

MEMORANDUM

TO: ALABAMA REPUBLICAN PARTY

FROM: DAVE SACKETT

RE: ATTITUDES OF GOP BASE VOTERS AND INDEPENDENTS TOWARDS
VOLUNTARY PRE-KINDERGARTEN

DATE: APRIL 24, 2010

The Tarrance Group is pleased to present the Alabama Republican Party with the key findings from a survey of voter attitudes in the state of Alabama. These key findings are based on telephone interviews with N=600 “likely” registered voters throughout the state of Alabama conducted jointly by Hart Research Associates and The Tarrance Group. Responses to this survey were gathered March 24-29, 2010 and the confidence interval associated with a sample of this type is $\pm 4.1\%$.

KEY FINDINGS

- Core Republican voters place a high level of importance on improving children’s reading ability by the third grade. Fully ninety percent (90%) of Republicans believe that this is very important.
- Republicans also believe that Alabama children are not beginning kindergarten with the knowledge and skills that they need to do their best. Less than two in ten Republicans believe that most Alabama children are entering kindergarten with the skills they need.
- Almost two-thirds of Republican voters, sixty-four percent (64%) believe that it is “important” for four-year-olds to spend time in a pre-kindergarten before the enter kindergarten. Almost half of Republicans, forty-four percent (44%), believe it is very important that four-year-olds spend time in a pre-kindergarten program.
- Fully eighty percent (80%) of Republicans believe that children who attend pre-kindergarten have an advantage over children who do not, and fifty-nine percent (59%) of Republicans believe that they have a large advantage.

- Like the electorate as a whole, a large portion of the Republican electorate believes that state government is not doing enough to ensure that pre-kindergarten programs are available to all four-year-olds whose parents want to send them. Forty-five percent (45%) of Republicans believe that the state is doing too little, and 18% are uncertain that the state is doing enough.
- Sixty-nine percent (69%) of Alabama voters believe that state government should fund voluntary pre-kindergarten for all families. This is a view that is largely shared by core Republican voters, with 49% of Republicans indicating that they believe the state should fund pre-kindergarten. There is significant intensity to this view, with thirty-three percent (33%) of Republicans indicating that they “strongly” believe this.
- Views of the importance and value of pre-kindergarten exist even within the recognition of the difficult economic times. As part of the interview, respondents were exposed to the following statement and asked if they agree or disagree:

“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.”
- Fully fifty-six percent (56%) of core Republican voters agree with this statement, and only forty-two percent (42%) disagree. This view is widely accepted across the entire electorate, with seventy-four percent (74%) of all Alabama voters indicating that they agree with this contention.
- Core Republican voters are persuaded of the value of a voluntary pre-kindergarten program that is available to all children in Alabama based on the rationale that improved reading skills benefits children throughout their formal education. Fifty-six percent (56%) of core Republicans believe that children who attend pre-kindergarten have better language skills when they enter kindergarten and become better readers.

Views of Independents and “Swing” Voters

- The views and attitudes of Independents, swing voters, and those voters who are undecided on the generic gubernatorial ballot towards voluntary pre-kindergarten are very strong.
- As you can see from the chart below, there is a significant amount of enthusiasm towards and support for an expansion of voluntary pre-kindergarten in the state of Alabama.
 - A majority of swing voters, fifty-four percent (54%), indicate they believe that increasing access to voluntary pre-kindergarten programs is extremely or very important.

- Fully three-quarters of swing voters, seventy-five percent (75%), believe it is important that four-year-olds spend time in a pre-kindergarten program before they enter kindergarten.
- Eighty-seven percent (87%) of swing voters believe that Alabama children who attend a pre-kindergarten program would have a significant advantage over those who don't
- Sixty-two percent (62%) of swing voters believe that the state of Alabama is not doing enough to make pre-kindergarten programs available.
- Fully seventy-one percent (71%) of swing voters believe that the state of Alabama should fund voluntary pre-kindergarten for all families
- Seventy-five percent (75%) of swing voters agree with the contention that, even though the economy is in bad shape, that Alabama needs to continue to increase its commitment to providing pre-kindergarten.

CONCLUSIONS

- The data from this study clearly shows that, despite the economic difficulties that the state and the country face, Alabama voters find significant “value” in having the state invest in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs for all Alabama children.
- There is a significant level of concern among core Republican voters that Alabama children are not entering kindergarten with the basic skills that they need, and that it is both important for and beneficial to the children and the state for children to be able to participate in a voluntary pre-kindergarten program.
- There is a strong sense that state government is not doing enough to ensure pre-kindergarten programs are available, and this is a view that also exists among core Republican voters – and is not simply driven by the Democrat base vote.
- Core Republicans recognize the value of expanding voluntary pre-kindergarten programs throughout the state of Alabama, even in difficult economic times, because they believe they are investing in improving the overall education of Alabama children throughout their academic career.
- From a political perspective, the data also indicates that the issue of voluntary pre-kindergarten also provides Republican incumbents and candidates a significant “opportunity” to position themselves in a positive light on the education issue in a way that attracts swing voters without alienating the base vote.

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