

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – NY CITY JEWISH EDUCATION POLL

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New polling by Charney Research finds that a large majority of New York City Democrats, including Jewish voters, support requiring private schools to offer students basic education in secular subjects “substantially equivalent” to what public schools offer, as state law provides. Likewise many would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports this requirement.

This issue has been controversial because government and press investigations have found that many private schools operated by Hasidic (ultra-Orthodox) Jewish groups do not provide equivalent secular instruction to public schools. Although Hasidic Jews constitute just 15% of the city’s Jewish population, many New York City Democratic politicians have been reluctant to speak out about this problem, because Hasidic communities tend to vote as a bloc and are concentrated in specific neighborhoods in Brooklyn and other areas. Conventional wisdom has been that demanding application of the equivalency law could carry a heavy political price in a Democratic primary, which is generally tantamount to election in the overwhelmingly Democratic city.

However, no public polling has examined views among Democrats city-wide or the non-Hasidic Jewish community on this issue in depth, so Charney Research was commissioned by the nonprofit YAFFED, which works on the substantial equivalency issue, to explore them.

The poll’s findings demolish the conventional wisdom about the issue, in several respects.

The consensus in support of substantial equivalency is broad.

- Support for substantial equivalency on secular subjects among public and private schools is voiced by 84% of all New York City Democrats (58% strongly) and 90% of non-Hasidic Jewish Democrats (69% strongly). Jewish Democrats make up 19% of registered Democrats, non-Hasidic Jews 16%.
- Backing is even higher for requiring the teaching of English, mathematics, science, social studies, art, and physical education to all private school students: 94% of all Democrats (74% strongly) and 96% of non-Hasidic Jewish Democrats (78% strongly).
- Nine in ten favor requiring private school to learn civics, as those in public schools do: 89% of all Democrats, 84% of non-Hasidic Jewish Democrats (59% strongly in both groups).
- Massive majorities favor requiring students in private schools to get at least 3½ hours of secular schooling daily (79% of all Democrats, 53% strongly, and 78% of Jewish Democrats, 59% strongly).

These are very big numbers in support – rarely seen in public opinion polling. And opposition numbers on every question are all in single digits, with strong opposition no more than 4% among Democrats in general or Jewish Democrats.

The breadth of Jewish support for substantial equivalency is impressive.

- On questions related to substantial equivalency, non-Hasidic Jewish support is very close to that of all Democrats, or even greater (regarding the principle of substantial equivalency and requiring specific secular subjects).

- Within the non-Hasidic Jewish community it is noteworthy that there is little difference between the principal Jewish movements (Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, and Modern Orthodox) on issues related to substantial equivalency.
- On these issues, majorities of the more liberal Reform and Reconstructionist movements take the same position on every question as those belonging to the Conservative and Modern Orthodox Movements.

There is broad support for putting teeth in the enforcement of substantial equivalency.

- Around five in six Democrats say private schools should be required to certify that they are substantially equivalent to public schools on secular subjects to get state aid, including 84% of all Democrats, 53% strongly, and 87% of non-Hasidic Jewish Democrats, 62% strongly. (In New York State, private schools receive public funds for transportation, secular books, security, academic support, and other services.)
- Again opposition is in low single digits – 9% of all Democrats (2% strongly), and 8% among Jewish Democrats (4% strongly).
- Three in five Democrats favor unannounced inspections of private schools of education in secular subjects (59% of all city Democrats, 66% of non-Hasidic Jewish Democrats).
- Only 32% of all Democrats and 21% of non-Hasidic Jewish Democrats prefer pre-announced inspections.
- On the application of substantial equality, non-Hasidic Jewish support is even stronger than that of all Democrats. This holds for supporters of all the major non-Hasidic Jewish movements.

Support for substantial equivalency on secular subjects between public and private schools could pack a political punch.

- The Democratic electorate is aware of this issue: 59% of registered Democrats and 71% of non-Hasidic Jewish Democrats have heard about it.
- Many more Democrats would be likelier to vote for a local or state candidate supporting substantial equivalency (58%, 39% much more likely) than to oppose them (5% less likely, 2% much less likely).
- The same is even truer among non-Hasidic Jewish Democrats: 67% likelier to support such a candidate (40% much more likely), 3% less likely (2% much less).
- Candidates willing to defy the conventional wisdom on this issue could reap a rich reward from the voters.

