



## **Bipartisan support for public school teacher pay raises and for \$8.50 minimum wage**

Less support for raising taxes to fund teacher pay raises and for increasing minimum wage to \$15.00



*The third in a series of six reports from the 2019 Louisiana Survey, a project of the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs*

For further information on this report:  
Michael Henderson, PhD  
225-578-5149  
[mbhende1@lsu.edu](mailto:mbhende1@lsu.edu)

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For further information on the Reilly Center:

Dr. Jenée Slocum, Director  
225-938-9333  
[jenee@lsu.edu](mailto:jenee@lsu.edu)

## About the Louisiana Survey

The *2019 Louisiana Survey* is the eighteenth in an annual series sponsored by the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication.

The mission of the *Louisiana Survey* is to establish benchmarks as well as to capture change in residents' assessments of state government services. The survey is further dedicated to tracking public opinion on the contemporary policy issues that face the state. Each iteration of the *Louisiana Survey* contains core items designed to serve as barometers of public sentiment, including assessments of whether the state is heading in the right direction or wrong direction, perceptions about the most important problems facing the state, as well as evaluations of public revenue sources and spending priorities.

In the *2019 Louisiana Survey*, this core is supplemented by measures of support for compromise; support for increases in teacher pay, the minimum wage, and the gasoline tax; approval of major recent policy developments such as criminal justice reform and Medicaid expansion; and attitudes toward a number of social issues such as gun policy, marijuana legalization, and sports gambling.

As part of an effort to ensure that the *Louisiana Survey* fulfills its public service mission, the research team solicited input about topics for the survey from members of the government and policy community across the political spectrum. Additionally, the research team drew upon expertise in public policy and polling from Louisiana State University faculty. These advisors provided invaluable insight into the design of the questionnaire and in identifying the contemporary policy questions that could most benefit from an understanding of the public's views. While we are indebted to them for their time and contributions, they bear no responsibility for final decisions on the questionnaire, analysis, and interpretation presented in this report or any mistakes therein.

We especially thank the Reilly Family Foundation for their generous support and vision in helping to create the Louisiana Survey.

### Principal Author

Michael Henderson, PhD  
Assistant Professor, Manship School of Mass Communication  
Director, Public Policy Research Lab  
[mbhende1@lsu.edu](mailto:mbhende1@lsu.edu)

## Summary

This is the third of six reports from the *2019 Louisiana Survey*, a project of the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication.

This report includes results for two current policy proposals: 1) Increasing public school teacher salaries, and 2) Raising the minimum wage.

Key results on teacher pay include:

- Support for raising public school teacher salaries is nearly unanimous among Louisiana residents, with 88 percent backing a pay raise. Raising teacher pay has broad consensus across political parties. More than 90 percent of Democrats and independents support boosting teacher salaries as do 80 percent of Republicans.
- There is less support – and more partisan division – on the question of raising taxes to fund the raise. Overall, framing the issue in terms of tax costs cuts support to 63 percent.
- Three-fourths of state residents (75 percent) underestimate average teacher pay in Louisiana; that is, they think teachers earn less than they actually earn.
- There is more support for uniform pay raises across-the board than for proposals to give larger raises to teachers who work in schools or subjects with teacher shortages. Only 25 percent of participants prefer giving larger salary increases to teachers who work in schools with teacher shortages and smaller increases to teachers in other schools. Just 26 percent prefer larger pay raises for teachers in subjects with teacher shortages and smaller raises for teachers in other subjects.
- Two-thirds (68 percent) of Louisiana residents have either a “good deal” of confidence or a “very great deal” of confidence in the state’s public school teachers.
- Thirty-nine percent of state residents grade their local public schools with an A (12 percent) or B (27 percent). In contrast, only 25 percent grade public schools across the state with an A (five percent) or B (20 percent). At the same time, 80 percent of residents want to increase state spending on public schools in Louisiana as a whole, but the share drops to 67 percent when asked about increasing state spending for public schools in their own local districts.

