

PRESS RELEASE

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Survey Shows Broad Support for Mayoral Control of Schools

Overall 62% Support Approach, Metrix Matrix and CGR Survey Finds

Rochester, NY — March 30, 2010 — Metrix Matrix, a local opinion research firm, and the Center for Governmental Research (CGR) today released results of a new survey on mayoral control of the Rochester City School District (RCSD). Conducted principally by mail from March 8-17, the survey shows a broad cross section of city households support mayoral control.

There were 435 survey respondents for a response rate of 26%, “which is very high for this type of survey,” said Metrix Matrix President Jim Antonevich.

When asked which “best describes your current opinion” on mayoral control of the RCSD, 62% strongly or somewhat support the approach while 23% somewhat or strongly oppose it. The remainder either had “not formed an opinion” or “do not care about this issue.”

Other Key Findings

CGR President Kent Gardner said, “Although the strength of support varies somewhat by race, age, whether the household includes an RCSD student, and other characteristics, respondents in all groups express support for mayoral control by a substantial margin.”

Responses by Ethnicity/Race

- Black/African American – 53% support vs. 32% oppose, a 21-point margin of support.
- White/Caucasian – 67% support vs. 19% oppose, a 48-point margin of support.
- Hispanic – only 5% of respondents are Hispanic, too few to allow a statistically-valid inference about opinions on this issue of Hispanics residing in the city.
- Weighted to reflect the racial distribution in Rochester’s population (48% white, 41% black, 11% other), Antonevich said, “Communitywide, the survey suggests that about 60% support and 25% oppose Mayor Robert Duffy’s proposal.” He added, “This assumes that the respondents are representative of non-respondents of the same race. However, as they chose not to return the survey, non-respondents are either less likely to have formed opinions, or to hold them less strongly than residents who did return the survey.”

Responses by Age

- Among residents under age 45, 54% support and 27% oppose the initiative, for a 27-point margin of support.

- Residents aged 45 to 64 are more supportive, with 69% favoring the initiative and 18% opposing it, a 41-point margin of support. Residents over age 65 support the initiative by a 38-point margin.

Respondents with Children Under 18 in the Household

- 60% of respondents with children under the age of 18 support mayoral control and 25% oppose it. The margin of support is the same regardless of whether the children attend public or private school, thus appears to reflect the views of RCSD parents.
- Households without children in the home are slightly more supportive of the Mayor's initiative than are households with school-aged children.

Republicans More Supportive than Democrats

- Republicans support the proposal 72% vs. 15%, while the comparable percentages for Democrats are 55% in favor vs. 33% opposed.

Respondents are Looking for a Change in Rochester Schools

Based on survey results, respondents are deeply concerned about the city schools.

- When asked “compared to a few years ago, would you say Rochester city schools are getting better/worse,” 62% of respondents say city schools are much or somewhat worse; 22% say they are about the same and 10% say they are either somewhat or much better.
- 77% of respondents agree with the statement, “I'm willing to consider a big change because current school district performance is unacceptable.”

School Board Is Viewed More Negatively than the City Administration

Only 24% of respondents agree “this school board is capable of overseeing the Superintendent and the RSCD.” By contrast, 61% agree “the Duffy administration is capable of overseeing the Superintendent and the RSCD.” Responding to other survey questions:

- 16% agree “it is easy to share my opinion and get answers from the Board of Education,” while 42% disagree.
- By contrast, 38% agree “it is easy to share my opinion and get answers from city government,” while 24% disagree.

Gardner noted that respondents are also more confident of the Duffy administration's ability to improve graduation rates: 50% agree (20% disagree) that “mayoral control will help increase graduation rates” while only 20% agree (56% disagree) that “keeping school board will help increase graduation rates.”

Top Priorities for the Schools – Safety & Graduation

Survey respondents were also asked about their priorities for the schools.

- Nearly all respondents say that “making schools safer” and “improving graduation rates” are either very or somewhat important.

- Cost matters: 61% say “reduce taxpayer spending on schools” is very or somewhat important while only 11% say this is somewhat or not at all important.
- The priorities that rank lowest are “honoring existing teacher contracts,” “retaining school district jobs,” and “more independence for Superintendent.”

Influence on Decision

The survey also asked, “How much influence do each of the following have on your opinion regarding mayoral control?”

- “The availability of details regarding the city’s plan” and “impact on spending and cost” rank highest - 71% and 69% say this information is influential.
- Ranking lowest are the opinions of church and community leaders and school unions (RTA, ASAR, BENTE & RAP).

Summary

“We’re very pleased by the responsiveness of city residents,” said Antonevich. “We’re confident that we’ve captured the opinions of those individuals who are paying attention to this issue. The high response rate reflects how strongly people feel about the issue—non-respondents are probably less engaged.”

“The overall finding — that residents support mayoral control — is quite robust, holding up across a broad cross-section of city residents,” said Gardner. “Yet what’s also clear is that the survey shows a profound level of dissatisfaction with the *status quo*. While respondents are expressing support for the Duffy administration, the results also show that city residents will support any change that may improve the quality of the schools. If the Mayor assumes this responsibility, the voters will hold him accountable.”

Editor’s Note: For more details on the survey results, see www.cgr.org.

