



VCU

L. Douglas Wilder School of
Government and Public Affairs

FOR RELEASE – JUNE 7, 2017

COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION POLL 2016-17

A survey of Virginians conducted by the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute at Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

Contact:

Robyn McDougle, Ph.D. – Interim Executive Director, Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute; (804) 827-3290 or rdmcdougle@vcu.edu

Public Believes High School Graduates Are College Ready, Most Doubt Workforce Readiness

Results of the 2016-17 Commonwealth Education Poll from the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University show the public believes that the thousands of students graduating this spring from Virginia public high schools are college ready, but doubt that graduates are workforce ready.

Six in 10 members of the public say high school graduates (60 percent) are ready for college. In contrast, only 36 percent of the public believe that high school graduates are ready for the world of work.

“For several decades, public schools have emphasized preparing a larger number of students to go to college,” said Robyn McDougle, Ph.D., interim executive director of the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute and associate professor at the Wilder School.

“Most Virginians see high school graduates as ready for that next educational step, suggesting many schools are succeeding in their college preparation goals. But these results also indicate that for those unable to pursue a college degree, a large portion of the public has concerns about whether a high school graduate can succeed in today’s workforce.”

The 2016-17 graduating class will hope to continue the growth trend in the number of state residents completing a high school diploma. In 2015-16, 88,848 students received a high school diploma, up from 78,485 a decade ago. Of the 2015-16 graduates, 49,324—or 46 percent of the total graduates or completers—received advanced diplomas (which require an additional credit in math, science, social studies and a foreign language) while 35,783, or 40 percent, received a standard diploma.

The state Board of Education has recently explored redesigning high school to increase the focus on workforce skills and the poll results suggest that the public is supportive of this broad shift.

For the second year, the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute asked respondents about changing the high school curriculum to focus on general skills in early years with later grades focusing on skills

needed for a desired career path. The poll found continued broad support for such a restructuring, with more than three-quarters of respondents (77 percent) in favor of this transition.

“Increasingly, policymakers are exploring ways to enable students to look at their desired career path late in high school and tailor their final years to the workforce skills needed for that path,” said McDougle.

These findings are part of a previously released statewide survey conducted by Virginia Commonwealth University. The Commonwealth Education Poll was conducted by landline and cell telephone from November 8-17, 2016, with a random sample of 806 adults in Virginia. The margin of error for the poll is plus or minus 4.3 percentage points. This poll is conducted annually by VCU’s Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute, which is part of the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs. These results were released in late January.

For a PDF of the full 2016-17 poll report including complete question wording and detailed tables of results see <http://cepi.vcu.edu/publications/polls/>. Data on 2015-16 graduate numbers are drawn from the Virginia Department of Education’s graduation database: http://bi.vita.virginia.gov/doe_bi/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=Main&subRptName=Graduation

END

RELEVANT RESULTS, METHODOLOGY AND CROSSTABS

COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION POLL 2016-17

A survey of Virginians conducted by the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute at Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

cepi.vcu.edu

Contact:

