

# The State of Education in Illinois 2025-2026 Report

February 23, 2026



# Poll details



## Conducted by:

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## Sample:

- 1,000 adults (not just voters) in Illinois

## Dates:

- January 26-29, 2026 (2025-26 school year)

## Margin of error:

- +/- 3.1% with 95% confidence

## Data weighted:

- U.S. Census data for Illinois

## Previous waves were:

- 2018-19 school year
- 2019-20 school year
- 2020-21 school year
- 2021-22 school year
- 2022-23 school year
- 2023-24 school year
- 2024-25 school year

# Overview

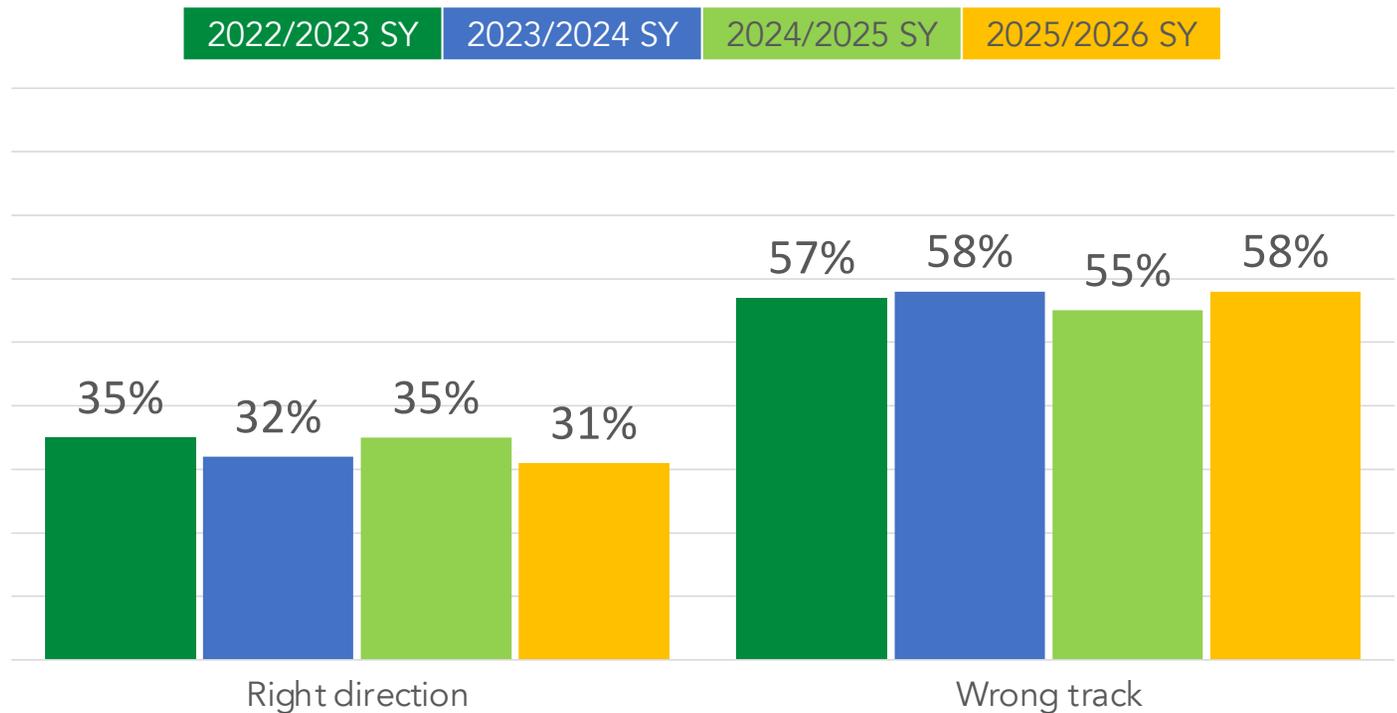


- **Despite what is happening nationally, public schools remain a top priority for Illinoisans.**
  - We should be investing more in our public schools, our students and our educators – not less.
  - ICE does not belong in or near our public schools.
  - All children have a right to a public education.
- **Educators are not getting the support they need.**
  - It is harder to be a teacher and paraprofessional.
  - Adjunct professors are not being treated fairly.
  - Shortages are a serious concern.
  - The tiered pension system is unfair.
- **What can we do to make it better? The public supports:**
  - More funding for schools, teachers and paraprofessionals;
  - Fair retirement benefits;
  - Teachers and parents leading in the classroom without input from politicians;
  - Equal pay for equal work for adjunct professors.

**Illinoisans remain pessimistic about the direction things in the state are going.**



“Would you say things in Illinois today are generally headed in the right direction or would you say things are off on the wrong track?”



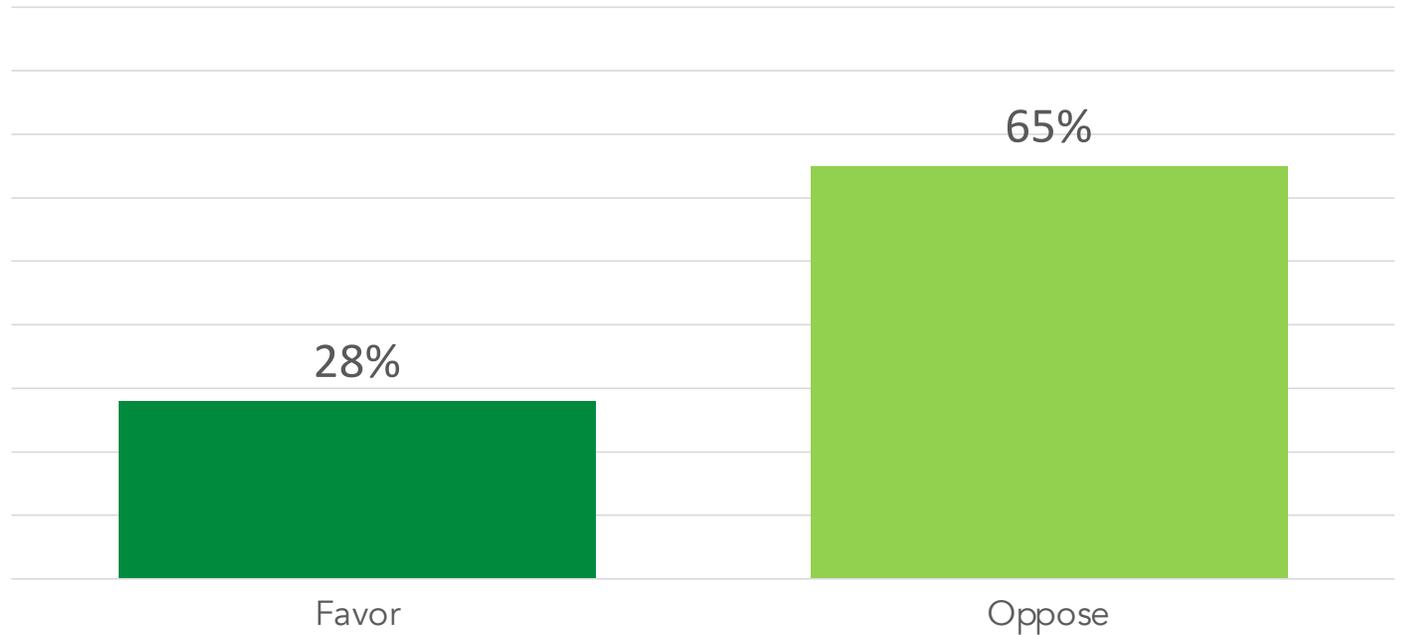
**The public strongly opposes the  
cuts to the  
U.S. Department of Education.**



Nearly two-thirds oppose the cuts to the Department of Education.



