

MEMO

To: Interested parties
From: Emma White and Lauryn Hill
Re: Voter support for changes to school funding
Date: November 20, 2024

Our survey of Vermont voters¹ finds voters are unhappy with the current system of school funding and support alternative ways to pay for schools including changing the structure to rely on income taxes instead of property taxes, and increasing property taxes on second homes. Although a majority of voters believe their property taxes are too high, they see school funding as highly important compared to other tax-funded services. Key findings of the survey are below:

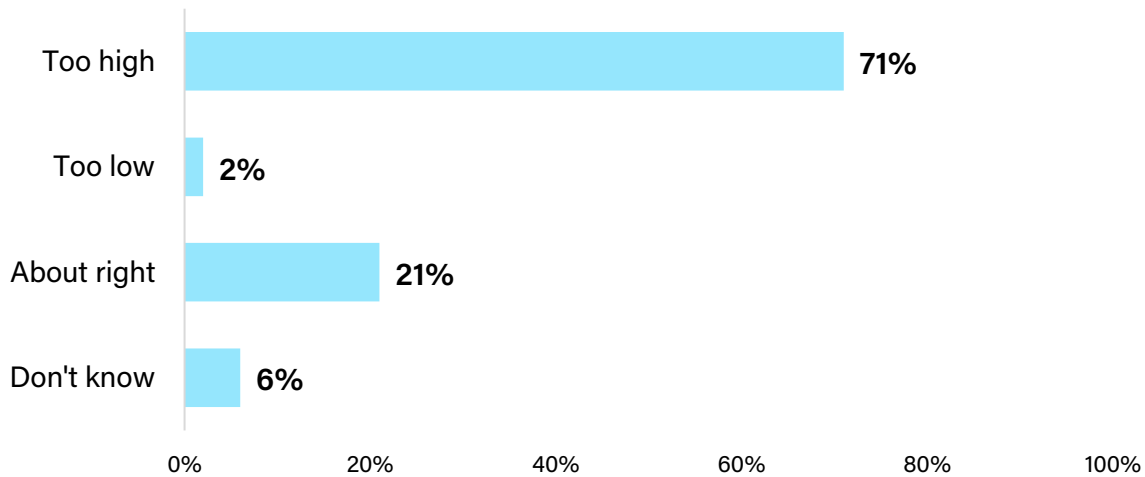
1. A majority of voters believe their property taxes are too high.

As seen in Figure 1, seven in ten voters (71%) report their property taxes are too high, while 21% say their property taxes are about right. The remaining 8% of voters say their property taxes are too low (2%) or don't know (6%).

¹ N=400 general election voters in Vermont, conducted October 7-10, 2024 via mixed method of cell, landline, and text-to-web.

Figure 1

Thinking about the public services your property taxes pay for, including schools, public safety, roads, parks and other services, would you say your property taxes are too high, too low, or about right?



2. However, Vermont voters see public schools as highly important compared to other things their taxes fund.

When asked about the importance of public schools compared to all the things their state and local tax dollars go to fund, seven in ten voters (72%) find public schools to be the most (18%) or very important (54%). Twenty percent say they are somewhat important and only 7% of voters say public schools are not very important or not important to them at all.

This support for schools crosses geographic and political lines, and remains high even among those who believe their property taxes are too high.

- Among voters in the Champlain Valley 74% say public schools are the most or very important along with 68% of those in Central Vermont, 65% in the Northeast Kingdom 65%, and 74% in Southern Vermont.
- Among those who say their property taxes are too high, 64% say public schools are the most or very important.
- Among those who trust Governor Phil Scott on education issues, 70% say public schools are the most or very important.

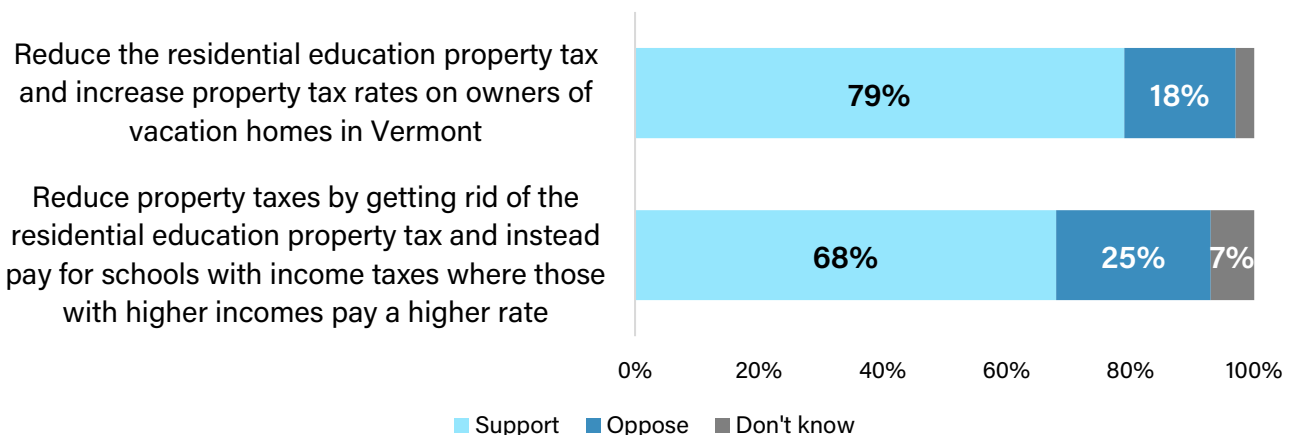
3. Voters support alternative funding strategies for schools, including moving to income tax-based funding.

Majorities of Vermont voters are supportive of potential paths for raising school funding, particularly when it is made clear that those with more resources will pay more.

- A large majority of voters (79%) support a plan to “reduce the residential education property tax and increase property tax rates on owners of vacation homes in Vermont,” while just 18% oppose this plan (Figure 2). Three percent (3%) of voters don’t know.
- Sixty-eight percent of voters support a plan to “reduce property taxes by getting rid of the residential education property tax and instead pay for schools with income taxes where those with higher incomes pay a higher rate” (Figure 2). A quarter (25%) are opposed, and 7% don’t know.

Figure 2

Moving forward, here are some ways that Vermont might change the way it funds public education. Would you support or oppose each of the following? Do you strongly or somewhat support or oppose this change?



Support for these proposals crosses geographic and political boundaries as well.

- Reducing residential property taxes and raising property taxes on second homes finds majority support among 82% of voters in the Champlain Valley, 70% in Central Vermont, 84% in the Northeast Kingdom and 79% in Southern Vermont. Eighty-five percent of those who say schools are most or very important support

this proposal along with 77% of those who say their taxes are too high and 78% of those who trust Governor Scott on education issues.

- Reducing property taxes and paying for schools with a graduated income tax is supported by 70% of voters in the Champlain Valley, 67% in Central Vermont, 79% in the Northeast Kingdom, and 63% in Southern Vermont. Seventy-three percent of those who say schools are most or very important support this proposal, along with 64% of those who say their taxes are too high, and 64% of those who trust Governor Scott on education issues.