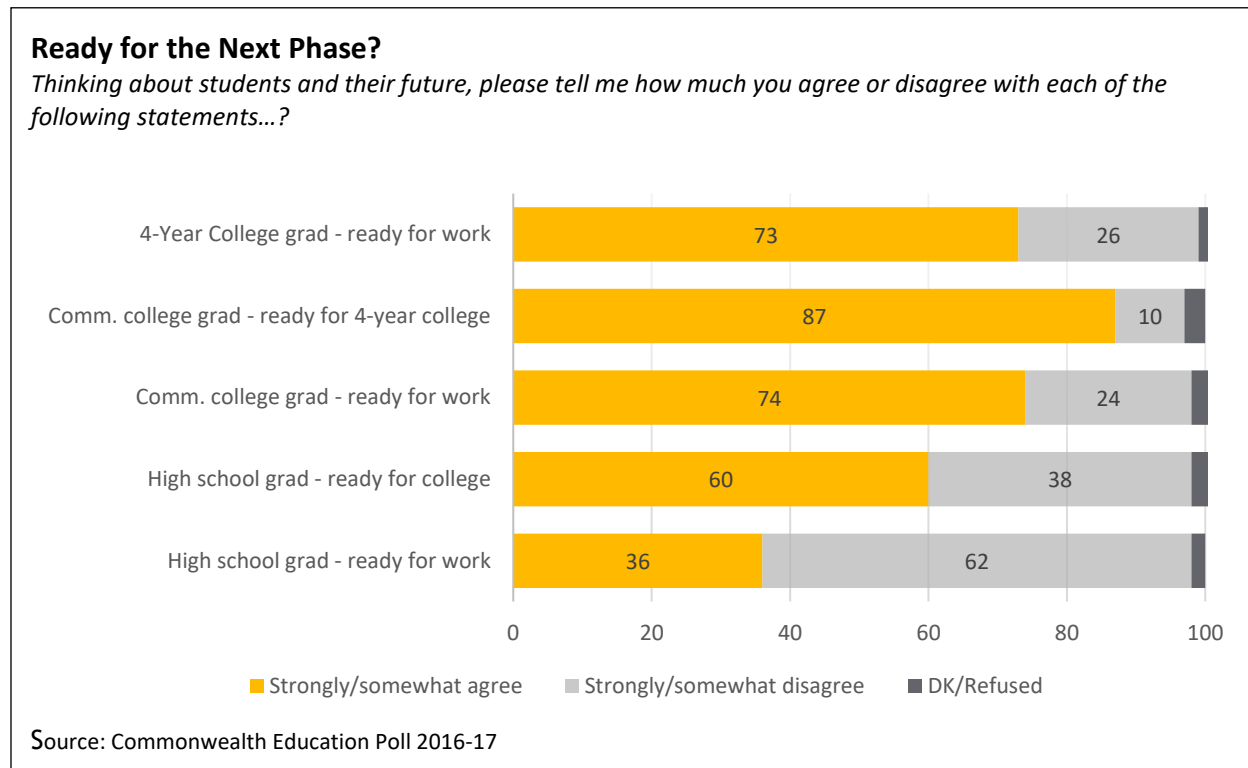
Robyn McDougle, Ph.D. – Interim Executive Director, Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute; (804) 827-3290 or rdmcdougle@vcu.edu

Table of Contents

Public Believes High School Graduates Are College Ready; Most Doubt Workforce Readiness....	1
High School Graduates Seen as Ready for College, but Not Workforce.....	4
Preparing for a Career in Secondary School	5
Methodology of the Commonwealth Education Poll	7
Tables with Subgroup Analysis	10

High School Graduates Seen as Ready for College, but Not Workforce.

This year's poll (conducted in late 2016) gauged public perception on whether graduates of high school are ready to move into the next potential phases of their education or career. The responses suggest that the public generally thinks high school graduates are not ready to join the workforce, but are prepared to go to college.



A strong majority (62 percent) think that high school graduates are not prepared for the workplace, strongly or somewhat disagreeing with the statement that “high school graduates are ready for the world of work.” Household income levels mark a difference of opinion on the question. Sixty-seven percent of those with an annual income of \$100,000 or more disagreed strongly or somewhat with the suggestion that high school graduates were ready for the workforce. This compared to 55 percent among respondents with incomes below \$50,000. Males were also more likely to disagree strongly or somewhat (66 percent) with high school graduates being ready for the workforce than were females (57 percent). Likewise, white respondents were more likely to disagree (65 percent) than were minority respondents (55 percent).

However, most Virginians (60 percent) believe that high school graduates are ready for college, which may indicate that the public believes a high school education is geared more toward preparing students for college than it is toward preparing them for a specific career. As with their readiness for

the workforce, women agreed strongly or somewhat with high school graduates being ready for college more frequently (65 percent) than did men (55 percent). Parents of public school students were also more likely to agree with the statement (at 67 percent) than were those who did not have a student in public schools.

