

# Every Child Matters Education Fund

## Summary of Budget and Tax Policy Survey Results

To determine public opinion on a variety of issues facing children and families in the United States, the Every Child Matters Education Fund commissioned Mason-Dixon Polling and Research to undertake a nationwide telephone survey among 800 registered voters, representing a cross-section of the American voting public. Respondents were selected at random. Mason-Dixon conducted the survey from February 19 to February 27, 2003; the survey has an overall margin of error of  $\pm 3.5$  percent. The following summarizes key findings from the survey:

➤ **Voters do not think Congress is doing enough to address children's needs and support greater investments in children by a large margin.**

Nearly two thirds (63%) say that the needs of children regularly get elbowed off the table in the Congress by stronger special interests while 24% think that Congress does a lot to help working families with children. Men and women feel similarly as do liberals and moderates. Slightly more conservatives feel Congress does a lot for working families with children, but still a majority say that children's needs are not addressed. When presented with a plan that focuses on smaller tax cuts for working families and greater investments in children, 66% of respondents say they would support this approach while only 26% would oppose it.

Children's Issues in Congress		
<i>(Question Wording) "Which comes closer to your view about how children's needs – such as health care, child abuse prevention, pre-school education, and after-school programs – are addressed in the Congress: Congress does a lot to help working families with children, OR the needs of children regularly get elbowed off the table in the Congress by stronger special interests?"</i>		
	Congress Does a Lot	Regularly Elbowed Off
All Voters	24%	63%
Men	23%	62%
Women	24%	64%
Liberals	14%	79%
Moderates	19%	67%
Conservatives	31%	53%

➤ **When given the choice between the administration's budget and tax approach and an alternative approach with greater investments in children, voters overwhelmingly prefer child investment.** More than two-thirds (68%) prefer the child

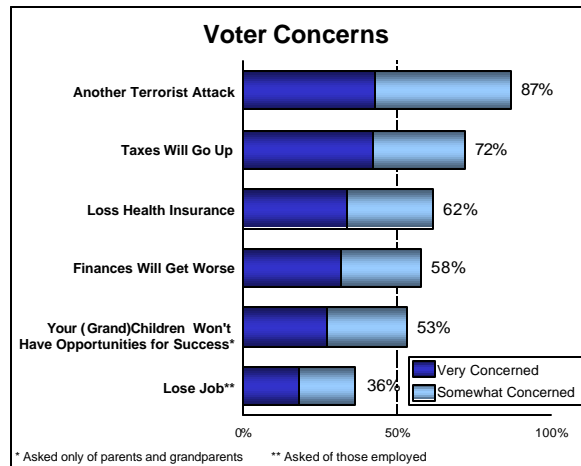
Preferred Budget and Tax Approach					
<i>(Question Wording) "Overall, which budget and tax approach do you prefer – President Bush's approach that focuses on large tax cuts or an approach that aims smaller tax cuts at working families and makes substantial new investments in proven programs to benefit children?"</i>					
	Child Investment Approach	Administration's Approach		Child Investment Approach	Administration's Approach
All Voters	68%	24%	2000 Voters	68%	26%
Men	67%	26%	Liberals	90%	6%
Women	70%	22%	Moderates	78%	11%
White	63%	29%	Conservatives	54%	39%
Black	94%	1%	East	71%	23%
Hispanic	88%	10%	Midwest	68%	26%
18-44 Year Olds	68%	27%	South	64%	25%
45-54 Year Olds	67%	25%	Rocky/West	73%	21%
55+ Year Olds	71%	20%			

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investment approach while just 24% support the administration's approach. Both men and women prefer the child investment approach as do voters in all regions of the country. It gets near universal support from blacks and Hispanics and also gets solid support from white voters. Younger, middle-aged, and older voters all equally choose child investments over large tax cuts. Liberals almost universally prefer child investments. Moderates strongly prefer it, and a majority of conservatives also choose a child investment approach over the administration's.

