

## MEMO

To: Interested Parties  
From: Emma White and Chris Campbell  
Re: Voter priorities for Michigan public schools  
Date: January 9, 2022

With the legislature preparing for a new session, we conducted a survey of Michigan voters<sup>1</sup> to explore voters' views of education issues. Key findings of our research include:

- Broad majorities across the political spectrum say public schools should be a high priority for state lawmakers
- Within the schools, their highest priorities include addressing gun violence, raising pay for educators, improving access to higher education, and expanding hiring of social workers and therapists to support mental health
- Educators are highly trusted on public schools generally and voters want both educators and parents to have a say in the curriculum, while they believe politicians should stay out.
- There is broad support for a number of policies to support students and educators, including public pre-school and providing breakfast and lunch to all K-12 students.
- A majority of voters would support a tax increase to fund public schools.

### **1. Michigan voters want state lawmakers to focus on public schools.**

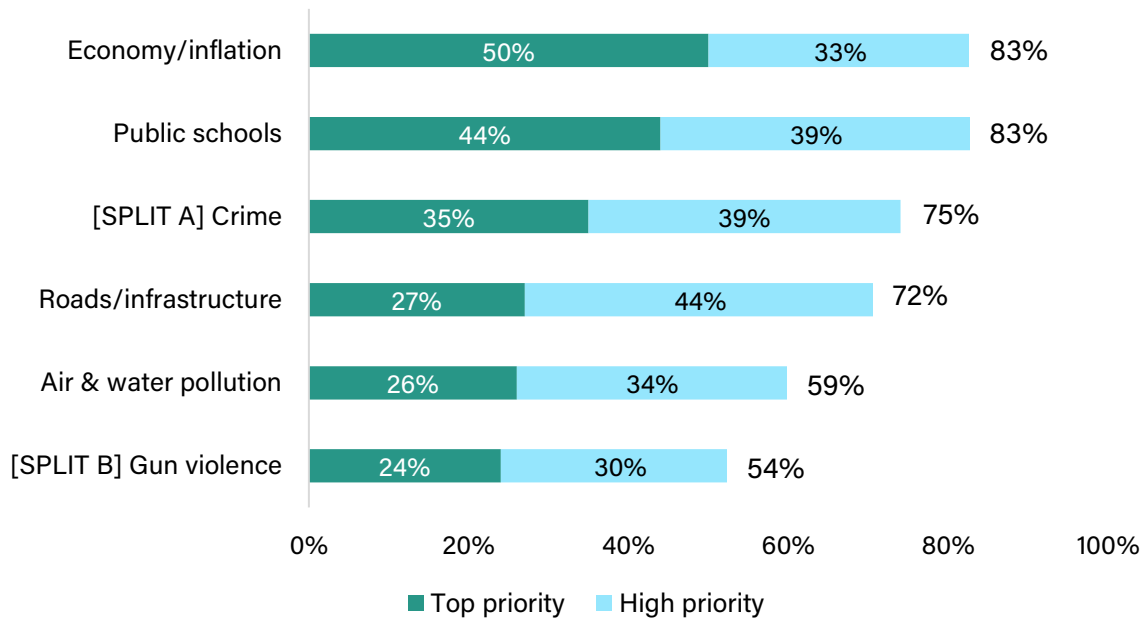
Forty-four percent of voters say public schools should be a top priority for the state government, second only to the economy, which 50% of voters say should be a top priority. Eighty-three percent of voters say public schools should be at least a high priority, matching the economy. Concern about public schools crosses partisan lines, with 89% of Democrats, 81% of Republicans, and 79% of independents saying they should be a high or top priority.