“As you may know, the federal government is making significant cuts to the Department of Education, including \$3 billion in cuts to Illinois public schools alone. **Do you favor or oppose the cuts that the federal government is making to the Department of Education?**”



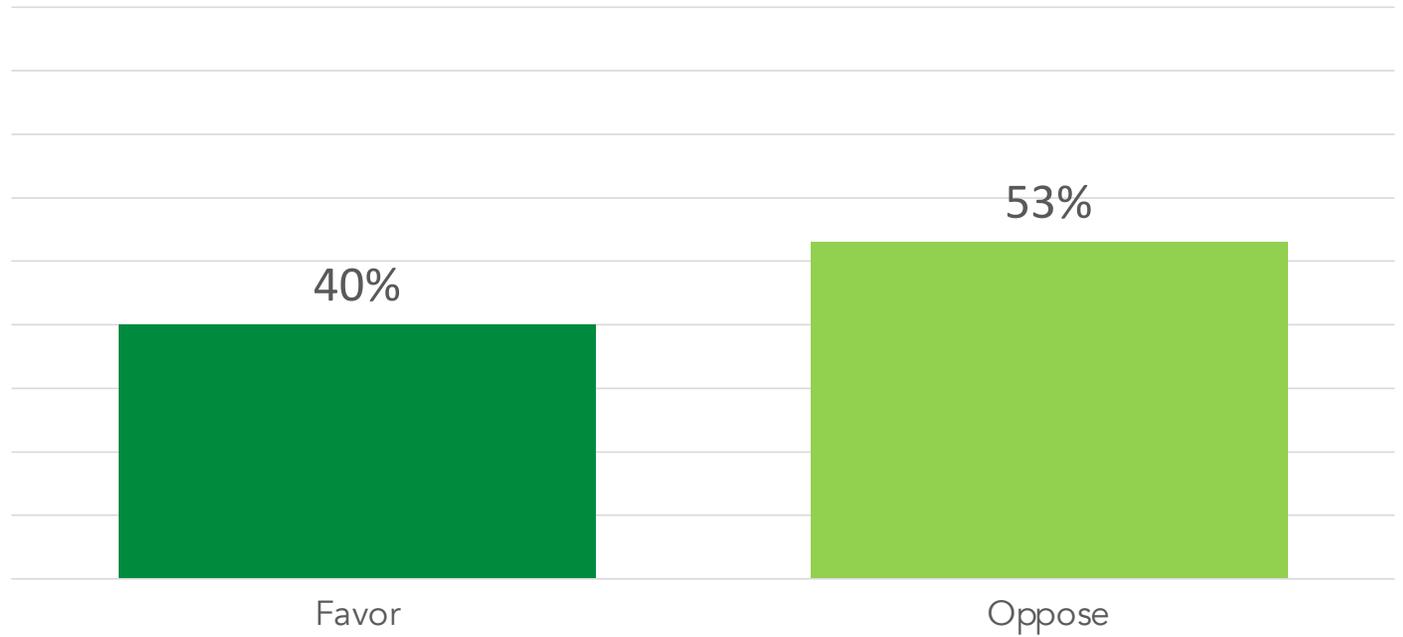
**Illinoisans are worried about  
immigration enforcement on school  
property.**



The public  
opposes ICE  
deportations in  
their  
communities.



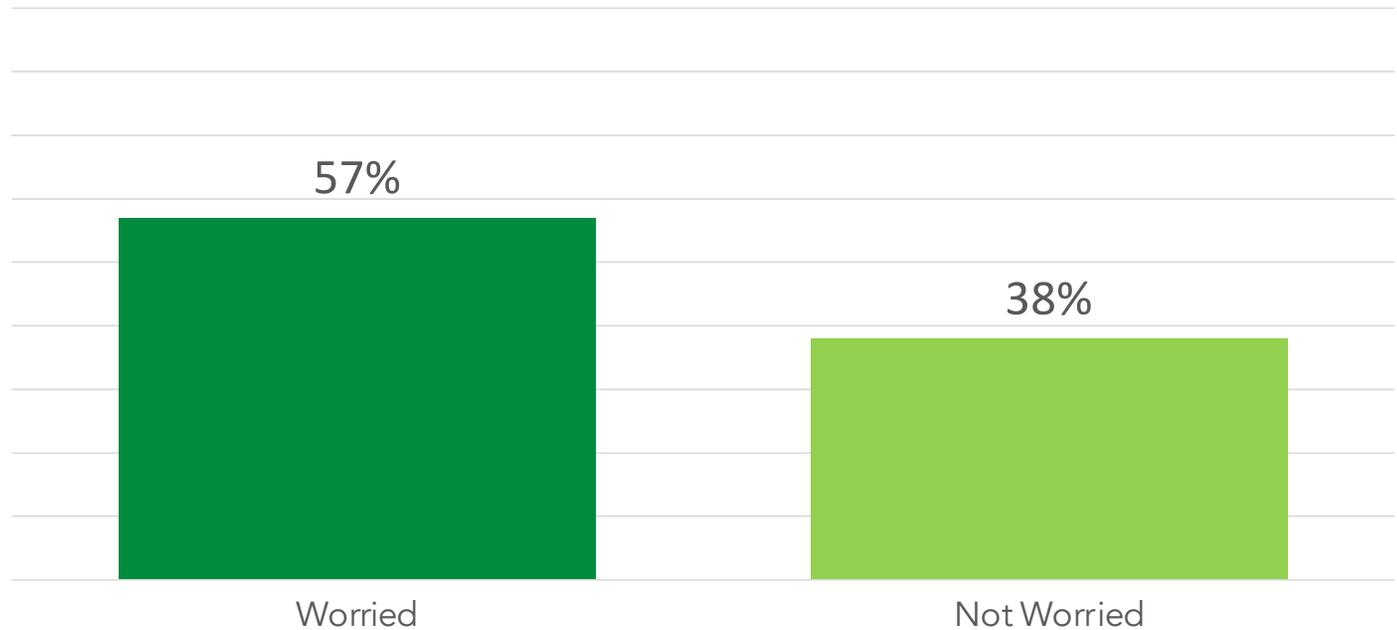
“As you may know, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, conducts many deportation operations around the country. **First, do you favor or oppose ICE arresting and deporting immigrants in your community?**”



There is significant concern about arrests on school property.



“Last January, about a year ago, President Trump changed the laws around protected places and removed schools from being safe zones. This means that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, can conduct raids and arrests on school grounds and at bus stops. **How worried are you about ICE arresting you, a child, another parent, or school employees on school property in your local community?**”



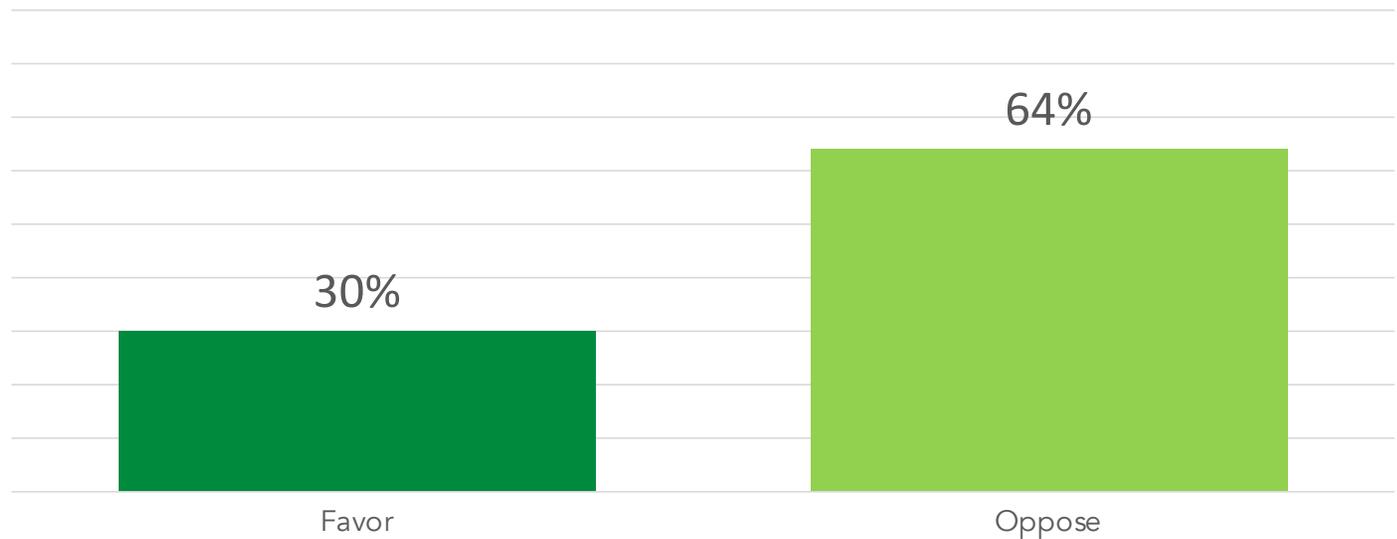
**There is also wide opposition to  
cuts to Medicaid  
and SNAP benefits.**

# More than six in ten oppose Medicaid and SNAP cuts



“The cuts to Medicaid and SNAP can have a direct impact on students in our local communities by reducing access to food for families and health care for students. More than 750,000 Illinois children rely on SNAP to eat and 40% rely on Medicaid for health care services. The cuts will leave them without health coverage and can put further strain on our school resources.”