➤ **Voters are dissatisfied with the current state of the country, worried about the future of children, and have serious concerns about the economy and their safety.**

Nearly six in 10 voters (59%) are dissatisfied with things in America while just 34% are satisfied. Parents of children under 18 feel similarly (54% dissatisfied, 37% satisfied). Nearly half of parents (47%) think children will grow up to be worse off while 36% say children will be better off. Voters are most concerned about another terrorist attack and taxes going up. A solid majority are also concerned that they will lose their health insurance or other benefits, that their finances will get worse, and their children or grandchildren will not have opportunities to succeed. Fully a third of employed voters are concerned about losing their jobs.



➤ **Despite more than two months of coverage of the administration's budget and tax plan, it does not gain majority support of the voting public and a large percentage of voters have little or no familiarity with what the administration is proposing.** Just a fifth (18%) of voters say they are very familiar with the administration's budget and tax policies while 50% say they are somewhat familiar and 23% have not too much or no familiarity at all. Overall, 48% support the administration's budget and tax policies and 38% oppose them, but intense opinions are equal (20% strongly support, 21% strongly oppose).

➤ **When voters learn more about the basic elements of the administration's budget and tax policies, support falls and the opposition rises.** In the survey voters were read

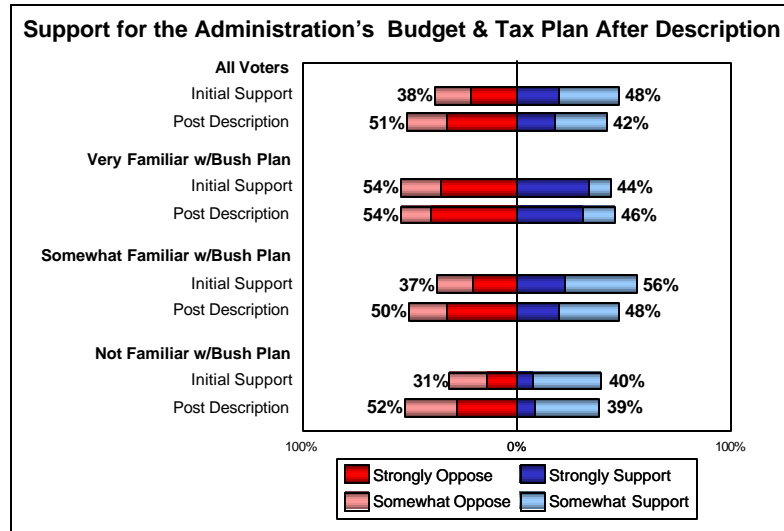
basic information about administration's plan. The wording reflects what the administration has said about the plan and information contained in the budget released on February 4<sup>th</sup>. After hearing this statement 51% oppose the administration's budget and tax plan compared to 42% who support it. Only 20% of liberals and moderates support the plan while conservatives continue to support it by a two-to-one

**Question Wording**

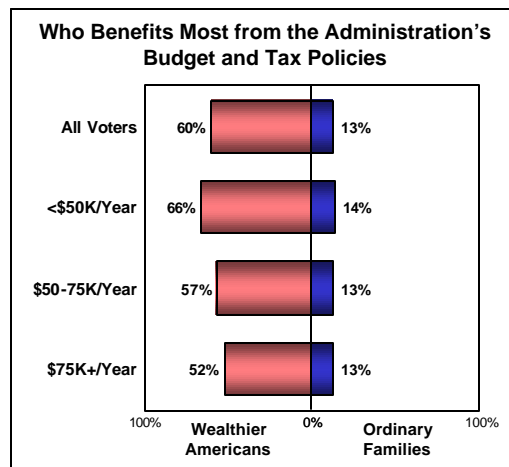
*"As you may know, the key elements of President Bush's recent budget and tax proposal include substantial increases in defense and homeland security spending, freezes or cuts in most domestic spending including children's programs, and a substantial tax cut that includes eliminating the taxes on stock dividends. The President acknowledges his plan will cause more than \$600 billion dollars in deficits over the next two years but says they are affordable. Based on this information, do you support or oppose President Bush's tax and budget proposal?"*

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margin. A majority (51%) of both men and women oppose the plan. Parents of children under 18 are split (46% support, 48% oppose).