---

<sup>1</sup> 600 interviews conducted via live interviewers (cell phone and landline) and text to web from December 15-21, 2022 among registered voters. The data were weighted by race, age, education, modeled partisanship, and vote participation to match the population. Margin of sampling error is +/- 4.0 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

**Figure 1**

Please tell me if you think this issue should be a top priority for state government to address, a high priority, a middle priority, a low priority, or if the state government should not make this a priority. (% top/high priority)



**2. Within public education, stopping gun violence in schools is the top priority for voters, followed by increasing salaries and benefits for educators.**

Fifty-eight percent of voters say protecting students from gun violence is a top priority for them personally, while another 26% say it is a high priority. Support is high across party lines – 93% of Democrats, 81% of Republicans, and 77% of independents say it is a top or high priority.

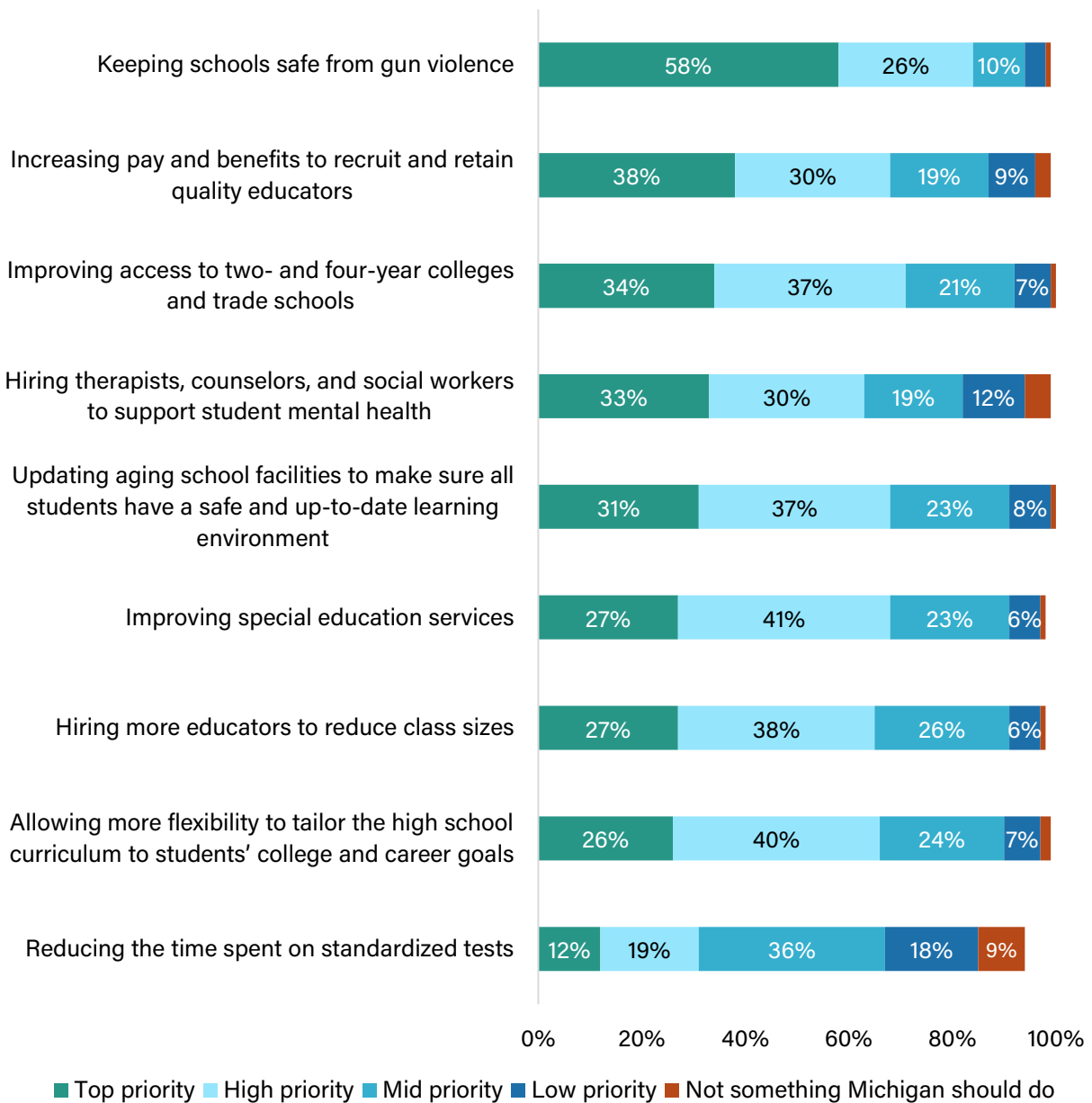
As Figure 2 on the next page illustrates, other priorities for voters include:

