



Public education after the pandemic:
A survey of Massachusetts residents

Summary of Findings

May 20, 2021



Survey methodology

- **Sample Population**
Residents of Massachusetts 18 years of age or older
- **Sample Size:** 600
- **Sample Structure:**
Quotas were used to ensure that the respondents matched the demographic profile of Massachusetts residents. Statistical weighting further ensured the accuracy of the sample.
- **Data Collection:**
Data was collected between March 26 and April 5, 2021, via an online questionnaire and by phone in English and Spanish.
- **Margin of Error:**
The margin of error is no greater than +/- 4% (at the 95% confidence level).

Note that percentages in the charts may not always add up to 100 due to rounding



Overall findings

We have a historic opportunity to advance a progressive educational model in Massachusetts

BECAUSE

The pandemic has exposed systemic problems in our public education system.

AND

Public appreciation for educators may well be at an all-time high.

AND

Support for increasing education funding is exceedingly strong.

AND

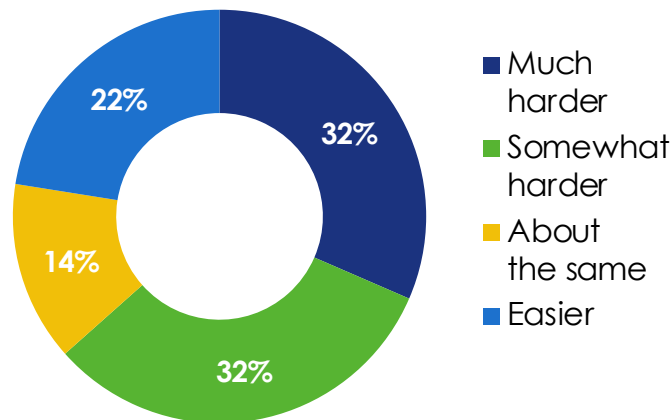
Parents and non-parents alike support a progressive pedagogical model that focuses on the “whole child” over an “information-accumulation” approach.

Educators are widely appreciated for dedication to students during the pandemic

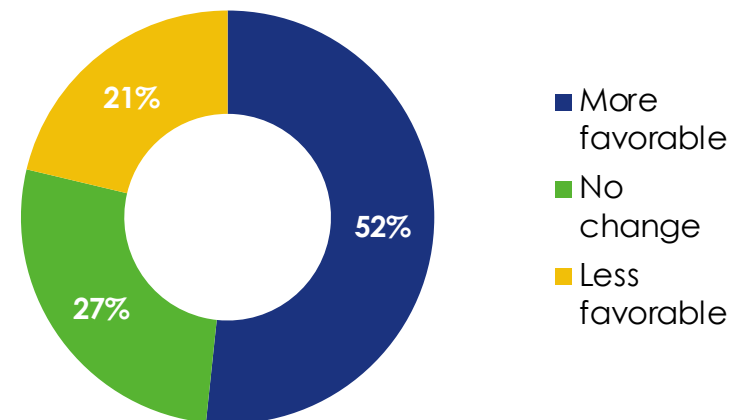
- Residents of Massachusetts are deeply appreciative of the role that educators have played during the COVID-19 pandemic, both in terms of their teaching efforts and in fighting for the health and safety of students, their families, and their communities. Parents recognize that remote learning has meant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

76% approve of how public school teachers/educators have responded to the pandemic; only 24% disapprove.

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



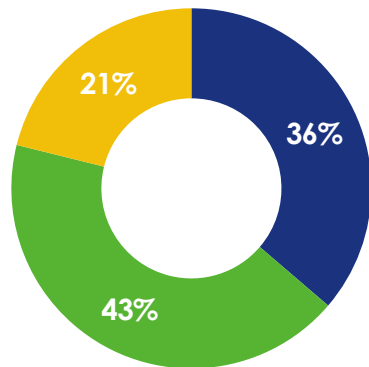
How has your impression of public school educators changed based on how they have handled teaching during the pandemic?



Educators' unions are credited for their leadership

- 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.

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.

Disagreed with Governor Baker's mandate

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.

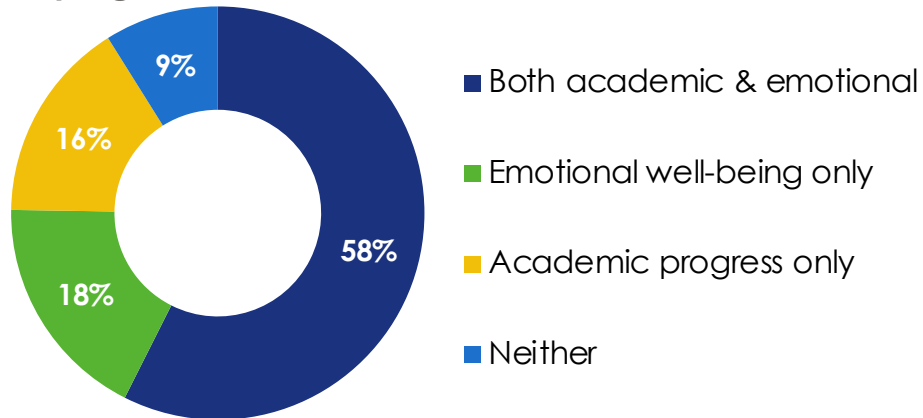
Worried about students' health/safety

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 return to school full time.