**“Do you favor or oppose the cuts that the federal government is making to Medicaid and SNAP?”**



**Illinoisans want a fact-driven, high-quality education for their students.**

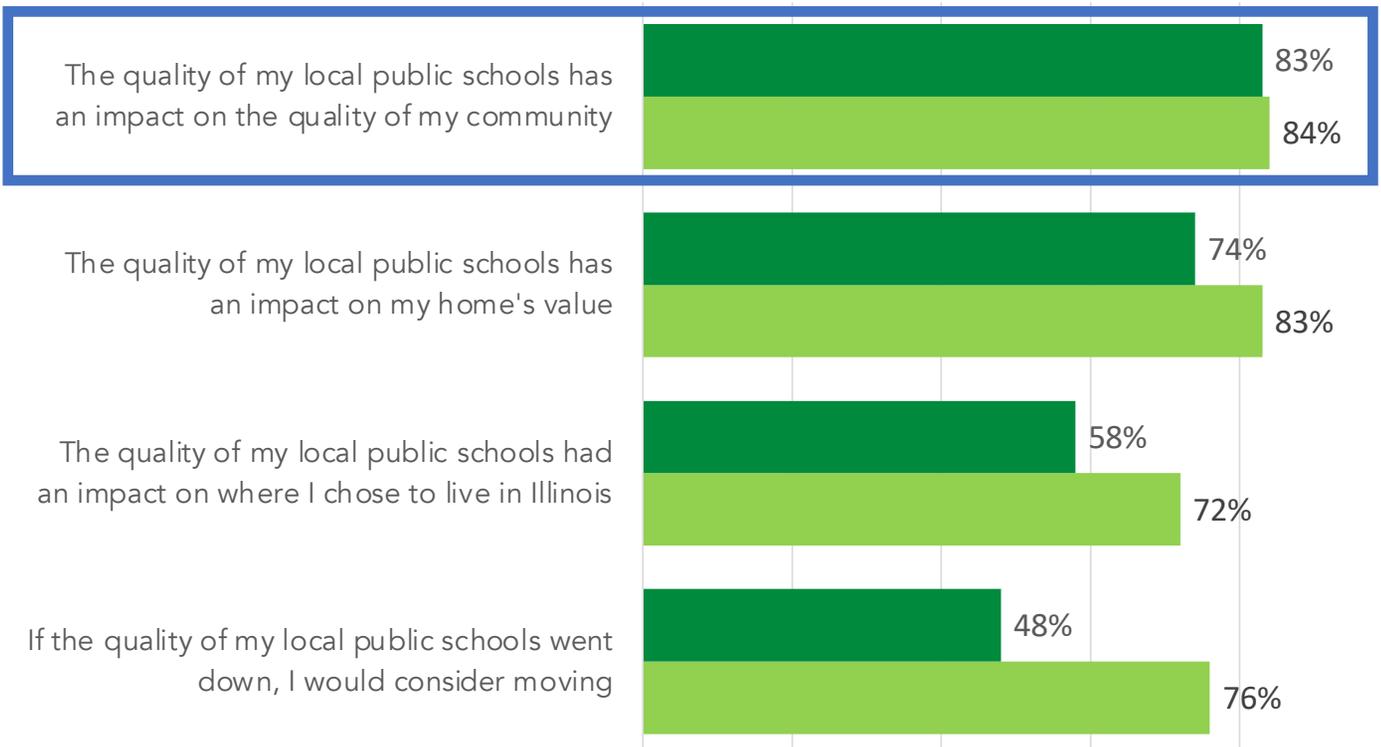


All Illinoisans,  
not just current  
parents, care  
strongly about  
the quality of  
their public  
schools.



“Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following?”

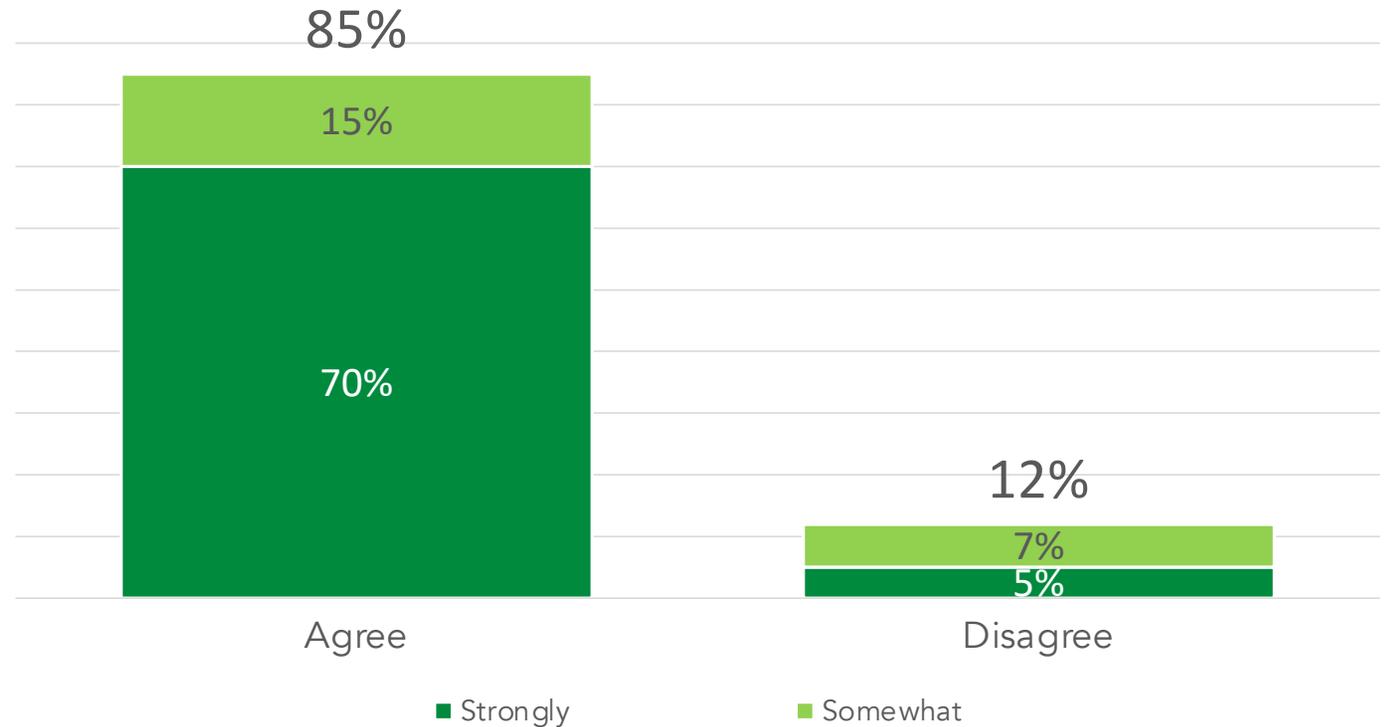
■ Agree overall    ■ Agree among current public school parents (23%)



The public strongly backs the right to a public education.



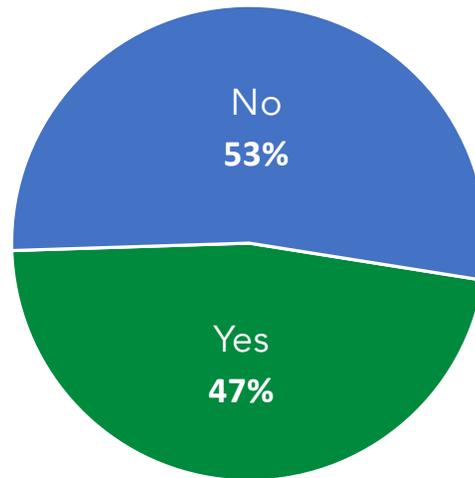
“Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement that every child in Illinois has the right to an education at a public school?”



**In addition to proximity, Illinoisans cited affordability and good quality of education for why they or their child attend college in Illinois.**



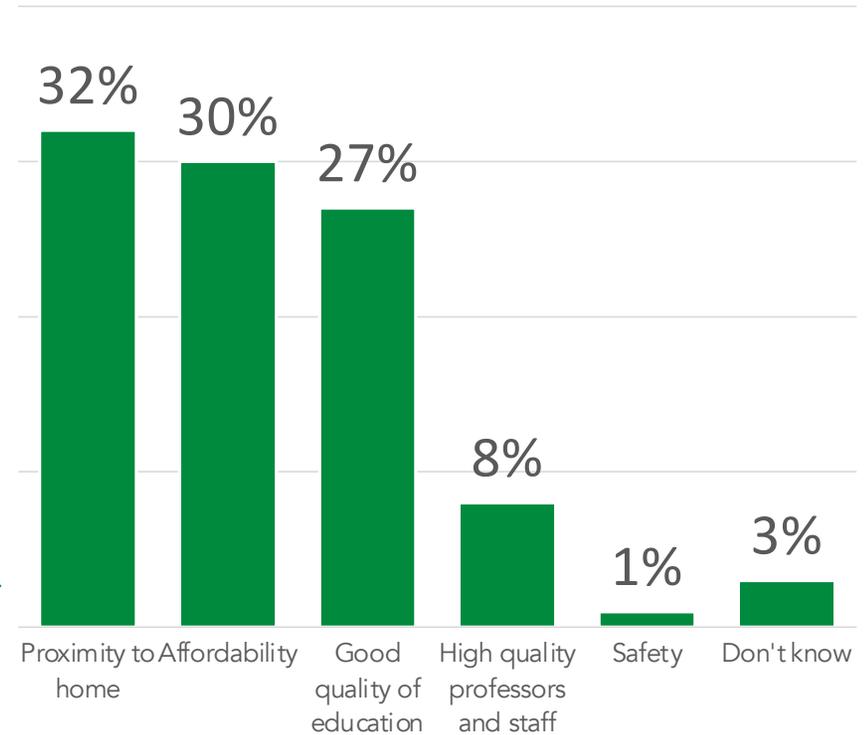
“Did you or your child attend a college or university in Illinois?”



n=470

*Among those saying Yes:*

“What was the main reason you or your child chose to attend college in Illinois?”