- Increasing pay and benefits to recruit and retain quality educators (38% top priority, 30% high)
- Improving access to two- and four-year colleges and trade schools (34% top priority, 37% high)
- Hiring therapists, counselors and social workers to support student mental health (33% top priority)

- Updating aging school facilities to make sure all students have a safe and up-to-date learning environment (31% top priority)

**Figure 2**

**When you think about changes Michigan could make to improve public education, how high a priority is each of the following for you personally?**



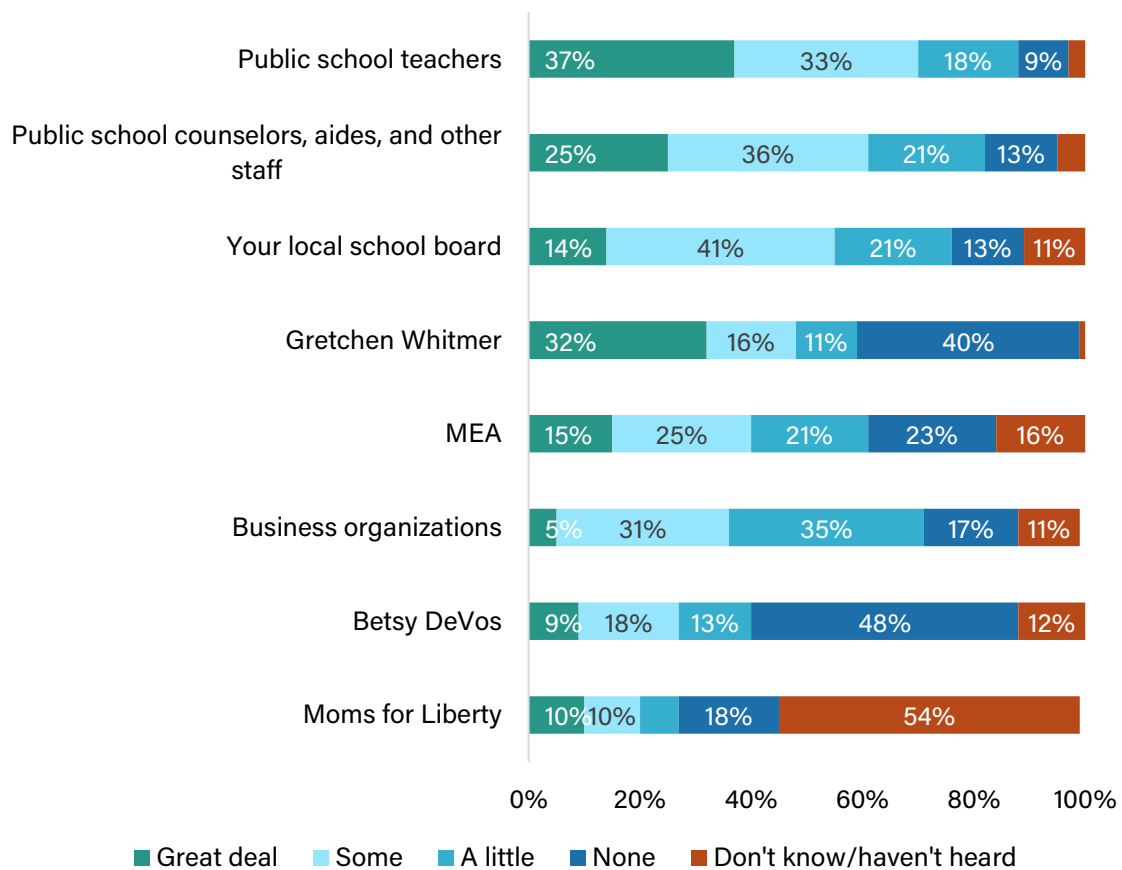
### 3. Voters trust teachers and school staff to lead on education issues over political groups.