Key results on raising the minimum wage include:

Four in five Louisiana residents (81 percent) support a minimum wage of \$8.50 an hour. The proposal is popular among Democrats (94 percent), independents (78 percent), and Republicans (72 percent). Support for a minimum wage drops to 59 percent when it is set as \$15.00 an hour, and only Democrats maintain majority support (85 percent). Just 44 percent of Republicans and 46 percent of independents support a minimum wage of \$15.00 an hour.

# Teacher Pay

## Strong bipartisan support for raising teacher pay, unless it requires taxes

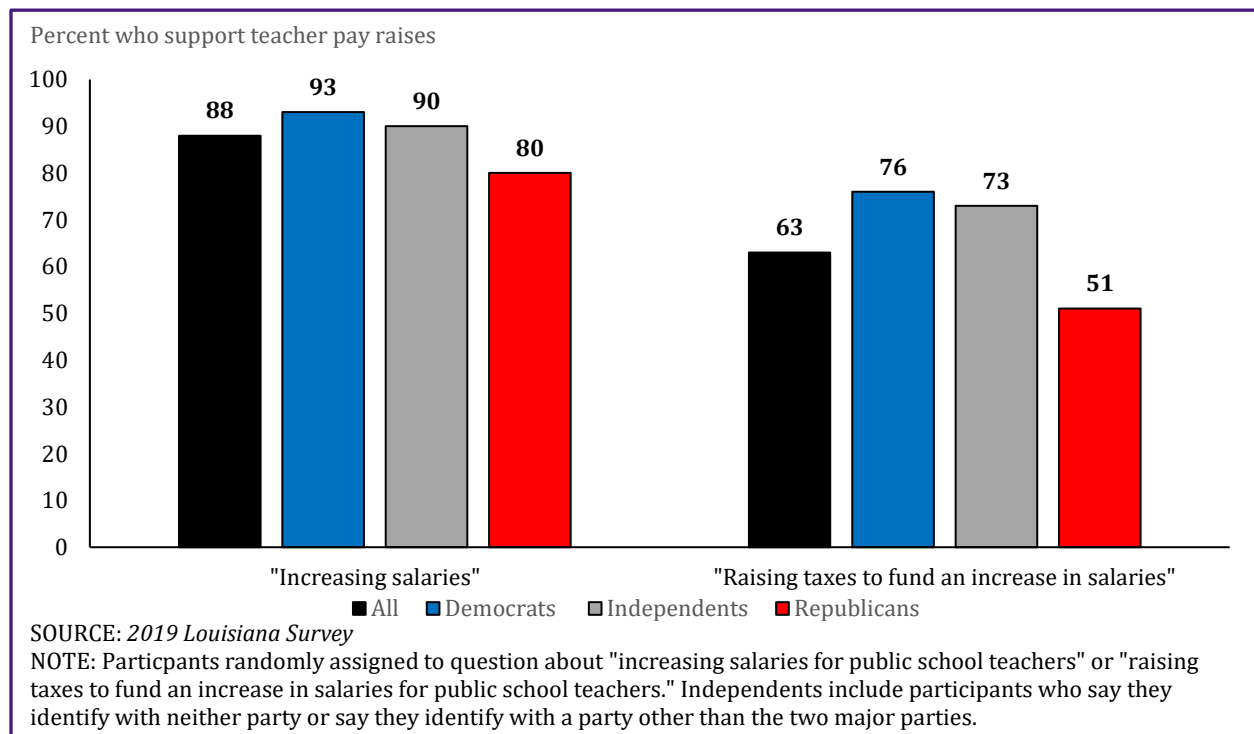
Support for raising public school teacher salaries is nearly unanimous among Louisiana residents, with 88 percent backing a pay raise. Raising teacher pay has broad consensus across political parties. More than 90 percent of Democrats and independents support boosting teacher salaries as do 80 percent of Republicans.

