

No matter party affiliation, N.J. voters not sold on Rutgers-Camden merger plan — NewsWorks

New Jersey's Democratic and Republican voters have found an issue they agree on.

A new Rutgers-Eagleton Poll finds broad public disapproval of Gov. Chris Christie's plan to merge Rutgers-Camden with Rowan University.

"Republicans and Democrats, as well as independents, all oppose the merger," said poll director David Redlawsk. "Republicans are slightly more likely to support it. Even so, this is really the first issue we've polled on where Republicans are not lined up behind the governor."

Pollsters interviewed 518 registered voters across New Jersey on both cell phones and landlines. They found that 59 percent oppose the merger; 19 percent support it; and 20 percent were unsure. The poll's margin of error was plus or minus 4.3 percentage points.

Redlawsk said the poll's findings is a clear message to policymakers.

"It suggests that the folks who are, in fact, supporting the effort have not made their case very clearly to the general public," he said.

Christie had hoped to force the merger by executive order. Last week, the state's nonpartisan Office of Legislative services said the proposal must be approved by the state Legislature.

Christie's administration, which has pledged to research the OLS recommendation, and has said that it will take its plan through the Legislature if it must.

State Senate President Stephen Sweeney, D-Gloucester, backs the merger. He has proposed a compromise in which the two schools could keep their identities but co-exist in a partnership.

Christie has dismissed that idea. He wants an all or nothing plan laid out by July 1.