



COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION POLL

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Virginians Strongly Support More Funding for Education

Richmond, VA—Virginians see a clear need for more money to support the schools, and most say a sales tax increase to get that funding would be a good idea, according to a new poll conducted by Virginia Commonwealth University. The Commonwealth Education Poll of 804 adults was conducted April 24-May 2 and has a margin of error of +/- 4 percentage points. The poll was conducted for the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute and sponsored in part by the Regional Educational Laboratory at AEL, Inc. The survey was conducted by the VCU Center for Public Policy.

The poll found 67 percent saying that funding for schools in Virginia is not enough to meet their needs and just 23 percent that it is enough. State budget woes in Virginia have done little to change the public's perception that schools don't have enough funding. A year ago, the Commonwealth Education Poll asked the same question with nearly the same result (70 percent not enough to 21 percent enough).

	Enough	Not Enough	Don't know/ No answer	Number of cases
Overall Funding for Schools	23%	67%	9%	804

A belief that the amount of funding is directly linked to the quality of education is widely shared among Virginians. Asked how much the amount of money spent affects the quality of students' education, 45 percent said a great deal and another 26 percent said quite a lot. This compares with just 23 percent who felt this affected education quality not too much or not at all.

Putting Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

Six in ten Virginians say they are even willing to pay higher taxes so that school funding can be increased. Just 34 percent say they are not willing to do so. Despite the many changes in the state economic climate, support for school funding appears as strong as did it a year ago. In 2001, the Commonwealth Education Poll found 57 percent willing to pay higher taxes and 36 percent not willing. Among those willing to pay higher taxes for the schools, nearly six in ten (58 percent) reported that a sales tax increase would be best. Just 14 percent mentioned income tax, 10 percent said real estate tax and 11 percent said personal property tax.

Public willingness to consider a sales tax increase was found in response to another question as well. Asked about the General Assembly's recent proposal to raise sales taxes in order to increase funding for education, six in 10 (61 percent) thought it was either a very good or good idea. This compares with 35 percent who said it was a bad or very bad idea.

“The General Assembly recently considered increasing the sales tax in Virginia in order to increase funding for public education. Do you think this is a very good idea, a good idea, a bad idea, or a very bad idea?”

	Very Good	Good Idea	Bad Idea	Very Bad	Don't know/ No answer	Number of cases
All respondents	14%	47%	24%	11%	4%	804
Funding is enough	11%	31%	34%	19%	4%	181
Funding is not enough	17%	51%	21%	8%	3%	545
Democrats	17%	50%	23%	5%	4%	228
Republicans	14%	42%	26%	15%	3%	221
Independents	14%	49%	23%	11%	3%	233
Funding Affects Quality						
A great deal	20%	52%	17%	7%	3%	359
Quite a bit	11%	47%	30%	8%	3%	222
Not too much or not at all	9%	33%	33%	23%	2%	179

Reaction to this proposal was quite similar across party lines. Those who see current funding in Virginia as enough were more negative towards this idea as were those who think that the amount of money spent on education has little affect on quality.

William C. Boshier, Jr., executive director of the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute commented, "Virginians have reconfirmed, consistent with the JLARC analysis, their belief that schools are underfunded and that the state sales tax is their preferred remedy."

Questions asked on the Commonwealth Education Poll
Virginia Commonwealth University
April 24 - May 2, 2002
Number of Respondents: 804

In your opinion, how much does the amount of money spent on the public schools affect the quality of students' education-a great deal, quite a lot, not too much, or not at all?

A great deal	45%
Quite a lot	26
Not too much	19
Not at all	4
Don't Know/No Answer	5%

Overall, do you think the funding for public schools in Virginia is enough to meet their needs, or not enough to meet their needs?

	2002	2001
Enough	23%	21%
Not enough	67	70
Don't Know/No Answer	9	10

Would you be willing or not willing to pay higher taxes so that school funding could be increased?

	2002	2001
Willing	60%	57%
Not willing	34	36
Don't Know/No Answer	6	7

IF WILLING: What kind of tax increase do you think would be best-- sales tax, income tax, real estate property tax, or personal property tax?

	Of Those Willing	
	2002	2001
Sales tax	58%	47%
Income tax	14	16
Real estate property tax	10	16
Personal property tax	11	13
Don't Know/No Answer	6	9

The General Assembly recently considered increasing the sales tax in Virginia in order to increase funding for public education. Do you think this is a very good idea, a good idea, a bad idea, or a very bad idea?

Very good idea	14%
Good idea	47
Bad idea	24
Very bad idea	11
Don't Know/No Answer	4

METHOD OF THE COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION POLL

The Commonwealth Education Poll is a public opinion survey of Virginia residents on education issues. The survey is conducted by telephone with a randomly-selected sample of adult Virginians.

Interviewing was conducted by telephone from the facilities of the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. The interviewing is conducted by a staff of professionally trained, paid interviewers using computer-assisted telephone interviewing software.

The sample of telephone numbers was prepared by Genesys Sampling Systems of Ft. Washington, Pennsylvania, and was designed so that all residential telephones, including new and unlisted numbers, had a known chance of inclusion. The cooperation rate for the survey was 49 percent. Using the CASRO response rate calculations, interviews were obtained with respondents in 42 percent of the known or assumed residential households in the sample.

The data were weighted to adjust for unequal probabilities of selection due to multiple telephone lines and multiple adults living in the household. In addition, the data were weighted on sex, race, age, and region of residence to reflect the demographic composition of the Virginia adult population. Percentages reported in the text and tables are weighted, while the number of cases shown in the tables for various subgroups is the actual number of respondents.

Questions answered by the full sample of adults are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus approximately 4 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. This means that in 95 out of 100 samples like the one used here, the results obtained should be no more than 4 percentage points above or below the figure that would be obtained by interviewing all adult Virginians with telephones. Where the answers of subgroups are reported, the sampling error would be higher. Because of nonresponse (refusals to participate, etc.), standard calculations of sampling error are apt to understate the actual extent to which survey results are at variance with the true population values. Surveys are also subject to errors from sources other than sampling. While every effort is made to identify such errors, they are often difficult or impossible to measure. Readers making use of the results are urged to be mindful of the limitations inherent in survey research.

More information on the methodology is available from the director of the Commonwealth Poll, Dr. Cary Funk, at (804) 827 1430 or clfunk@vcu.edu. Other results from the Commonwealth Education Poll can be found at <http://www.edpolicyvcu.org/>.

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