



# MAKING VIRGINIA THE **TOP STATE FOR TALENT**

**HOW BEING THE BEST STATE FOR COLLEGE, INTERNSHIPS, AND CAREERS  
SETS US APART AND SECURES OUR FUTURE**

**POLICY AND POLL BRIEFING**  
Spring 2025

# About VBHEC, GROWTH4VA, and our menu of poll-tested policy proposals.

- **The Virginia Business Higher Education Council (VBHEC)** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan partnership among Virginia's business and higher education leadership, **the most active such partnership in the 50 states**.
  - We believe Virginia's standout higher ed system and leadership on internships/talent pathways set Virginia apart as the **Top State For Talent** and are the keys to providing opportunity **for all Virginians**.
- **GROWTH4VA is VBHEC's advocacy program to promote investment and innovation in Virginia's higher education system**. It is supported by business enterprises and donors throughout Virginia, all 16 public colleges and universities in Virginia, the Virginia Community College System, and thousands of grassroots Virginians.

## OUR POLICY PROPOSALS AND POLL RESULTS

- **Every state election year, VBHEC briefs Virginia leaders** on the economic impact of Virginia's top-ranked higher education system and our recommendations for making it stronger and benefiting more Virginians.
- We provide **a menu of poll-tested policy proposals and key messages** for use in campaigns and in office. Our poll of 800 registered voters\* was conducted online on Dec. 5-12, 2024, by two national firms with deep Virginia experience: **Public Opinion Strategies, a Republican firm, and FrederickPolls, a Democratic firm**.
- We encourage officeholders and candidates to deliver speeches, issue position papers, and take action on these important topics, and we assist by providing **detailed crosstabs, background research, and draft materials upon request**.

\*Split samples (approx. 400 voters each) were used for some questions.  
Percentages are rounded.

# About our leadership: VBHEC's board of directors

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**Holly Sullivan**

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**Cedric T. Wins**

Virginia Military Institute

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**M. Kirkland (Kirk) Cox, *President***

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# Why having the Nation's best higher education system makes Virginia a winner . . .

*Virginia has many assets, but voters in both parties believe our top-ranked higher education system is uniquely valuable and sets Virginia apart.*

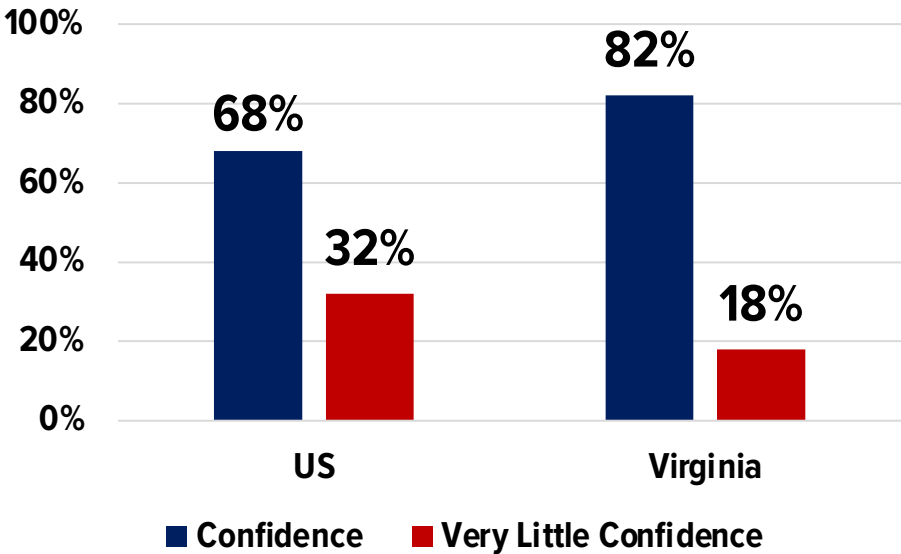
*In this section . . .*

<b>Virginia versus the Nation: what voters say</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The competitive advantage from being #1</b>	<b>9</b>
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# Attitudes about higher education: VA versus the US

GALLUP

*Please tell me how much confidence you, yourself, have in higher education [in Virginia]?*

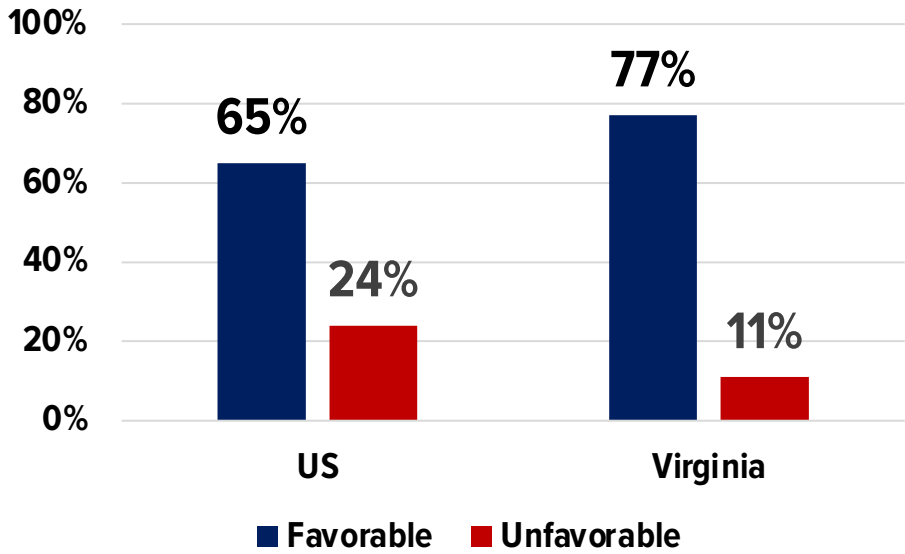


June 3-23, 2024



THIRD WAY

*Please indicate whether you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of four-year colleges and universities [in Virginia].*



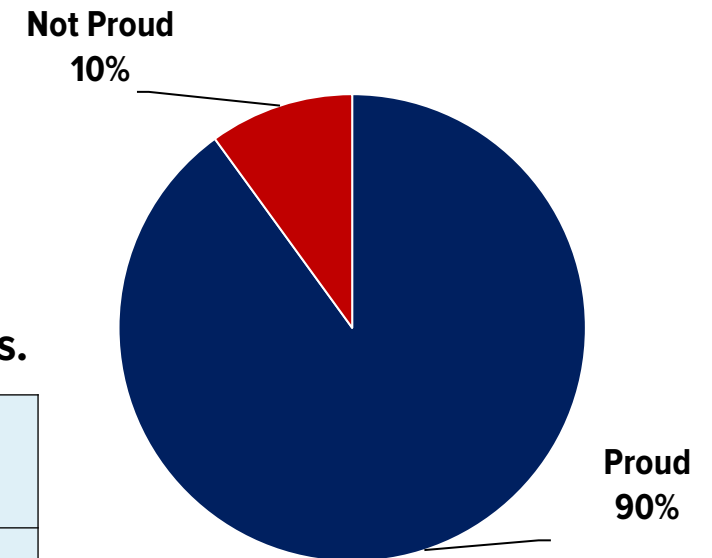
March 21-26, 2024

NOTE: Virginia data on these graphs is from VBHEC's Dec. 2024 survey.

# Virginians in both parties are proud of our top-ranked higher ed system.

**Colleges do not make good punching bags in Virginia.** Unlike states where populist attacks on higher education pay political dividends, Virginia voters in both parties say **we should feel proud** of our colleges, universities, and community colleges.

<i>In your opinion, how proud should people who live in Virginia feel regarding our system of public colleges, universities, and community colleges?</i>								
	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Child H.H.	No Child	Men	Women
Proud	90%	87%	93%	90%	94%	88%	91%	88%
Very Proud	42%	33%	49%	44%	40%	42%	42%	41%
Somewhat Proud	48%	54%	44%	45%	54%	46%	49%	47%
Not Proud	10%	13%	7%	10%	6%	12%	9%	12%



**Virginians want their own daughters and sons to attend one of our colleges and universities.**

<i>If you had a child who was applying to college, how likely would you be to recommend that they consider applying to a public college or university in Virginia as a top choice?</i>								
	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Child H.H.	No Child	Men	Women
Likely	90%	92%	85%	90%	94%	89%	91%	90%
Very Likely	50%	45%	46%	56%	41%	54%	52%	48%
Somewhat Likely	40%	47%	39%	34%	53%	34%	38%	42%
Not Likely	10%	8%	15%	10%	6%	11%	9%	10%

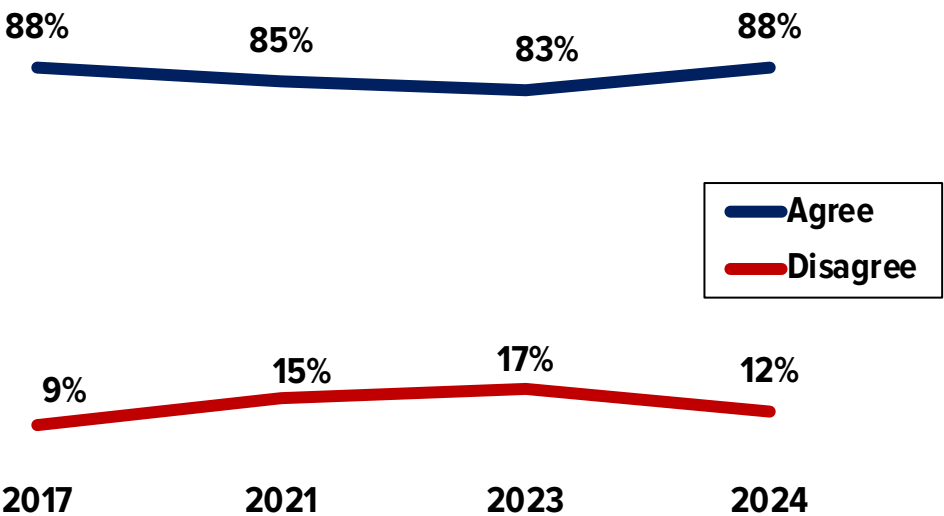
# Virginians in both parties strongly approve of our colleges' performance.

Virginians overwhelmingly agree their colleges are a valuable asset, well-run, and a sound place to invest.

This entrenched, positive attitude among Virginia voters in both parties has remained consistent over time despite the negative press coverage higher education often receives nationally.

*Please read the following statement. After you read the statement, please indicate if you agree or disagree with that statement:*

*Virginia's universities, colleges, and community colleges are a valuable public asset of the Commonwealth of Virginia, are well-run, and are a sound place to invest public dollars.*



	Agree	Disagree
Rep	85%	15%
Dem	95%	5%

# Our top-ranked higher ed system gives Virginia a competitive advantage.

It has branded Virginia nationally as the top state for talent ...

SmartAsset has ranked VA's higher ed system #1 or #2 nationally for the last seven straight years.

“

*“Virginia ranks in the top 10 states for three of the metrics we considered: undergraduate graduation rate (72%), student-to-faculty ratio (less than 16 students per faculty member) and 20-year return on investment (about \$403,200).”*

Source: “Top States for Higher Education”, SmartAsset, 5/2021.



... and is the key reason Virginia is the best state for business ...



”

*“Virginia’s biggest competitive strength is its education system, ranked #1 in the CNBC study. Virginia offers a wealth of higher education opportunities, including five historically Black colleges. State support for higher education has increased a healthy 28% over the past five years ....”*

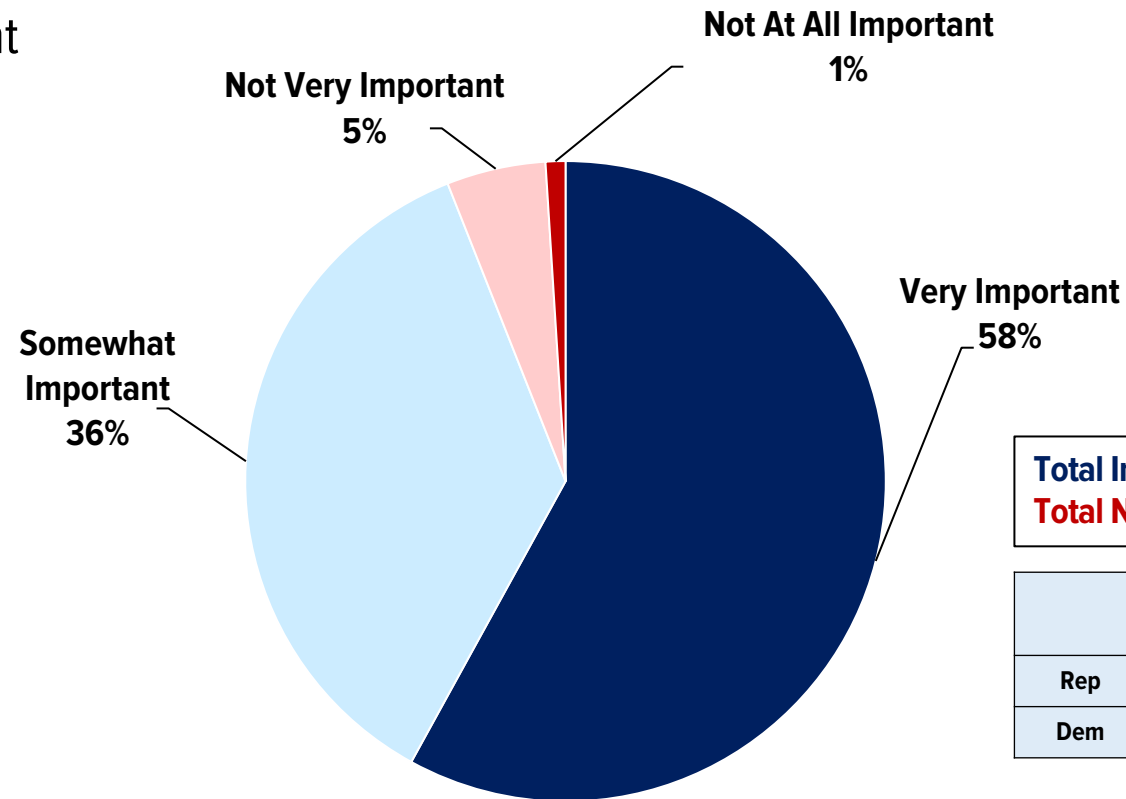
Source: “Virginia is America’s Top State for Business in 2024”, CNBC, 7/2024.