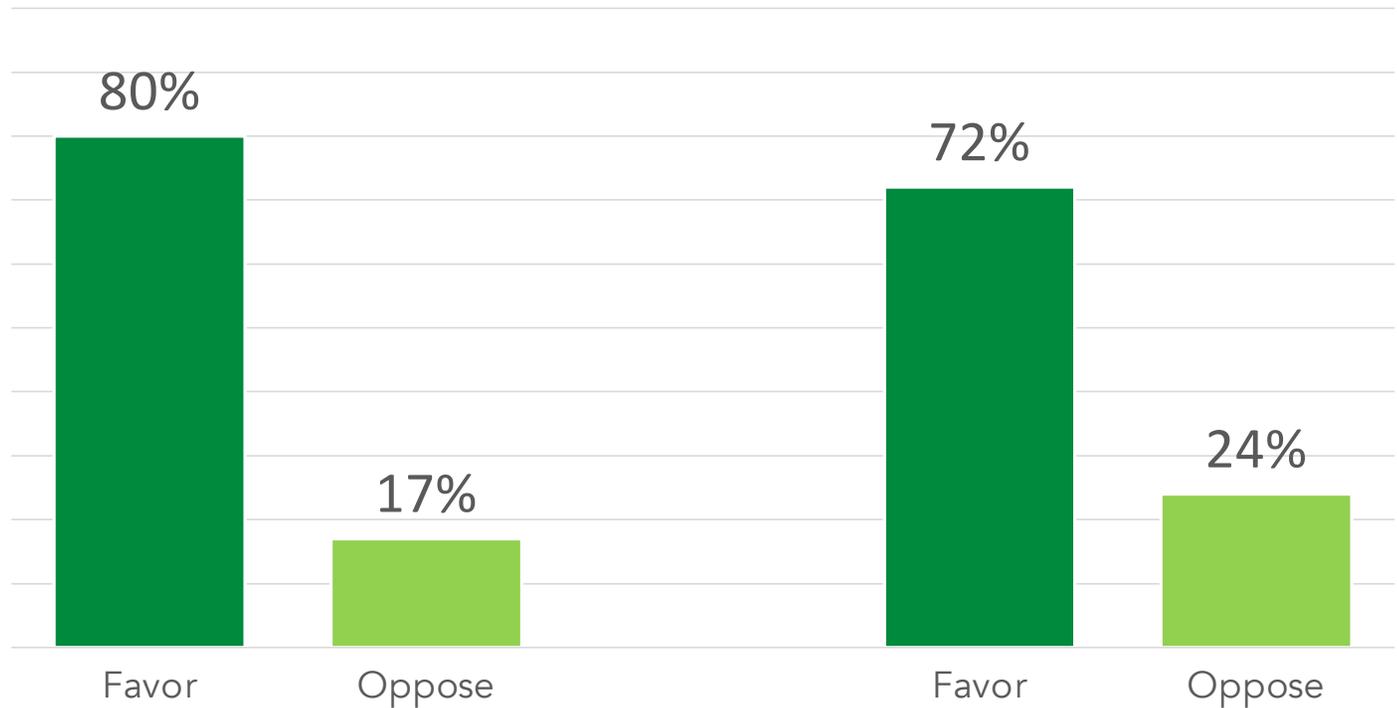
**Illinoisans want  
fact-based U.S.  
history taught  
in high school.**



“Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose teaching Illinois high school students about:”

**Slavery in the United States  
and its impacts?**

**Racism and its impact in the  
United States?**



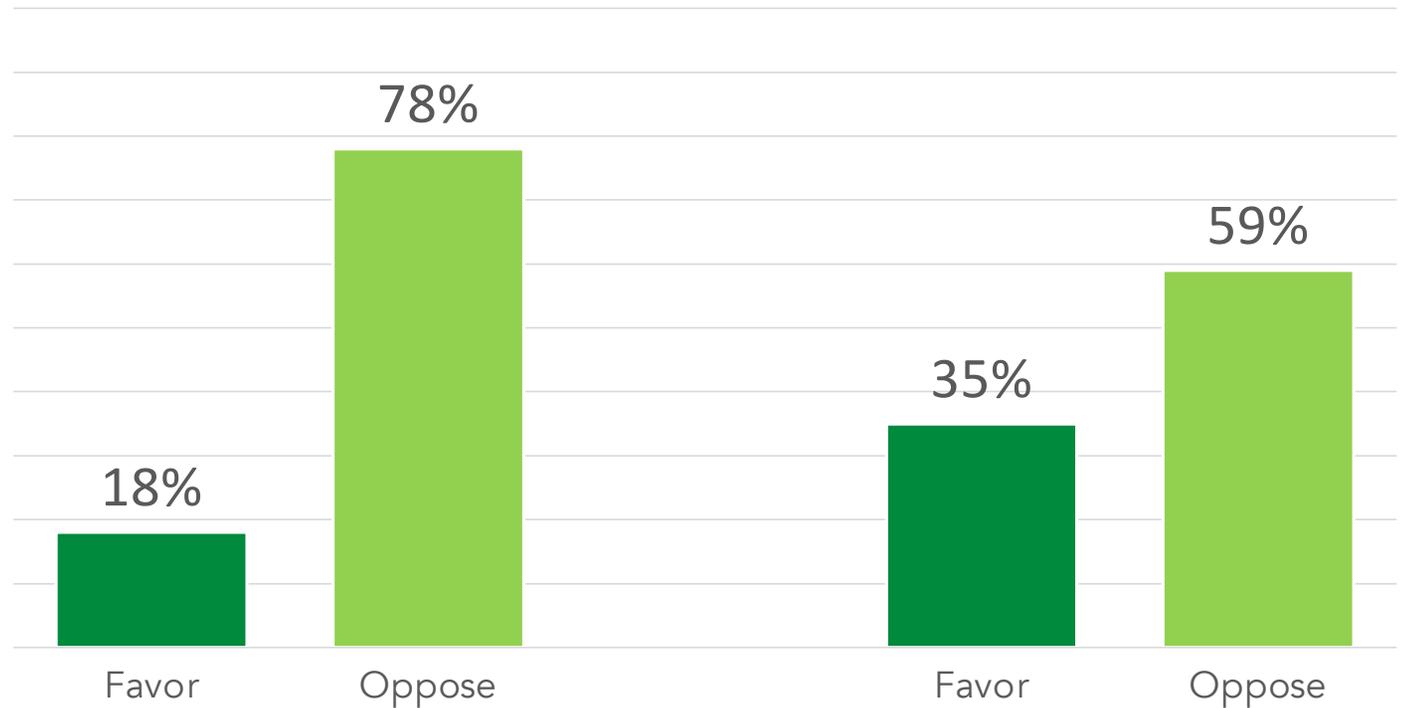
**Illinoisans want  
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history taught  
in high school.**



“Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose:”