There is less support – and more partisan division – on the question of raising taxes to fund the raise. To distinguish between support for raising teacher pay and support for raising taxes to increase teacher salaries, we randomly assigned one group of

participants to a question asking about “increasing salaries for public school teachers” and another group to a question asking about “raising taxes to fund an increase in salaries for public school teachers.”

Overall, framing the issue in terms of tax costs cuts support to 63 percent (figure 1). Yet, even as most state residents continue to support boosting teacher pay if doing so requires raising taxes, important divisions open between political parties. Without referencing taxes, Republican support for pay raises is 13 percentage points less than Democratic support. When asked about raising taxes to fund a salary increase for teachers, this partisan gap nearly doubles to 25 percentage points.

**Figure 1: High support for teacher pay raises, less support for raising taxes to fund them**



## Most underestimate average teacher pay, but correction does not affect opinions about raises

We asked participants to tell us what they think the average public school teacher in Louisiana earns and recorded their responses verbatim. The average response is \$37,602, significantly less than the average annual salary of public school teachers in Louisiana. According to the most recent data available, the average annual salary for public elementary and secondary school teachers in Louisiana is \$50,000.<sup>1</sup>

Three-fourths of state residents (75 percent) *underestimate* average teacher pay in Louisiana; that is, they think teachers earn less than they actually earn. A far smaller share (four percent) has the opposite impression and believe teachers earn more than they actually earn. Just six percent know the actual average annual salary of public school teachers in the state. The remaining 14 percent did not guess.

To determine if these misperceptions – particularly the impression that teachers are earning less than do – shapes attitudes about pay raises, we randomly split participants into two further groups. We told one group the average annual salary of public school teachers in the state before asking them whether they support or oppose raising teacher pay, but did not provide this information to the other group. The information has no impact on support for pay raises. Even when considering only participants who underestimate teacher salaries, telling them teachers actually earn more than they thought does not depress their support for raising pay.

## More support for giving same raise to all teachers than for larger raises to teachers in areas with shortages

We asked two questions to determine whether Louisianans support uniform, across-the-board raises versus a market-based approach that tailors the size of the raise to the locations or subjects in which teachers work. The first of these questions, asked to a randomly selected group of participants, is:

“If the state of Louisiana raises salaries for public school teachers, do you think it is better to give a larger salary increase to teachers who work in *schools where there are shortages*, such as schools in central cities or rural areas, even if it means other teachers get a smaller raise? Or, is it better to give the same salary increase to all teachers?”

Only 25 percent of participants prefer giving larger salary increases to teachers who work in schools with teacher shortages and smaller increases to teachers in other schools. Instead, a large majority (72 percent) prefer giving the same raise to all public school teachers.

The second question, asked to a different randomly selected group of participants, is:

“If the state of Louisiana raises salaries for public school teachers, do you think it is better to give a larger salary increase to teachers in *subject areas where there are shortages*, such as math and science, even if it means other teachers get a smaller raise? Or, is it better to give the same salary increase to all teachers?”

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<sup>1</sup> Reported for the 2016-2017 school year in the National Center for Education Statistics 2017

Again, most prefer equal, across-the-board raises. Seventy percent prefer all public school teachers to receive the same raise. Just 26 percent prefer larger pay raises for teachers in subjects with teacher shortages and smaller raises for teachers in other subjects.

There is an interesting political dynamic at work as well. Democrats and Republicans are similar in their response to targeting pay raises to schools with teacher shortages: 25 percent and 22 percent support this approach, respectively. The parties move in opposite directions, however, when considering a proposal to target raises based on whether the teacher works in subjects with shortages. Fewer Democrats support this proposal than support the proposal to target raises to schools with teacher shortages (13 percent versus 25 percent). At the same time, more Republicans support subject-based targeting than support school-based targeting (35 percent versus 22 percent).