# Voters count on our colleges to preserve Virginia's #1 business ranking.

**94% of Virginia voters say it is important to invest in higher education to maintain our competitive advantage.**

**More than half** of Virginians say this investment is **very important**, indicating that voters' views on this issue are **especially intense**.

*For several years, Virginia has been ranked by CNBC as one of the best states for business, and a key reason given for these rankings has been our strong educational system, including our colleges, universities, and community colleges. Since these national business rankings have a big impact on where companies choose to locate their facilities and create jobs, how important do you believe it is for Virginia's Governor and the General Assembly to invest in our colleges, universities, and community colleges?*

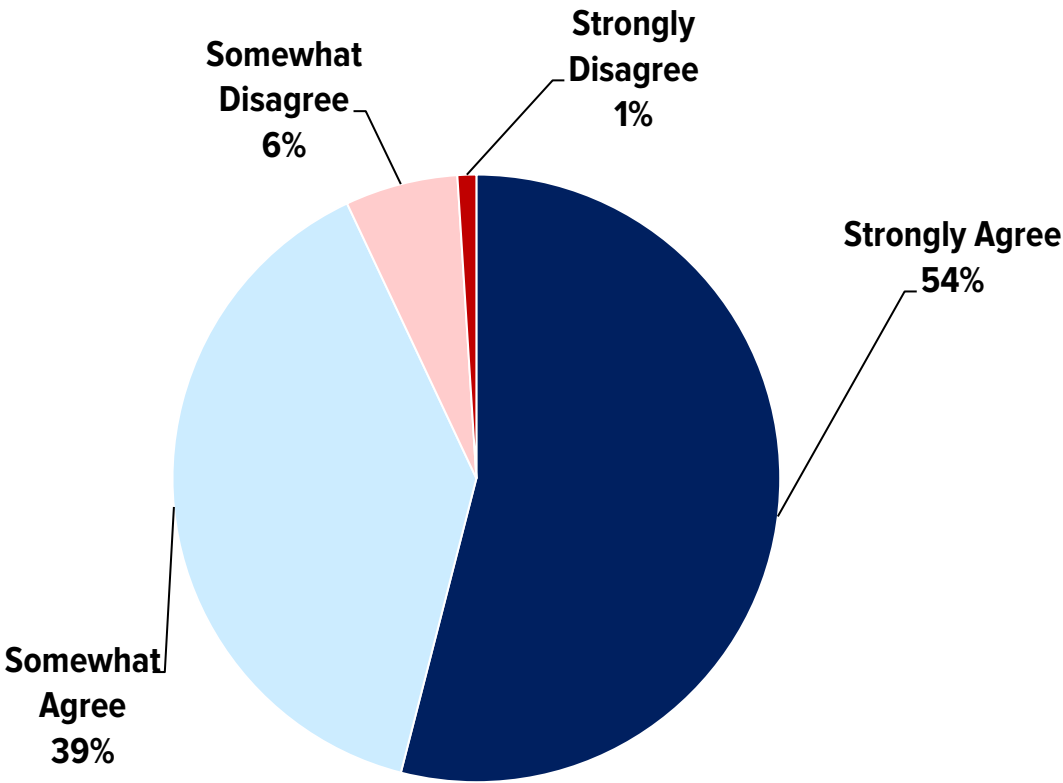
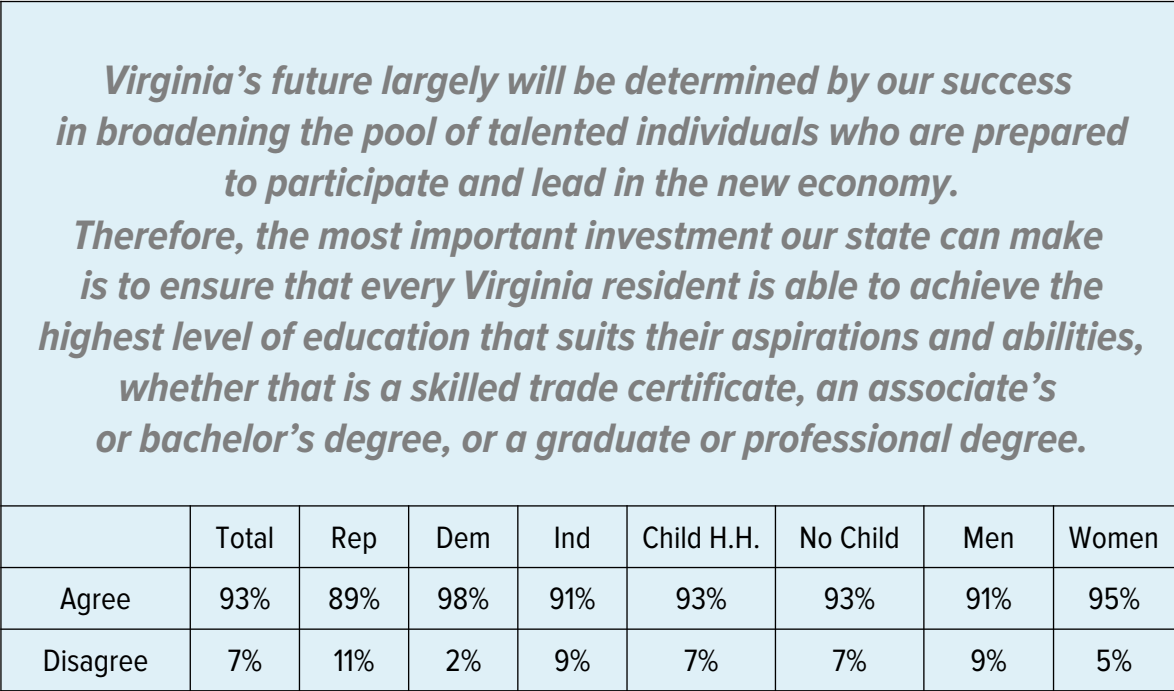


**Total Important 94%**  
**Total Not Important 6%**

	Important	Not Important
Rep	91%	9%
Dem	98%	2%

# Voters believe investing in talent should be our top priority.

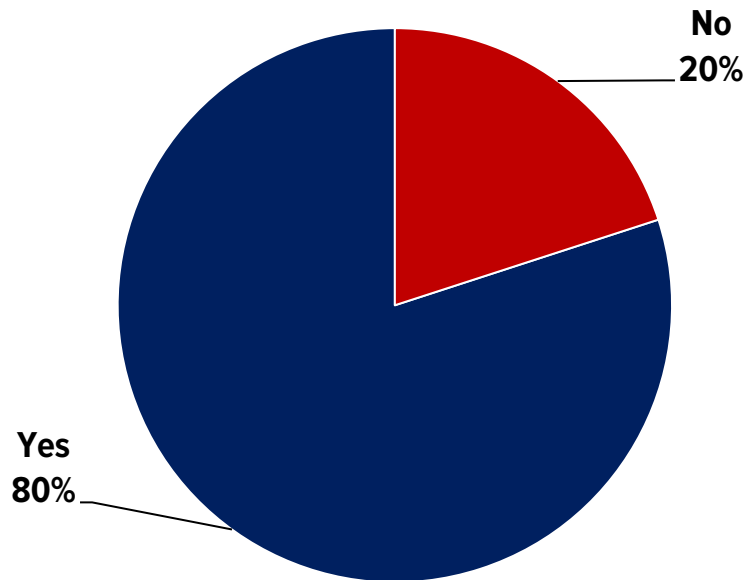
More than half **strongly agree** that broadening the talent pool through varied degrees and credentials that fit individual aspirations and abilities is **“the most important investment our state can make.”**



# Virginians in both parties say a college education is still a good value.

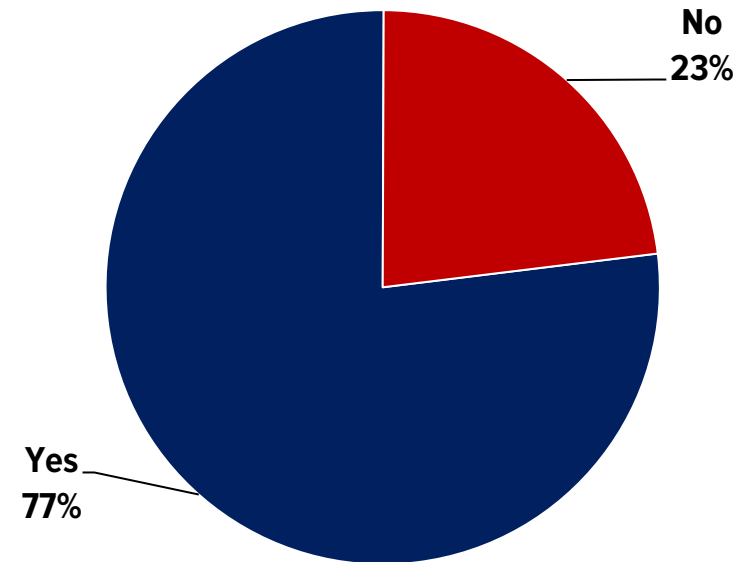
Virginians say “yes” to college education being a good value even when common criticisms of higher education are included in the question, such as some graduates’ difficulty finding jobs and the expensiveness.

*In your opinion, is having a college education still a good value even though some college graduates have trouble finding work in their chosen fields of study these days?*



	Yes	No
Rep	79%	21%
Dem	84%	16%

*In your opinion, is having a college education still a good value even though it has become more expensive?*

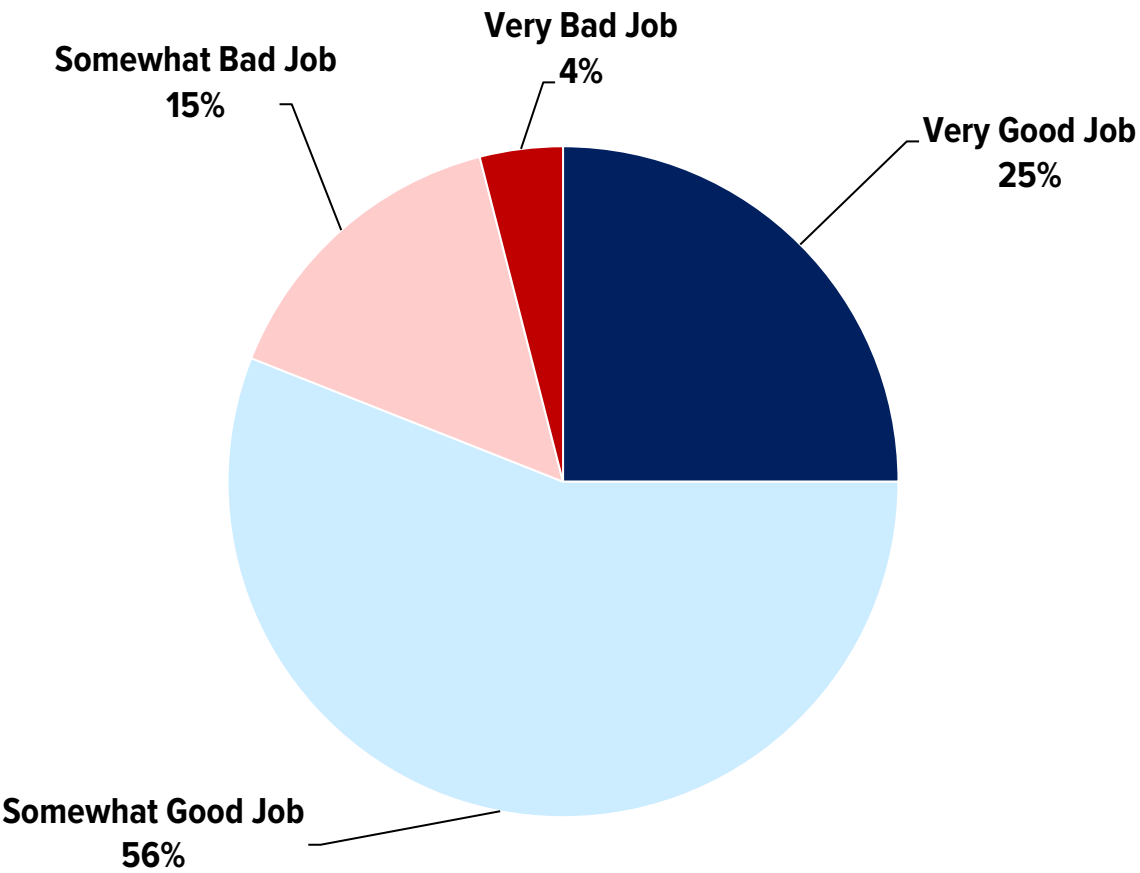


	Yes	No
Rep	77%	23%
Dem	82%	18%

# Virginia’s colleges prepare young people for success in a changing economy.

*Would you say Virginia's universities and colleges are doing a good job or a bad job at making sure students are graduating with the skills they need to succeed in the changing economy?*

<b>Total Good Job</b>			<b>81%</b>
<b>Total Bad Job</b>			<b>19%</b>
	<b>Good Job</b>	<b>Bad Job</b>	
Rep	79%	21%	
Dem	88%	12%	



# The college investment produces a strong ROI for individual Virginians.

## Voters agree that higher education in Virginia is a good investment.

*Since college graduates on average earn more than twice what non-graduates earn, attending and graduating from a Virginia college or university is a good investment.*



*Since, in today's economy, the highest paying jobs generally go to the best educated workers, a greater state investment in Virginia's higher ed system will result in higher average incomes for Virginia workers and a stronger economy.*

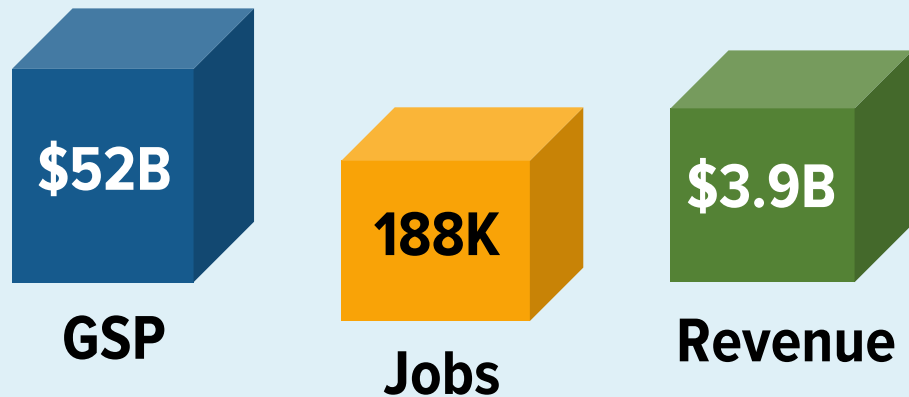


■ Strongly Agree   ■ Somewhat Agree   ■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Somewhat Disagree

# No investment produces a higher ROI for the Commonwealth.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS

A comprehensive study completed by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service in 2023, the fourth of its kind since 2009, has documented the dramatic economic impact of Virginia's higher education system.