**Banning books from Illinois  
school libraries?**

**Banning teaching about sexuality  
in Illinois high schools?**



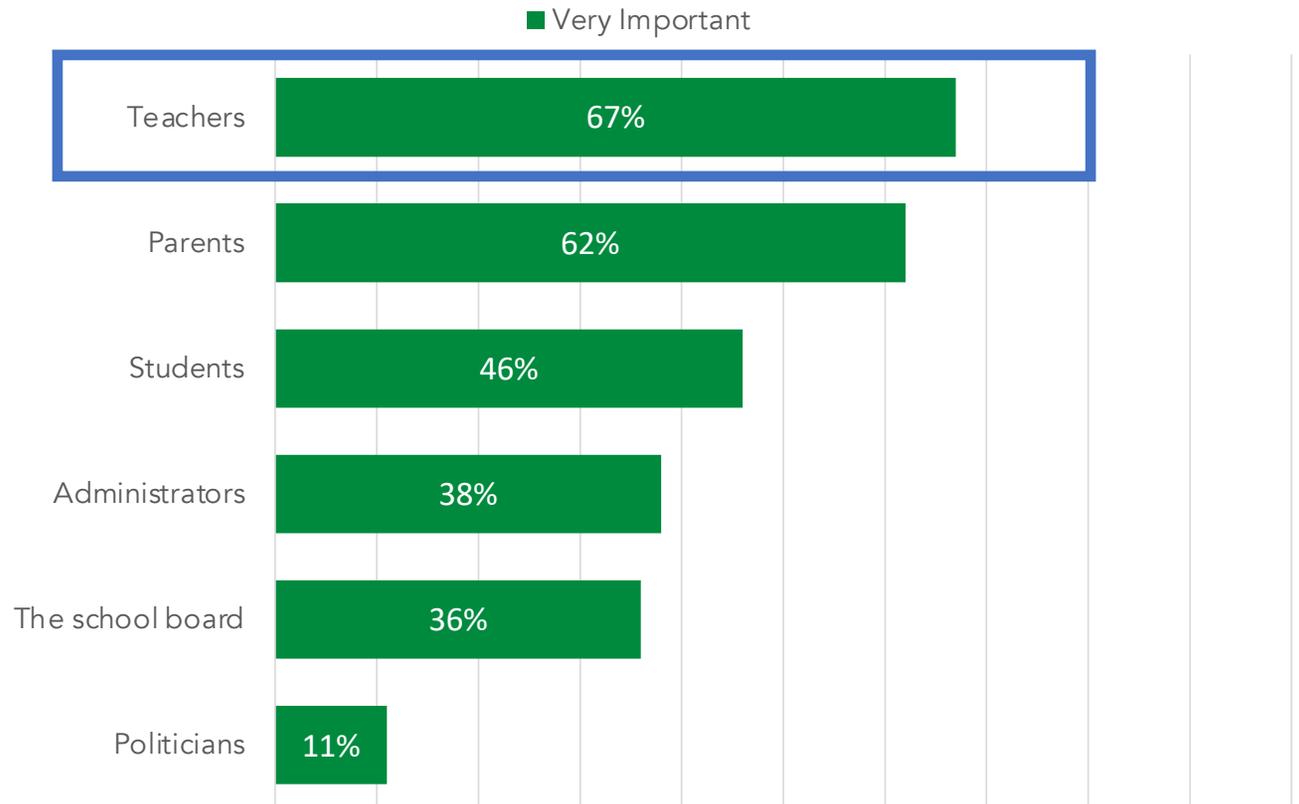
**Illinoisans are very concerned about  
teacher and school staffing  
shortages.**



**Teachers' and parents' voices are the most important. Illinoisans also value the voices of students in their own education.**



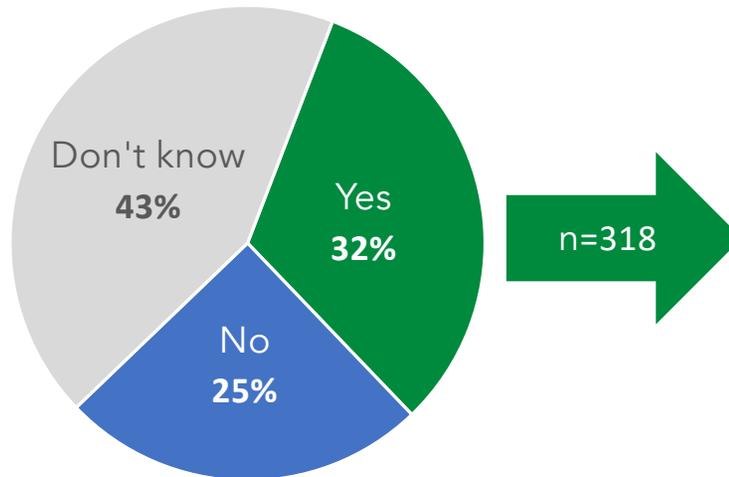
“Please say how important it is for each of these groups to have a strong voice in how public schools in Illinois are run. Is it very important, somewhat important, not very important or not important at all for them to have a strong voice in how public schools in Illinois are run?”



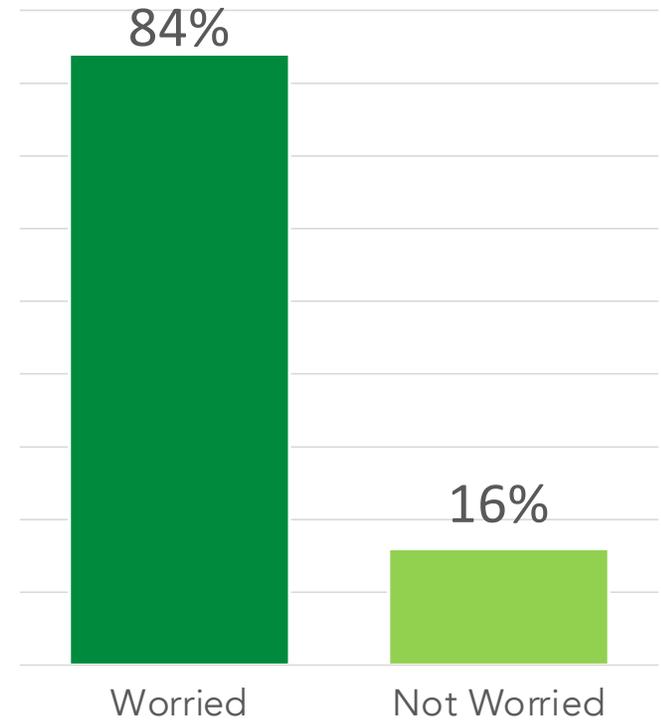
**Only a third are aware of teacher shortages, but those who are aware are very worried.**



“As far as you know, is your community school district currently experiencing teacher shortages?”



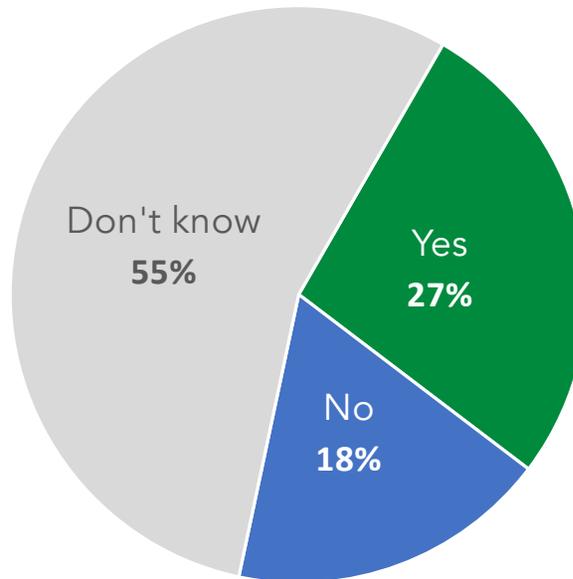
Among those saying Yes:  
“How worried are you about these shortages?”