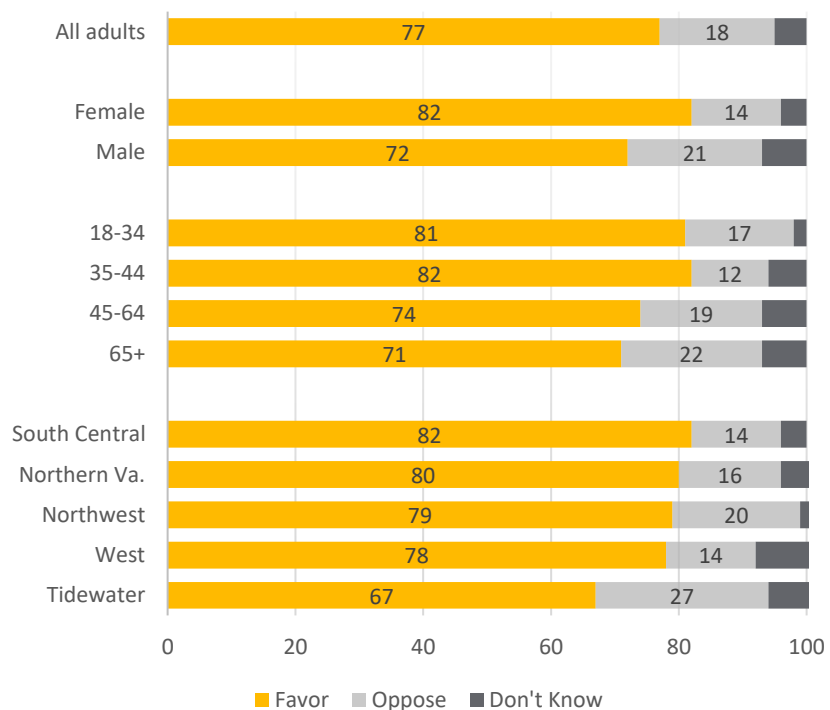
Preparing for a Career in Secondary School

Recent work to develop a profile of Virginia high school graduates has considered whether a restructuring of the high school curriculum is necessary where early high school grades would focus on general skills and later grades would focus on skills needed for a desired career path. For the second year, we asked respondents about such a possible change and found there was continued broad support for such a restructuring of high school. More than three-quarters (77 percent) of respondents supported a transition from focusing on general skills in lower grades to a desired career focus in a student's final years. This marked a 5 percentage point increase in support from last year.¹

The age and sex of respondents showed differences in the level of support for such a reform, though a majority support it in all categories. Those ages 18-34 (81 percent) and 35-44 (82 percent)

Restructure High School for Career Focus in Later Grades

Policymakers are considering various ways to align high school learning with the needs of employers. One proposal is to have students focus on general academic skills in early high school, and classes focused on their desired career in later grades. Would you favor or oppose organizing education in Virginia public high schools this way?



Source: Commonwealth Education Poll 2016-17

¹ In the 2015-16 poll, the wording of the question was slightly different, using "grades 9-10" in place of "lower grades" and "grades 11-12" in place of "later grades."

were more likely to favor this proposal than those ages 45-64 (74 percent) and those 65 and older (71 percent). Likewise, 82 percent of females supported such a change, compared to 72 percent of males. There were also significant regional differences in opinion on the idea of restructuring the high school experience. South Central (82 percent in favor), Northern Virginia (80 percent), Northwest (79 percent) and West (78 percent) were tightly clustered together as more likely to be supportive of the idea, in comparison to the Tidewater area, where only 67 percent are in favor.

