks and test-driven curriculum. It should "catch kids up" to where they would have been without the issues caused by COVID-19.

- **Fourth**, there is widespread recognition that students in communities of color and lower-income communities have suffered disproportionately and will have much more difficulty recovering from the pandemic.

Difficulty in recovering from academic and emotional setbacks in different types of communities



**5. Residents of Massachusetts recognize that addressing the needs of our public schools will require significant investments. There is near-unanimous agreement that funding for public education, from preK to college, should be increased. Support for increasing public school funding has risen significantly in the past two years.**



\*Survey of 600 Massachusetts voters conducted by Echo Cove Research & Consulting. Data was collected online August 19-28, 2019.

**Also of note:**

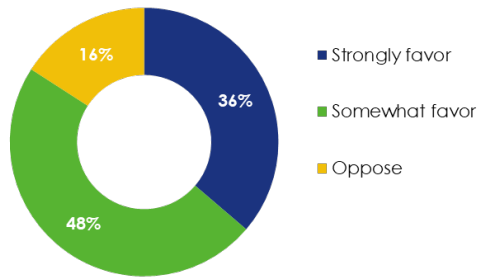
- 90% approve of dedicating special funding to create programs to help students struggling academically or emotionally, 86% favor increasing funding for preK-12 public schools in general, and 84% favor funding to make public colleges and universities more affordable.
- More specifically: 85% favor increasing school funding in low-income communities and communities of color that have been hit especially hard by the coronavirus.
- A substantial majority of residents oppose laying off faculty and staff at public colleges and universities.

Thinking about when school resumes this fall, which one of these statements do you most agree with?

Now is not the time to cut budgets and reduce staffing. Students who are dealing with the pandemic need faculty, staff, and programs more than ever.	72%
Budgets are very tight, so there is no choice but to reduce spending even though it might impact programs and students.	28%

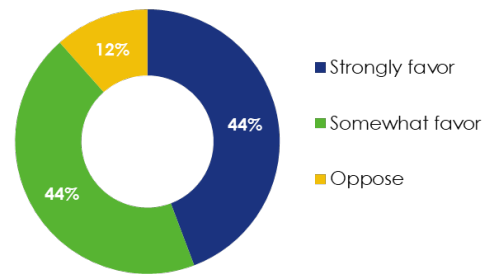
**6. The desire to improve our public schools and colleges – and willingness to provide adequate funding – translate into exceedingly strong support for two legislative initiatives:**

**Fully Funding the SOA**



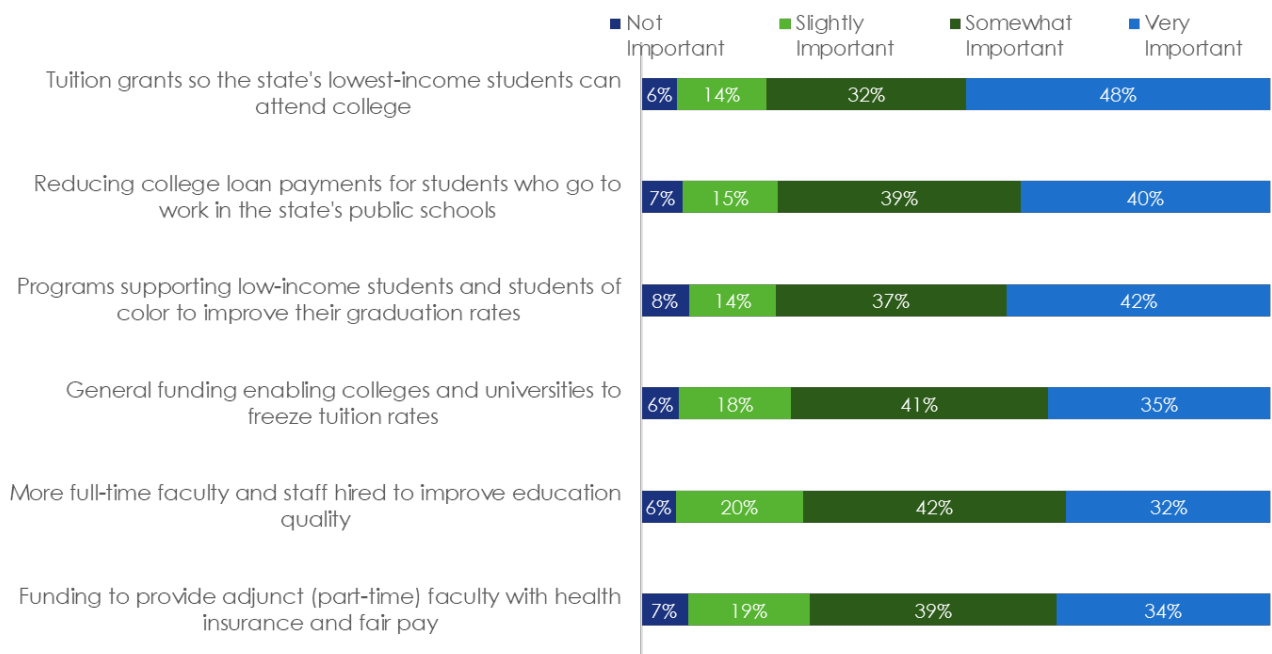
We want your opinion about legislation called the *Student Opportunity Act (SOA)*. Due to the pandemic, the SOA was underfunded last year. Do you favor or oppose increasing funding for the SOA by enough to ensure that it stays on track?