**Few know  
about using  
substitutes to  
fill full-time  
teacher  
vacancies.**



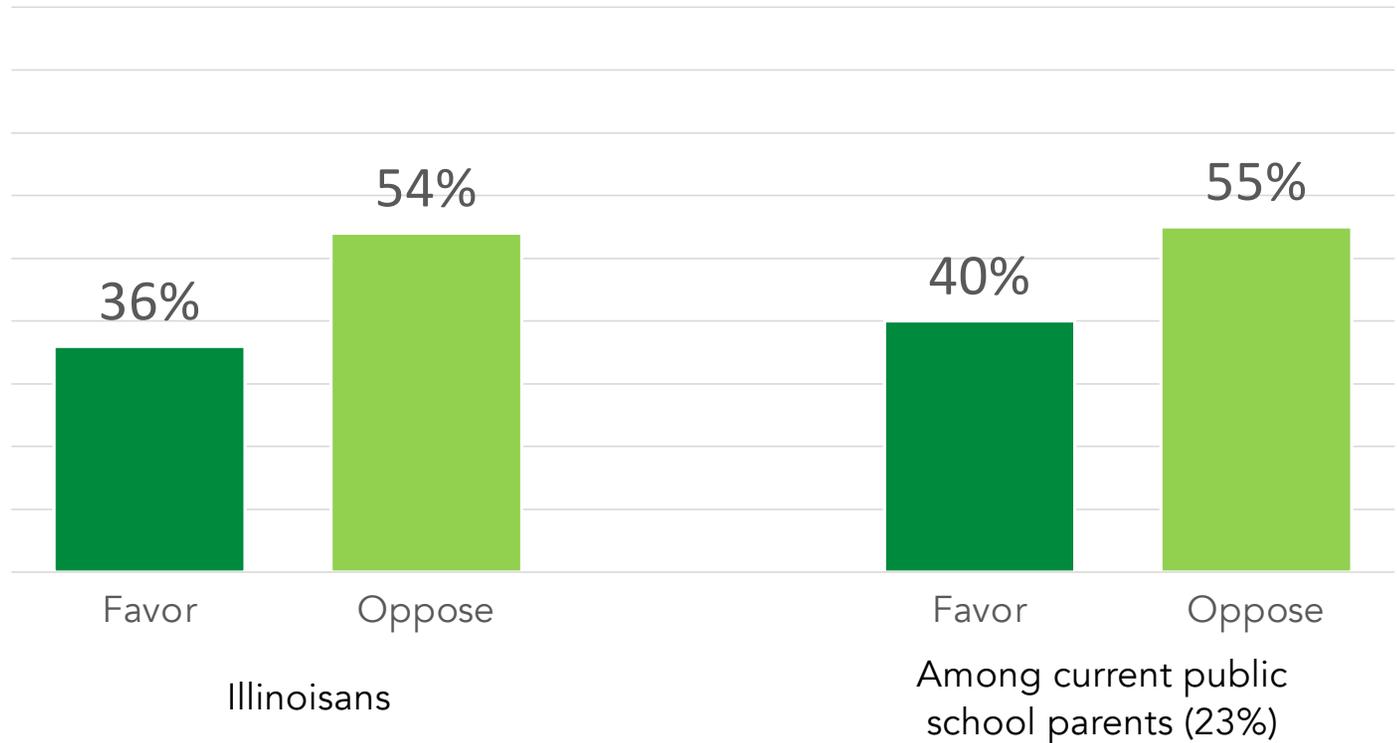
“As far as you know, is your local school district currently using substitute teachers to fill full-time teacher vacancies, so that the substitute teacher is there for the full school year, not just a day or two?”



**After hearing that substitutes lack certification or professional training, a majority become opposed to using substitutes to fill full-time positions.**



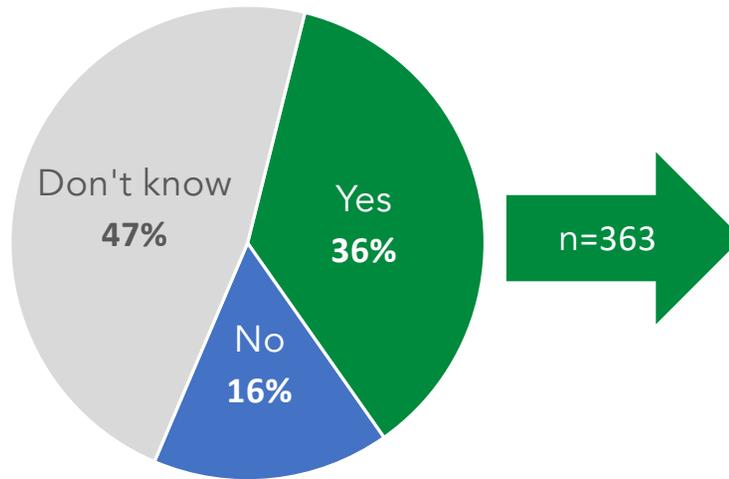
Most substitute teachers are not fully certified or licensed and lack the training of full-time teachers. **After reading that, do you favor or oppose your local school district using substitute teachers to fill full-time teacher vacancies?**



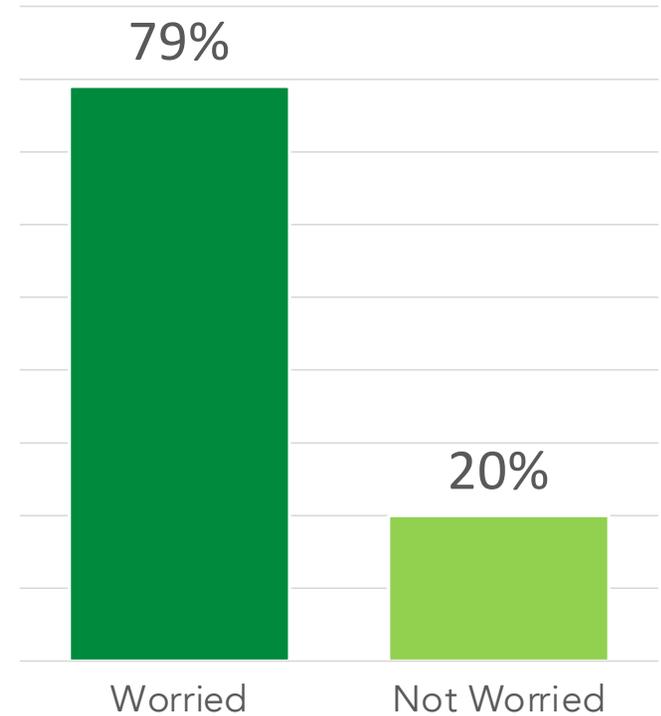
**Paraprofessional shortages are viewed similarly as teacher shortages.**



"And as far as you know, is your community school district currently experiencing staffing shortages for support roles like paraprofessionals, bus drivers, nurses, librarians, and custodians?"



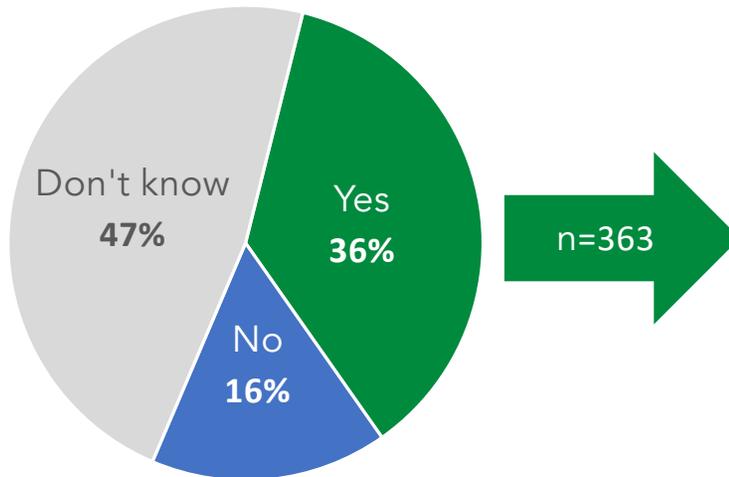
*Among those saying Yes:*  
"How worried are you about these shortages?"



They are also concerned about bus driver shortages.

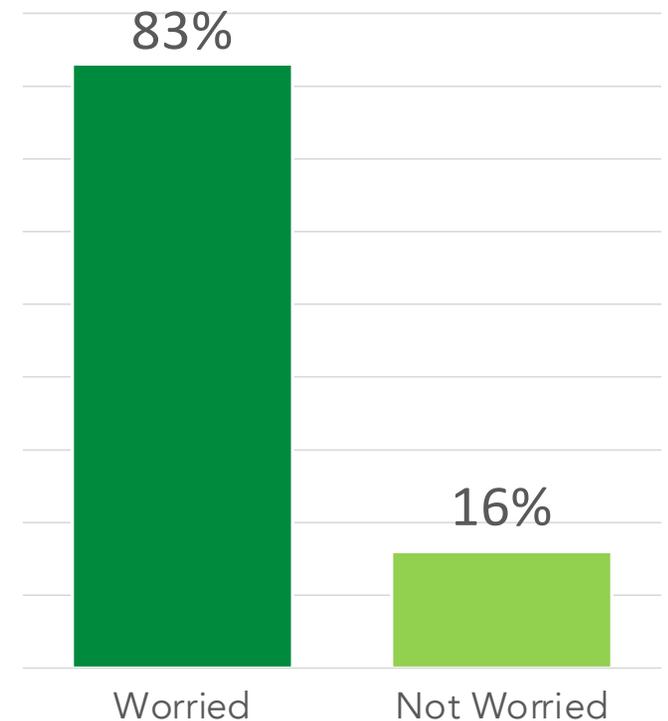


"As far as you know, is your community school district currently experiencing staffing shortages for support roles like paraprofessionals, bus drivers, nurses, librarians, and custodians?"



