



Office of Public Policy Outreach

L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

Summer 2017 Public Policy Poll

A survey of Virginians conducted by the Office of Public Policy Outreach

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VCU poll: Half of Virginians support campus anti-discrimination policies over unlimited free speech

RICHMOND, Va. (Aug. 29, 2017) — Half of Virginians (50 percent) think colleges and universities should place more emphasis on protecting everyone on campus from discrimination even if doing so means there are negative consequences for voicing one's opinions, [according to a poll released today](#) by the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University.

In contrast, 40 percent believe the emphasis should be on allowing unlimited freedom of expression even if some groups may face discrimination.

"University administrators frequently face difficult tradeoffs, especially as we consider the context of controversial demonstrations on or near college campuses," said Robyn McDougle, Ph.D., faculty director of the Wilder School's Office of Public Policy Outreach, which conducted the poll.

"On one hand, universities have long traditions of robust debate and free speech, but increasingly administrators are called on to ensure zones of safety from ongoing discrimination for students and other members of campus communities," McDougle said. "These results show Virginians are divided over which to emphasize, with a very narrow majority believing that protection from discrimination should receive a higher emphasis than unlimited expression."

The poll, conducted by landline and cell telephone from July 17-25, is a random sample of 806 adults in Virginia with an overall margin of error of 4.2 percentage points.

Groups that have been targets of past discrimination in American society were more likely to think the emphasis on campuses should be on protecting everyone from discrimination — 61 percent of minority respondents compared to 46 percent of white respondents, and 56 percent of women compared to 44 percent of men.

“Robust debate is the hallmark of an effective educational system, but we must be mindful of any situation that threatens physical safety on our campuses,” said Virginia Secretary of Education Dietra Trent. “Virginia's schools can, must, and do provide a safe space for both vulnerable students and dissenting ideas.”

Results from the poll also show that strong majorities of Virginians rate college campuses and public K-12 schools in Virginia as safe or very safe. Sixty-nine percent of respondents said college and university campuses were safe or very safe while 79 percent felt that schools in their community were safe or very safe.

Poll findings also indicate that recent policy shifts to diversify ratings of public schools beyond proficiency on standardized tests have strong public support.

- Sixty-one percent of Virginians think that when rating public schools there should be more emphasis on how much students improve overall, while 33 percent think more emphasis should be placed on how many students reach a particular level of proficiency.
- A slim majority (55 percent) say schools should get credit for students who earn credentials in technical and vocational programs even if they don't pass state standardized tests, while 40 percent thought credit should only be received for students who pass standardized tests in basic subjects like math and reading.

For a PDF of the 15-page report, including complete question wording and detailed tables of results, see <http://www.wilder.vcu.edu/office-of-public-policy-outreach/>

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About VCU and VCU Health

Virginia Commonwealth University is a major, urban public research university with national and international rankings in sponsored research. Located in downtown Richmond, VCU enrolls more than 31,000 students in 225 degree and certificate programs in the arts, sciences and humanities. Seventy-nine of the programs are unique in Virginia, many of them crossing the disciplines of VCU's 13 schools and one college. The VCU Health brand represents the health sciences schools of VCU, the VCU Massey Cancer Center and the VCU Health System, which comprises VCU Medical Center (the only academic medical center and Level I trauma center in the region), Community Memorial Hospital, Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, MCV Physicians and Virginia Premier Health Plan. For more, please visit www.vcu.edu and vcuhealth.org.

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Perspectives on Higher Education

Free Speech in the Campus Context

In the context of controversial demonstrations on and near college campuses, respondents were asked about the protection of free speech on college and university campuses and no significant majority emerged. Half of Virginians (50 percent) thought colleges and universities should place more emphasis on protecting everyone on campus from discrimination even if there are negative consequences for voicing one's opinions and 40 percent thought emphasis should be on unlimited freedom of expression even if some groups may face discrimination.