## The investment more than pays for itself.

Each dollar spent on Virginia's public higher education system produces more than \$25 in greater Gross State Product (GSP) and returns nearly \$2 to the state treasury.

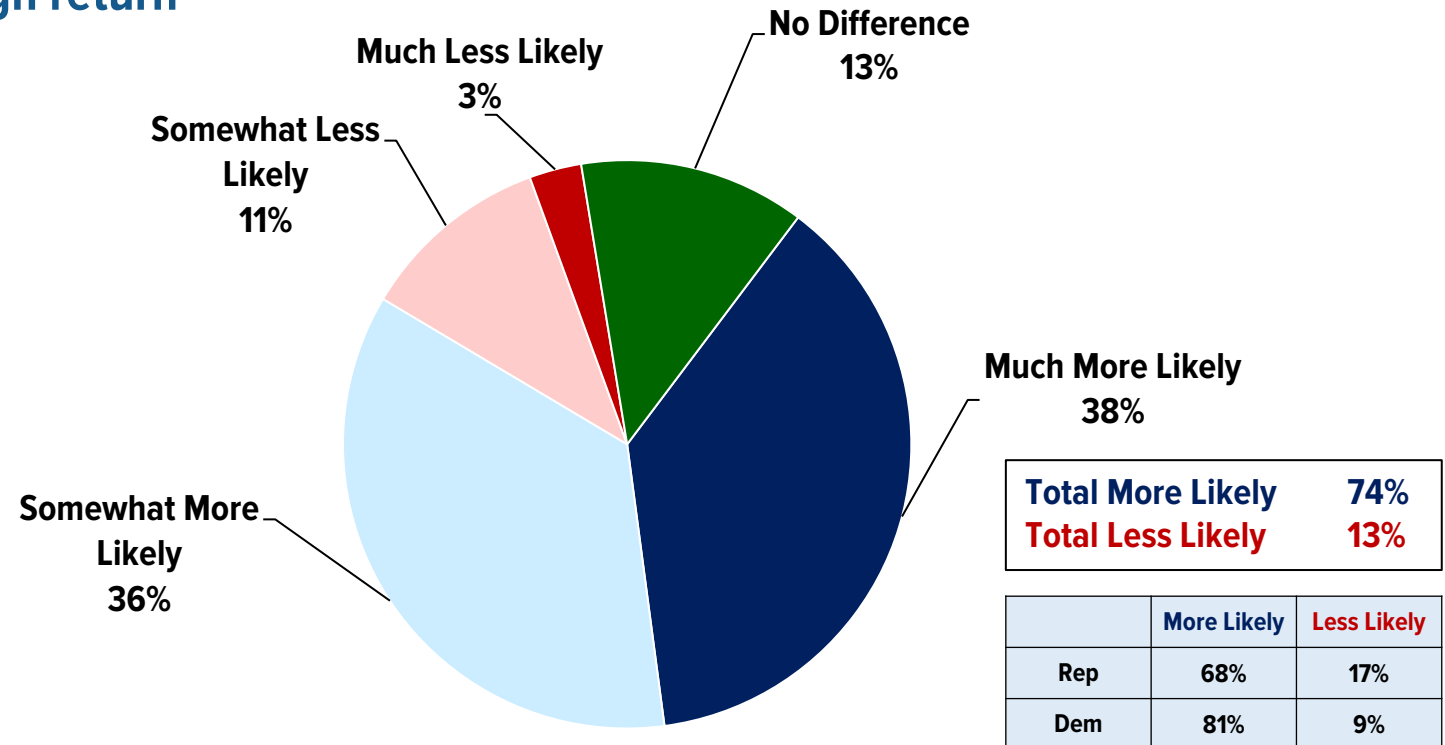


# The high ROI generates bipartisan support for higher ed investments.

Voters are more likely to vote for a candidate who says higher education is one of the best investments Virginia can make, citing this documented high return on investment.

*[Would you be more or less likely to vote for:]*

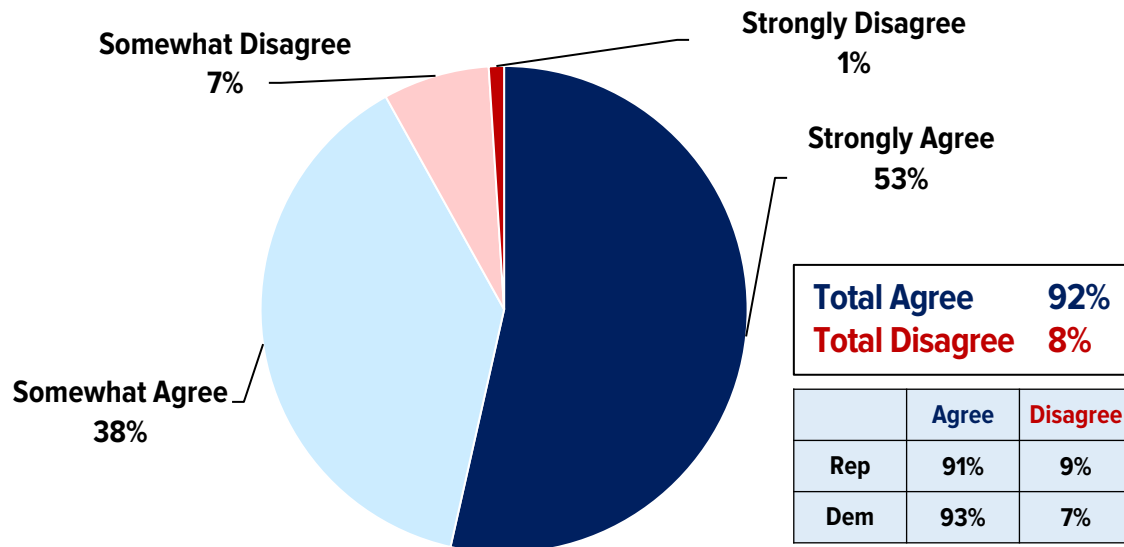
*A candidate who says that higher education is one of the best investments Virginia can make because an independent study shows that every \$1 Virginia taxpayers spend on our public higher education system generates \$25 of economic output in our state, and the investment more than pays for itself by producing nearly \$2 in new revenue for every \$1 spent.*



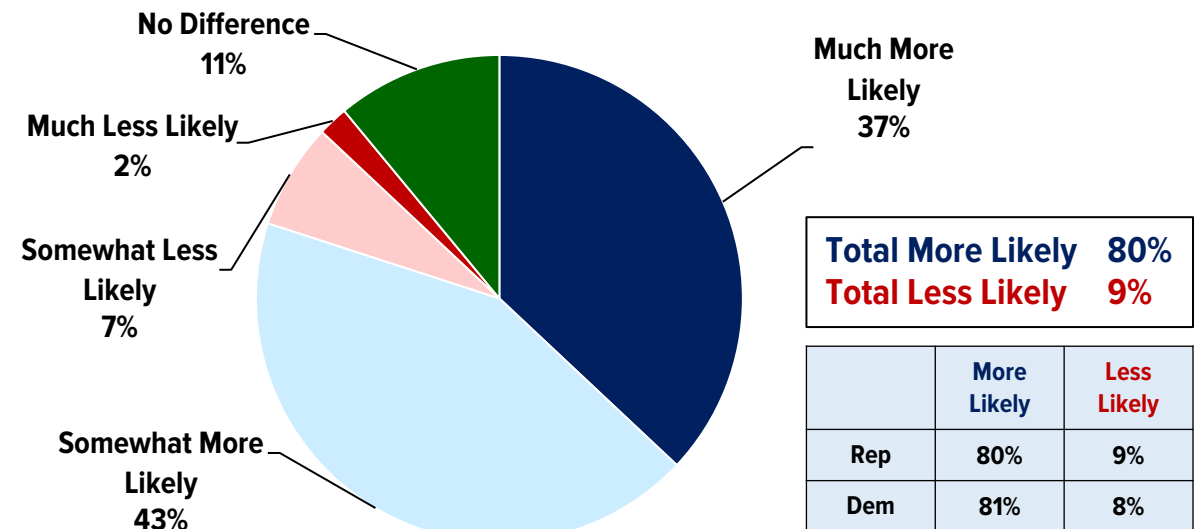
# Virginia needs more college degrees AND skilled trade certificates.

Voters respond best to leaders who understand Virginia's wide-ranging workforce needs and therefore support **BOTH** more college degrees AND more non-degree credentials, rather than emphasizing only one.

*[Agree or disagree:] Our country has workforce shortages today in jobs ranging from those requiring four-year college degrees to skilled trade jobs requiring two years of education and training or less. We need to increase both the number of college graduates and the number of skilled workers who are qualified to fill these jobs.*



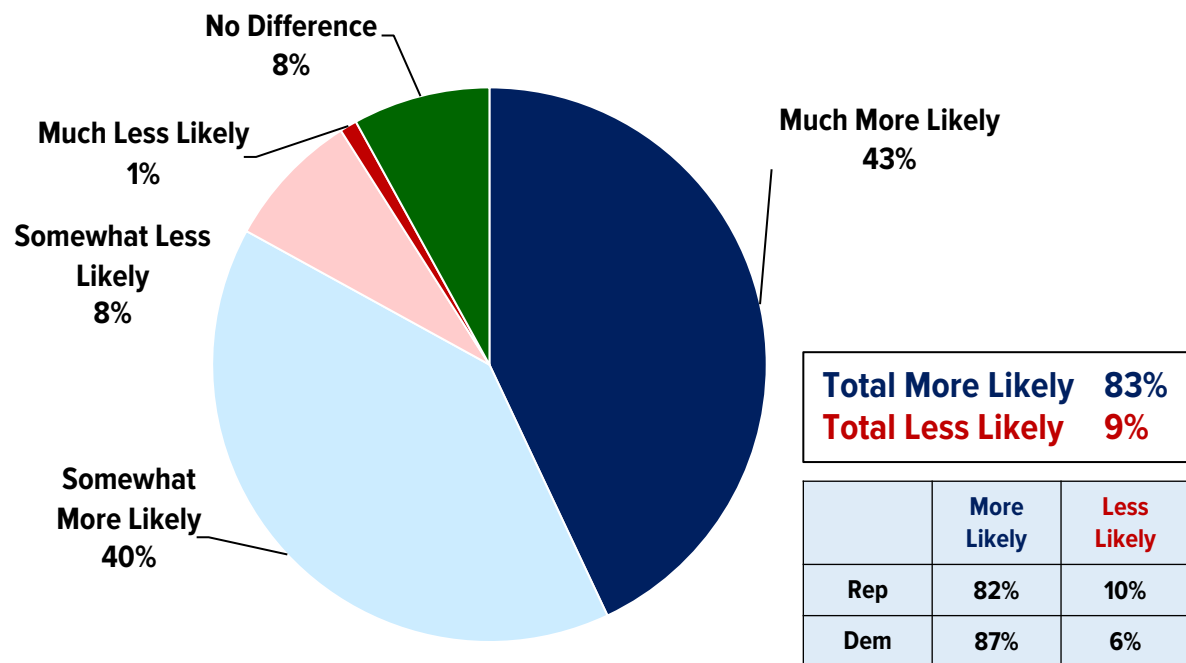
*[More or less likely to vote for:] A candidate who proposes increasing the number of college and community college degrees and credentials earned by Virginia students in high-wage, high-demand sectors of the economy, such as science, technology, engineering and math, and in areas where there now are shortages of trained workers, such as health care and data science.*



# Research universities improve healthcare and help grow regional economies.

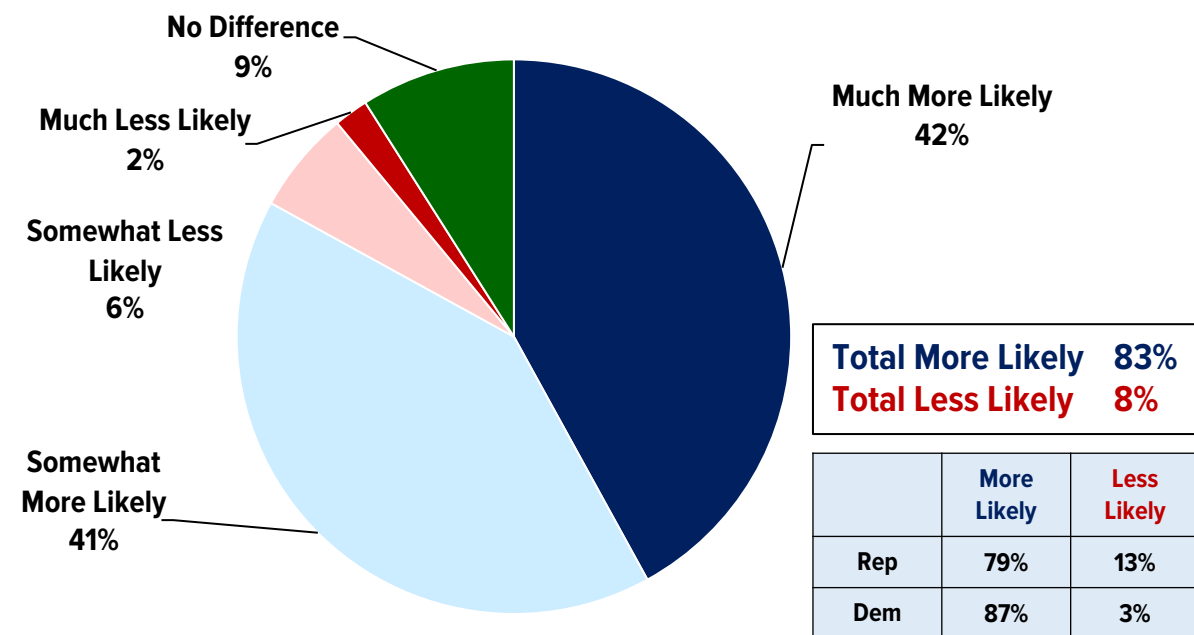
*[More or less likely to vote for:]*

*A candidate who says to improve the health and quality of life for Virginians, we should use our colleges and community colleges to train more doctors and nurses and also promote university-based research into advanced forms of medical care and treatment.*