Voters have more confidence in teachers and other educators than other leaders on public education. They want both teachers and parents to have a substantial say in the curriculum, while they want state and national elected officials to stay out.

As shown in Figure 3, 70% percent of voters say they have a great deal (37%) or some trust (33%) in public school teachers on education issues, while 60% say the same of public school counselors, aides, and other staff.

**Figure 3**

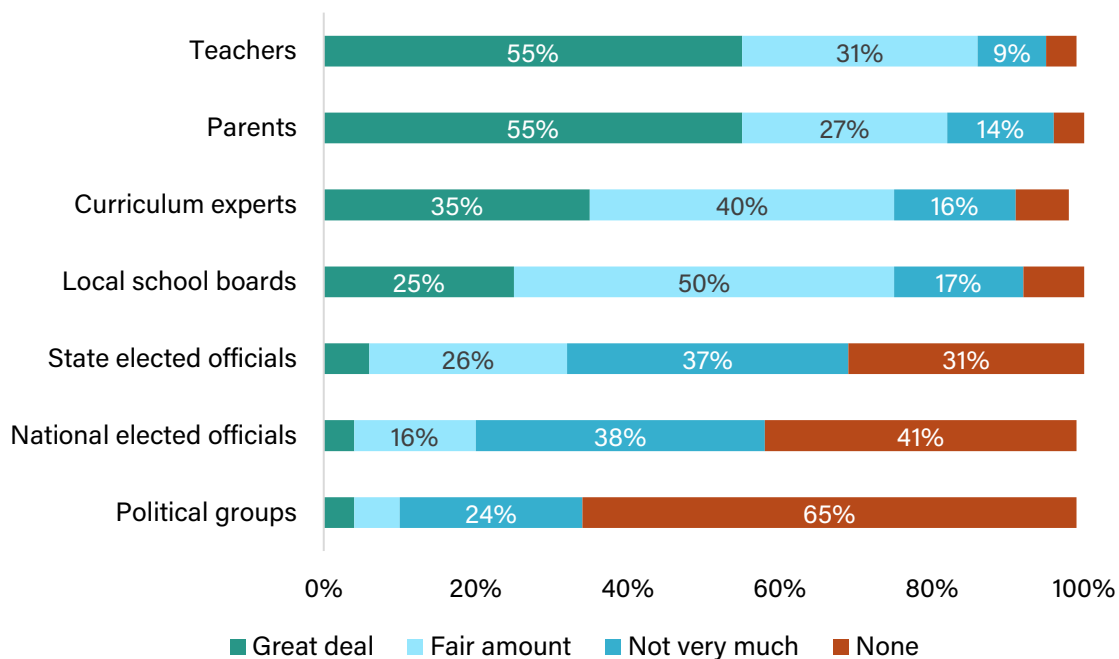
Now I'm going to read a list of people and organizations who may speak out about education issues. As I read each name please tell me whether you have a great deal of trust in that person or organization on education issues, some trust, a little trust, or no trust?



As shown in Figure 4, 86% percent of voters say teachers should have a “great deal” or “some” level of input on what is included in the K-12 curriculum, while 82% say the same of parents. Sizable proportions also trust curriculum experts (75% great deal/some) and local school boards (75% great deal/some) to influence the curriculum. On the other hand, 65% of voters say political groups should have no influence on the K-12 curriculum. Forty-one percent say the same of national elected officials, and 31% say state elected officials should not be involved in the curriculum.

