

## Poll shows NJ voters support tenure reform

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An Eagleton Institute of Politics poll released Saturday found that New Jerseyans support important elements of Gov. Chris Christie's plans to reform teacher tenure and pay.

Fifty-eight percent of registered voters disapprove of the current tenure policies, while 40 percent approve, according to the institute's poll of 912 New Jersey adults.

"In some areas, there is frustration that students aren't doing better," said David Redlawsk, Eagleton Institute of Politics poll director. "This causes concern that it might be linked with the idea of bad teachers."

Families both with and without school-age children support the reforms that would eliminate lifetime tenure, revamp teacher evaluation procedures and tie teacher pay to performance, according to the poll taken between Feb. 24 and 26 through telephone.

The survey also found varied opinions depending upon a person's party affiliation, their views on Christie and whether they belong to a labor union, said Redlawsk, a University professor of political science.

Public employee union households proved to be stronger supporters of the current K-12 teacher tenure system, according to the poll.

Meanwhile, 55 percent of private union members disapproved, and 64 percent of non-union households do not favor it.

Redlawsk said New Jersey public union workers naturally support the current policies because majority of them are teachers.

"It's simply that a teacher's union has negotiated this issue over the years, and labor households tend to support what labor unions do," he said.

By a 2 to 1 margin over the Republicans, Democrats support current tenure policies, according to the poll. Independents favor the policy with 36 percent approval.

Redlask said people's support of Christie and his proposals was a major factor for voters — with 21 percent of those who support the governor versus 56 percent of those who disapprove of Christie.

"What we are really finding in the data is how liking or disliking Christie plays a big role in voter decisions as he has been extremely outspoken of this issue," he said. "So I think people who find Christie appealing are more likely to support the things he tends to address."

The proposed changes to tenure include evaluating teachers on standardized test scores, classroom observations and school-wide student performance, he said.

"The idea is to tie tenure and teacher evaluation together so that the system wouldn't be automatic anymore," he said.

"Low-performing teachers would be let off if their evaluations are poor, which is not the case now."

Nearly two-thirds of voters showed that they support the administration's proposal, according to the survey. Christie's supporters favored with an 81 percent. Those who do not favor Christie were split between 48 percent approving and 50 percent disapproving.

In an Eagleton Institute of Politics poll conducted last October about the specific issue of teacher's pay being directly tied to student test scores, 28 percent approved of tenure.

Voters believe that teacher's pay should not only be tied to scores but to other factors, such as the town in which they teach and the subjects or areas of specialization that should also be covered, Redlawsk said.

Sixty percent of respondents agreed with connecting pay to evaluations, while 35 percent disagreed, according to the poll.

"The public doesn't think that student test scores should be the only thing that teachers should be evaluated on, but when we include test scores with other factors like classroom observations, people see that as a valid part of a bigger evaluation process," Redlawsk said.

Michael Slott, University labor studies part-time lecturer, said he believes tenure needs to be reformed, but teachers have a right to due process first.

"Tenure was established in the first place to provide a measure of job security for teachers who faced discrimination, favoritism, nepotism and the pressure to adhere to orthodox viewpoints," Slott said.

He also said although teacher performance is crucial, providing adequate resources for schools and understanding the impact of students' social and family environments is equally important.

Valerie Albano, an American literature teacher at Watchung Hills High School, said she is opposed to tenure being based on student test scores.

"It is okay to fire teachers for being lazy at their job, but linking tenure to student test scores is not right," she said. "Sometimes the student must not be trying hard enough. It's just not a fair assessment for the teacher's capability."

Katherine Mosquera, a Rutgers Business School senior, said the tenure reform would prove to be efficient only if proper types of controls and regulations were taken.

"Controls such as score performance comparisons should be done by external sources," she said. "This will control teacher's deliberate curve in grades and inaccurate scoring."

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