*[More or less likely to vote for:]*

*A candidate who says we need to have strong colleges and community colleges in each region of our state, because these colleges improve the quality of life, supply a skilled workforce, and encourage public-private partnerships on research and economic development that attract new businesses and high-paying jobs to the region.*



# Why investing in college affordability is essential for young Virginians' future . . .

*Virginia's competitors provide much more state support for higher education, resulting in lower tuition for their students.*

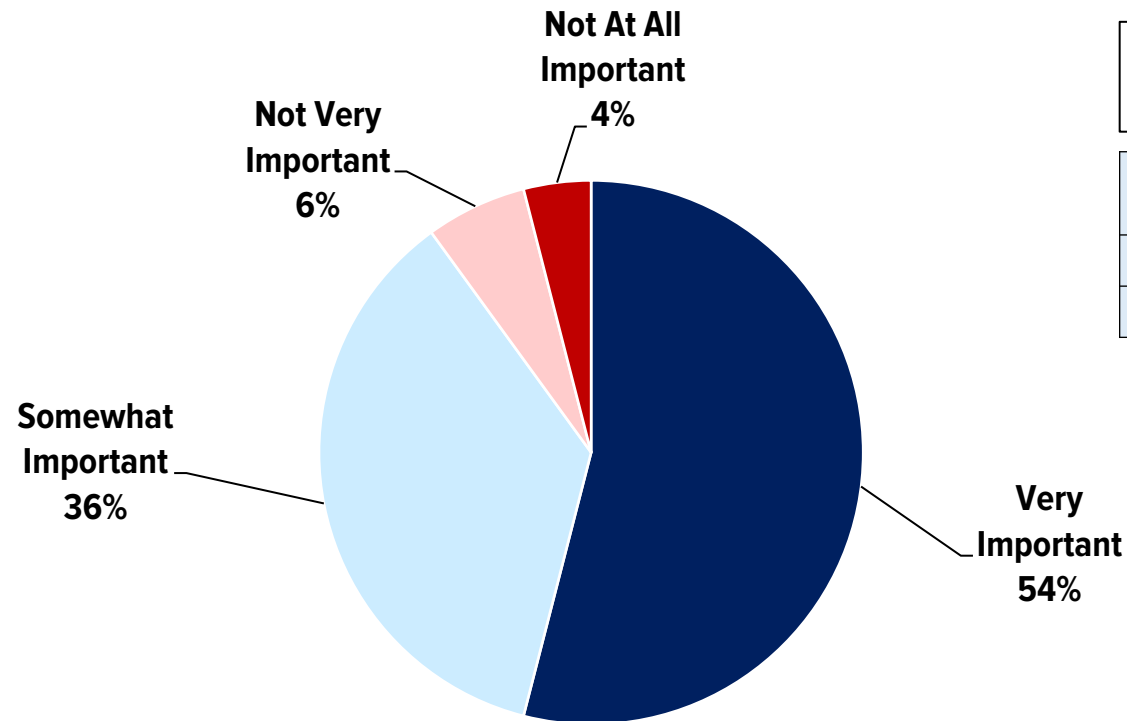
*In this section . . .*

<b>Our competitors are out-investing us</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Our colleges are not resting on their laurels</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Opportunity depends on affordable access</b>	<b>28</b>

# 9-in-10 voters want Virginia to invest in college affordability.

**54% of Virginians say it is very important** for the state of Virginia to invest more in higher education so that tuition increases are kept to a minimum.

*How important would you say it is for the state of Virginia to invest more in higher education so that tuition increases are kept to a minimum for students and their families?*



Total Important	90%
Total Not Important	10%

	Important	Not Important
Rep	88%	12%
Dem	97%	3%

# Enhancing college affordability requires an all-of-the-above approach.

## VBHEC advocates investments in these initiatives to enhance affordable access for all Virginians:

- **Higher state operating support for higher education** to close the gap with competing states and ease pressures on tuition.
- **Increased student financial aid** for students in public institutions **and TAG grants** for students in private nonprofit institutions.
- **Paid internship opportunities for all students** who want them without extending the time to obtain a degree or credential.
- **Workforce credential grants** for students pursuing industry-recognized credentials through the community college system.
- **Increased support for HBCU's, community colleges,** and other institutions that enroll high percentages of low-income, first-generation, and under-represented students.
- **Grants to expand Pell-eligible admissions** at public institutions.
- **Full state funding of tuition waivers for military families through VMSDEP** (Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program).
- **Expanded dual enrollment options and other affordable pathways to degree/certificate attainment,** including career and technical education, work-based training, community college transfers, advanced placement, and expedited completion.
- **State funding for student mental health and academic support services** to ease reliance on student fees.

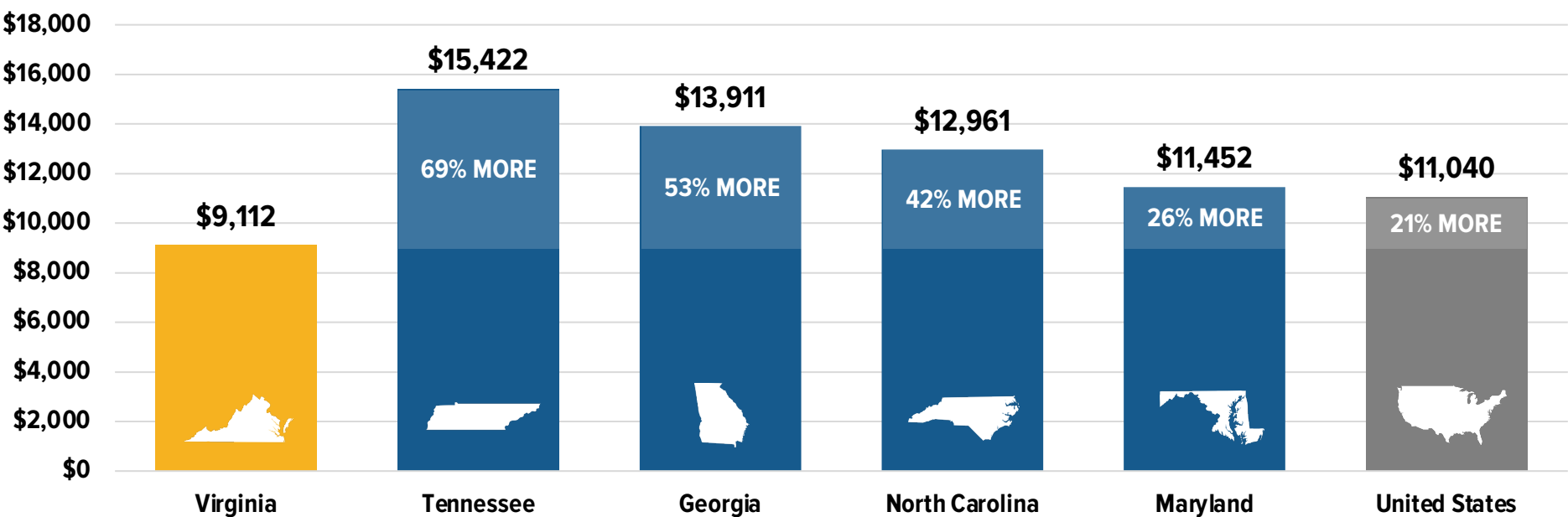
## VBHEC advocates innovations to help bend the cost curve and improve ROI for students, including:

- **Continued higher education restructuring** that increases managerial flexibility and accountability for outcomes.
- **Expanded business-higher ed partnerships** on internships/talent pathways, research/entrepreneurship, and cost-saving innovations.
- **Greater collaboration by colleges, universities, and community colleges** to reduce duplication by leveraging technology, sharing academic and administrative resources, developing centers of excellence, and using model curricula.

# Virginia's low state support for higher education drives up tuition.

Virginia ranks 32<sup>nd</sup> among the 50 states in state support of higher education.

Our neighbors—the states we compete most with for jobs and business investment—are investing much more.



State Support per FTE Student, FY 2023

Source: State Higher Education Finance Report FY 2023, Page 44, Table 3.2, SHEEO, 4/2024.

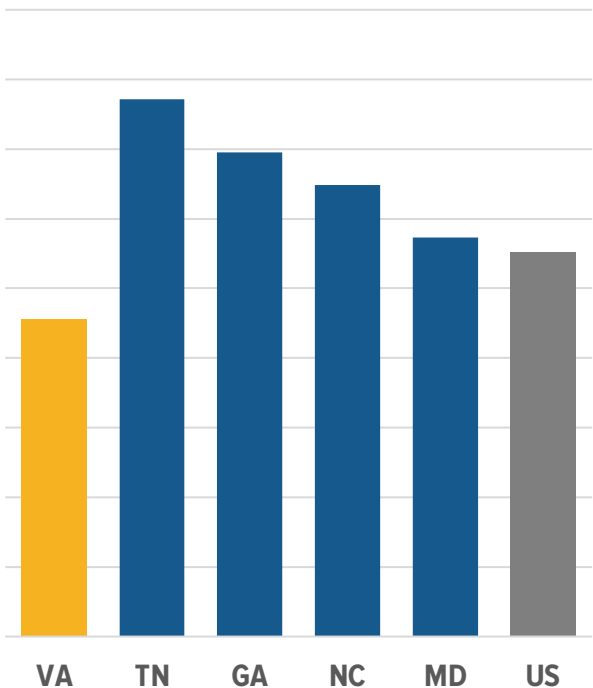
# Voters react strongly to the tuition consequences of low state support.

**Huge majorities in both parties** want the state to reduce reliance on tuition by increasing state funding for higher education.

*Currently, tuition at our public universities in Virginia is higher than in neighboring states like Tennessee, North Carolina, and Maryland. This is mainly because those states provide thousands of dollars more funding per student than Virginia provides, leaving less to be paid by students and families in those states.*

*Knowing this, how important would you say it is for Virginia's Governor and the General Assembly to reduce reliance on tuition by increasing the state's funding of our higher education system?*

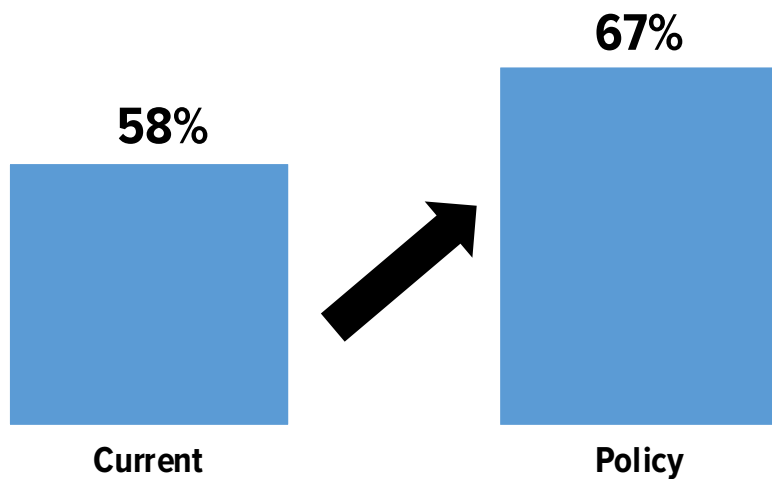
	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Child H.H.	No Child	Men	Women
Important	91%	88%	97%	82%	94%	89%	91%	91%
Very Important	55%	45%	68%	48%	55%	55%	56%	55%
Somewhat Important	36%	43%	29%	34%	39%	34%	35%	36%
Not Important	9%	12%	3%	18%	6%	11%	9%	9%



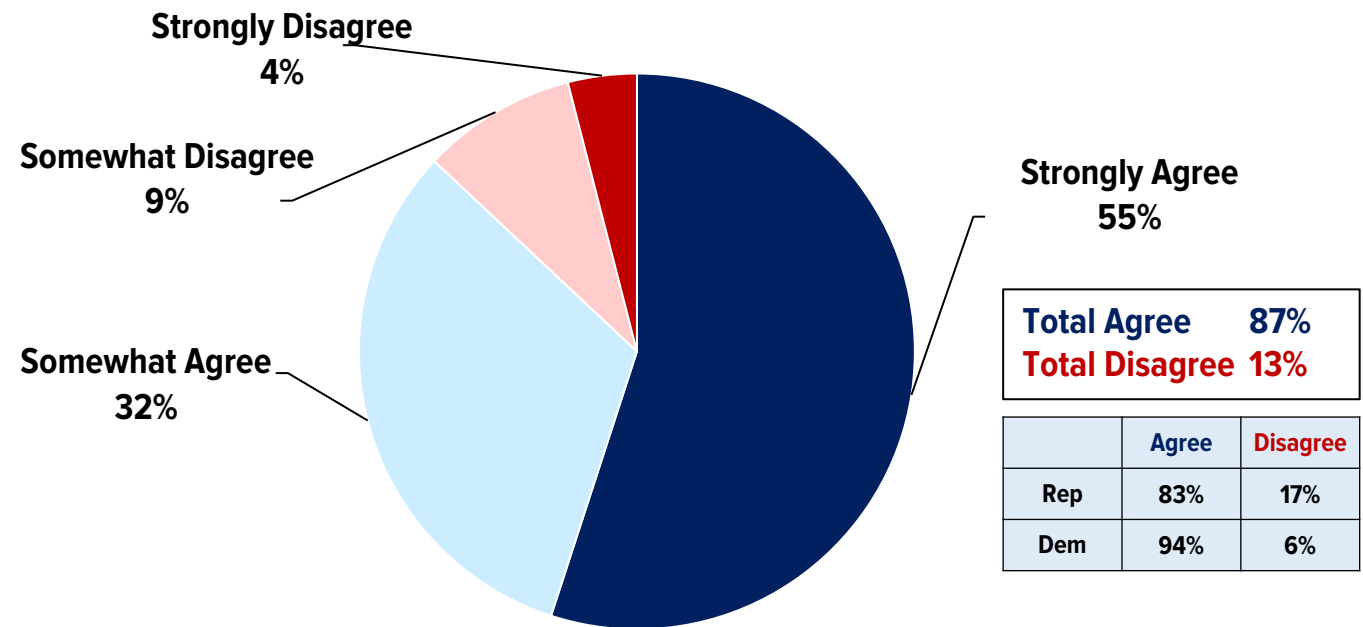
# Virginians want their state to honor its higher ed funding commitment.

