



# COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION POLL

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**VCU POLL: SCHOOL FUNDING CONCERNS DECLINE WITH BUDGET PRESSURES**

*Also, most Virginians oppose federal control on setting school standards*

RICHMOND, Va. (Jan. 12, 2006) – As budgetary pressures on state government decreased in 2005, so did the percentage of Virginians who feel current funding is not enough to meet school needs, according to a new Virginia Commonwealth University poll which also shows most Virginians prefer state control over setting school standards.

The Commonwealth Education Poll was administered by telephone to 803 adult Virginians from Oct. 17 through Oct. 27. It was conducted for the VCU Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute by the VCU Center for Public Policy/Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory. The questions answered by respondents are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

While a clear majority of Virginians, 64 percent, believe current funding for schools is not enough to meet their needs, the percentage feeling this way has declined from 69 percent in 2004. Likewise, the percentage of those who feel funding is enough for schools to meet their needs is 26 percent, up from 20 percent in 2004.

In another example of public support for education, 55 percent of Virginians said they would be willing to pay higher taxes to increase school funding while 38 percent are not.

Despite fluctuations in economic conditions over the past few years, about six in 10 Virginians have consistently reported a willingness to pay higher taxes to increase funding for education since 2001.

“Virginians continue to support increased funding for public education with sales tax as the preferred mechanism,” said Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute Executive Director Bill Boshier, Ed.D., a former Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction. “While regressive in nature, this perhaps best serves those who have the greatest need.”

The percentage of those who favor a personal property tax increase to boost school funding doubled from seven in 2004 to 14 percent in 2005, while the percentage of those who would instead prefer a sales tax increase declined from 58 to 49 percent. This could be related to the statewide sales tax increase soon after the 2004 survey was conducted.

A majority of Virginians, 57 percent to 28 percent, favor budget cuts over a tax increase to meet education funding needs.

The federal No Child Left Behind law has raised new questions about the role of federal and state government in education. The poll found that a majority of Virginians see responsibility for the schools as resting more with the state than federal government in

setting academic standards, funding, testing to measure student achievement, and judging school performance.

“While a majority sees the state as having more responsibility than the federal government in these areas, the results suggest that citizens are open to federal involvement in at least some aspects of the school,” said poll director David J. Urban, Ph.D.

Eight of 10 respondents agree with the statement that “the federal government needs to make sure that states are held accountable for school performance.” At the same time, 86 percent agree that “state governments know more about the needs of students and schools in their state than the federal government does.”

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***About the VCU Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute:*** A joint venture between the VCU School of Education and the VCU Center for Public Policy, the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute is committed to the expansion of public dialogue and participation in the important issues facing K-12 public education. The institute provides research, analysis, training and service to education policy-makers, school systems, citizens and the larger school community.

***About VCU and the VCU Medical Center:*** Located on two downtown campuses in Richmond, Va., Virginia Commonwealth University is ranked nationally by the Carnegie Foundation as a top research institution and enrolls more than 28,500 students in more than 181 certificate, undergraduate, graduate, professional and doctoral programs in the arts, sciences and humanities in 15 schools and one college. Forty of the university’s programs are unique in Virginia, and 20 graduate and professional programs have been ranked by U.S. News & World Report as among the best of their kind. MCV Hospitals, clinics and the health sciences schools of Virginia Commonwealth University compose the VCU Medical Center, one of the leading academic medical centers in the country. For more, see [www.vcu.edu](http://www.vcu.edu).