



MEDIA ADVISORY
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NEW POLL SHOWS VIRGINIANS BELIEVE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SAFETY OF CHILDREN SHOULD BE TOP PRIORITY FOR GOVERNOR CANDIDATES

Voters choose improving children's well-being over the economy, jobs and traffic

Newport News – As the gubernatorial and delegate campaigns gear up, a new statewide poll of Virginians was released today at a local elementary school. The poll shows that an overwhelming majority of voters, 87 percent, say issues of child well-being, such as afterschool programs, child health care and child abuse prevention are important in making their voting decisions. When given a choice, 65 percent of voters chose improving these children's issues as one of the top two most important issues facing the next governor, ahead of the economy, jobs, and traffic congestion. Yet, the majority of Virginia's voters are not familiar with where the gubernatorial candidates stand on these issues.

The poll, which surveyed likely voters, showed that only two-fifths of voters are familiar with where the majority party candidates (43% Kilgore, 41% Kaine) stand on childcare, health care, child abuse, and funding for afterschool and pre-school education programs. Only 9% know where independent candidate Russell Potts stands on these issues.

“In this poll, we hear clearly the voices of Virginia's voters speaking about what really matters to them. 78 percent of registered voters believe it is our moral responsibility to make sure all children have the opportunity to succeed and they look to government to be a partner in investing in our children,” said Suzanne Clark Johnson, Ph.D., President of Voices for Virginia's Children. “Voters are clear. Candidates' positions on children's issues have an important impact on their votes. I hope all the candidates will take this to heart and be sure that they raise their own voices in speaking up for children in this fall's election,” Johnson added.

Virginia voters were asked about specific children's issues, such as afterschool programs, expanding pre-school programs, universal child health coverage, reducing child abuse, and improving schools. Strong majorities of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans want leadership in addressing the needs of children next year.



The poll shows that 80 percent of voters say they are concerned about the amount of unstructured time children have after school. A similar high percentage (72 percent) agree that afterschool programs are essential for their community.

The poll reveals that voters overwhelmingly want the next Governor and state legislature to provide leadership on expanding afterschool programs and find it important that this issue is addressed in this fall’s campaign. 85 percent of voters say it is important for the next Governor to address the issue of expanding afterschool programs, and 58 percent of voters, including 72 percent of working mothers, say this is very important.

"One in four Virginia schoolchildren are alone after school, with no adult supervision," said Jen Rinehart, associate director of the Afterschool Alliance. "It’s then that juvenile crime rates triple, and that they are most likely to become involved with drugs, alcohol, and sexual activity. Their peers in afterschool programs, by contrast, are safe, cared for, and engaged in wholesome, educational activities. That’s why a majority of voters say there aren’t enough afterschool programs in Virginia and want candidates to address how they will close the ‘afterschool gap’ between supply and demand.”

In addition to the importance voters place on afterschool, they want the next governor and session of the state legislature to provide leadership in passing a variety of proposals that would invest in children.

Below are the proposals that ranked the highest among voters:

Importance for the Next Governor and State Legislature to Provide Leadership in Passing Proposals to Benefit Children				
	<u>Voters</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Ind</u>	<u>GOP</u>
Expand the Virginia Child Health Insurance Program so that all uninsured children have access to health care.....	91%	97%	94%	83%
Provide scholarships and other incentives to recruit and prepare teachers for so all schools can meet quality educational standards.	89%	92%	91%	86%
Expand afterschool programs that keep kids safe, inspire kids to learn, and provide enriching activities.	85%	91%	87%	79%
Reduce child abuse and neglect by helping new parents connect with a trained mentor who can help them learn the basics of good parenting and provide emotional support.	85%	93%	83%	79%



Increase funding for public schools to reduce class size and improve the school buildings and other infrastructure.....	84%	95%	89%	69%
Help working parents by improving the quality and accessibility of childcare.....	84%	93%	83%	79%

According to the poll, by a nearly three-to-one margin, voters are much more concerned about children in Virginia not having adequate educational opportunities, health coverage, and protection from abuse than they are about taxes. In fact, 63 percent of voters say they are more concerned that children will not have adequate opportunities compared to just 22 percent who are worried more that state taxes will be too high.

“The poll confirms that Virginia’s voters want their leaders to make improving the health, education and safety of children a high priority,” said Tom LaPointe, Virginia state coordinator for Every Child Matters. “The message is clear, Virginians want new investments in children and they are willing to pay for it.”

To determine public opinion on a variety of issues facing children and families in Virginia, the Every Child Matters Education Fund, in coordination with the Afterschool Alliance, and Virginia Voices for Children, commissioned Mason-Dixon Polling and Research to undertake a telephone survey in Virginia among 625 likely general election voters. Respondents were selected at random. Mason-Dixon conducted the survey from July 26-28, 2005; the overall survey has an overall margin of error of ± 3.9 percent.

Kids Deserve Better in Virginia is a joint effort of **Every Child Matters, the Afterschool Alliance** and **Voices for Virginia’s Children**. Kids Deserve Better is a non-profit, non-partisan campaign to elevate public engagement on children’s issues – particularly afterschool – in the Virginia Governor’s race and encourage voters to vote for kids at the polls on November 8, 2005.

For the full report on the poll and more information on the Kids Deserve Better campaign go to www.kidsdeservebetter.org

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