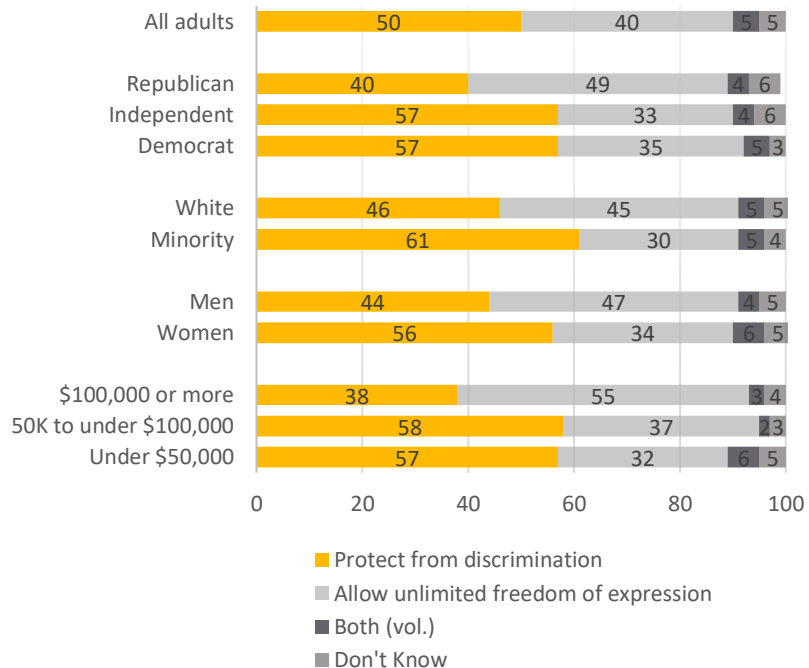
Groups that have been targets of past discrimination in American society were, not surprisingly, more likely to think more emphasis should be on protecting everyone from discrimination. Sixty-one percent of minority respondents thought this, compared to 46 percent of whites. Women (at 56 percent) were also more likely to think emphasis should be on protection from discrimination

compared to only 44 percent of men thinking the same.

Income appears to play a role in opinion on the topic. Those from households making under \$100,000 a year were more likely to think everyone should be protected from discrimination as were 58 percent of those making \$50,000 to \$100,000 and 57 percent of those making less than \$50,000. Only 38 percent of those from households making \$100,000 or more thought the same. In contrast, 55 percent of those respondents from households making more than \$100,000 annually thought more emphasis

Free Speech and the Campus Environment

If you had to choose, do you think colleges and universities should place more emphasis on protecting everyone on campus from discrimination, even if it means there are negative consequences for voicing one's opinions or allowing everyone on campus to have unlimited freedom of expression, even if it means some groups of people may face discrimination?



Source: 2017 Summer Public Policy Poll, VCU's Office for Public Policy Outreach, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

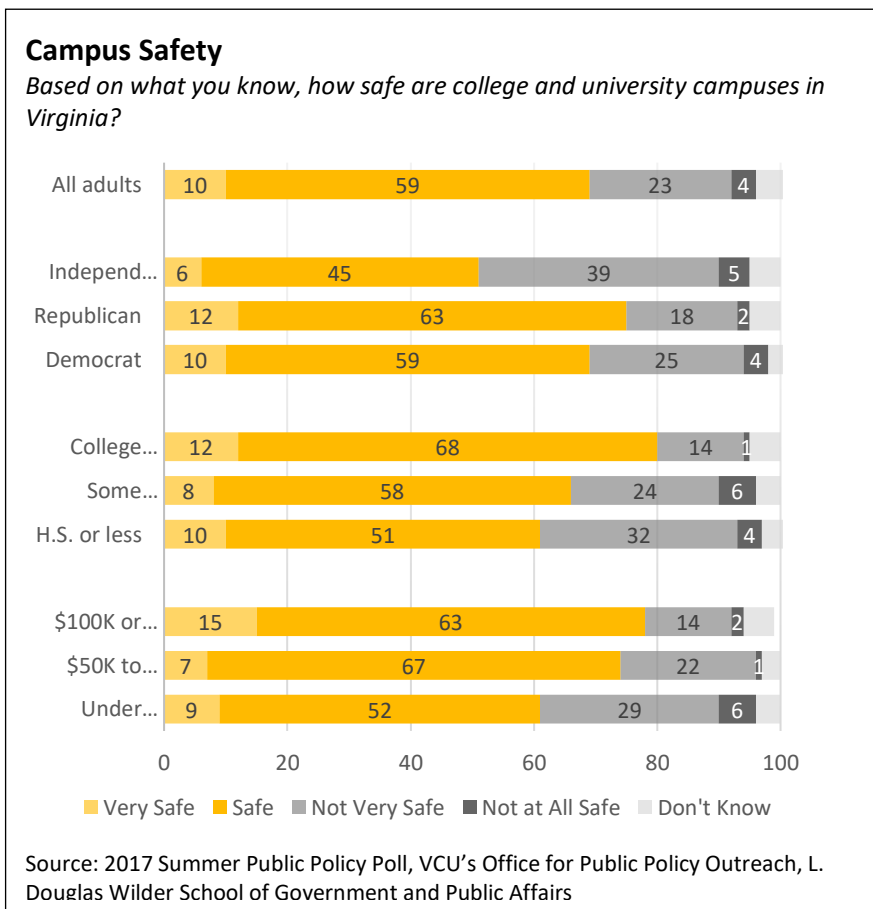
should be placed on unlimited freedom of expression. Party identification also played a role. Fifty-seven percent of Democrats and independents thought more emphasis should be placed on protecting from discrimination, while only 40 percent of Republicans thought the same.

