



MOST ARIZONANS THINK OUR LEGISLATURE HAS FAILED KIDS, NEW POLL SHOWS - VOTERS APPROVE OF REFORMING OR REMOVING AEL, ELIMINATING JUVENILE COURT ADMINISTRATIVE FEES

A new public opinion poll of Arizona voters highlights disapproval of current leadership in the legislature. Polling results suggest voters want to see new leadership tackle issues such as reforming or removing the Aggregate Expenditure Limit, eliminating juvenile court administrative fees, and think “lack of adequate funding” is the biggest problem facing our local public schools.

(PHOENIX) – Every year Stand for Children Arizona conducts an annual poll of Arizona voters asking them to weigh in on key issues facing education in the state. The 2022 public opinion survey results reveal that most Arizonans feel failed leadership in the legislature has negatively impacted our students and that “lack of adequate funding” is the biggest issue facing our schools.

Arizonans are unhappy with failed leadership and think schools need more funding.

- 57% of voters feel Arizona, as a whole, is on the wrong track, a 5% increase from Dec. 2021 and the worst sentiment since this question was first asked in 2019.
- When asked to evaluate how well the legislature is serving schools, 57% of voters gave a “D” or Failing grade, the worst result since that question was first asked in 2020.
- Voters feel “lack of adequate funding” is the biggest problem facing our schools - 19% chose it as the highest-ranking issue.
- When asked how much of a need there is for additional funding for Arizona’s public schools, 69% still feel there is “Great” or “Some” need – with over 51% saying there is “Great” need.

Not only do Arizonans feel dissatisfied with leadership, Arizonans also feel let down by their own schools. When asked to evaluate Arizona’s public schools in grades K through 12, 44% of voters gave Arizona public schools a “D” or Failing grade. But when asked to evaluate schools in their personal communities, this year, only 29% of voters gave their own schools an “A” or “B” grade – a full 5% drop since Dec. 2021 and the lowest since this survey began in 2016. This also represents the first time that the A/B ratings for local schools is not higher than the D/F rating – both are at 29%.

The survey suggests a ballot measure to resolve the AEL issue could be successfully passed.

To fix the issue of state funding for education, many leaders and organizations have pointed to the outdated Aggregate Expenditure Limit (AEL) as a major obstacle to Arizona’s public schools providing a high-quality education that they can be proud of.

In June, the legislature passed, and Governor Ducey approved, a state budget that substantially increased investment in Arizona public schools. However, the nearly \$1 billion allotted to public schools has yet to make it to classrooms due to the archaic spending cap. Stand for Children Arizona asked voters how they felt about dealing with the limit.

- When asked if there were a statewide ballot measure that would permanently raise the expenditure limit, 62% of Arizonans said they would vote “Yes” on it.
- When asked the same question, but for a ballot measure that would remove the limit altogether, 54% said they would vote “Yes.”

The polling then asked voters to respond to statements surrounding the AEL:

- 63% of Arizonans feel that “the state’s current budget process is cumbersome, bureaucratic, and out of touch with what schools really need to provide a high-quality education that we can be proud of” is a strong argument to eliminate the expenditure limit.
- 60% of Arizonans find the fact that “the spending limit creates undue financial stress and burden on our schools” is a strong argument to “raise the spending limit or remove it altogether.”

Arizonans want teachers to be able to teach.

- Voters feel teacher pay is the main reason to increase funding – 21% of voters who expressed schools had “Great” or “Some” need of additional funding said teacher pay was the main reason to increase funding.

They are also sympathetic to teacher’s need for academic freedom:

- 63% of surveyed Arizonans agree that teachers should be assured of academic freedom in setting curriculum without government interference.
- 57% of voters agree with the statement that Arizona legislators “are trying to tie the hands of teachers by preventing them from teaching important topics that kids need to learn so we don't repeat the mistakes of our past.”

Arizonans want investment in early learning.

- 68% of voters support establishing state funding for all-day Kindergarten in all Arizona public school districts and charters.
- 65% of voters support establishing state funding for pre-Kindergarten programs in all Arizona public school districts and charters.

Arizonans support fairer treatment of kids in juvenile court

The survey included questions about how voters feel about the “wide array of administrative fees on youth and their families,” in the youth justice system.

- A majority of surveyed Arizonans support a proposal to eliminate court administrative fees associated only with juvenile court – 51% support, 29% oppose, and 20% don’t know. To note: eliminating these administrative fees does not impact civil and criminal penalties or restitution for victims.

There are multiple supported justifications on eliminating these fees:

- 61% of voters feel “reforming the juvenile court system to eliminate burdensome administrative court fees does not mean that convicted offenders will be excused from having to pay civil penalties or restitution to victims” is a strong argument for eliminating all fees associated with juvenile court.
- 60% of Arizonans think a good reason to remove the financial burden of juvenile court fees on our youth is that “ultimately, a well-functioning juvenile court system will reduce the likelihood of those youth ending up in our state prisons in the future”.

Rebecca Gau, Executive Director of Stand for Children Arizona, finds the results of the survey compelling and feels legislators can learn from how their constituents are responding. She says, “Education is still a top concern for Arizonans, and they clearly want the Aggregate Expenditure Limit fixed. Meanwhile, the legislature heads into 2023 with 54% of voters unhappy with their performance – the highest it has ever been in our survey. We hope that they’ll respond to the needs of Arizona and work together with our new Governor to support our students and teachers.”

The survey was conducted December 3-6, 2022, by Moore Information Group. Poll results are attached.

Stand for Children Arizona is a nonprofit advocacy organization that focuses on empowering and educating parents, teachers, and community members to become active leaders and serve as a voice for children at the state and local level. Our mission is simple: to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, graduate from high school prepared for, and with access to, a college education. For more information, visit www.stand.org/arizona