**Figure 4**

**How much input, if any, should each of the following have on what is included in K-12 public school’s curriculum?**



**4. Voters support a wide range of policy items that would support educators and schools.**

Broad majorities of voters support policies that would offer additional supports to students, change the teacher evaluation process, and expand labor rights for educators. All the policies presented (shown in Figure 5 on page 7) receive majority support from Democratic, Republican, and independent voters. Voters are most enthusiastic about these possible policies:

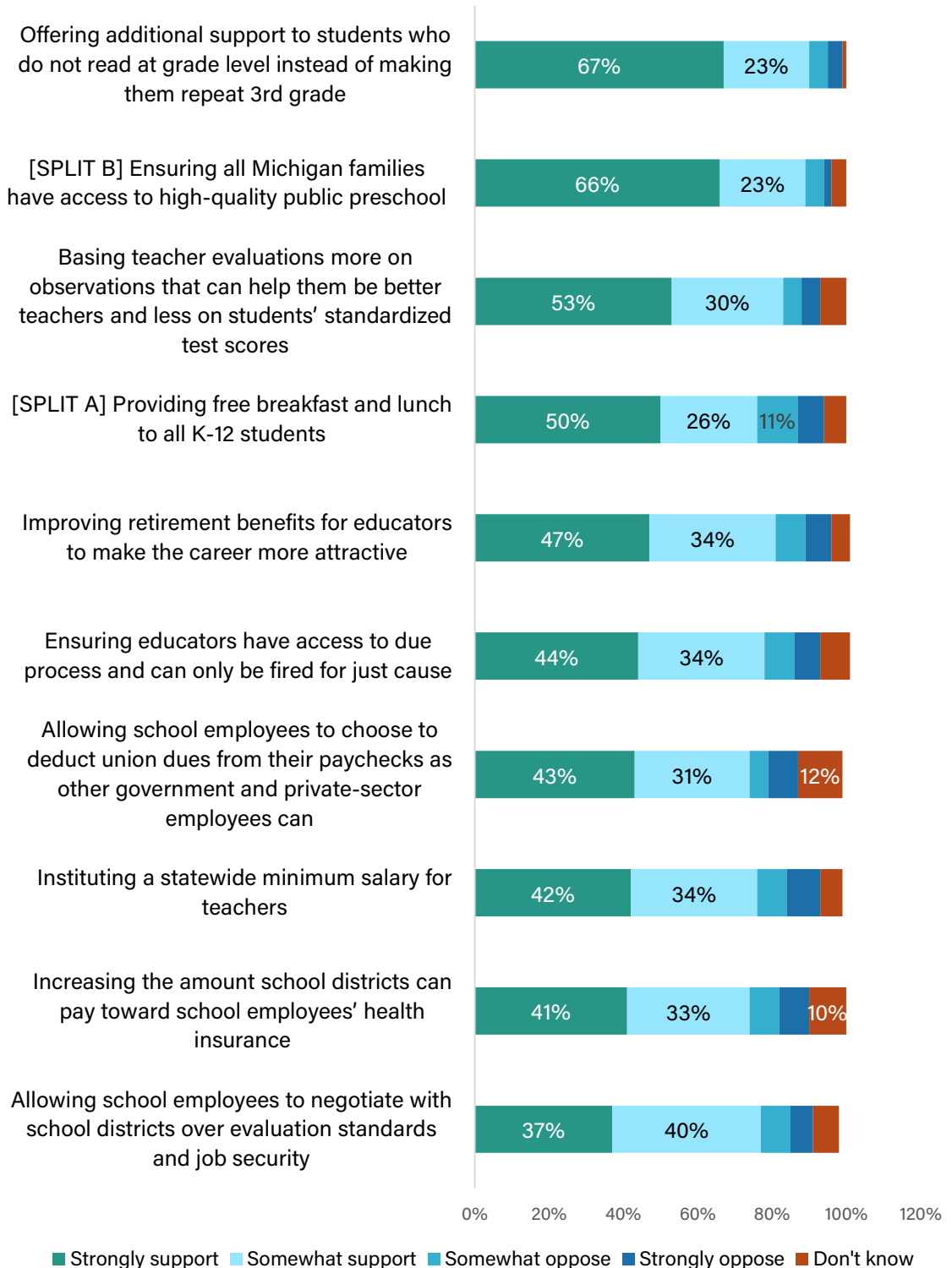
- Offering additional support to students who do not read at grade level instead of making them repeat 3rd grade (67% strongly support, 23% somewhat support)
- Ensuring all Michigan families have access to high-quality public preschool (66% strongly support, 23% somewhat support)
- Basing teacher evaluations more on observations that can help them be better teachers and less on students' standardized test scores (53% strongly support, 30% somewhat support)
- Providing free breakfast and lunch to all K-12 students (50% strongly support, 26% somewhat support)

