

MEMORANDUM

TO: Alabama Democratic Party
FROM: Hart Research Associates
DATE: April 27, 2010
RE: Implications Of Pre-kindergarten Poll For Democratic Candidates

This memorandum outlines the key findings from a poll of Alabama voters conducted by the polling firms of Hart Research Associates (D) and The Tarrance Group (R) on behalf of the Alabama School Readiness Alliance. The survey was conducted March 24 through 29, 2010, among 600 Alabamans who regularly vote in state elections. The survey's margin of error is ± 4.1 percentage points for the full sample, and is higher among subgroups (such as Democratic and swing voters) that are cited herein.

Key Research Findings

- **Availability of pre-kindergarten continues to enjoy enormous support among Alabamans, despite the poor economy.** Seven in 10 (69%) voters say the state should fund voluntary pre-k for all families, including a 54% majority who *strongly* feel this is the case. Just 28% say the state should not fund pre-k for all families. In addition, 59% say the state is doing too little to ensure that high-quality pre-k is available to all families who want it.
- **Support for funding pre-k is especially strong among Democratic voters.** Among voters who report that they vote for Democratic candidates a large majority of the time, fully 89% say the state should fund pre-k for all, including 82% who feel strongly about this. Three in four (75%) Democrats say the state is doing too little in this area.
- **The numbers are nearly as impressive among ticket-splitting or "swing" voters.** More than one in three (35%) Alabama voters report that they split their votes between Democratic and Republican candidates. The large majority (71%) of these "swing" voters says the state should fund pre-k, including 53% who feel strongly about this. And 62% say the state is doing too little to ensure the availability of pre-k to all families.
- **The same is true for the 19% of voters who are undecided about whether they will vote Democratic or Republican in this year's gubernatorial election.** Seven in 10 (70%) of these undecided voters say the state should fund pre-k, and 57% say the state is doing too little in this area.

- **Education is a much higher priority for Alabamans than reducing state spending and the deficit.** Creating jobs and improving the economy is the top priority for most Alabamans (56%), but close on its heels is improving education (44%). By comparison, just 18% say controlling state spending should be a top priority. When faced with a choice of just two of these issues, only 28% say it is more important to hold the line on taxes and spending, while 66% say it is more important to ensure sufficient funding for needs such as education. It is unsurprising that these numbers are even higher among Democrats, but it is important to note that 70% of swing voters choose education funding over holding the line on spending.
- **Voters place a premium on pre-kindergarten education.** Alabamans' recognition of the importance of education in general extends to pre-k specifically. After hearing a description of a quality pre-k program, three in four (74%) voters say it is important for four-year-olds to spend time in such a program, including 60% who say it is *very* important. Pre-k's value is widely recognized, even across partisan lines—89% of Democratic voters, 63% of Republican voters, and 74% of swing voters say pre-k is important for four-year-olds.
- **Voters understand that pre-k benefits everyone in the state.** Three in four voters agree with the following statement:

“Even though the economy is in bad shape, Alabama needs to continue to increase its commitment to providing high-quality pre-kindergarten education because it benefits everyone in the state when our children receive the best possible education.”

Agreement with this statement is nearly universal among Democratic voters (92%), and agreement is at 75% among swing voters.

Conclusion

Democratic candidates for office face myriad challenges this election year, including independent and swing voters who are increasingly fed up with government expansion. But the results of this survey clearly illustrate that expanding funding for pre-k education is an issue that the large majority of voters can rally around. These voters' concerns about the economy are real, but the concerns manifest themselves as a desire for jobs more than as a demand that state spending be cut at the expense of education programs. Indeed, their concerns about government expansion notwithstanding, **swing voters are adamant that state government should be involved with and should expand its funding of pre-kindergarten programs.** Democratic voters are nearly unanimous in their support for pre-k programs. In taking an affirmative position on pre-k funding, Democratic candidates have the opportunity to attract the attention and support of an essential voting bloc while also unifying and solidifying their base. In this way, favoring enhanced pre-k funding is a natural position to take in what is an otherwise challenging environment for Democratic candidates.