**The Cherish Act**



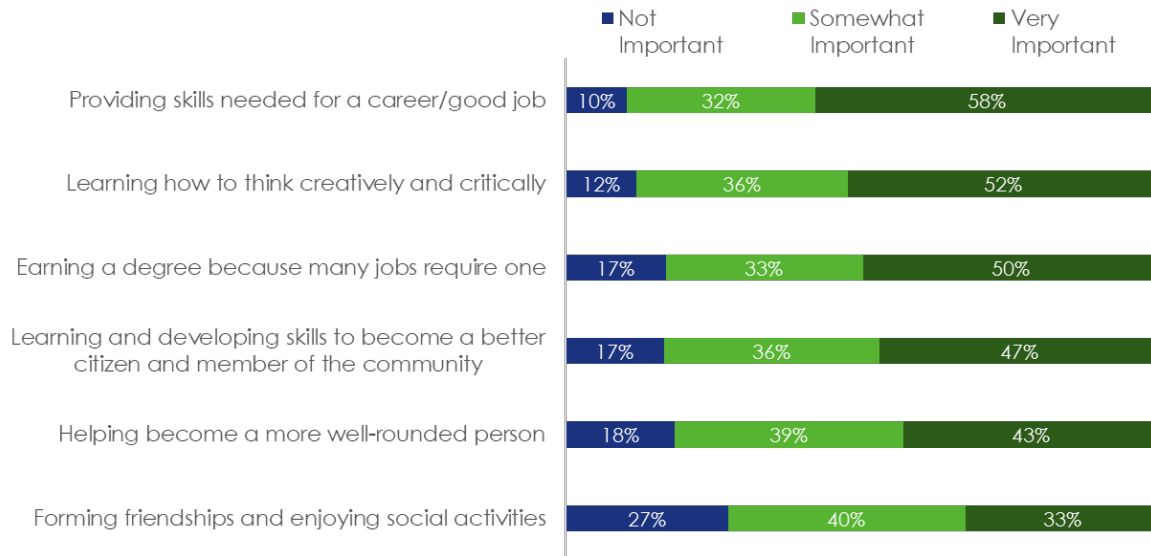
The state Legislature is now considering legislation called the Cherish Act. The Cherish Act would provide funding to make a public college education more affordable for low- and middle-income students and help provide a quality higher education by ensuring sufficient faculty and staff. Do you favor or oppose the Cherish Act?

**7. For a host of reasons, residents believe it is important to increase funding for public higher education, with many centering around reducing costs and supporting low-income students and students of color to help them complete college.**



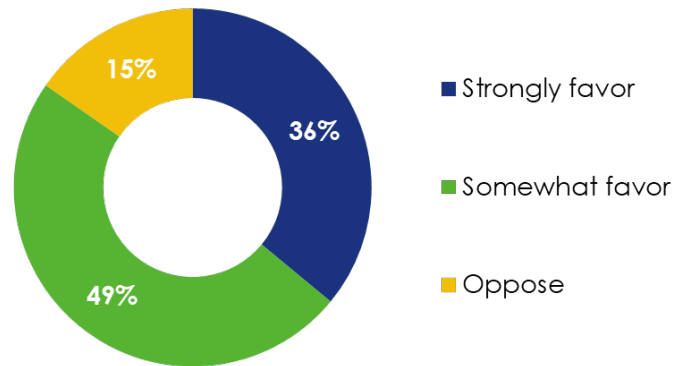
**8. By significant margins, survey respondents see higher education as an important pathway to developing critical thinking ability and the skills needed for a well-rounded and successful life.**

**Importance of aspects of a college education**



**9. After suffering through more than a year of the pandemic and seeing the cost it has inflicted on students and the public education system, Massachusetts residents are ready for a change. They believe that we must not return to the "old normal" – and that the "old normal" has failed many students, especially those in communities of color and lower-income communities. Residents believe that now is the time for a fundamental change in how we educate our students. They are willing to fund this change and believe that educators should lead it.**

We now have a real opportunity to address the consequences of years of underfunding and ensure that public schools are dedicated to educating the whole child. This would include programs that go beyond the basics to inspire interest in music, the arts, and other areas. We would educate our children in a joyful and welcoming environment that highlights the value of students and public education. This would require state funding for investments in new programs, improving facilities, and hiring educators. Would you favor or oppose funding dedicated to achieving this goal?



10. The public believes that revenue for increased education spending should be raised in part by increasing the state income tax on households with annual incomes of more than \$1 million. Almost three-quarters of all residents support the Fair Share Amendment. Recent polls by MassInc and UMass Amherst/WCVB show similar levels of support.

Would you favor or oppose a 4% additional tax on annual income over \$1 million?