Methodology

Charney Research conducted 570 online interviews amongst New York City registered Democrats from May 21 to June 6, 2021. The sample was quota controlled to promote representativeness in terms of borough, race, age, gender, religion, and (among Jews) Jewish movement. The sample included a sub-sample of 186 Jewish Democrats. (However, this included only 3 ultra-Orthodox Jews: the Hasidic community is difficult to reach via polling.)

Findings from the survey are below. Questions can be directed to Craig Charney, craig@charneyresearch.com (917-372-2951)

Poll Results

New York State law lets private schools teach any subject, including religious instruction, but requires them to give their students basic education in secular subjects like science, math, and English that is at least "substantially equivalent" to what public schools offer. Have you heard of this issue?

	NYC Democrats	NYC Jewish Democrats (Non-Hasidic)	Reform/Reconstructionist Jews	Conservative /Modern Orthodox Jews
Yes	59%	71%	69%	73%
No	35%	26%	29%	24%
Don't know	6%	4%	1%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Do you favor or oppose requiring that students in private schools get basic education in secular subjects that is at least substantially equivalent to what public schools offer?

	NYC Democrats	NYC Jewish Democrats (Non-Hasidic)	Reform/Reconstructionist Jews	Conservative /Modern Orthodox Jews
Favor, strongly	58%	69%	70%	75%
Favor, somewhat	26%	21%	22%	18%
Oppose, somewhat	7%	2%	0%	3%
Oppose, strongly	2%	2%	2%	0%
Don't know	8%	6%	7%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Would you be more or less likely to vote for a local or state political candidate who supports this requirement?

	NYC Democrats	NYC Jewish Democrats (Non-Hasidic)	Reform/Reconstructionist Jews	Conservative / Modern Orthodox Jews
Much more likely	39%	40%	36%	47%
Somewhat more likely	29%	27%	31%	27%
Neither more nor less likely	21%	21%	19%	18%
Somewhat less likely	3%	1%	3%	1%
Much less likely	2%	2%	2%	3%
Don't know	6%	8%	9%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Would you favor or oppose requiring that all students in private schools are taught English, math, science, social studies, art, and physical education?

	NYC Democrats	NYC Jewish Democrats (Non-Hasidic)	Reform/Reconstructionist Jews	Conservative / Modern Orthodox Jews
Favor, strongly	74%	78%	74%	74%
Favor, somewhat	20%	18%	23%	24%
Oppose, somewhat	2%	1%	0%	1%
Oppose, strongly	0%	1%	3%	0%
Don't know	3%	2%	1%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Would you favor or oppose requiring that all students in private schools should get at least 3½ hours of secular education daily?

	NYC Democrats	NYC Jewish Democrats (Non-Hasidic)	Reform/Reconstructionist Jews	Conservative / Modern Orthodox Jews
Favor, strongly	53%	59%	53%	57%
Favor, somewhat	26%	19%	22%	21%
Oppose, somewhat	8%	6%	4%	13%
Oppose, strongly	3%	2%	3%	12%
Don't know	10%	14%	19%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Would you favor or oppose requiring students in private schools to learn civics, as public school students must?

	NYC Democrats	NYC Jewish Democrats (Non-Hasidic)	Reform/Reconstructionist Jews	Conservative / Modern Orthodox Jews
Favor, strongly	59%	59%	67%	54%
Favor, somewhat	30%	33%	31%	38%
Oppose, somewhat	5%	2%	0%	4%
Oppose, strongly	1%	0%	0%	0%
Don't know	5%	6%	2%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Most private schools receive public funds for transportation, secular books, security, academic support, and other things. Would you favor or oppose requiring private schools to certify they are substantially equivalent to public schools in basic secular subjects to get state aid?

	NYC Democrats	NYC Jewish Democrats (Non-Hasidic)	Reform/Reconstructionist Jews	Conservative / Modern Orthodox Jews
Favor, strongly	53%	62%	67%	63%
Favor, somewhat	31%	25%	21%	27%
Oppose, somewhat	7%	4%	1%	3%
Oppose, strongly	2%	4%	0%	3%
Don't know	7%	6%	11%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Would you favor unannounced inspections to check if private school students get basic schooling in secular subjects, or would you favor pre-announced inspections?

	NYC Democrats	NYC Jewish Democrats (Non-Hasidic)	Reform/Reconstructionist Jews	Conservative / Modern Orthodox Jews
Favor unannounced inspections	59%	66%	66%	67%
Favor pre-announced inspections	32%	21%	15%	23%
Don't know	10%	14%	19%	10%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%