Campus Safety in Virginia

Respondents were also asked to rate the safety of college and university campuses in Virginia. The majority of Virginians (69 percent) thought college and university campuses were safe or very safe. Only 27 percent thought they were not very or not at all safe.

There were significant differences based on income and level of education. Seventy-eight percent of those making more than \$100,000 per year thought campuses were safe or very safe, compared to 74 percent of those making \$50,000 to \$100,000 and only 61 percent of those making less than \$50,000. Respondents with a college degree or more were most likely to say safe or very safe, at 80 percent. Only 66 percent of those with some college experience and 61 percent of those with a high school thought the same.

Party identification also appears to play a role in respondents' perceptions of campus safety. Republicans (75 percent) were the most likely to say safe or very safe, while 69 percent of Democrats and only 51 percent of independents thought the same.



Perspectives on Public Schools

Public School Safety

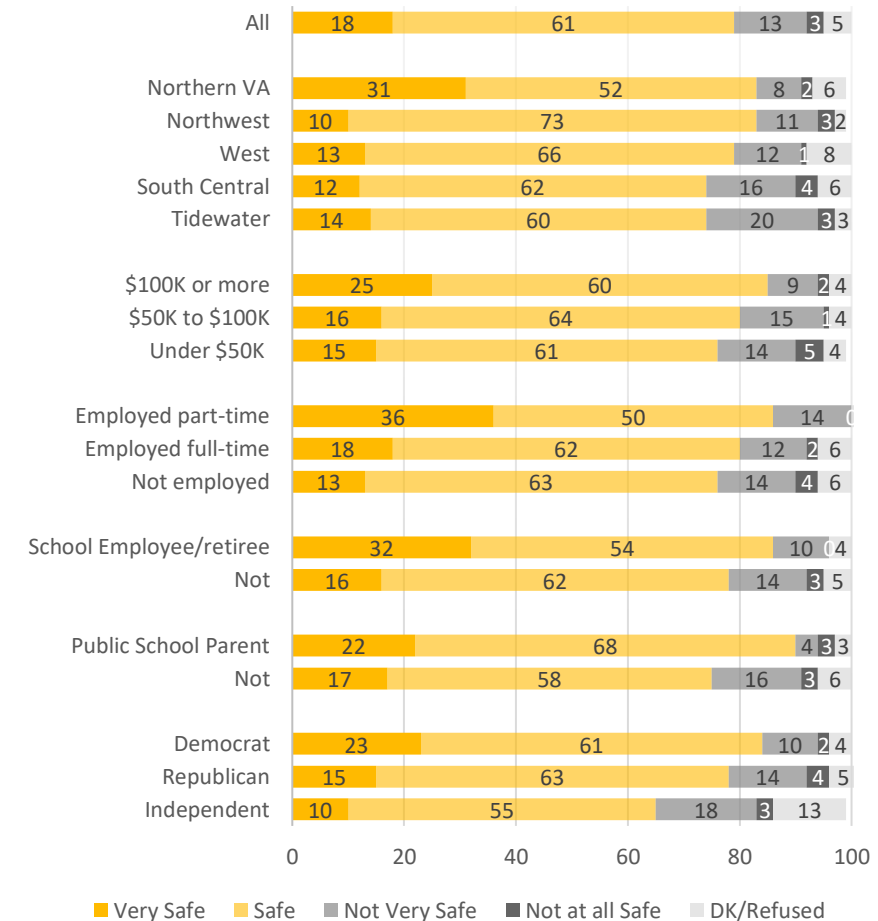
Respondents were also asked how safe they feel public schools are in their community. A large majority, 79 percent, felt that schools in their community were safe or very safe. Only 16 percent felt schools were not very or not at all safe.