Parents believe children have suffered academic and emotional setbacks and want special programming

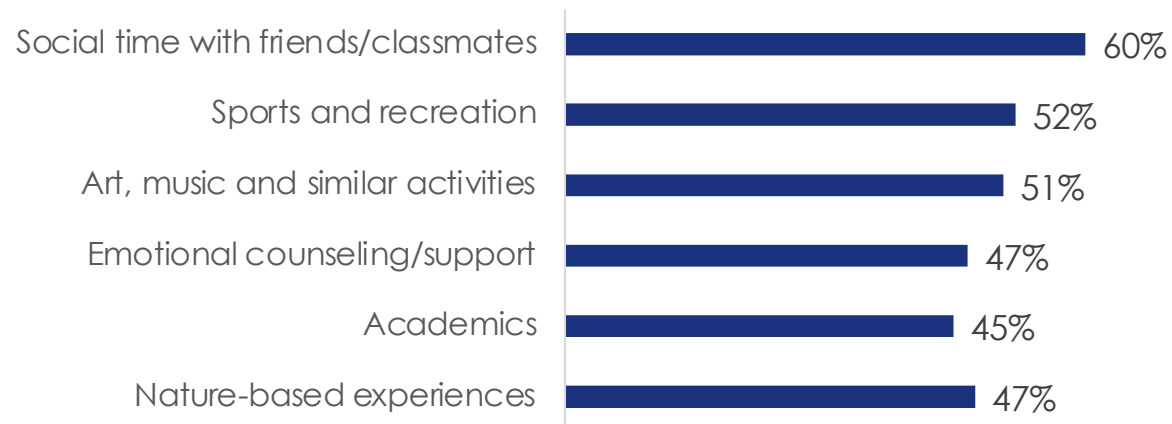
- As we begin to emerge from the pandemic and see a possible return to normalcy, the public recognizes that it will take a great deal of effort and a sustained commitment for children to recover fully.
- Nearly all parents are concerned about their children's academic progress or emotional well-being.
- Most parents wanted their children to participate in a range of summer programs if they were offered by the schools.

% of parents concerned about children's well-being and progress:



58% of parents believe that students "... will need dedicated programs to help them recover and get back on track."

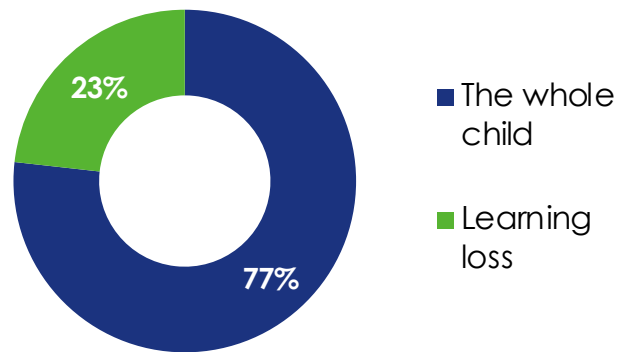
Desired participation in various types of summer programs



Programs and curricula should focus broadly on the “whole child” rather than narrowly on academics

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.

Programs to help students cope should focus on ...

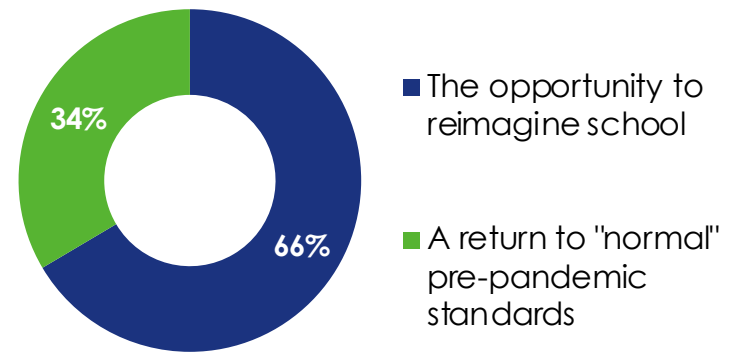


Which of these statements do you most agree with?

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 ...



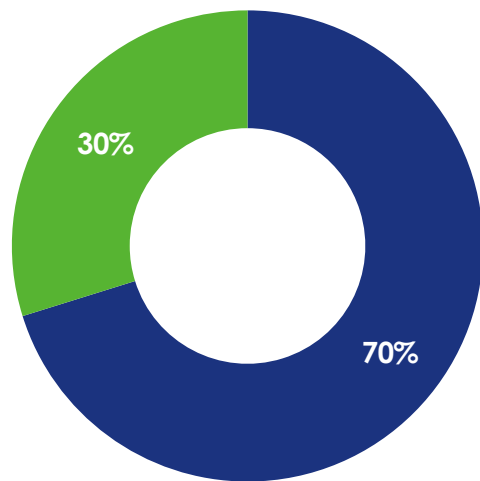
Which of these statements do you most agree with?

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.

The public opposes administering the MCAS this spring, as it will hinder students' process of recovery

Continue with or cancel MCAS testing this spring?



■ Cancel ■ Continue

Which of these statements do you most agree with?