Large majorities also favor other policies including:

- Improving retirement benefits for educators to make the career more attractive (47% strongly support, 34% somewhat support)
- Ensuring educators have access to due process and can only be fired for just cause (44% strongly support, 34% somewhat support)
- Instituting a statewide minimum salary for teachers (42% strongly support, 34% somewhat support)
- Increasing the amount school districts can pay toward school employees' health insurance (41% strongly support, 33% somewhat support)
- Allowing school employees to choose to deduct union dues from their paychecks as other government and private-sector employees can (43% strongly support, 31% somewhat support)
- Allowing school employees to negotiate with school districts over evaluation standards and job security (37% strongly support, 40% somewhat support)

Figure 5

Here are some laws the state government could pass regarding public education. For each, would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose this proposal?

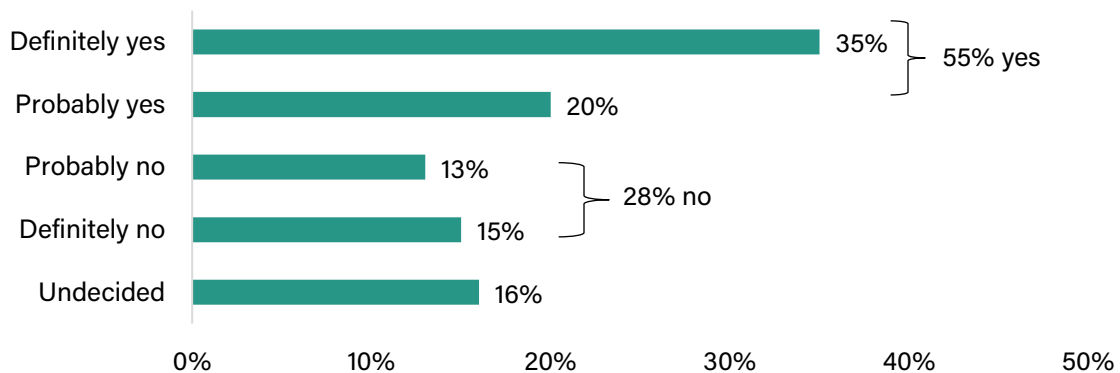


**5. Voters are inclined to support additional resources for public education.**

As Figure 6 illustrates, 55% of voters say they would definitely or probably support a modest tax increase in their school district for their local public schools.

**Figure 6**

**[SPLIT A, N=300] If there was a ballot proposal in your school district for a modest tax increase to provide more money to your local public schools, would you vote yes or no, or are you undecided?**



A statewide tax increase to fund schools throughout Michigan also retains majority support, with 50% of voters saying would definitely or probably support it. The details of how a tax increase was structured and exactly what it would fund would likely make a substantial difference in support.

**Figure 7**

**[SPLIT B, N=300] If there was a ballot proposal in Michigan for a modest tax increase to provide more money to public schools, would you vote yes or no, or are you undecided?**

