



## COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION POLL

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### **Virginians Want More Funding for Education But Not Tax Increases**

Richmond, VA—Virginians believe that funding for education makes a difference for the quality of education and most feel that current funding levels are too low, according to a new poll conducted by Virginia Commonwealth University. However, public support for increasing taxes to get that funding is soft. The Commonwealth Education Poll of 801 adults was conducted March 25-April 2 and has a margin of error of +/- 4 percentage points. The poll was conducted for the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute in the VCU School of Education. It was also sponsored in part by the Regional Educational Laboratory at AEL, Inc. The survey was conducted by the VCU Center for Public Policy.

Most Virginians believe that the amount of money spent on the public schools affects the quality of education. Better than seven out of ten Virginians (73 percent) believe the amount of money spent has either a great deal or quite a lot of affect on the quality of students' education. Just two in ten believe that spending makes no difference or not too much difference on the quality of education. When it comes to spending in specific areas, a clear majority of Virginians believe that spending for teacher salaries (70 percent), instructional materials (66 percent), and for reduced class size (61 percent) is a big help for improving school performance. The one area asked about where Virginians see less impact on school performance is spending on building facilities; a third feel this spending is a big help and 42 percent think this is a medium help for improving school performance.

A clear majority of Virginians (at 64 percent) believe that current funding for schools in Virginia is not enough to meet their needs; just 27 percent think the funding is enough. Public opinion on how to pay for increased education funding is less clear. When asked whether respondents would be willing to pay higher taxes in order to increase school funding, 61 percent were willing. Responses to another question on state funding for education that offered a choice between increased taxes or cuts to other programs suggest that public support for tax increases is soft. About a third of Virginians (32 percent) support a tax increase while the majority (53 percent) support cuts to other programs in this context. Forty-six percent of those who said they were willing to pay higher taxes in order to increase education funding preferred the tax increase over cuts to other programs. Forty-three percent of those willing to pay higher taxes preferred cutting other programs over state tax increases. Republicans were more likely to prefer cuts to other programs rather than tax increases by 60 to 28 percent. Democrats were split between the two choices with 43 percent preferring tax increases and 44 percent wanting cuts to other programs.

William C. Boshier, Jr., dean of the VCU School of Education and executive director of the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute observed, "No one is in doubt that education is underfunded, but most Virginians believe that additional funding should come from the reduction of other governmental services, not tax increases."

Questions asked on the Commonwealth Education Poll  
March 25-April 2, 2003  
Number of respondents: 801

School Funding

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?

	2003	2002
A great deal	42%	45%
Quite a lot	31	26
Not too much	18	19
Not at all	2	4
Don't Know/No Answer	7	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?

	2003	2002	2001
Enough	27%	23%	21%
Not enough	64	67	70
Don't Know/No Answer	9	9	10

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

	2003	2002	2001
Willing	61%	60%	57%
Not willing	34	34	36
Don't Know/No Answer	5	6	7

(ASK 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			
	2003	2002	2001
Sales tax	54%	58%	47%
Income tax	14	14	16
Real estate property tax	13	10	16
Personal property tax	10	11	13
Don't Know/No Answer	10	6	9

Suppose state funding for education were cut, do you think the schools in your community would be able to continue pretty much as they are now, OR do you think this would bring major changes to the schools in your community?

Would continue as they are now	22%
Would bring major changes	70
Don't Know/No Answer	7

Next, please tell me how much you think spending in each of the following areas helps improve school performance. First,...

(Next four questions were asked in random order.)

Spending on salaries to keep and hire quality teachers? (Is spending in this area a big help, medium help, small help, or no help at all for improving school performance?)

Big help	70%
Medium help	18
Small help	4
No help at all	5
Don't Know/No Answer	3

Spending on instructional materials such as books, computers and library resources? (Is spending in this area a big help, medium help, small help, or no help at all for improving school performance?)

Big help	66%
Medium help	26
Small help	4
No help at all	2
Don't Know/No Answer	1

Spending to reduce the number of students in each classroom? (Is spending in this area a big help, medium help, small help, or no help at all for improving school performance?)

Big help	61%
Medium help	25

Small help	5
No help at all	4
Don't Know/No Answer	5

Spending on building facilities? (Is spending in this area a big help, medium help, small help, or no help at all for improving school performance?)

Big help	33%
Medium help	42
Small help	15
No help at all	5
Don't Know/No Answer	5

The Virginia constitution requires the state to share the costs of public education with local governments. A report by the General Assembly's investigative agency said that the state is not paying as much for education as agreed to in the cost-sharing guidelines. This leaves local school districts paying more than expected. In order for the state to meet the education cost-sharing guidelines, would you prefer that the state increase taxes OR make cuts to other programs?

Increase taxes	32%
Make cuts to other programs	53
Don't Know/No Answer	14

#### 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 43% percent. Using the Council of American Survey Research Organization (CASRO) response rate calculations, interviews were obtained with respondents in 37% 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 [cfunk@vcu.edu](mailto:cfunk@vcu.edu). Other results from the Commonwealth Education Poll can be found at <http://www.ceponline.org/>.

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