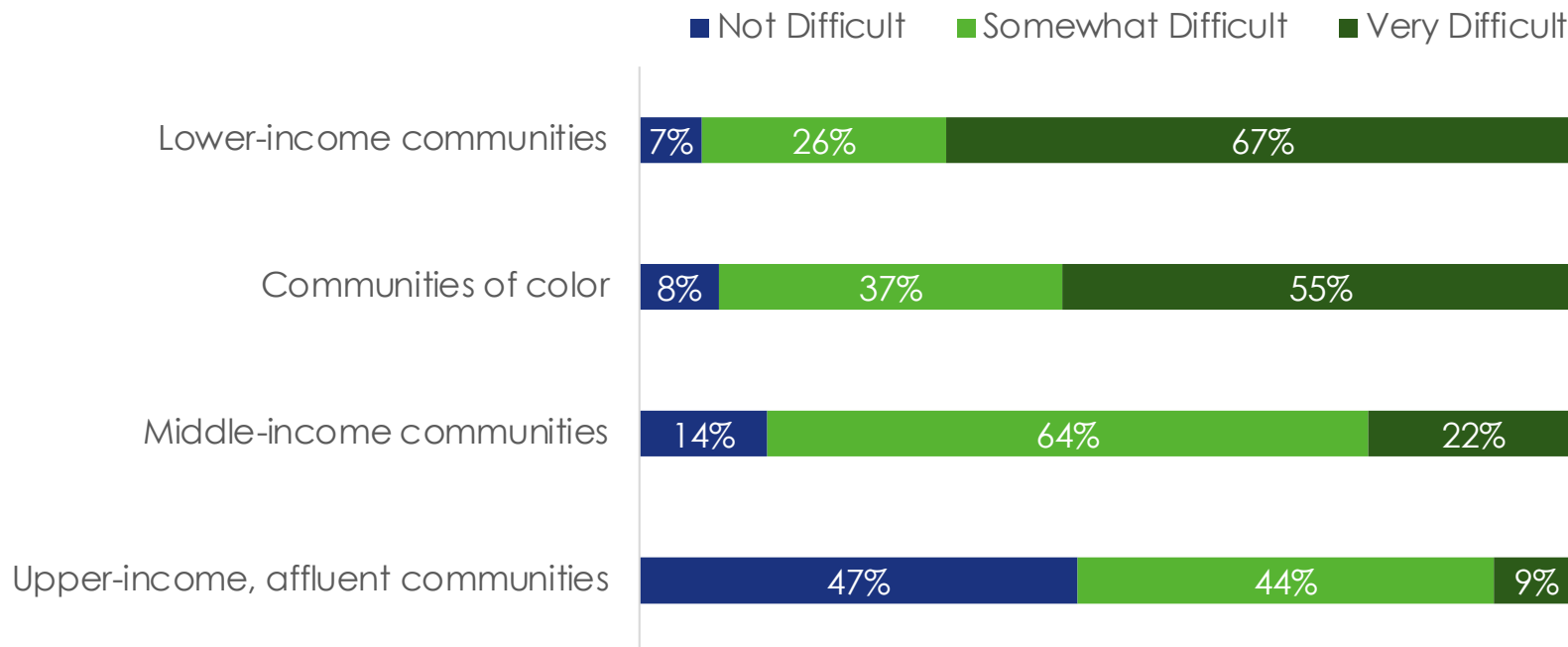
MCAS testing should be canceled . This has been a year of emotional turmoil for students. They now need emotional support as they reconnect with educators and classmates. Also, many students are struggling emotionally, and this is not the time to create more anxiety.

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.

Residents acknowledge that lower-income areas and communities of color have suffered disproportionately

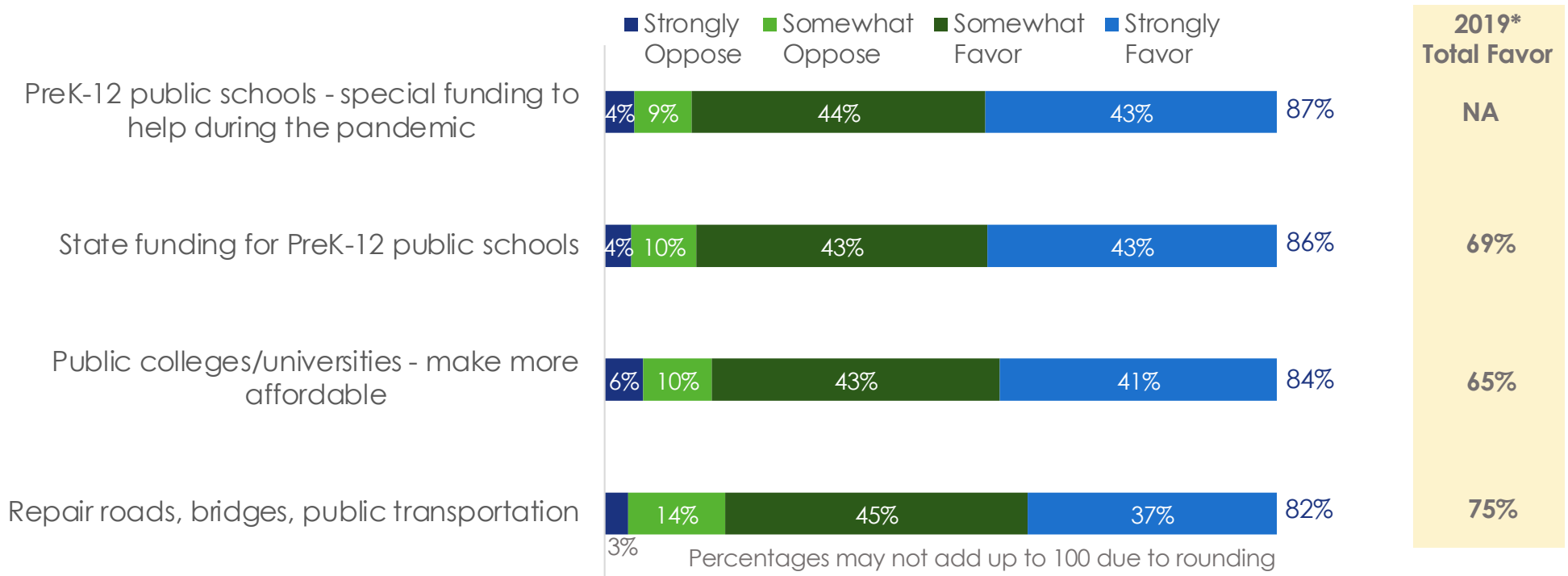
- There is widespread recognition that children in lower-income communities and communities of color will have a much more difficult time recovering from the pandemic than will those living in more affluent cities and towns.