Regionally, respondents from Northern Virginia were most likely to see their community's schools as very safe, at 31 percent. Though only 10 percent of respondents from the Northwest region rated schools in their community very safe, the combined portion saying safe or very safe was the same as Northern Virginia respondents at 83 percent. Those from Tidewater were more likely to say not very or not at all safe, with 23 percent.

Family income and employment status played a role in opinion on this topic. Twenty-five percent of those making more than \$100,000 per year said community schools were very safe, compared to 16 percent of those making \$50,000 to \$100,00 and 15 percent of those making less than \$50,000. Thirty-six percent of respondents who are employed part-time felt their community's schools were very safe versus 18 percent of those employed full-time and 13 percent of those who are not employed.

Safety of Public Schools

In general, do you feel the public schools in your community are very safe, safe, not very safe, or not at all safe?



Source: 2017 Summer Public Policy Poll, VCU's Office for Public Policy Outreach, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

Direct experience with public schools also played a role. School employees or retirees were more likely to feel schools were very safe, at 32 percent, compared to 16 percent of those who have

never worked for public schools. Parents of students in public schools were also more likely to feel their schools were safe or very safe with nine-in-10 (90 percent) selecting that option. Seventy-five percent of those who are not parents felt the same. Democrats were also more likely to feel their community's schools were safe or very safe at 84 percent, compared to 78 percent of Republicans and 65 percent of independents.

Measuring Success in Public Schools

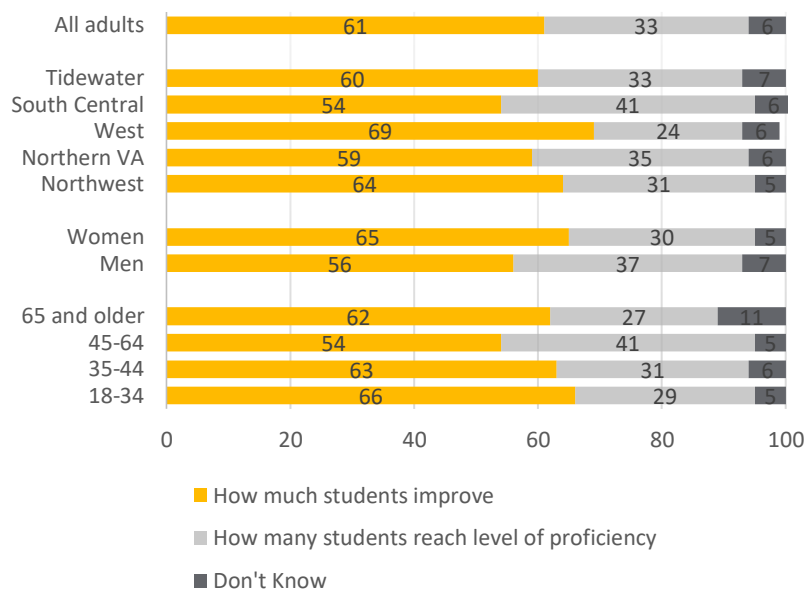
Within the significant and ongoing debate about the use and number of standardized tests to rate public schools, the definition of how to measure student achievement has become especially relevant. A majority of Virginians, 61 percent, thought that when rating public schools, there should be more emphasis on how much students improve overall, compared to 33 percent who thought more emphasis should be placed on how many students reach a particular level of proficiency.