### **Louisiana residents have confidence in their public school teachers**

When asked how much trust and confidence they have in the men and women who are teaching children in the public schools in Louisiana, 54 percent have a “good deal” of confidence and another 14 percent have a “very great deal” of confidence. Only about one-fourth of state residents say they do not have very much confidence (23 percent) or no confidence at all (four percent) in Louisiana’s public school teachers.

### **Local public schools seen more positively than public schools across state**

Thirty-nine percent of state residents grade their local public schools with an A (12 percent) or B (27 percent). In contrast, only 25 percent grade public schools across the state with an A (five percent) or B (20 percent).

This pattern is especially strong among parents with children in public school. A majority of these parents grade their local schools with an A (17 percent) or B (35 percent). For adults who do not have children in public school, 36 percent grade their local public schools with an A (11 percent) or B (25 percent). When it comes to evaluating public schools across the state, public school parents and other adults grade them similarly. For public school parents, three percent grade them with an A and 22 percent grade them with a B. For participants without children in public school, five percent grade Louisiana’s public schools with an A and 20 percent grade them with a B.

At the same time, support for increasing state spending on public schools *in Louisiana as a whole* is higher than support for increasing state spending on public schools *in participants’ own school districts*. Eighty percent of residents want to increase state spending on public schools in Louisiana as a whole. The share drops to 67 percent when asked about increasing state spending for public schools in their own local districts. This pattern is the same for public school parents and adults who do not have children in public school.

# Minimum Wage

## Bipartisan support for \$8.50 minimum wage, not for \$15.00

Four in five Louisiana residents (81 percent) support a minimum wage of \$8.50 an hour. The proposal is popular among Democrats (94 percent), independents (78 percent), and Republicans (72 percent). The percentage of supporters is slightly higher than when we last asked about an \$8.50 minimum wage in 2016 (76 percent) and 2014 (74 percent). Republicans, in particular, have shown the most growth in support – from 55 percent in 2014 to 59 percent in 2016 to 72 percent in 2019.

In addition to asking a randomly selected group of participants about an \$8.50 minimum wage, we asked another randomly selected group about a \$15.00 minimum wage. Support for a minimum wage drops to 59 percent when it is set as \$15.00 an hour, and only Democrats maintain majority

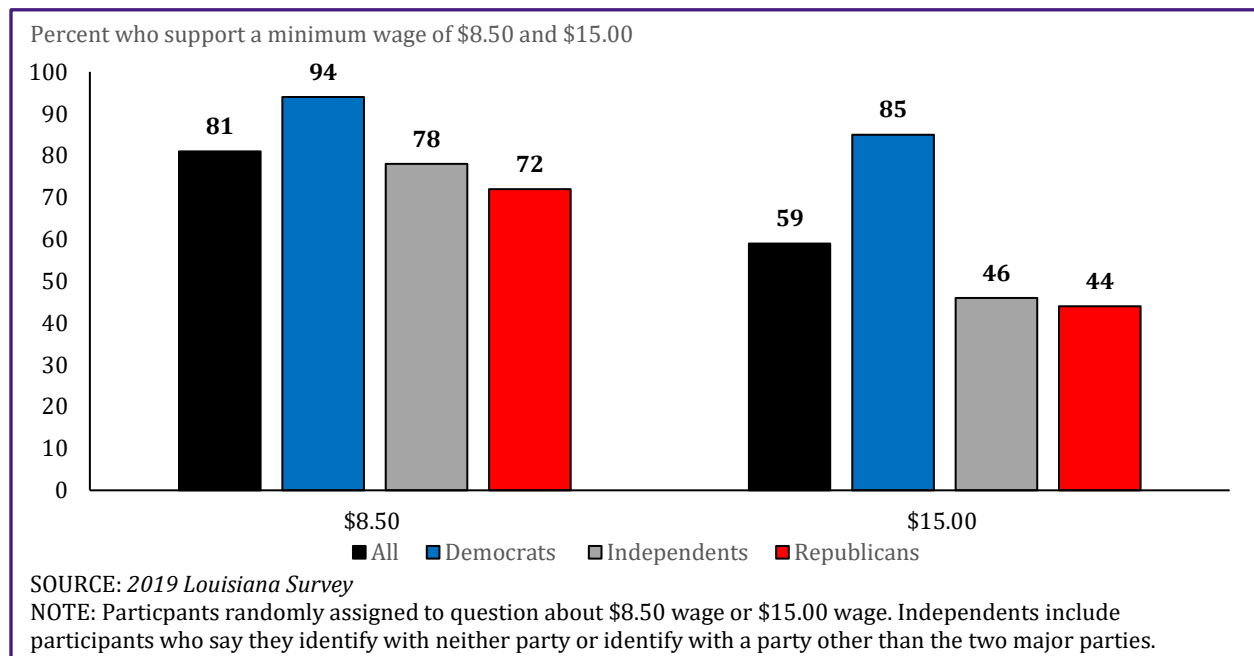
support (85 percent). Just 44 percent of Republicans and 46 percent of independents support a minimum wage of \$15.00 an hour.