Methodology of the Commonwealth Education Poll

The Commonwealth Education Poll 2016-17, sponsored by Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), obtained telephone interviews with a representative sample of 806 adults, age 18 or older, living in Virginia. Telephone interviews were conducted by landline (400) and cell phone (406, including 197 without a landline phone). The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI). Interviews were done in English by Princeton Data Source from November 8-17, 2016. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 4.3 percentage points.

A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all adults in Virginia who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were drawn with probabilities in proportion to their share of listed telephone households from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but was drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers.

The data are weighted to adjust for unequal probabilities of selection due to multiple adults living in landline households and for frame size of the landline and cell phone sampling frames. In addition, the data are weighted on sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region of residence and population density to reflect the demographic composition of the adult population in Virginia. 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 4.3 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 4.3 percentage points above or below the figure that would be obtained by interviewing all Virginian residents with telephones. Where the answers of subgroups are reported, the sampling error would be higher. Because of non-response (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.

Commonwealth Education Poll 2016-17Statewide survey of Virginians²

November 8-17, 2016

Number of Respondents: 806

Q11. Policymakers are considering various ways to align high school learning with the needs of employers. One proposal is to have students focus on general academic skills in early high school, and classes focused on their desired career in later grades. Would you favor or oppose organizing education in Virginia public high schools this way?³

	16-17	15-16
	%	%
Favor	77	72
Oppose	18	23
Don't Know/Refused	5	5

² Percentages may add to 99 or 101 due to rounding. Cells that are blank contain no cases. Cells with a zero percent entry contain cases, but the percentage is less than 0.5%.

³ 2015-16 wording: "One proposal is to have students focus on general skills in grades 9 and 10, and classes focused on their desired career in grades 11 and 12."

Q12. Thinking about students and their future, please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. **[INSERT ITEMS; RANDOMIZE]. READ FOR FIRST ITEM, THEN IF NECESSARY:** Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat DISagree, or strongly disagree?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know/Refused
	%	%	%	%	%
a. Today's HIGH SCHOOL graduate is ready for the world of work	7	29	30	32	2
2015-16	10	26	30	33	2
2014-15	4	26	39	31	1
2013-14	5	28	34	33	1
b. Today's HIGH SCHOOL graduate is ready for college	14	46	24	14	3
2015-16	15	49	21	13	2
2014-15	11	53	23	11	2
2013-14	12	51	24	11	2
c. Today's COMMUNITY COLLEGE graduate is ready for the world of work (<i>new in 2015-16</i>)	21	53	17	7	3
2015-16	21	52	16	9	3
d. Today's COMMUNITY COLLEGE graduate is ready for a four-year college or university (<i>new in 2015-16</i>)	38	49	6	4	3
2015-16	38	50	5	3	4
e. Today's FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY graduate is ready for the world of work	23	50	17	9	1
2015-16	27	48	13	10	2
2014-15	10	54	25	10	1
2013-14	13	55	20	10	2

Tables with Subgroup Analysis

		Q11. Policymakers are considering various ways to align high school learning with the needs of employers. One proposal is to have students focus on general academic skills in early high school, and classes focused on their desired career in later grades. Would you favor or oppose organizing education in Virginia public high schools this way?			
		Favor	Oppose	Don't know	Number of cases
All adults		77%	18%	5%	806
VA Region	Northwest	79%	20%	2%	112
	Northern VA	80%	16%	5%	229
	West	78%	14%	9%	141
	South Central	82%	14%	4%	151
	Tidewater	67%	27%	7%	173
Gender	Men	72%	21%	7%	441
	Women	82%	14%	4%	365
Age	18-34	81%	17%	2%	130
	35-44	82%	12%	6%	80
	45-64	74%	19%	7%	314
	65 and older	71%	22%	7%	249
Education	H.S. or less	73%	21%	5%	180
	Some college	80%	16%	4%	197
	College grad or more	78%	16%	6%	421
Family Income	Under \$50,000	73%	22%	5%	222
	50K to under \$100,000	79%	17%	4%	205
	\$100,000 or more	80%	14%	6%	244
Race	White	79%	16%	5%	560
	Minority	75%	21%	4%	195
School employee or retiree?	Yes	77%	20%	3%	179
	No	77%	17%	6%	624
Parent of public school student?	Yes	74%	21%	5%	171
	No	78%	17%	5%	635
Party identification	Democrat	77%	17%	6%	339
	Republican	77%	18%	5%	320
	Independent	69%	25%	6%	79

