



KANSAS BOARD OF REGENTS

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SURVEY FINDS LITTLE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION CUTS

Only 6% of Kansans Support a Reduction in Higher Education Funding

(TOPEKA) – Today the Kansas Board of Regents released the results of a recent statewide public opinion survey which solicited Kansans’ thoughts about the state’s public higher education system (7 public universities, 19 community colleges, and 6 technical colleges). The study, conducted by Public Opinion Strategies, a company headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia that specializes in public policy research, and made possible through private funding, surveyed 500 likely Kansas voters.

“It’s clear that Kansans place a premium on higher education,” said Donna Shank of Liberal, Chair of the Board of Regents. “The Board is well aware of the budget challenges currently facing state lawmakers, and, as a result of careful planning undertaken over the past few months, the state’s higher education system is prepared to absorb the 3% budget reductions the Governor has proposed for Fiscal Year 2009. As we look ahead to Fiscal Year 2010 and the prospect of additional cuts, we are prepared to share in the collective pain of a constrained state budget. However, higher education should not be called upon to shoulder a disproportionate burden.”

In the survey, Kansas voters revealed the following sentiments regarding current state budget challenges:

- When faced with the prospect of a state budget deficit, only 6% of voters support reducing funding for higher education.
- Nearly 75% of voters believe that reductions in state support for higher education would put the quality of higher education in the state at risk.
- When voters were informed that state government provides an average of 32% of the funding necessary to support the operating budgets for the six state universities, voters believe, by a 42% to 7% margin, that the state should provide a higher percentage of funding.

“It was no surprise to learn that voters would not respond well to potential cuts in state funding for higher education,” said Shank. “Voters believe that these cuts would hurt the quality of

education that the state's public higher education institutions provide. In addition, there is also a sense that these cuts would make higher education less affordable and accessible for students."

Kansas voters revealed the following sentiments regarding affordability and accessibility:

- While 78% of voters agree that the state's higher education institutions are "affordable," when they were asked to suggest one thing to improve about higher education in Kansas, the consensus was to keep it affordable for residents.
- Further, the data clearly indicated, by a 55% to 33% margin, that voters place the responsibility of affordability and accessibility squarely on the shoulders of State Government (in the form of state funding), rather than on students and their families (in the form of tuition).

"I hope this survey information, which reflects what Kansans think about public higher education, is helpful to lawmakers as they work to solve the state's budget crisis," added Shank. "Our higher education system only recently recovered from cuts incurred during the last recession, and a disproportionate hit would profoundly stunt the progress the system has made toward meeting the state's workforce and economic development needs. Increased workforce skills boost overall economic productivity, and in an economic downturn individuals look to us to provide training, but decreased funding makes this a challenge."

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About the Kansas Board of Regents:

The nine-member Kansas Board of Regents is the governing board of the state's six universities and the statewide coordinating board for the state's 32 public higher education institutions (six state universities, a municipal university, nineteen community colleges, and six technical colleges). In addition, the Board administers the state's student financial aid, adult education, GED, and career and technical education programs. The Board also authorizes private proprietary schools and out-of-state institutions to operate in Kansas, and administers the Kan-ed network, a statewide network that provides broadband Internet access and distance learning capabilities for schools, hospitals, and libraries.

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