

February 4, 2026

Release is effective immediately

Hawkeye Poll: Parents split on preferred school types for their children

According to a recent Hawkeye Poll—conducted by University of Iowa faculty and students between November 14 and November 20—adults, including those who are parents, have a wide range of preferences in where they would prefer to send their kids to school. The great majority of U.S. students attend public schools, yet when asked where they would choose to send their children if “cost and location weren't an issue”, 20.2% of parents chose private, non-religious schools, 26.7% chose public schools, 20.2% religious schools, 11.6% homeschooling, and 5.9% charter schools. This suggests a wide range of preferences on which schooling system is preferred. The poll surveyed 1,002 Americans over the age of 18.

Respondents who had children were more likely to choose religious schools (24.0%), with an eleven percentage point increase compared to those without children (13.2%). They were also less likely to choose public or private, non-religious schools, by about four percentage points each.

Public schools are not the most popular school choice overall, but they have strong support in some areas. A plurality of rural residents, 39.8%, prefer public schooling. This is a large amount compared to 25.8% of Metro residents, 30.9% of Micropolitan residents, and 31.1% of small-town residents.

Additional differences emerge when compared by political orientation. Liberals overwhelmingly prefer public and private, non-religious schools: 39.6% and 36.2% of respondents chose these options, respectively. This accounts for 75.8% of liberal parents, with all other choices at or below 6.1% for that demographic. In contrast, conservative parents rally behind religious schools: 38.5% would send their children to them. 17.7% of conservative parents prefer public schools while 19.0% prefer private, non-religious schools. An additional 14.5% prefer homeschooling. These trends clearly reveal a political divide which may contribute to debate over school choice.

The two school systems chosen the least were charter schools and homeschooling. Yet there are significant differences in those two systems vis-à-vis public approval. Charter schools were proven to be equally unpopular across all demographics, averaging 5.9% across all respondents. Small towns and micropolitan areas were particularly opposed to them, with 2.3% of metropolitan residents and 0.0% of small-town residents choosing them. Homeschooling varied from 18.4% in small towns to 6.8% among rural residents. Conservatives prefer home schooling to charter schools by an eight-point margin, 14.5% to 6.5%. Liberals had a similar ordering but a smaller margin at 6.1% to 5.0%. Moderates were in between. This shows a consistent preference for home schooling over charter schools.

Overall, the Hawkeye poll shows that there is little consensus on public preference for educational systems. Yet there is a consensus on which ones are not preferred, with non-traditional systems—charter schools and homeschooling—being significantly less popular. The preferred system also varies substantially across the political spectrum, showing that ideological differences in the U.S. include how and where children should be taught.

The University of Iowa Department of Political Science has conducted the Hawkeye Poll since 2007. A series of national and state public opinion polls, this experience serves as an important learning opportunity for students. Over 1100 students have had the opportunity to directly participate in the

research and survey process and to acquire valuable career-related knowledge about survey research and public polling in general. This year 24 students collaborated to design and implement a poll of Iowans. Learn more about the course at <https://now.uiowa.edu/2019/11/taking-iowas-pulse-hawkeye-poll>.

Respondent Identification: The Iowa Center for Social Science Innovation (CSSI) assisted with survey programming and data collection. The CSSI contracted with Verasight to field the survey to a demographically representative sample of about 1000 respondents. Respondents invited to complete the web survey were U.S. adults, aged 18+, recruited for participation via web panel.

To further ensure data quality, the Verasight data team implements a number of post-data collection quality assurance procedures, including confirming that all responses correspond with U.S. IP addresses, confirming no duplicate respondents, verifying the absence of non-human responses, and removing any respondents who failed in-survey attention and/or straight-lining checks. The Verasight data team also reviewed open-ended items to ensure no responses contained nonsensical, inappropriate, or non-sequitur text. Respondents that completed the survey in less than 30% of the median completion time were removed.

Sample: 1002 U.S. voting-age respondents. The margin of sampling error, which accounts for the design effect and is calculated using the classical random sampling formula, is +/- 3.3%.

Weighting: The data are weighted to match the August 2025 Current Population Survey on age, race/ethnicity, sex, income, education, region, and metropolitan status, as well as to a running three-year average of partisanship distributions from the Pew Research Center NPORS benchmarking surveys and population benchmarks of 2024 vote.

About the Hawkeye Poll: The poll was conducted by the Hawkeye Poll Cooperative, comprised of University of Iowa faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students in the Political Science departments. The poll is a teaching, research, and service project, and is directed by Frederick J. Boehmke, professor of political science. The Department of Political Science provides financial support for the poll.

Student Research Team: Grant T. Allen, Sonja G. Fortier, Reece T. Gallagher, Dalton J. Hojka, Lucas A. Rezende, and Caden R. Shetler assisted with the preparation of this release.

Contact: Frederick Boehmke, Faculty Advisor for the Hawkeye Poll, 319-335-2342 (office), 716-866-9277 (cell), frederick-boehmke@uiowa.edu.

###