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



Support for public investment in education is overwhelming and has increased dramatically

- Residents of Massachusetts recognize that improving our public school system 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 increased significantly in the past two years.

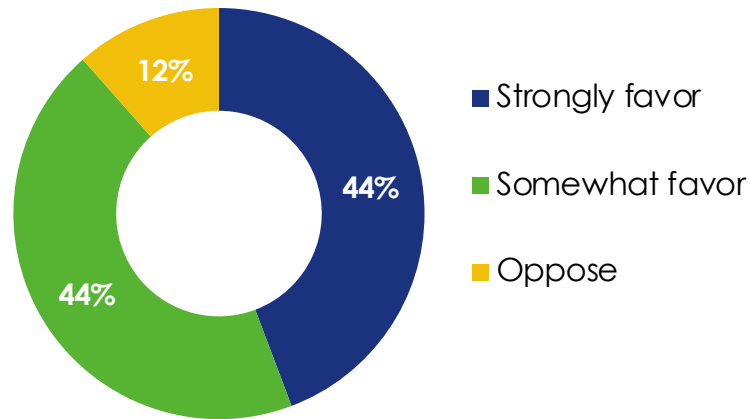


*Survey of 600 Massachusetts voters conducted by Echo Cove Research & Consulting. Data was collected online August 19-28, 2019.

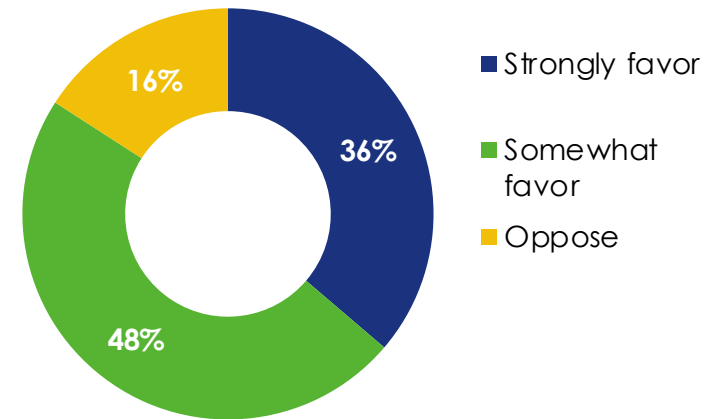
Support for specific school funding initiatives is remarkably strong

- The desire to improve our public schools and colleges – and willingness to provide adequate funding – translate into widespread support for fully funding the *Student Opportunity Act* and the *Cherish Act* as well as opposition to staff layoffs at state colleges.
- The depth and breadth of support for these school funding initiatives are remarkable.