Despite recent investments, **Virginia still is not meeting its statutory policy of paying 2/3 of educational costs for in-state students.** Tuition-paying Virginia families make up the difference.

*A state law passed in 2011 declared that the state should pay at least two-thirds of the cost of educating Virginia resident students at our state's public colleges. Despite recent progress, the state is still not meeting its goal, which means that Virginia students and their families must make up the difference through higher tuition. The Governor and the General Assembly should meet the two-thirds goal as soon as possible so that our colleges can charge Virginia students less tuition.*



Source: 2024-25 Tuition and Fees Report, Page 15, Chart 6, SCHEV, 8/2024.



# Virginia’s colleges use new state funding to hold down tuition.

**JLARC** in 2024 studied the performance of Virginia’s higher education institutions and found that the **cost of attending Virginia’s colleges came down in recent years** because of new state funding.

*Virginians in both parties strongly support continuing these investments.*

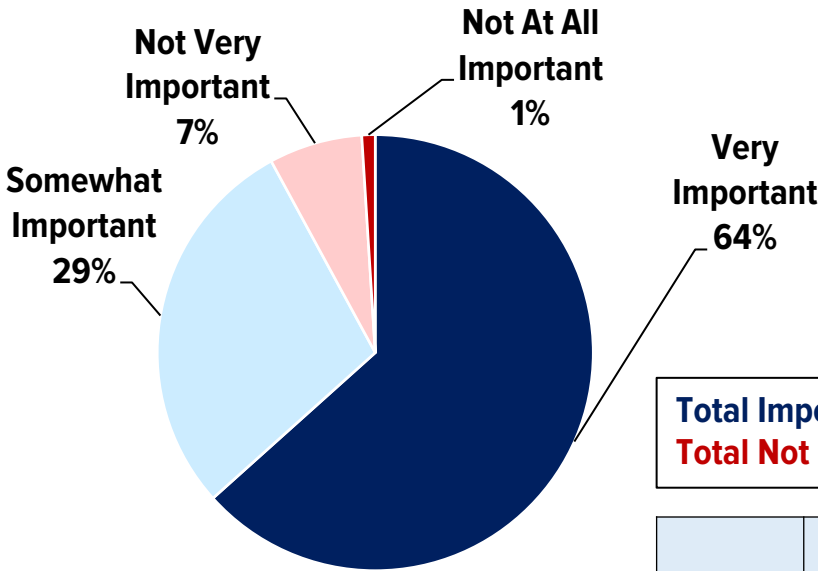


**Key findings, adjusting for inflation:**

- Total cost of attendance at VA’s 4-yr public colleges and universities declined on average since 2020.
- Over the past 10 years, the total cost of attendance averaged an annual increase of less than ½ of 1%. Instructional costs, not overhead, were the biggest cost driver.
- Avg net price (after including financial aid) declined at most Virginia institutions over the past 10 years.

Source: “Spending and Efficiency in Higher Education,” JLARC, 10/7/2024, Pages 9-13 & 18-19.

*According to the 2024 report by the state's audit agency, the average cost of attending college in Virginia has declined in recent years for in-state students. This is because the state has invested more in higher education while colleges have controlled costs, resulting in a lower tuition burden for students and their families. Since the cost of college remains hard to afford for many low and middle income Virginia families, how important is it to you that the state continue to increase its investment in higher education and reduce the tuition burden on students and their families?*



Total Important	92%
Total Not Important	8%

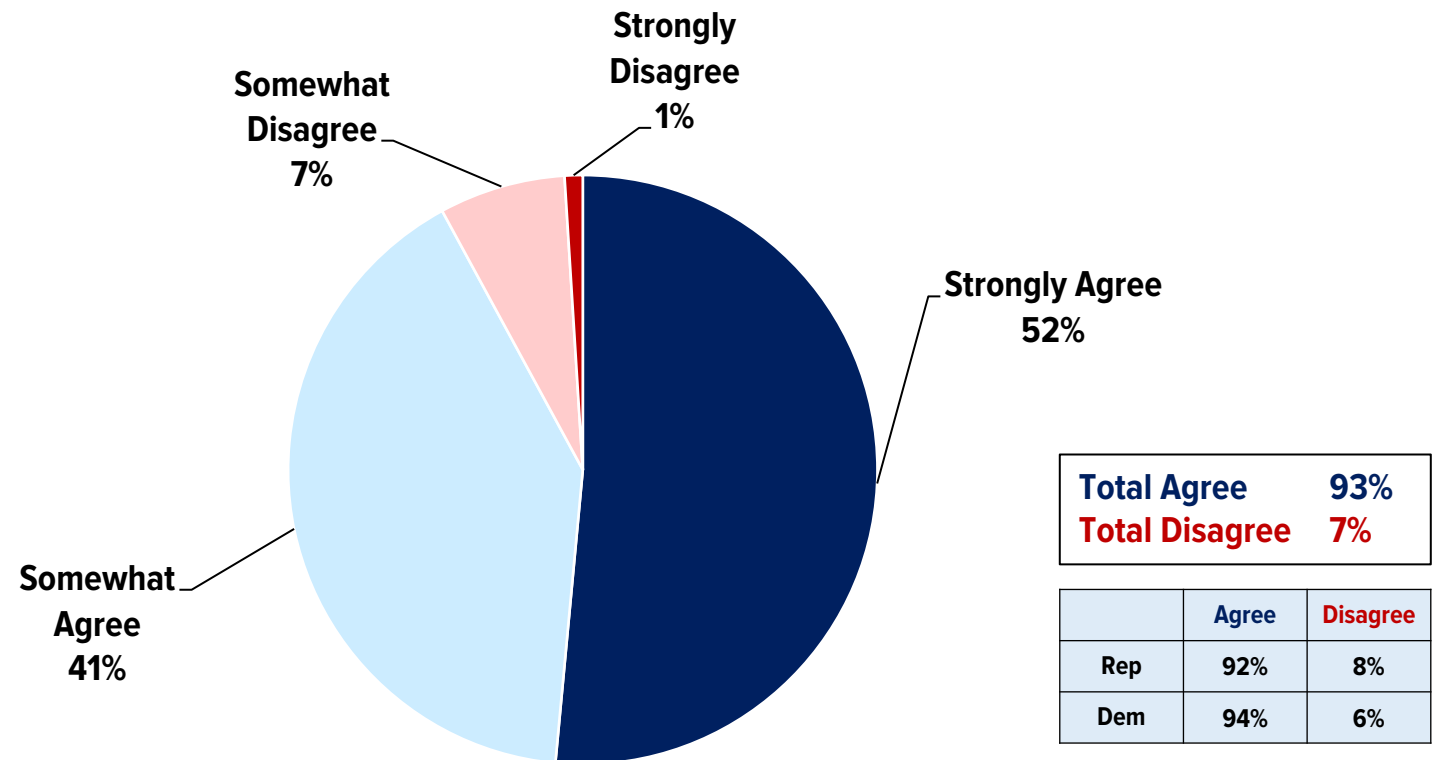
	Important	Not Important
Rep	90%	10%
Dem	95%	5%

# Virginia's high-performing colleges are not resting on their laurels.

Higher education institutions in Virginia already outperform competitors and are working with business partners to become even more cost-efficient.

*This approach resonates strongly with voters.*

*Virginia's colleges and universities have high graduation rates and spend less per degree than neighboring states, but there is much more they should do to become cost-efficient. They should work closely with business partners to adopt more efficient business practices, reduce duplication by sharing administrative and academic resources among the colleges, make better use of advanced technology, and streamline coursework to move students more efficiently through their studies into internships and eventually into full-time jobs.*

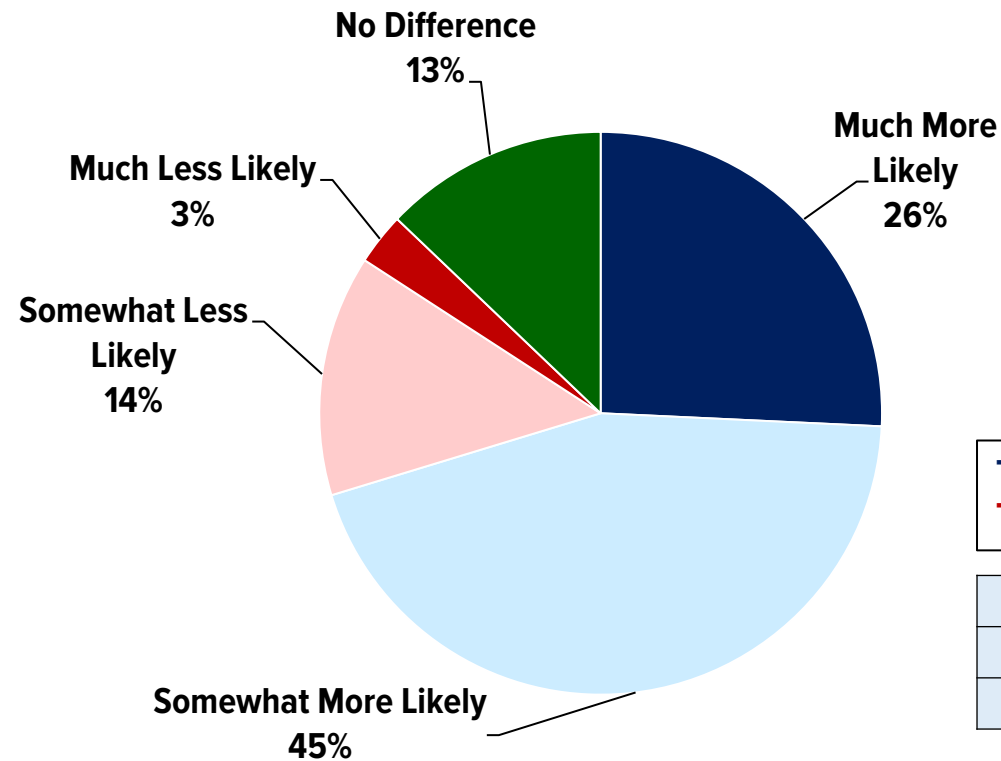


# Voters approve of Virginia's higher education restructuring reforms.

Virginians are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports higher ed restructuring that gives colleges greater managerial flexibility and holds them accountable for student outcomes.

*[More or less likely to vote for:]*

*A candidate who says the best way to control college costs and improve results is to continue to restructure the system so that the colleges have more freedom to manage their operations efficiently and are funded based mainly on their success in producing good outcomes for students, including specific factors like the number of students enrolled, graduation rates, and student success in securing good jobs.*



Total More Likely	71%
Total Less Likely	16%

	More Likely	Less Likely
Rep	76%	18%
Dem	67%	17%

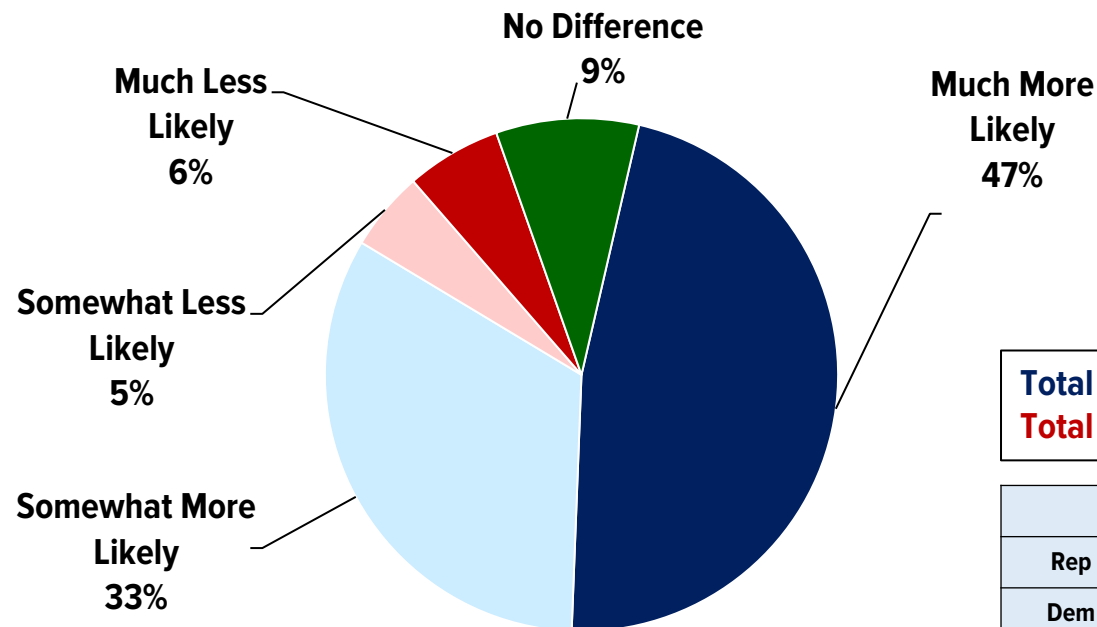
# Voters want to ensure affordable access for all Virginians.

Virginians want the state to invest more in student financial aid, so that every qualified high school graduate in the Commonwealth can afford to attend.

**80% voters are more likely to vote for a legislative candidate who calls for increased state funding of student financial aid.**

*[More or less likely to vote for:]*

*A candidate who says every qualified Virginia high school graduate should have affordable access to college; therefore, we should increase state funding for student financial aid because currently the number of low-income and middle-income students needing this aid far exceeds the available grants.<sup>^</sup>*



<b>Total More Likely</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Total Less Likely</b>	<b>11%</b>

	More Likely	Less Likely
Rep	74%	18%
Dem	88%	3%

# Virginians want more financial aid for low- and middle-income families.

## Financial aid can have lifelong impacts for low-income and first-generation students.

Voters also want students from middle-income families to receive more financial aid grants so they are not saddled with excessive student loan debt.