Regional differences exist with respondents from the West region (at 69

percent) being more likely to say emphasis should be placed on overall improvement and respondents in the South Central region (at 41 percent) being more likely to say emphasis should be placed on reaching a particular level of proficiency with. Women (65 percent) were more likely to think emphasis should be placed on overall improvement than men (56 percent). Meanwhile, respondents ages 45 to 64 were more likely to think emphasis should be placed on reaching a particular level of proficiency with 41 percent, compared to 31 percent of those ages 35-44, 29 percent of those who ages 18-34, and 27 percent of those 65 and older.

Rating Public Schools

In rating public schools, should there be more emphasis on how much students improve overall or more emphasis on how many students reach a particular level of proficiency?



Source: 2017 Summer Public Policy Poll, VCU's Office for Public Policy Outreach, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

Additionally, respondents were asked about when schools should receive credit towards accreditation. A slim majority, 55 percent, thought that schools should get credit for students who earn credentials in technical

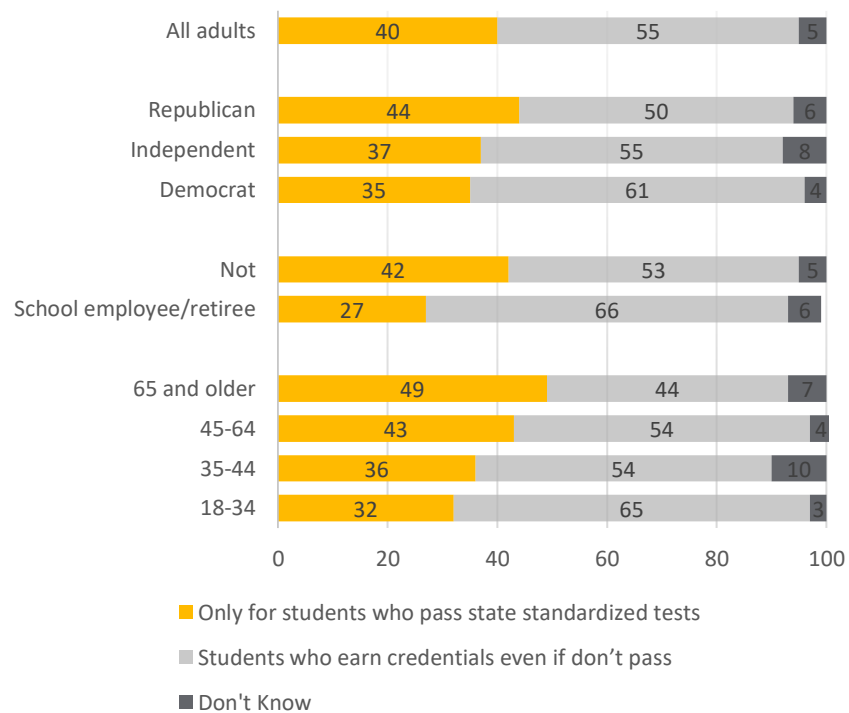
and vocational programs even if they don't pass state standardized tests, while 40 percent thought credit should only be received for students who pass standardized tests in basic subjects.

Younger respondents were more likely to think vocational and technical credentials should count towards accreditation, with 65 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds providing that answer. Fifty-four

percent of those ages 35 to 44 and 44 percent of those 65 or older thought the same. Respondents who have worked for the public school system were also more likely to think that schools should receive credit for student vocational and technical credentials. Sixty-six percent of school employees or retirees chose that option, while by comparison, 53 percent of those who have never worked for the public school system did. Democrats were also more likely to think vocational and technical credentials should count in accreditation, at 61 percent. Half of Republicans (50 percent) and 55 percent of independents felt the same.

Vocational Credentials and Public School Accreditation

When it comes to public school accreditation, please tell me which statement is closer to your own view: Public schools should receive credit toward accreditation only for students who pass state standardized tests in basic subjects such as English and Math or for students who earn credentials in technical and vocational programs even if they don't pass state standardized tests?