## Potential costs of minimum wage dampens support, but only among Republicans

To determine whether the tradeoff between raising earnings for low-wage workers and potential increases in prices consumers must pay to cover employer costs affects opinions about a minimum wage, we asked a randomly selected group of participants if they support raising the minimum wage “even if it means higher prices when buying goods and services.”

Bringing the cost tradeoff to mind does bring down support by nine percentage points. However, this effect only happens for Republicans, whose support falls by 20 percentage points. Opinions among Democrats and independents remain unfazed.

Figure 2: More bipartisan support for \$8.50 wage than \$15.00 wage





## Survey Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted among a statewide sample of 917 adults (18 years of age or older) living in Louisiana. The survey was conducted by interviewers at Louisiana State University's Public Policy Research Lab. The sample includes 385 respondents interviewed via landline telephone and 532 respondents interviewed on a cellphone, including 365 who do not have a landline telephone. Interviews for this survey were conducted from February 7 to March 15, 2019.

Approximately three-fourths of the sample (76 percent) was stratified across parishes proportional to their adult population to ensure geographic representation across the state. The remaining 24 percent of the sample was drawn statewide. For both the parish and statewide samples, the design of the landline samples ensures representation of both listed and unlisted numbers by use of random digit dialing. Similarly, the cell phone samples are randomly drawn from known, available phone number banks dedicated to wireless service. Both samples, landline and cellphone, were provided by Marketing Systems Group.

The combined landline and cell phone sample is weighted using an iterative procedure that matches race, education, household income, gender, and age to known profiles for the adult population of Louisiana found in the Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2017 one-year estimates. Weighting cannot eliminate every source of nonresponse bias. However, proper administration of random sampling combined with accepted weighting techniques has a strong record of yielding unbiased results.

The sample has an overall margin of error of +/- 4.6 percentage points. The margin of error includes adjustment due to the weighting procedure. The design effect due to weighting is 1.4 percentage points; that is, the margin of error is 1.4 percentage points larger than it would be for a simple random sample of this size without weighting.

In addition to sampling error, as accounted for through the margin of error, readers should recognize that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. As often as possible, the *Louisiana Survey* follows the wording of relevant questions repeatedly used by reputable public opinion research institutions and projects, such as the Pew Research Center, Gallup Inc., and the American National Election Studies.

The *2019 Louisiana Survey* has a response rate of six percent. This response rate is the percentage of eligible residential households or personal cell phones in the sample for which an interview is completed. The rate is calculated using the American Association for Public Opinion Research's method for Response Rate 3 as published in their Standard Definitions. Response rates for telephones have been on decline for several decades and frequently fall in the single digits even among the very best survey research organizations.

Louisiana State University's Public Policy Research Lab, a division of the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs, designed the survey questionnaire and sampling strategy, computed the survey weights, and conducted all statistical analysis.