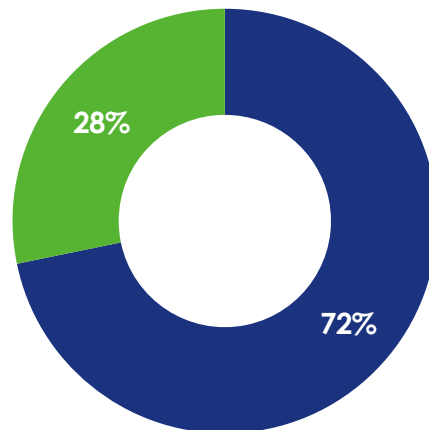
The Cherish Act



Fully Funding the SOA



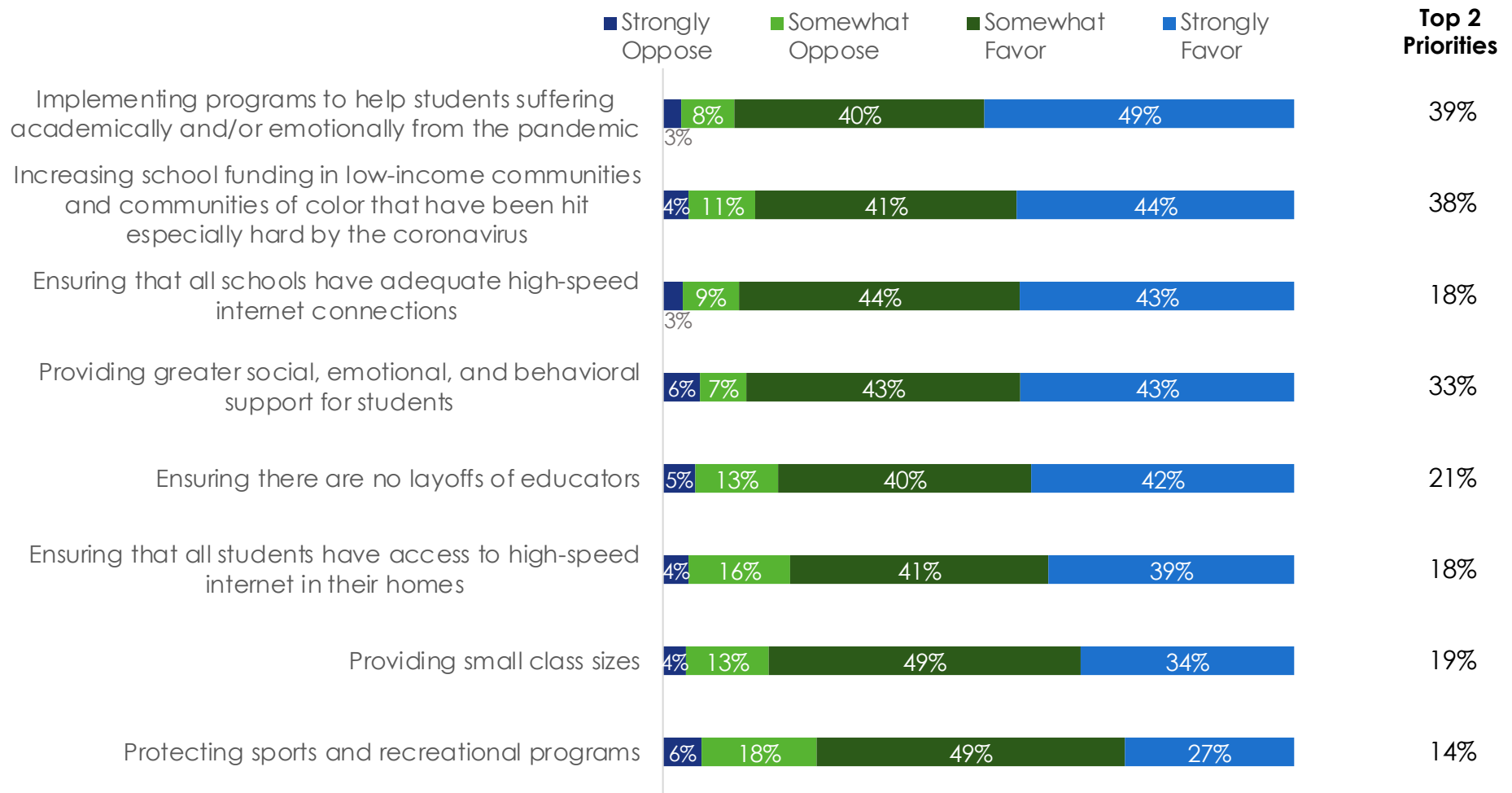
Layoffs at Massachusetts Public Colleges



- 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.
- Budgets are very tight, so there is no choice but to reduce spending even though it might impact programs and students.

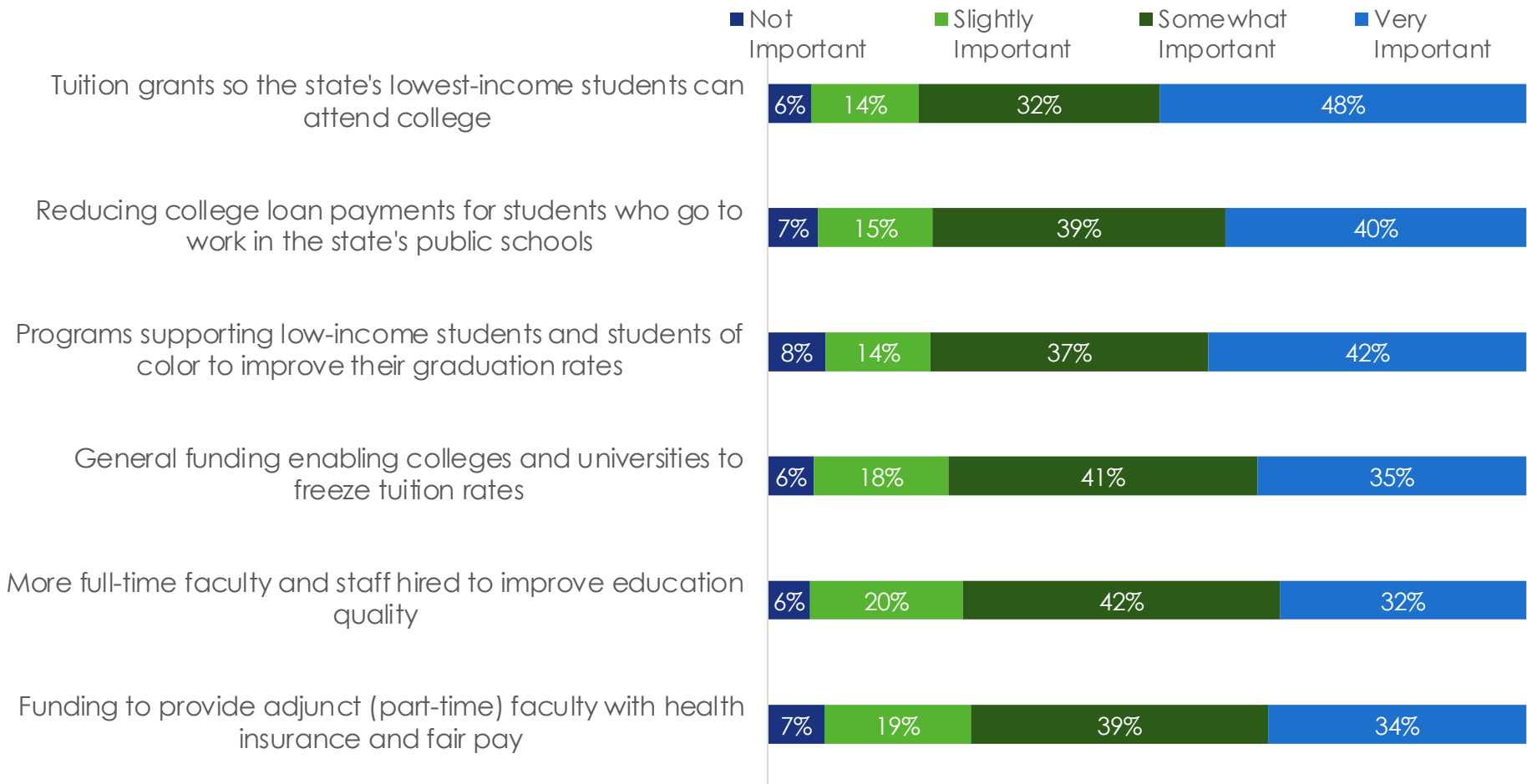
Funding priorities for preK-12 education

- While there is strong support for all of the specific education funding areas tested, two priorities emerge: special funding for low-income communities and communities of color (which have been hit especially hard by the pandemic) and programs to help students recover emotionally and academically.