*Virginia's Governor and General Assembly should work to increase student financial aid so that college is more affordable for low-income and first-generation college students.*



*While higher-income Virginians can afford college, and lower-income families tend to qualify for significant federal financial aid, many middle-income families in Virginia qualify only for loans, resulting in high levels of student loan debt. The Governor and General Assembly should seek a significant increase in state-funded financial aid for middle-income families so fewer Virginia students leave college with large debt burdens.*



*Providing more financial aid so that low- and middle-income students can afford college is an important social investment, because independent studies show that college graduates tend to pay more in taxes, and require less public expenditures on everything from healthcare and unemployment insurance to welfare and incarceration.*



■ Strongly Agree   ■ Somewhat Agree   ■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Somewhat Disagree

# Virginians want the state to fully fund benefits for military families.

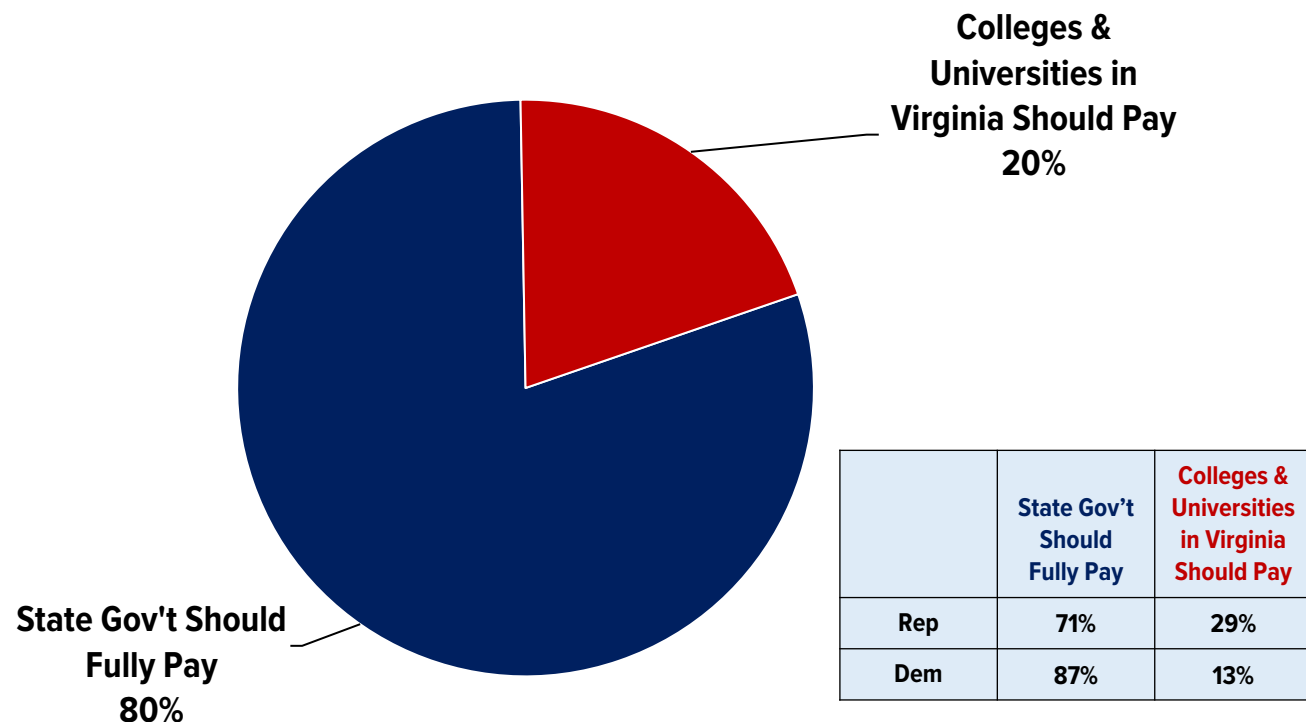
**80% of voters** want the state rather than colleges to pay for the rising cost of these benefits so other students do not bear the burden through higher tuition.

*Virginia covers the cost of in-state tuition for spouses and children of veterans who were disabled or killed in action. In recent years, the cost of this program has grown rapidly as more military families have qualified for these benefits, and the state of Virginia now must decide how to pay for this program. Which of the following options do you support most?*

*The state government should fully pay for the program so that the colleges and universities in Virginia do not pass along the costs to students of non-military families in the form of higher tuition.*

*...Or...*

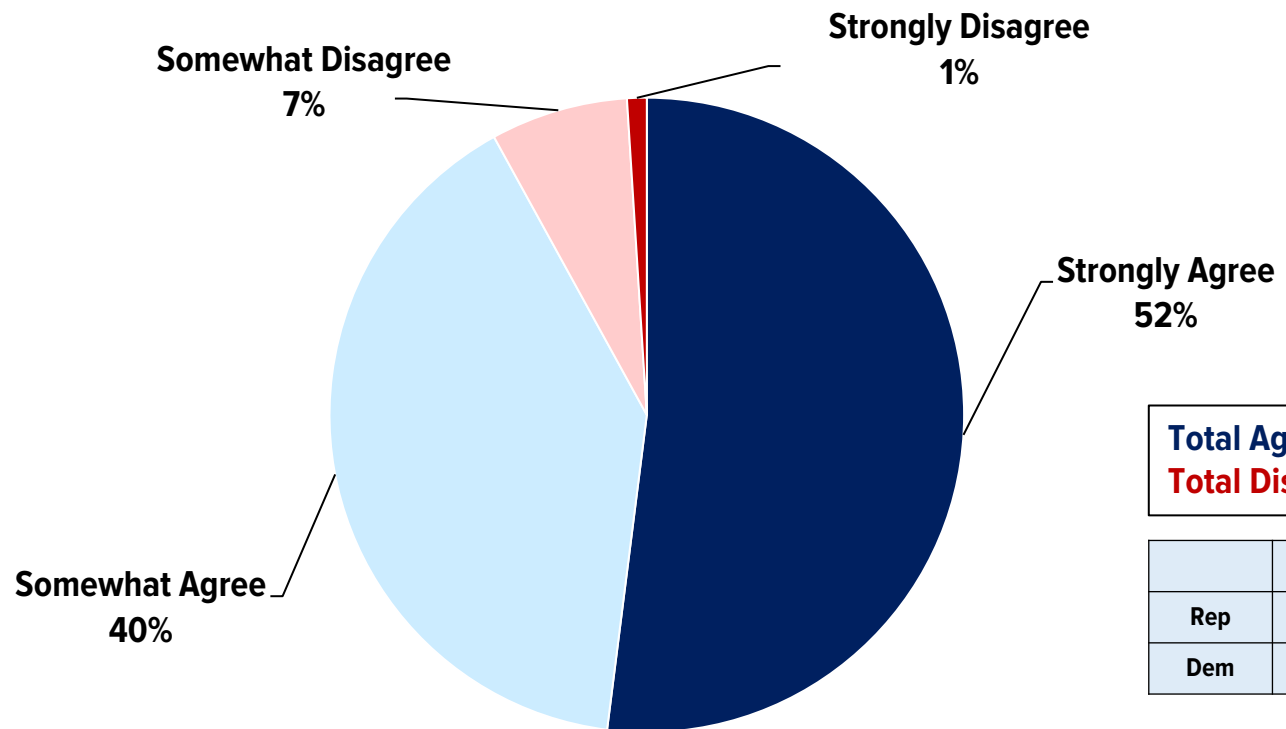
*The colleges and universities in Virginia should pay for the program even if it means that students from non-military families will have to pay for the program through higher tuition.*



# Virginians want to expand community college dual enrollment.

Dual enrollment in high school and community college lets students gain two-year degrees and industry-recognized credentials faster and at less cost.

*The Governor and General Assembly should expand the number of dual enrollment courses, which are usually community college courses that students can take while they are still in high school, because the sooner a student can get a two-year degree or industry credential, the quicker and cheaper it will be for them to complete their education and get a good job.*



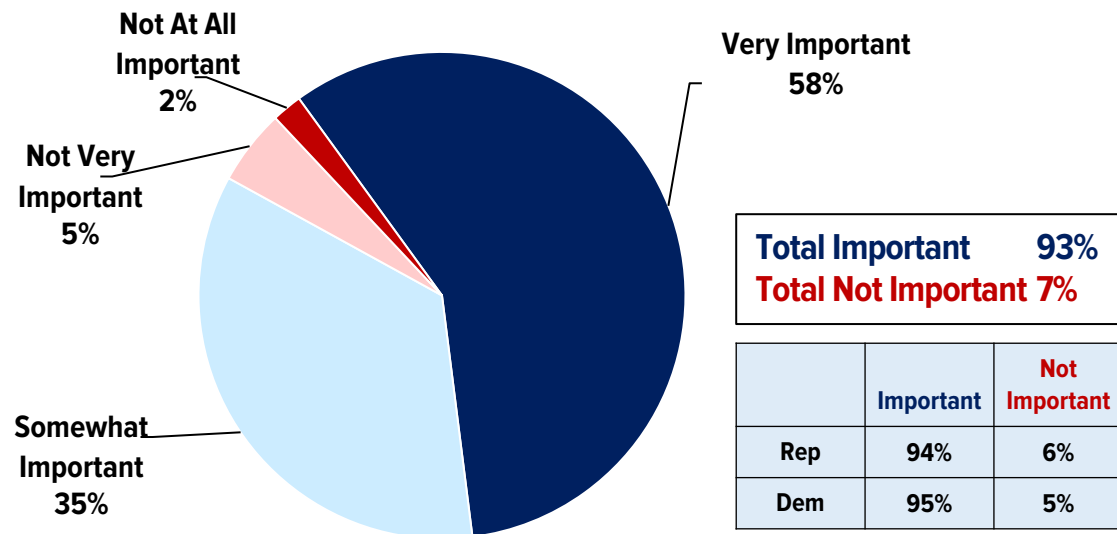
Total Agree	92%
Total Disagree	8%

	Agree	Disagree
Rep	90%	10%
Dem	95%	5%

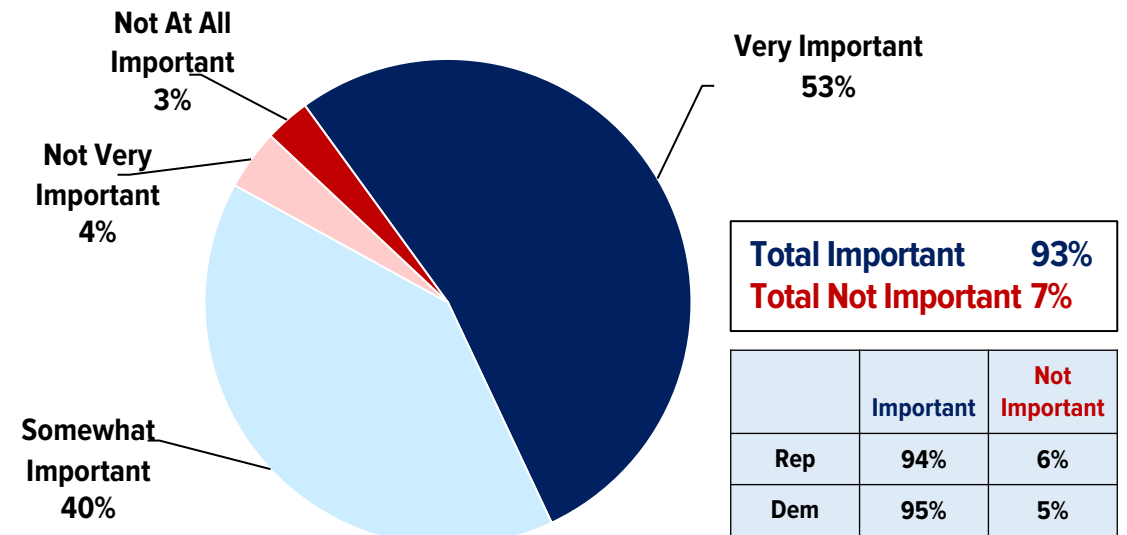
# Virginians support community college initiatives to meet workforce needs.

## Community colleges provide an affordable pathway to degrees and industry-recognized certificates.

*To help grow Virginia's economy, Virginia community colleges want to significantly increase the number of industry-recognized non-degree certificates they award, enroll more working-age adults seeking to upgrade their skills, develop more paid internship and apprenticeship opportunities, and expand high-demand programs by the year 2030. How important is it for the state to fund these proposals by Virginia's community colleges?*



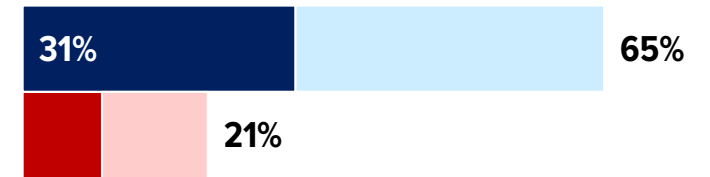
*The current funding model for Virginia's community colleges primarily supports traditional two-year degree programs, but many jobs in today's economy require skills training and industry-recognized certificates rather than college degrees. How important is it to reform this funding model so that community colleges receive additional funding to provide more industry-recognized certificate programs that address workforce needs?*



# Voters support state investments in HBCU programs and facilities.

## Virginians also want to increase state funding for Tuition Assistance Grants (TAG) at private, nonprofit colleges in the Commonwealth.