		Q12a. Thinking about students and their future, please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Today's HIGH SCHOOL graduate is ready for the world of work					
		Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Number of cases
All adults		7%	29%	30%	32%	2%	806
VA Region	Northwest	8%	26%	31%	31%	3%	112
	Northern VA	6%	34%	27%	30%	3%	229
	West	11%	31%	25%	31%	3%	141
	South Central	2%	23%	32%	41%	1%	151
	Tidewater	10%	27%	35%	27%	0%	173
Gender	Men	5%	28%	31%	35%	2%	441
	Women	10%	30%	29%	28%	2%	365
Age	18-34	8%	28%	37%	27%	0%	130
	35-44	6%	33%	28%	30%	3%	80
	45-64	8%	28%	29%	34%	1%	314
	65 and older	8%	29%	25%	34%	4%	249
Education	H.S. or less	16%	25%	27%	30%	2%	180
	Some college	4%	32%	27%	36%	1%	197
	College grad or more	2%	31%	36%	30%	2%	421
Family Income	Under \$50,000	13%	30%	26%	29%	2%	222
	50K to under \$100,000	1%	34%	34%	31%	0%	205
	\$100,000 or more	5%	26%	33%	34%	2%	244
Race	White	6%	27%	35%	30%	2%	560
	Minority	11%	32%	22%	33%	1%	195
Parent of public school student?	Yes	9%	33%	27%	30%	9%	171
	No	7%	28%	31%	32%	7%	635
Parent of VA college student?	Yes	6%	29%	28%	35%	6%	320
	No	8%	29%	31%	30%	8%	486
Party identification	Democrat	7%	32%	33%	27%	1%	339
	Republican	6%	29%	26%	37%	2%	320
	Independent	10%	21%	40%	26%	4%	79

		Q12b. Thinking about students and their future, please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Today's HIGH SCHOOL graduate is ready for college					
		Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Number of cases
All adults		14%	46%	24%	14%	3%	806
VA Region	Northwest	15%	45%	30%	8%	3%	112
	Northern VA	16%	52%	18%	11%	4%	229
	West	15%	46%	19%	18%	2%	141
	South Central	11%	34%	33%	18%	4%	151
	Tidewater	12%	49%	23%	14%	1%	173
Gender	Men	13%	42%	26%	16%	3%	441
	Women	15%	50%	21%	11%	3%	365
Age	18-34	14%	42%	29%	14%	1%	130
	35-44	17%	46%	20%	14%	3%	80
	45-64	14%	51%	23%	10%	2%	314
	65 and older	12%	44%	19%	19%	6%	249
Education	H.S. or less	15%	45%	23%	15%	3%	180
	Some college	16%	46%	23%	13%	3%	197
	College grad or more	11%	48%	25%	13%	3%	421
Family Income	Under \$50,000	18%	43%	24%	14%	2%	222
	50K to under \$100,000	12%	46%	26%	15%	1%	205
	\$100,000 or more	14%	50%	22%	12%	3%	244
Race	White	13%	45%	28%	12%	2%	560
	Minority	18%	48%	15%	17%	2%	195
Parent of public school student?	Yes	15%	52%	19%	11%	3%	171
	No	14%	44%	25%	14%	3%	635
Parent of VA college student?	Yes	12%	54%	20%	11%	2%	320
	No	15%	43%	25%	14%	3%	486
Party identification	Democrat	15%	50%	24%	8%	3%	339
	Republican	13%	44%	22%	19%	2%	320
	Independent	21%	38%	24%	16%	0%	79