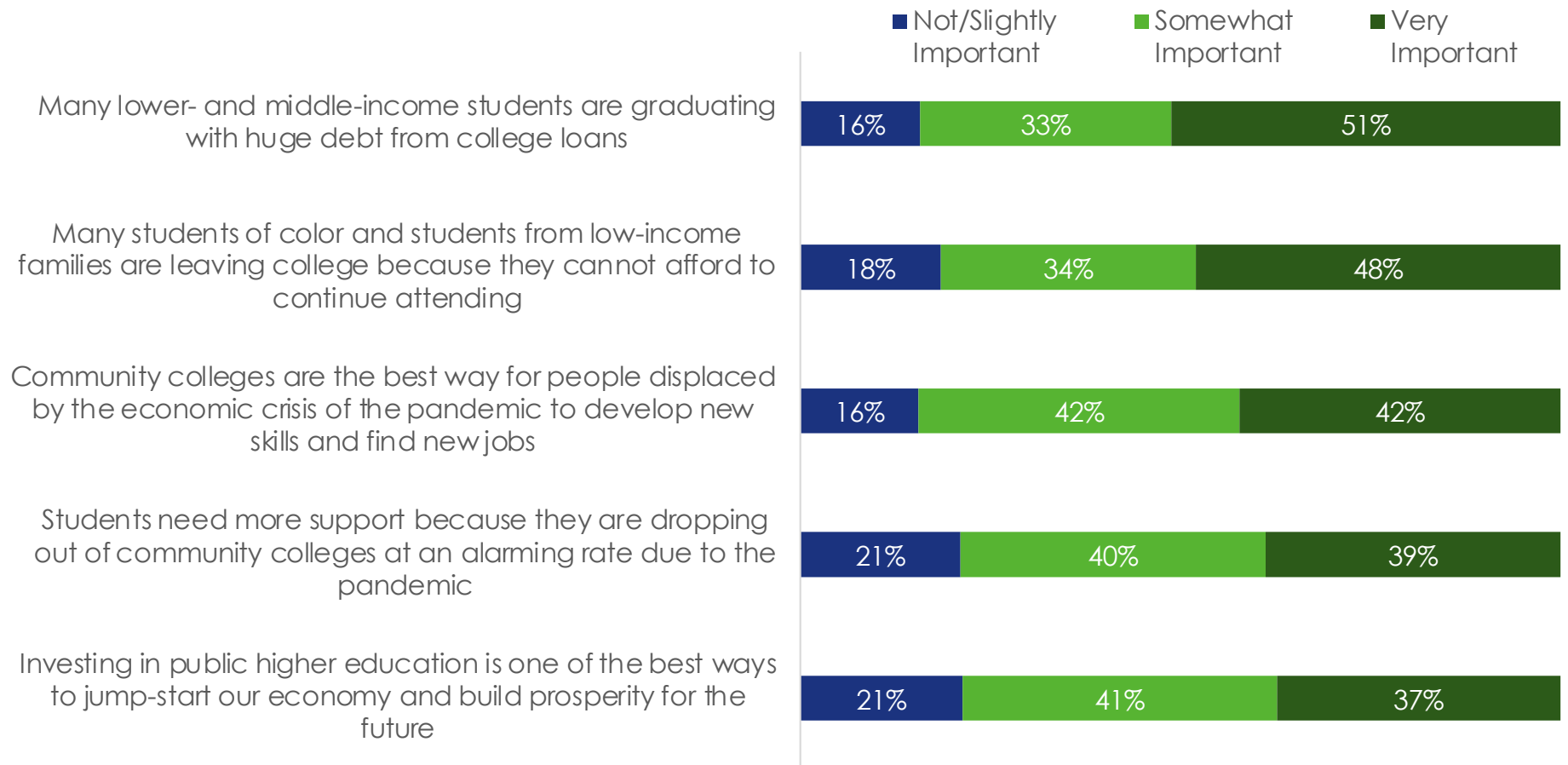
Funding priorities for higher education

- The top funding priorities for public higher education revolve around supporting low-income students and students of color. However, it is important to note that there is very strong support for funding in all of the areas tested.