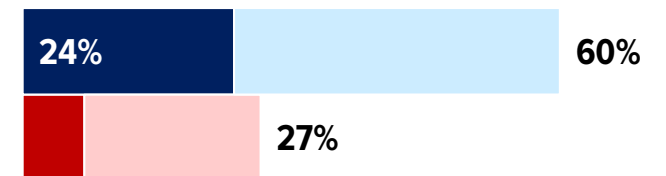
*[More or less likely to vote for:] A candidate who says we should invest in Virginia's historically black colleges and universities, also known as HBCU's, to support academic programs, attract top faculty, and provide more paid internships, support services, and financial aid to students. This will help make the HBCU experience affordable for diverse students, including low-income and first-generation students.*



*A candidate who says we should invest in Virginia's historically black colleges and universities, also known as HBCU's, to substantially upgrade and improve the infrastructure and facilities for research, teaching, and housing on those campuses, since Virginia's audit agency released a report in 2024 finding that the facilities at Virginia's two public HBCU institutions are aging and have been historically underfunded.*



*A candidate who says that Virginia's private nonprofit colleges and universities are an essential part of our state's top-ranked higher education system, therefore, Virginia should increase the amount of tuition assistance, also called TAG grants, that the state provides to Virginia resident students who attend those private colleges.*



■ Much More Likely    ■ Somewhat More Likely    ■ Much Less Likely    ■ Somewhat Less Likely

# Why internships and talent pathways should be a top priority for Virginia's leaders . . .

*Virginia can lead the Nation on internships and talent pathways, expanding opportunity for all and fortifying our state's competitive advantage by attracting, developing, and retaining a top workforce.*

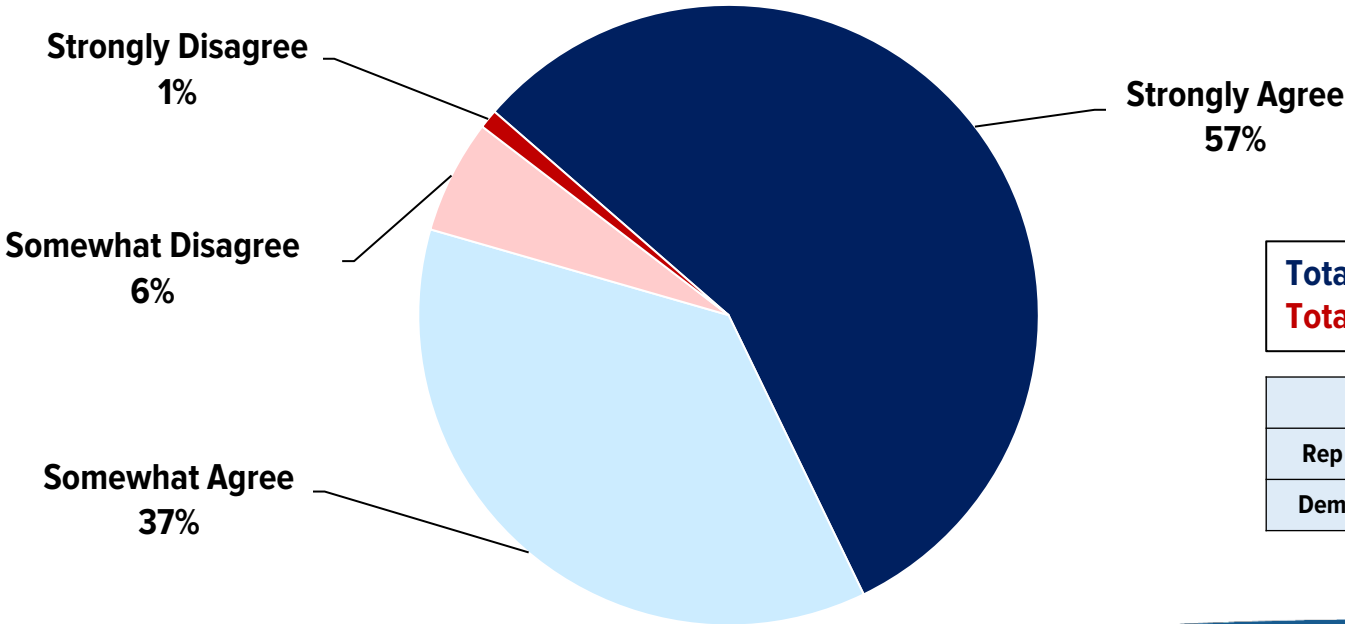
*In this section . . .*

<b>The Big Goal: paid internships for all students</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Business-education partnerships are the key</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Pathways to great careers by staying in Virginia</b>	<b>45</b>

# Expanding paid internships generates especially intense support.

**THE BIG GOAL: EVERY STUDENT WHO ATTENDS VIRGINIA’S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR AT LEAST ONE PAID INTERNSHIP IN THEIR FIELD OF STUDY WITHOUT EXTENDING THE TIME IT TAKES TO COMPLETE THEIR DEGREE.**

*It is important the state of Virginia invests in the Innovative Internship Program which increases the number of paid internships, co-op programs, and other work-based learning opportunities available to students attending Virginia’s colleges and universities.*



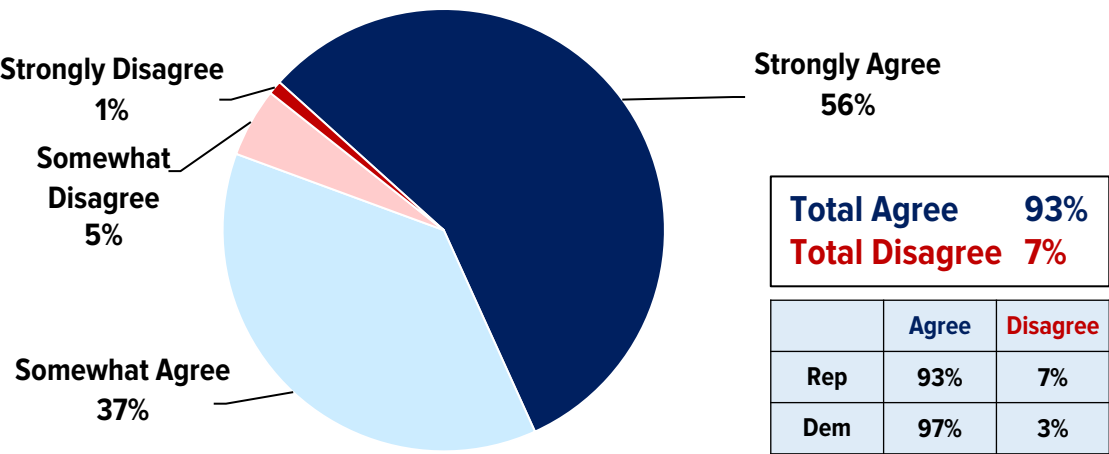
Total Agree	94%
Total Disagree	6%

	Agree	Disagree
Rep	92%	8%
Dem	98%	2%

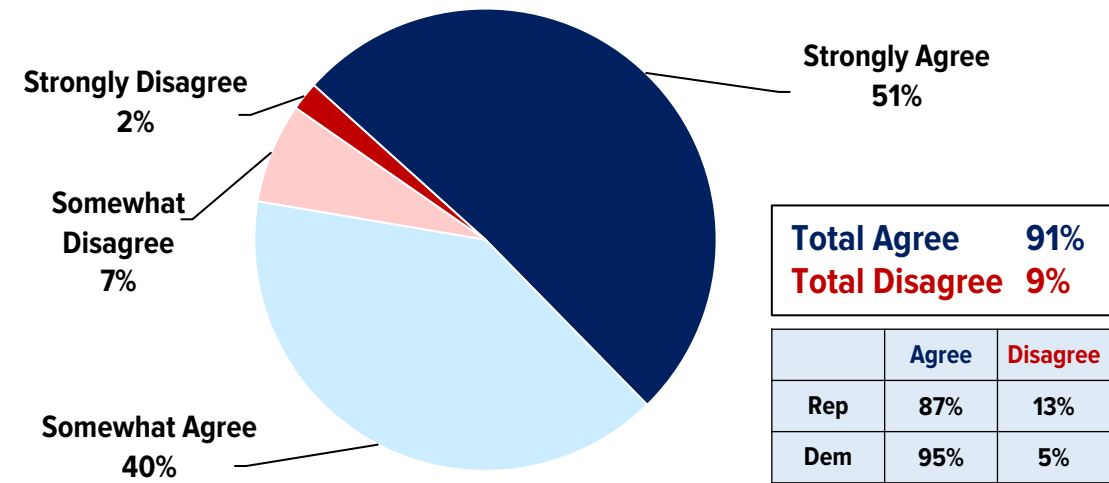
# Paid internships that qualify for academic credit are best for students.

Internships provide crucial connections to potential employers and workplace experience, whether a student is in a STEM or liberal arts course of study.

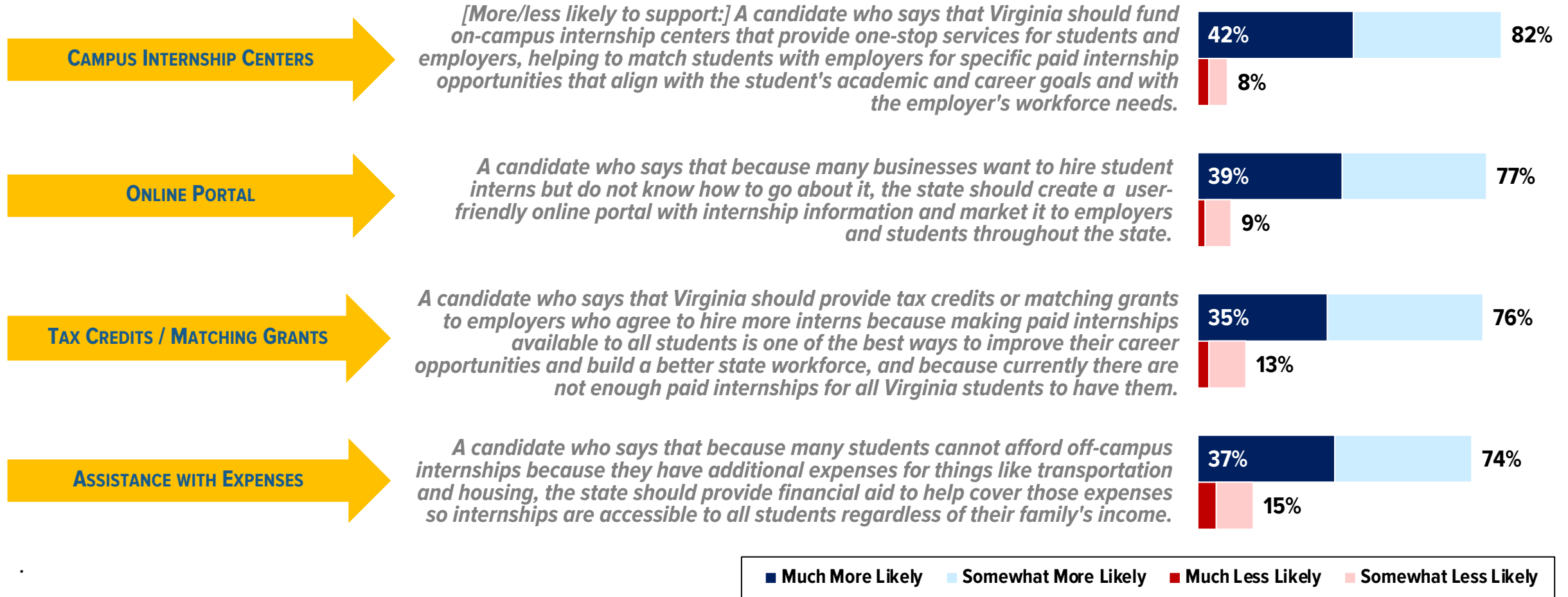
*Internships can provide life-changing benefits for students by helping them gain practical skills to be job-ready and increase their chances of securing good jobs after graduation. But many students currently do not have these internship opportunities because they have part-time job obligations, do not receive enough wages or expenses to afford an internship, and do not receive college credit for the internship. Therefore, the state should make it a priority to help Virginia's colleges and universities provide all students with paid internships that also result in academic credit.*



*Liberal arts majors at Virginia's colleges and universities learn valuable skills that employers need, such as written and verbal communications, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem solving. To make these graduates even more attractive to employers, the college curriculum should include internships and other work-based learning opportunities that provide practical experience in the student's field of study.*



# Virginians favor candidates who support these internship investments.



# Virginians favor employer tax credits or grants to expand internships.

**“To increase internship opportunities and strengthen the workforce, some states provide matching grants or tax credits to employers who hire interns. How important do you think it is for the state to provide such grants or tax credits to employers who have interns in the following situations?”**

*For employers of teachers, healthcare workers, and in other occupations that have significant shortages of qualified workers.*



*For employers who agree to significantly expand their internship programs and allow many more students to intern with their business.*



*For small and mid-size businesses that otherwise might not be able to afford to hire interns.*



*For employers that provide internships for first-generation college students, low-income students, and others who typically do not have those opportunities.*



*For employers that provide internships for veterans and family members of veterans and military personnel.*



*For businesses in high-growth sectors of the economy where the workers they need are in especially high demand.*

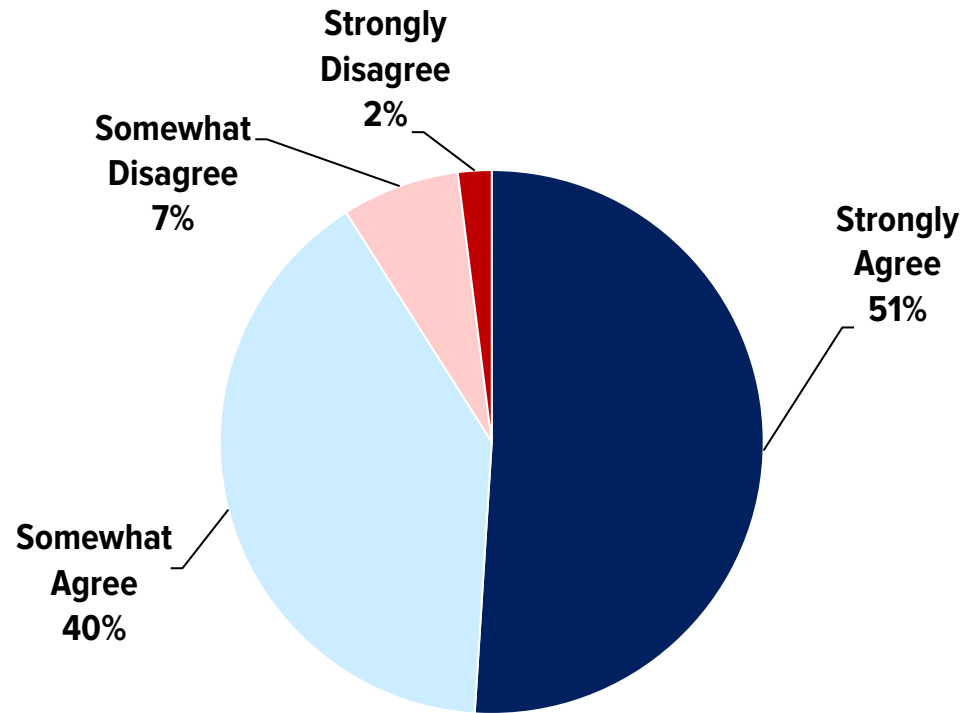


■ Very Important   ■ Somewhat Important   ■ Not At All Important   ■ Somewhat Not Important

# Virginians want to combine internships with effective career coaching.

Career coaching advises students on courses of study and work-based learning opportunities that provide pathways to good job and career opportunities in particular fields. A new policy initiative that focuses on providing students this kind of practical help would receive strong support from Virginia voters.