Among those saying Yes:

"Full time bus driver shortages lead to increased use of substitute drivers who do not know the bus routes well, often leading to confusion and students arriving late to school. **After hearing that, how worried are you about the shortage of full-time bus drivers?"**



**The public wants more funding for their schools and stronger benefits for their teachers, staff and professors.**

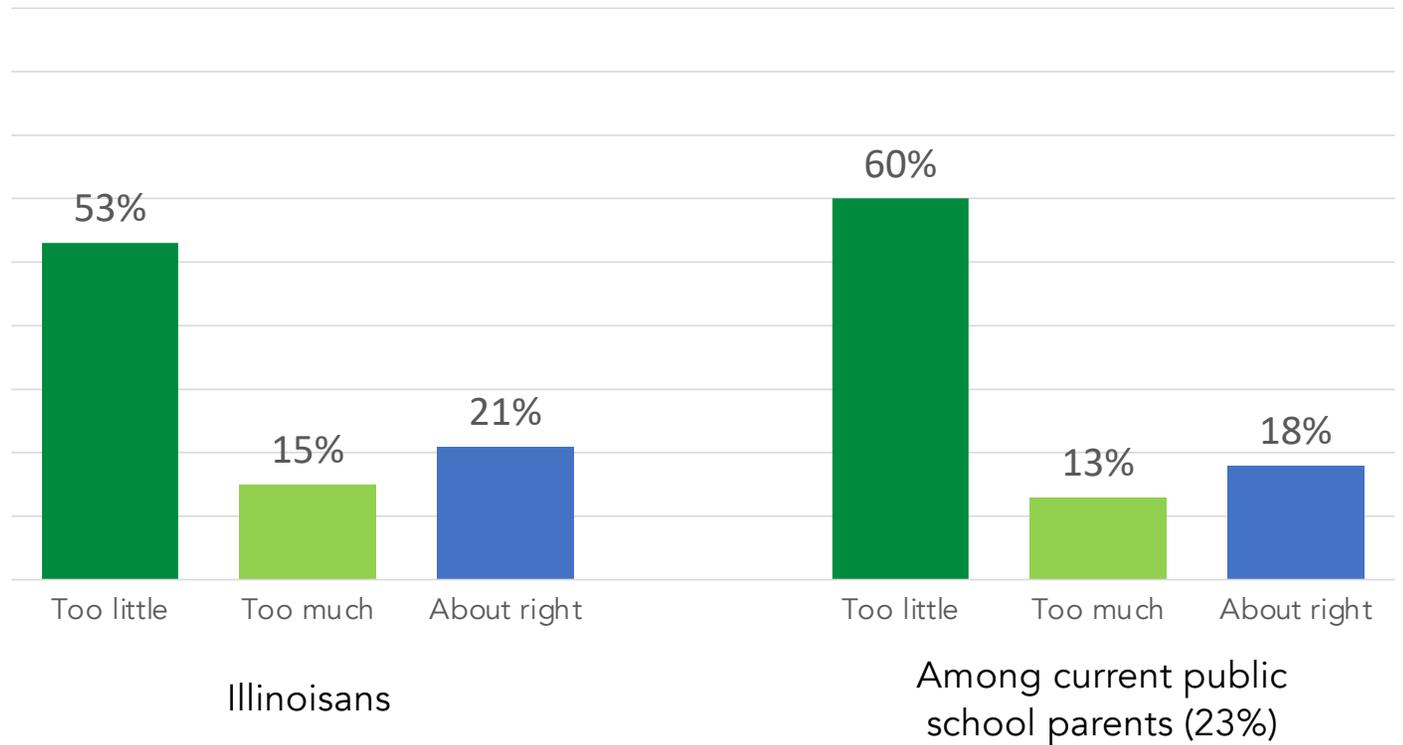




The public thinks teachers are paid too little. Public school parents are even more emphatic.



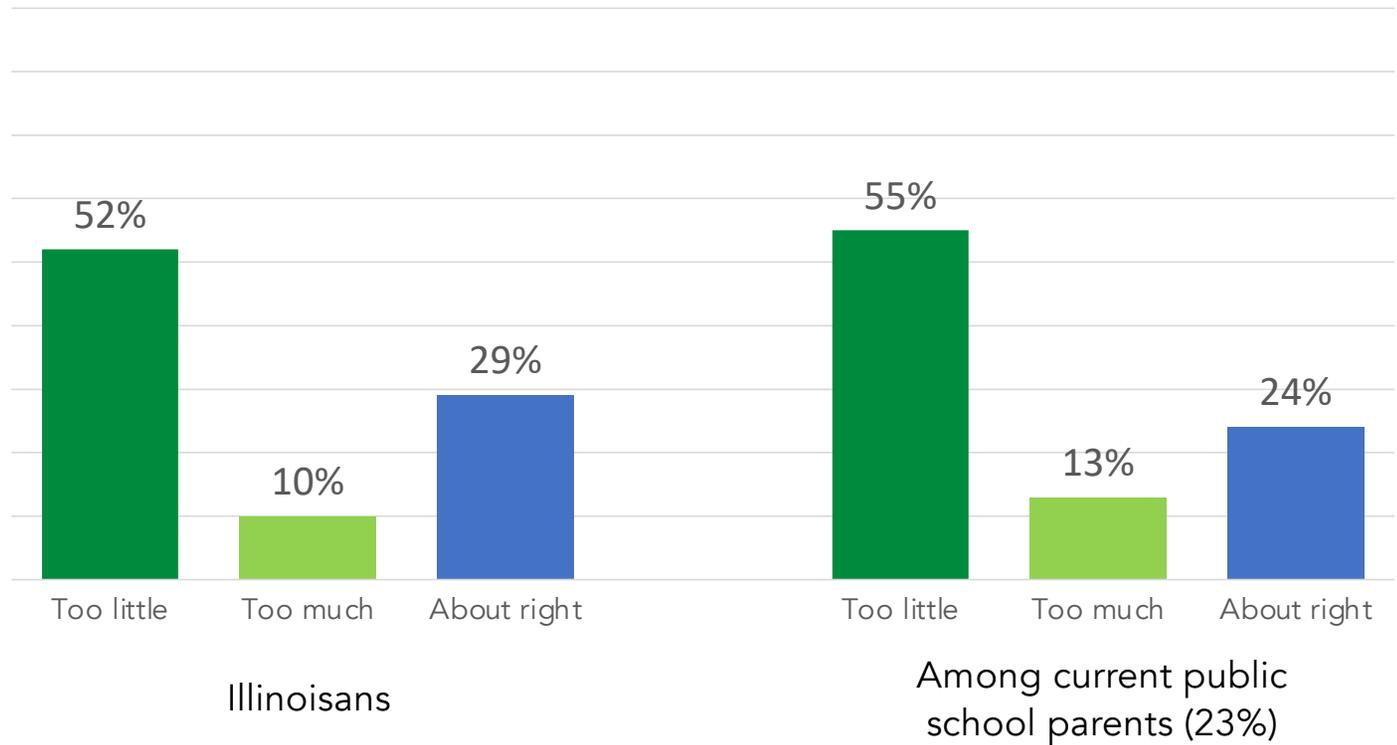
“Do you think that public school teachers in your community are paid too little, too much, or about right?”



The public thinks  
paraprofessionals  
are paid too  
little.



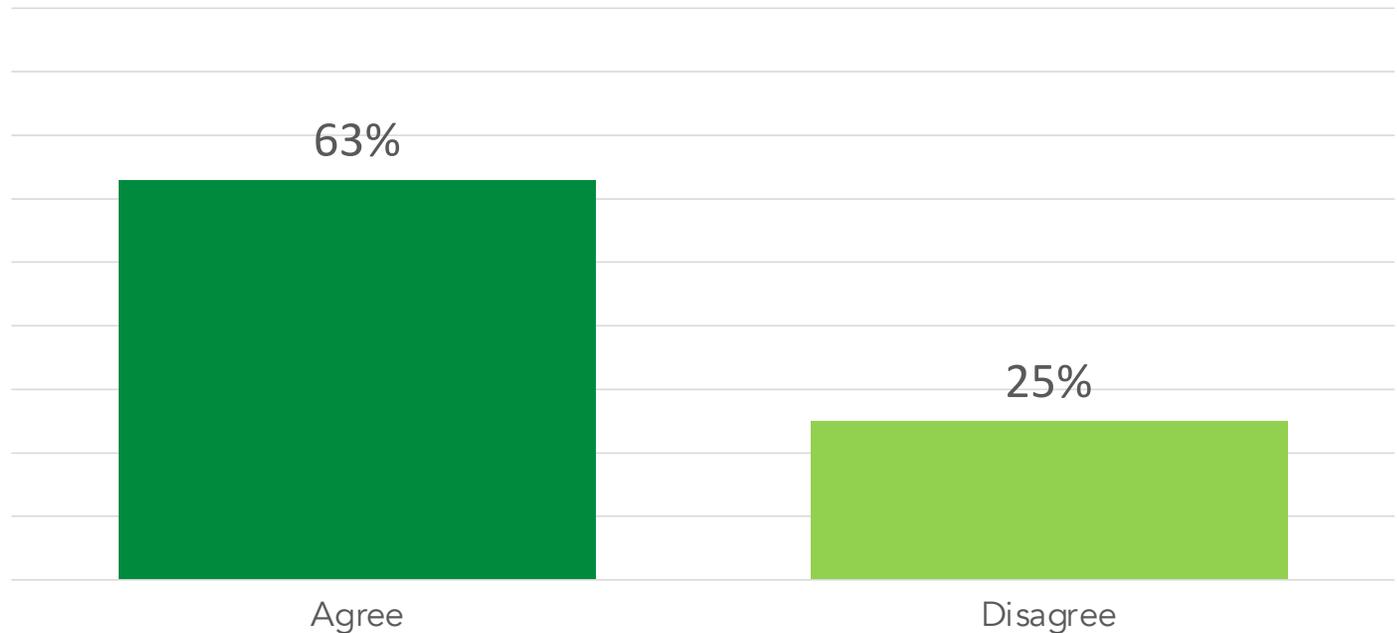
“As you may know, public schools in Illinois have support staff in classrooms called paraprofessionals. These paraprofessionals work with students with disabilities and behavior challenges. They get paid an average of \$22 per hour, about \$37,000 per year. Do you think that paraprofessionals in your community are paid too little, too much or about right?”