Reasons for investing in public higher education

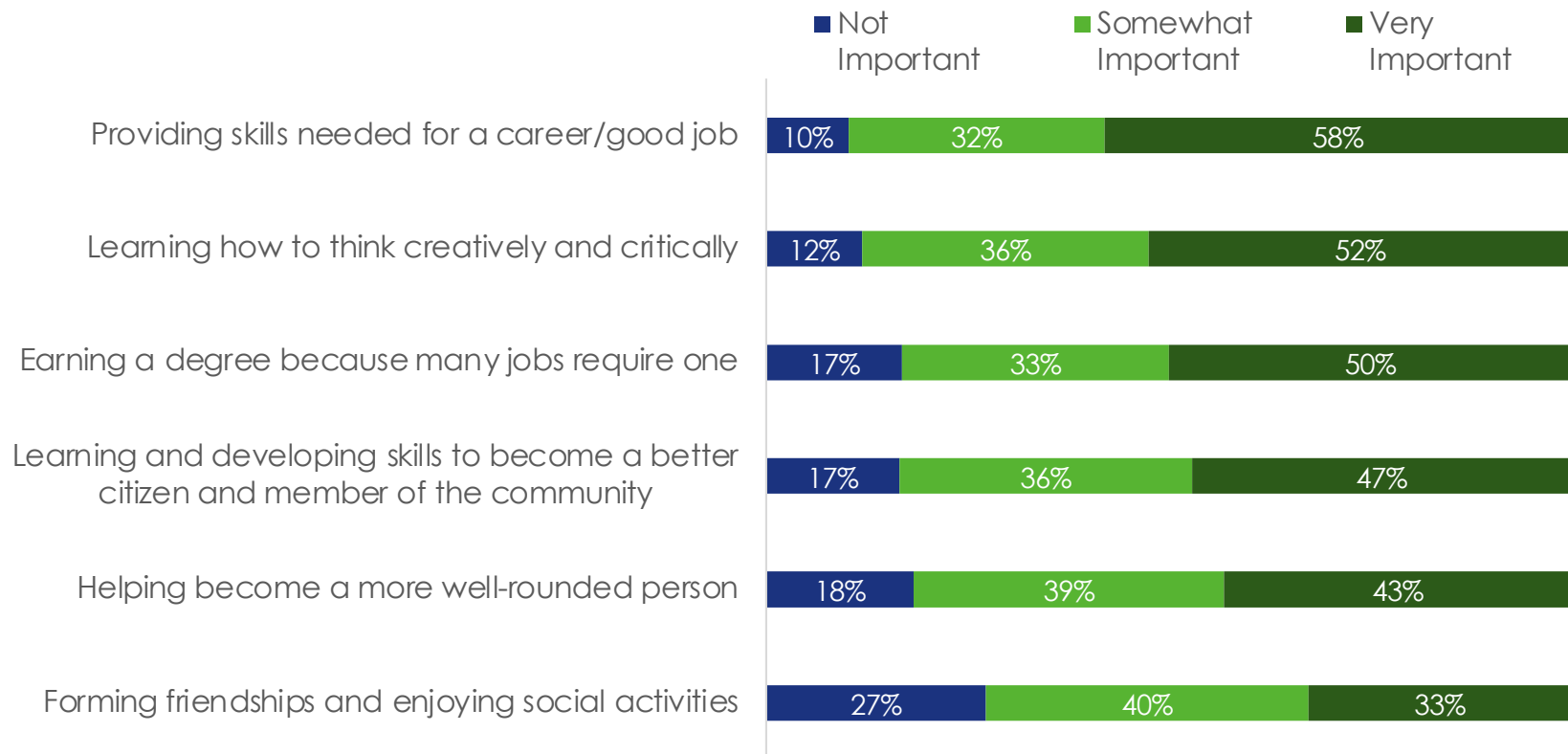
- Among the many reasons for investing in public higher education are debt relief, making college more accessible to students of color and those from low-income families, and helping those displaced by the pandemic.



Residents believe that higher education is vital for many reasons aside from career advancement

- 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



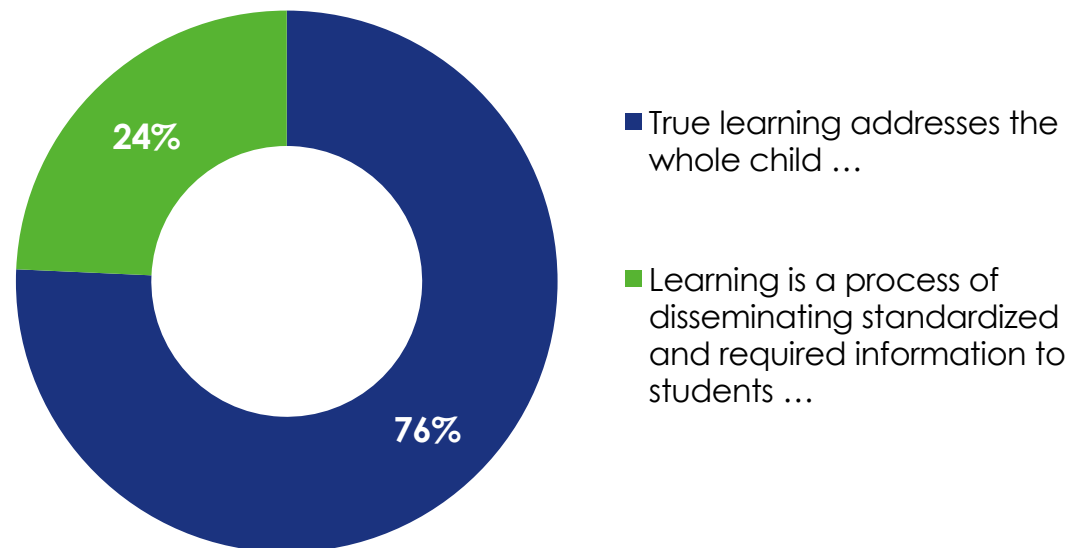
Residents embrace a holistic view of education that encompasses far more than academic achievement

- Massachusetts residents firmly support a progressive pedagogical model rather than a traditional “information acquisition” approach.

Which of these statements do you most agree with?