Source: 2017 Summer Public Policy Poll, VCU's Office for Public Policy Outreach, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

Methodology of the VCU Wilder School Public Policy Poll

The 2017 Summer Public Policy Poll, sponsored by the Office of Public Policy at VCU's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, obtained telephone interviews with a representative sample of 806 adults, age 18 or older, living in Virginia. Telephone interviews were conducted by landline (396) and cell phone (410, including 235 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 July 17-25, 2017. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 4.2 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 4.2 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 4.2 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.

Topline

Commonwealth Education Poll: August 2017

Conducted as part of the 2017 Summer Public Policy Poll, a program of VCU's Office for Public Policy Outreach,

L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

Statewide survey of Virginians¹

July 17-23, 2017

Number of Respondents: 806

Q1. In general, do you feel the public schools in your community are very safe, safe, not very safe, not at all safe?

	Aug 17	16-17	15-16	14-15	13-14
	%	%	%	%	%
Very safe	18	27	25	20	29
Safe	61	51	54	59	51
Not very safe	13	16	14	14	13
Not at all safe	3	4	5	5	4
Don't Know/Refused	5	3	2	1	3

Q2. In rating public schools, should there be...[READ AND RANDOMIZE]?

	Aug 17
	%
More emphasis on how much students improve overall	61
More emphasis on how many students reach a particular level of proficiency	33
Don't know/Refused	6

Q3. When it comes to public school accreditation, please tell me which statement is closer to your own view:

[READ AND RANDOMIZE]

[READ IF NECESSARY: The Virginia Department of Education evaluates the educational performance of public schools and assigns each school a rating. Schools with a high enough rating are considered "accredited" by the state.]

	Aug 17
	%
Public schools should receive credit toward accreditation only for students who pass state standardized tests in basic subjects such as English and Math	40
Public schools should receive credit toward accreditation for students who earn credentials in technical and vocational programs even if those students don't pass state standardized tests for English and Math	55
Don't know/Refused	5

QUESTIONS 4 AND 5 HELD FOR SEPARATE RELEASE

¹ 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%.

Q6. If you had to choose, do you think colleges and universities should place more emphasis on **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

	Aug 17
	%
Protecting everyone on campus from discrimination, even if it means there are negative consequences for voicing one's opinions	50
Allowing everyone on campus to have unlimited freedom of expression, even if it means some groups of people may face discrimination	40
Both	5
Don't know/Refused	5

Q7. Based on what you know, how safe are college and university campuses in Virginia?

	Aug 17	16-17	15-16	14-15	13-14	12-13*	11-12*
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very safe	10	16	14	11	12	22	25
Safe	59	58	53	55	58	58	53
Not very safe	23	21	27	28	22	12	13
Not at all safe	4	3	3	4	3	4	4
Don't Know/Refused	5	2	3	2	4	4	5

*Response wording was "somewhat safe" instead of "safe."

QUESTIONS 8 TO 20 HELD FOR SEPARATE RELEASE

		Q1. In general, do you feel the public schools in your community are very safe, safe, not very safe, not at all safe?					Number of cases
		Very Safe	Somewhat Safe	Not Very Safe	Not At All Safe	Don't know	
All adults		18%	61%	13%	3%	5%	806
VA Region	Northwest	10%	73%	11%	3%	2%	115
	Northern VA	31%	52%	8%	2%	6%	233
	West	13%	66%	12%	1%	8%	130
	South Central	12%	62%	16%	4%	6%	149
	Tidewater	14%	60%	20%	3%	3%	179
Gender	Men	18%	61%	12%	3%	6%	384
	Women	19%	60%	14%	2%	5%	422
Age	18-34	21%	62%	9%	1%	6%	127
	35-44	20%	61%	7%	4%	8%	94
	45-64	17%	59%	17%	4%	3%	306
	65 and older	15%	64%	14%	1%	6%	258
Education	H.S. or less	15%	62%	17%	4%	2%	221
	Some college	17%	62%	12%	3%	5%	185
	College grad or more	23%	58%	10%	1%	8%	396
Family Income	Under \$50,000	15%	61%	14%	5%	4%	241
	50K to under \$100,000	16%	64%	15%	1%	4%	213
	\$100,000 or more	25%	60%	9%	2%	4%	228
Race	White	20%	59%	14%	2%	6%	573
	Minority	15%	65%	13%	4%	3%	201
School employee or retiree?	Yes	32%	54%	10%	0%	4%	154
	No	16%	62%	14%	3%	5%	648
Parent of public school student?	Yes	22%	68%	4%	3%	3%	146
	No	17%	58%	16%	3%	6%	660
Employment status	Employed part-time	36%	50%	14%	0%	1%	375
	Employed full-time	18%	62%	12%	2%	6%	83
	Not employed	13%	63%	14%	4%	6%	346
Party identification	Democrat	23%	61%	10%	2%	4%	369
	Republican	15%	63%	14%	4%	5%	338
	Independent	10%	55%	18%	3%	13%	69