## Question Wording and Toplines

Unless otherwise indicated, results are for the total sample. Not all respondents were asked each question, and questions asked to a subset of respondents are labelled accordingly. For these questions, percentages are only for those respondents who were asked the particular question. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

### Q1. [HALF OF PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY SELECTED TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION.]

What grade would you give to the public schools in your local school district?

A.....	12
B.....	27
C.....	38
D.....	10
F.....	7
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	6

### Q2. [HALF OF PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY SELECTED TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION.]

Should state spending on public schools in your local school district be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

Increased.....	67
Decreased.....	2
Kept about the same.....	26
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	5

### Q3.

What grade would you give to Louisiana's public schools overall?

A.....	5
B.....	20
C.....	47
D.....	20
F.....	6
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	3

### Q4.

Should state spending on public schools in Louisiana as a whole be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

Increased.....	80
Decreased.....	1
Kept about the same.....	17
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	2

**Q5.**

Based on your best guess, what is the average annual salary of a public school teacher in Louisiana? [IF RESPONDENT SAYS 'don't know,' PROBE ONCE: Just your best guess is fine.]?

**VERBATIM RESPONSE RECORDED**

**Q6a. [PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A, B, C OR D.]**

Do you support or oppose the state of Louisiana increasing salaries for public school teachers?

Support .....	88
Oppose.....	10
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	1

**Q6b. [PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A, B, C OR D.]**

Do you support or oppose the state of Louisiana raising taxes to fund an increase in salaries for public school teachers?

Support .....	63
Oppose.....	31
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	5

**Q6c. [PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A, B, C OR D.]**

According to the most recent data available, the average annual salary for public school teachers in Louisiana is about fifty thousand dollars. Do you support or oppose the state of Louisiana increasing salaries for public school teachers?

Support .....	83
Oppose.....	14
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	3

**Q6d. [PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A, B, C OR D.]**

According to the most recent data available, the average annual salary for public school teachers in Louisiana is about fifty thousand dollars. Do you support or oppose the state of Louisiana increasing salaries for public school teachers?

Support .....	67
Oppose.....	32
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	1

**Q7a. [PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A OR B.]**

If the state of Louisiana raises salaries for public school teachers, do you think it is better to give a larger salary increase to teachers who work in schools where there are shortages, such as schools in central cities or rural areas, even if it means other teachers get a smaller raise? Or, is it better to give the same salary increase to all teachers?

Larger increase to teachers in schools with shortages.....	25
Same increase to all teachers.....	72
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	4

**Q7b. [PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A OR B.]**

If the state of Louisiana raises salaries for public school teachers, do you think it is better to give a larger salary increase to teachers in subject areas where there are shortages, such as math and science, even if it means other teachers get a smaller raise? Or, is it better to give the same salary to all teachers?

Larger increase to teachers in subjects with shortages.....	26
Same increase to all teachers.....	70
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	4

**Q8.**

How much trust and confidence do you have in the men and women who are teaching children in the public schools in Louisiana? A very great deal, a good deal, not very much, or none at all?

Very great deal.....	15
Good deal.....	54
Not very much.....	23
None at all.....	4
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	4

**Q9a. [PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A, B, C OR D.]**

Do you support or oppose raising the minimum wage in Louisiana to \$8.50 an hour?

Support .....	81
Oppose.....	20
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	0

**Q9b. [PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A, B, C OR D.]**

Do you support or oppose raising the minimum wage in Louisiana to \$15 an hour?

Support .....	59
Oppose.....	39
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	2

**Q9c. [PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A, B, C OR D.]**

Do you support or oppose raising the minimum wage in Louisiana to \$8.50 an hour even if it means higher prices when buying goods and services?

Support ..... 71  
Oppose..... 27  
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] ..... 3

**Q9d. [PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A, B, C OR D.]**

Do you support or oppose raising the minimum wage in Louisiana to \$15 an hour even if it means higher prices when buying goods and services?

Support ..... 50  
Oppose..... 49  
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] ..... 1