True learning addresses the whole child, centering on a combination of academics, social and emotional health, and personal growth. When school reflects students' complex identities of race, ethnicity, class and gender, students feel affirmed and motivated to learn. True learning is meaningful for a student's entire life – and it cannot be “lost.”

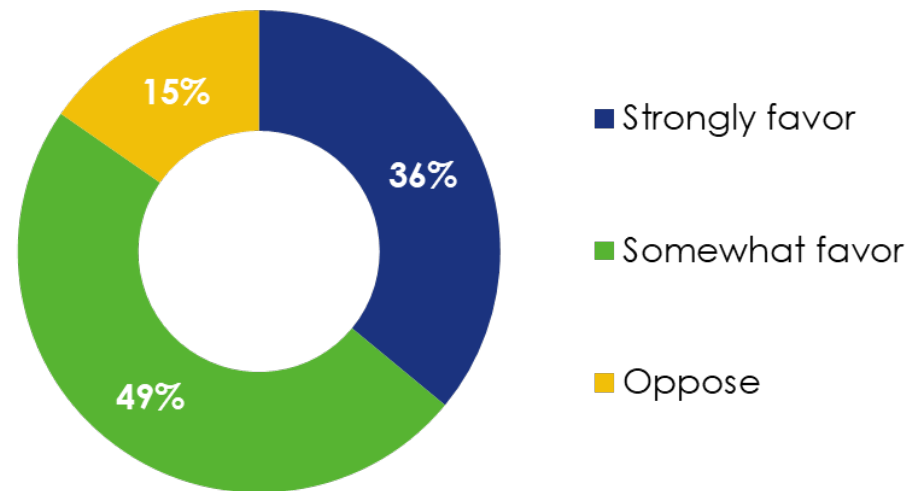
Learning is a process of disseminating standardized and required information to students over time. It can be measured by the number of correct answers on a test – standardized, usually multiple-choice. An increase in correct responses is gain; a decrease is loss. This model of assessing our students helps us figure out whether there is an “achievement gap.”



Residents believe that we have an opportunity to reimagine our approach to public education

- 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.

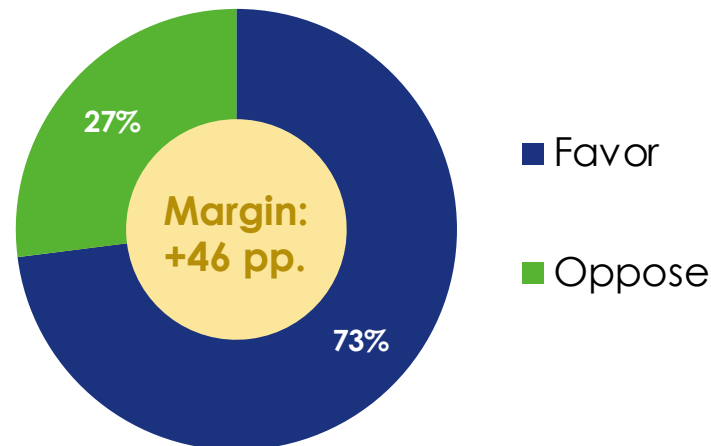
We now have a real opportunity to address the consequences of years of underfunding and ensure that public schools are dedicated to educating the whole child. This would include programs that go beyond the basics to inspire interest in music, the arts, and other areas. We would educate our children in 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?



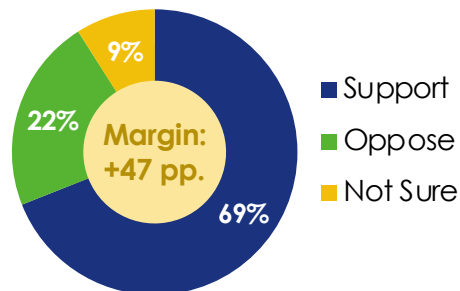
Paying for investments in education: more than seven in ten favor the Fair Share Amendment

- The public believes that revenue for increased education spending should be raised by increasing the state income tax on households with annual incomes of over \$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.

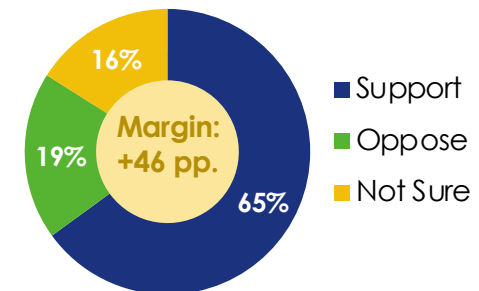
How much would you favor or oppose a 4% additional tax on annual income over \$1 million?



MassInc
(December 8-20, 2020)



UMass Amherst/WCVB
(March 5-9, 2021)



In 2022, there may be a ballot question that would create an additional 4% tax on income over \$1 million a year. The minimum amount to trigger the tax would go up with inflation every year. Based on this description, would you support or oppose this additional 4% tax on income over \$1 million a year?

Do you support a 4 percentage point increase to the state's income tax only for individuals with incomes over \$1 million?

Demographic profile of the sample

The demographic profile of the sample matches the characteristics of the Massachusetts adult population

Gender	
Female	52%
Male	48%
Age	
18-29	18%
30-39	26%
40-49	20%
50-59	14%
60-69	11%
70 +	11%

Education	
High school or less	23%
Some College/2 yr. College	30%
4 yr. College/ Grad Degree	46%
Race	
Hispanic	12%
Black/African-American	10%
White	73%
Other	5%

Party	
Democrat	39%
Republican	10%
Independent/ Unenrolled	51%
Income	
Less than \$25,000	15%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	21%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	35%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	19%
\$150,000 or higher	11%

Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.