Illinoisans believe adjunct professors should be paid the same for teaching the same classes as tenured professors.



Some people say that adjunct professors who teach the same college courses that are taught by tenured professors should be paid the same amount. They say that students pay the same amount of money for the course no matter who teaches it. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree **that adjunct professors should be paid the same amount as tenured professors when they teach the same college courses?**



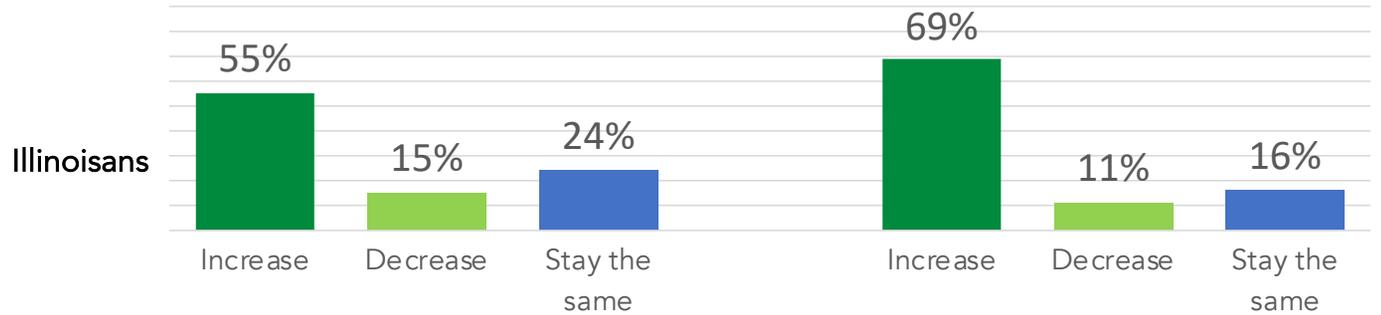
**The public wants more funding for  
their schools and better benefits.**



# Illinoisans largely support better funding for public education.

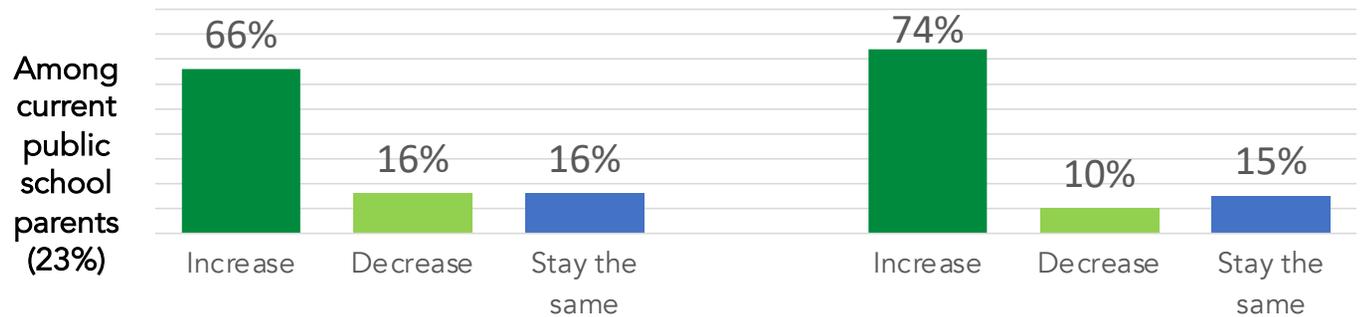


“Do you think funding for public schools in Illinois should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?”



“As you may know, 80% of Illinois public schools are not funded at the level required by the evidence-based model. This funding model was designed to prioritize state funding for students with the most need and school districts with the lowest local funding, allocating resources based on research-based best practices in education. Right now, just 20% of schools are fully funded.

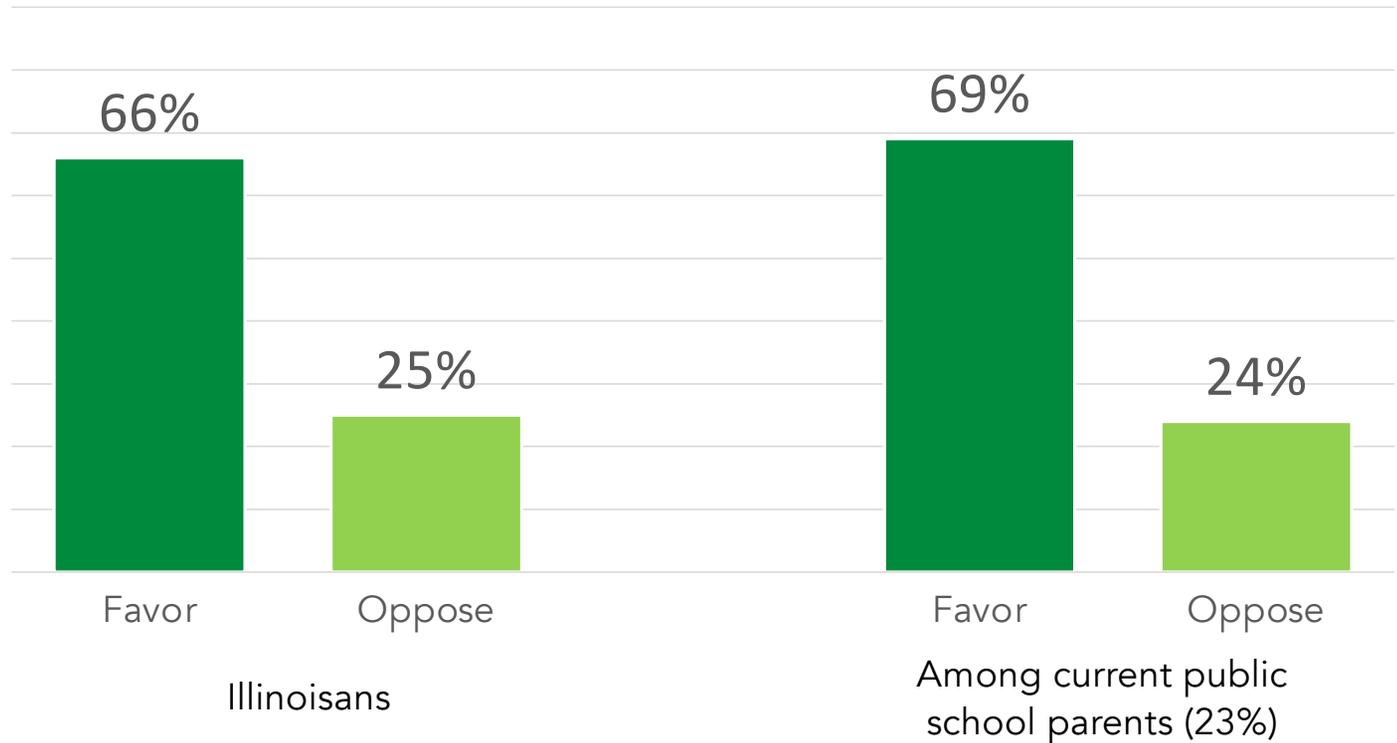
Having heard that, do you think funding for public schools in Illinois should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?”



# And Illinoisans want to see a fairer pension system.



“Right now, the teacher pension system in Illinois is divided into two tiers. Tier One is for teachers hired before 2011 and Tier Two is for those who began working as teachers in 2011 or more recently. Tier One teachers are eligible for their full pension at age 60 or at age 55 if they have been teachers for 35 years. Tier Two teachers are required to work until the age of 67 to get their full pension benefits. All teachers pay 9% of their salary into the pension system. **Would you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose changes to the teacher pension system that would allow Tier Two teachers to retire before age 67 and still receive their full benefits?**”



# UNITED

18  53  
**WE WIN.**



ILLINOIS EDUCATION ASSOCTION