		Q2. In rating public schools, should there be [RANDOMIZE] more emphasis on how much students improve overall, OR should there be more emphasis on how many students reach a particular level of proficiency?			
		How much students improve	How many students reach level of proficiency	Don't know	Number of cases
All adults		61%	33%	6%	806
VA Region	Northwest	64%	31%	5%	115
	Northern VA	59%	35%	6%	233
	West	69%	24%	6%	130
	South Central	54%	41%	6%	149
	Tidewater	60%	33%	7%	179
Gender	Men	56%	37%	7%	384
	Women	65%	30%	5%	422
Age	18-34	66%	29%	5%	127
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	College grad or more	59%	35%	6%	396
Family Income	Under \$50,000	65%	30%	5%	241
	50K to under \$100,000	60%	34%	6%	213
	\$100,000 or more	52%	42%	6%	228
Race	White	63%	31%	6%	573
	Minority	57%	38%	5%	201
Parent-VA public school student	Yes	64%	31%	5%	146
	No	60%	34%	6%	660
School employee or retiree	Yes	60%	35%	6%	154
	No	61%	33%	6%	648
Employment status	Employed full time	60%	35%	5%	375
	Employed part time	62%	32%	7%	83
	Not employed	62%	32%	6%	346
Party identification	Democrat	65%	30%	4%	369
	Republican	57%	36%	7%	338
	Independent	64%	29%	8%	69

		Q3. When it comes to public school accreditation, please tell me which statement is closer to your own view: Public schools should receive credit toward accreditation [READ AND RANDOMIZE] only for students who pass state standardized tests in basic subjects such as English and Math OR for students who earn credentials in tech. & vocational programs even if [they] don't pass state standardized tests.			
		Only for students who pass state standardized tests	Students who earn credentials even if don't pass	Don't know	Number of cases
All adults		40%	55%	5%	806
VA Region	Northwest	42%	53%	4%	115
	Northern VA	40%	53%	7%	233
	West	44%	48%	9%	130
	South Central	39%	59%	2%	149
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Party identification	Democrat	35%	61%	4%	369
	Republican	44%	50%	6%	338
	Independent	37%	55%	8%	69

		Q6. If you had to choose, do you think colleges and universities should place more emphasis on [READ AND RANDOMIZE] protecting everyone on campus from discrimination OR allowing everyone on campus to have unlimited freedom of expression.				
		Protect from discrimination	Allow unlimited freedom of expression	Both (Volunteered)	Don't know	
						Number of cases
All adults		50%	40%	5%	5%	806
VA Region	Northwest	53%	38%	5%	5%	115
	Northern VA	53%	40%	3%	4%	233
	West	46%	44%	6%	4%	130
	South Central	44%	43%	8%	5%	149
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Race	White	46%	45%	5%	5%	573
	Minority	61%	30%	5%	4%	201
Parent of VA college student	Yes	53%	38%	3%	7%	297
	No	49%	41%	5%	4%	509
Employment status	Employed full time	48%	43%	5%	4%	375
	Employed part time	49%	40%	5%	6%	83
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	Independent	57%	33%	4%	6%	69

		Q7. Based on what you know, how safe are college and university campuses in Virginia?					Number of cases
		Very Safe	Safe	Not Very Safe	Not At All Safe	Don't know	
All adults		10%	59%	23%	4%	5%	806
VA Region	Northwest	12%	43%	39%	4%	2%	115
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Parent of VA college student	Yes	14%	55%	24%	3%	4%	297
	No	8%	60%	23%	3%	5%	509
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