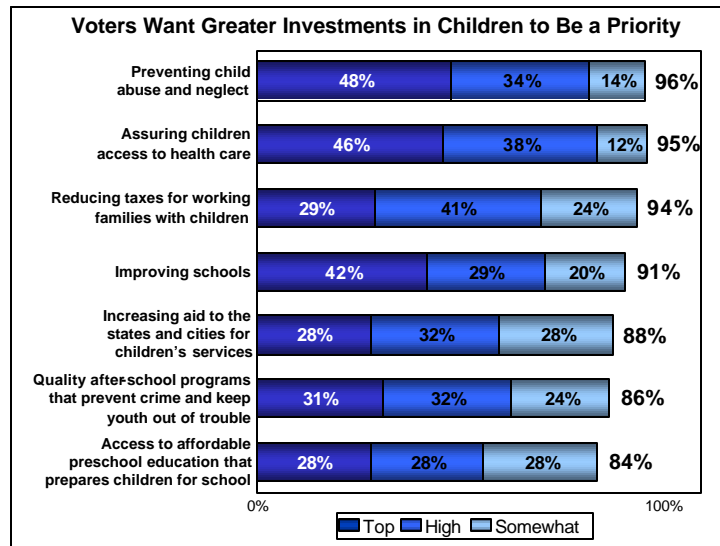
- **Less than half of voters believe the administration's budget and tax plan is fair to them, and overall think it benefits wealthier Americans and not ordinary working families.** Overall, 49% of voters say the administration's policies are fair, while 32% say they are not fair to them. The remaining 19% cannot give an answer. However, just 13% of voters believe the plan benefits ordinary working families compared to 60% who think the plan helps mostly the wealthy.



- **Few voters can name reasons to support or oppose the administration's proposed budget and tax policies.** When asked the best reason to support the administration's policies, 23% say because it cuts their taxes, 10% say that it will improve the economy, and just 5% say that it ends the dividend tax. However, 30% say there are no reasons, and another 30% don't know enough to give an answer. When asked the best reason to oppose the plan, 18% say it produces large deficits, 15% say it cuts taxes on the rich, 6% say it won't help the economy, and 3% say the policies are not fair. Just 19% say that there are no reasons to oppose the administration's plan while 34% can give no answer.

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- **Voters want Congress to make greater investments in children a higher priority.**



- **Positive messages that highlight the benefits of investment in children highly persuade voters.** When assessing the arguments to increase investments in children, voters are most moved by a sense of moral responsibility, the importance of long-term returns, child protection, and the affordability of a bold new plan to address serious problems. Complaining about the unfairness of the 2001 tax cuts registered as the least persuasive argument. Any communication to promote a child investment plan thus should focus on its benefits.

### ***About the Every Child Matters Education Fund***

*The Every Child Matters Education Fund is a Washington, D.C. based 501(c)(3) organization created to raise the visibility of children and family issues in elections. Michael Petit, founding president of the Every Child Matters Education Fund, served as commissioner of Maine's Human Services Department and was deputy director of the Child Welfare League of America. For more information, please visit the Every Child Matters Education Fund web site at [www.everychildmatters.org](http://www.everychildmatters.org).*

### ***About Mason-Dixon Polling and Research***

*Mason-Dixon Polling and Research, Inc., is an independent polling firm that conducts voter surveys for news media, lobbyists, interest groups, trade associations, and political action committees. Mason-Dixon is the nation's most active state polling organization, conducting copyrighted public opinion polls for news media organizations in all 50 states. These media clients include over 250 local television affiliates and over 100 daily newspapers. Since 1983, Mason-Dixon has conducted surveys in every state in the country, on almost every public issue, and has tracked every major election and referendum. During this time, Mason-Dixon has earned the reputation as one of the most credible and accurate independent polling firms in the nation.*