*The state should provide funding for colleges and universities to provide students with high-quality academic and career coaching that helps students access in-demand career pathways, connects students to employers through internships and mentoring, and offers comprehensive mental health and academic support services.*



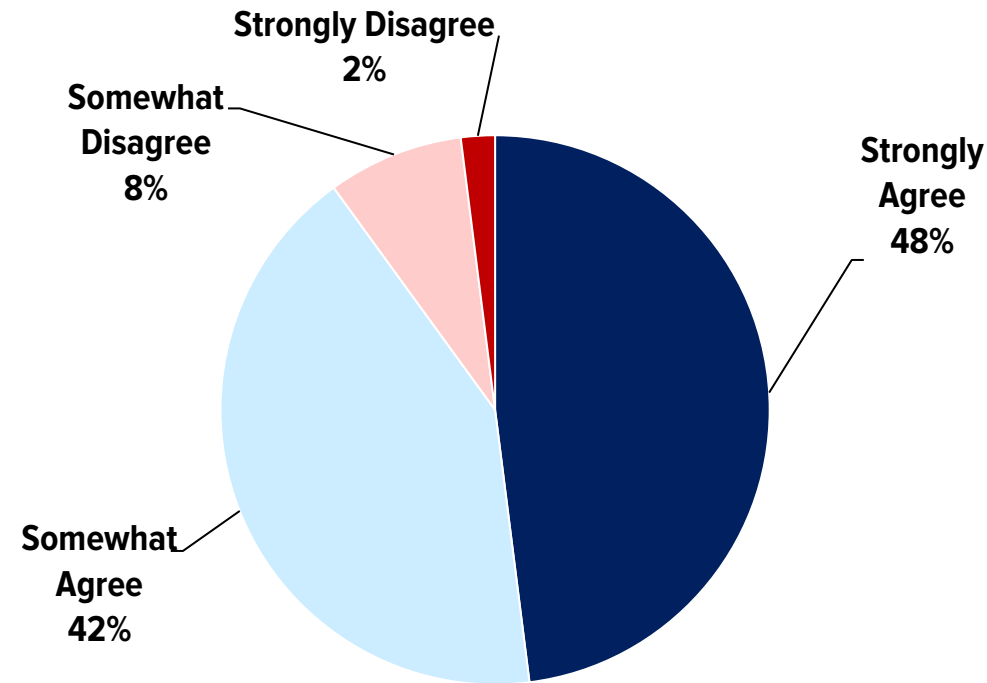
Total Agree	91%
Total Disagree	9%

	Agree	Disagree
Rep	86%	14%
Dem	97%	3%

# Virginians want internship grants for students training to be teachers.

Since public school systems typically cannot afford to pay student teachers, we asked about a potential state initiative to provide grants for students who intern in the classroom. Such a proposal would generate strong support.

*Since most public school systems cannot afford to pay student teachers serving as interns, the state should provide grants to student teachers to help make internships financially affordable and to keep new teachers in Virginia after graduation.*



Total Agree	90%
Total Disagree	10%

	Agree	Disagree
Rep	86%	14%
Dem	96%	4%

# Paid internships are a top factor determining lifelong career success.

According to a Business Higher Education Forum study,\* paid internships are a top determinant of whether a student is employed at their education level or underemployed throughout their career.

*Large majorities of Virginia voters want the state and colleges to partner with employers in practical ways to expand these opportunities.*

*One of the biggest obstacles to business growth today is the difficulty of finding well-qualified entry-level employees. Internships can help solve this problem by attracting talented young people and giving employers the opportunity to assess their abilities before offering a full-time position.*



*Virginia should provide hands-on assistance to employers to help them start or expand paid internship programs and to help match them with students whose academic and career goals align with the employers' workforce needs.*



*Virginia should encourage public and private employers to revise job postings so that high-quality internships can satisfy work experience requirements, making it easier for young graduates to stay and find jobs in Virginia.*



\* Source: “Expanding Internships: Harnessing Employer Insights to Boost Opportunity and Enhance Learning”, Business Higher Education Forum, 9/2024.

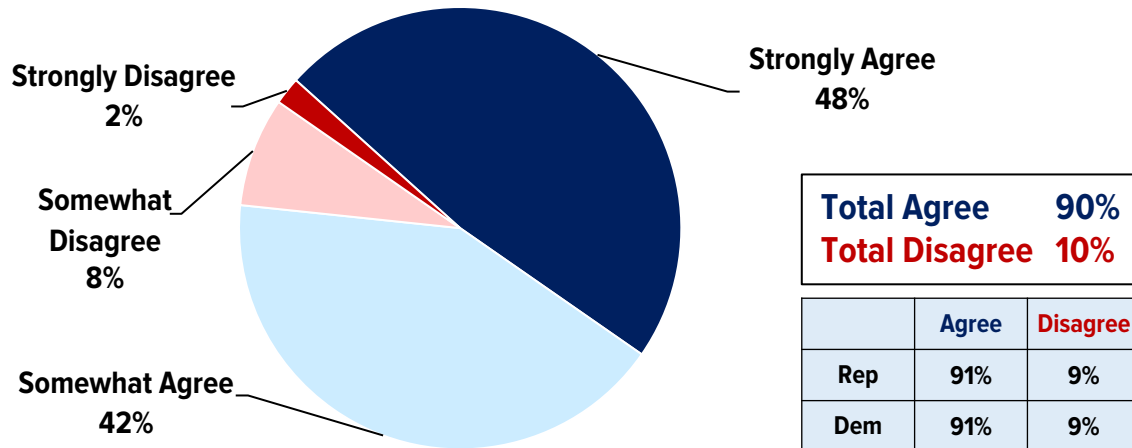


# Virginians support expanding business-higher ed partnerships.

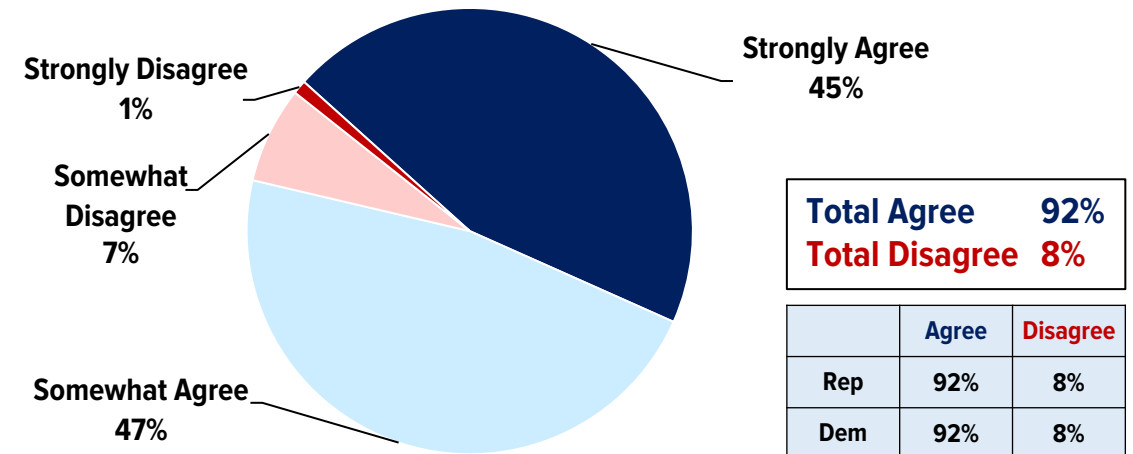
Voters want the state to provide financial incentives to encourage formation of partnerships between businesses and higher education institutions.

Voters also favor streamlining regulatory processes so colleges can better meet employers' workforce needs.

*The state should financially incentivize businesses and higher education institutions to form partnerships because these partnerships help schools recruit talented students, operate more efficiently, align academic programs with workforce needs, and turn university-based research into new enterprises and investments that support regional economic growth.*



*The state should streamline the regulatory approval process for new academic programs so colleges can respond more quickly to changing workforce needs and demands of prospective students, while also holding colleges and universities accountable for the outcomes of these programs, such as student enrollment and job placement rates.*



# Voters support investment strategies to reverse Virginia's loss of talent.

“Some state leaders are warning of a possible brain drain with younger, better educated people leaving to take jobs in other states. This warning is backed up by data showing that more younger people have moved away from Virginia than have moved into the state over the last 10 years. Knowing this, please indicate if you support or oppose each of the following proposals.”

*Encouraging Virginia college graduates to stay in Virginia by establishing partnerships between Virginia businesses and higher education so more students have paid internships that connect them to Virginia-based employers during their college years.*



*Providing new student loans that will be forgiven if the student remains employed in Virginia for five years after graduation in their chosen field of study or another field that is experiencing a shortage of qualified workers.*



*Providing competitive compensation for college faculty to prevent the loss of talented faculty members to other states, maintain our colleges' top national rankings, and provide students the high-quality instruction they need to succeed.*



■ Strongly Support   ■ Somewhat Support   ■ Strongly Oppose   ■ Somewhat Oppose

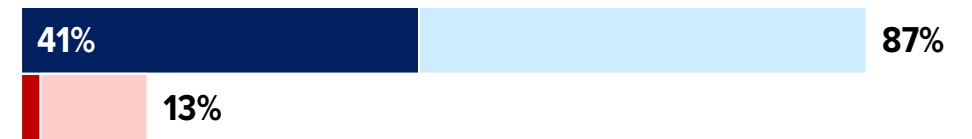
# Virginians favor competitive enrollment policies to attract and retain talent.

**“Virginia's colleges and universities face stiff competition when recruiting students. Colleges and universities in other states, especially those in neighboring TN, NC, and MD, are luring Virginia students to their schools by offering tuition breaks, scholarships, and other incentives that Virginia typically does not match. Once these students leave for college, many do not return. Knowing that, please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements.”**

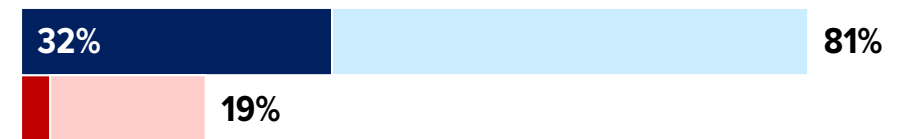
*The state should provide flexibility to Virginia colleges and universities that need to enroll more students so these institutions can offer financial incentives and compete effectively for in-state and out-of-state students.*



*While many of Virginia's colleges and universities have no trouble attracting students, some of Virginia's higher education institutions now have declining student enrollment. These colleges typically are major employers in their regions and are important to the local economy. To help make sure these colleges with declining enrollment remain healthy and viable, the state government should give them flexibility to enroll more out-of-state students.*



*Virginia should invest in attracting talented out-of-state students through a national marketing campaign that highlights Virginia's top-ranked higher education system and Virginia's best-in-the nation talent pathways program that helps students get paid internships during college and jobs after graduation.*



■ Strongly Agree   ■ Somewhat Agree   ■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Somewhat Disagree

# Bringing it all together: “Affordable Talent Pathways”

## **AFFORDABLE TALENT PATHWAYS** FEATURE THESE 4 ELEMENTS:

- 1** Educators and employers (colleges and businesses) will partner to **align curriculum** with workforce needs and **create efficient pathways to marketable degrees and credentials** through our top-ranked higher education system, leading to resilient careers and fulfilling lives.
- 2** Along these pathways from learning to earning, every Virginian will have the opportunity for a **paid internship, apprenticeship, or other work-based learning experience** with a Virginia employer.
- 3** The pathways will be **affordable for everyone**: for young people who may be the first in their family to go to college ... for students and families who face financial hardships ... for unemployed and under-employed adults who need new skills to find their place in the new economy ... *for all Virginians*.
- 4** The pathways will lead to **full-time employment here in Virginia**, thereby reversing the loss of Virginia’s talent to other states, providing well-prepared workers and community leaders, and making Virginia a magnet for talent, innovation, and investment.

# Virginians prefer candidates who want to invest in affordable talent pathways.

## REDUCE TIME AND COST OF GETTING A DEGREE AND JOB

*A candidate who says Virginia should invest in creating more talent pathways where colleges, community colleges, and high schools work together with businesses to streamline coursework, provide work experience while learning, and reduce the time and cost of getting a degree followed by a full-time job.*

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Child H.H.	No Child	Men	Women
More/Less Likely	82/7	83/9	82/6	79/6	90/6	79/8	79/7	84/8

## CONNECT STUDENTS WITH VA EMPLOYERS WHILE IN COLLEGE

*A candidate who says we need to invest in creating more talent pathways in Virginia because the best way to keep talented young people from moving away from our state after graduation is to connect them to Virginia businesses while they are still in college, such as through internships and co-op programs that can lead to full-time employment in Virginia.*

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Child H.H.	No Child	Men	Women
More/Less Likely	83/7	82/10	87/4	73/11	80/11	84/6	82/7	84/8

## BUILD PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN COLLEGES AND BUSINESSES

*A candidate who says the General Assembly should provide financial incentives that encourage colleges and community colleges to form "talent pathway" partnerships with businesses and other employers so that any student who stays in Virginia will have an affordable pathway to a degree, an internship or co-op opportunity while in college, and a Virginia-based job after graduation.*

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Child H.H.	No Child	Men	Women
More/Less Likely	79/12	73/20	83/6	80/7	79/13	78/12	78/11	79/11

## PRESERVE VIRGINIA'S COMPETITIVE EDGE ON TALENT

*A candidate who says Virginia's main advantage in competing for business investment is our talented workforce, but that advantage is declining because many young people are moving away from our state after graduation. Therefore, the General Assembly should make it a top priority to create talent pathways that provide incentives for students to come to Virginia for college and stay here for work after graduation.*

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Child H.H.	No Child	Men	Women
More/Less Likely	81/9	79/12	84/5	76/10	85/9	79/9	80/9	82/9

# Virginians prefer candidates who want to invest in affordable talent pathways.

## EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FIRST-GENERATION & LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

*A candidate who says we need to invest in creating more talent pathways in Virginia because they are especially helpful for first-generation and low-income college students who otherwise have trouble getting needed work experience and being considered for well-paying jobs.*

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Child H.H.	No Child	Men	Women
More/Less Likely	78/11	78/13	84/4	68/20	81/13	78/10	77/11	79/11

## EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES IN ECONOMICALLY DISTRESSED AREAS

*A candidate who says we need to invest in creating more talent pathways in Virginia because they help young people in economically distressed urban and rural areas get access to good education and job opportunities that otherwise they would miss out on.*

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Child H.H.	No Child	Men	Women
More/Less Likely	82/7	78/10	86/5	80/7	84/11	81/6	81/8	82/6

## EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

*A candidate who says Virginia should invest in creating more talent pathways that are available to students with disabilities, since, quite often, those students do not have good access to internships that can lead to full-time employment.*

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Child H.H.	No Child	Men	Women
More/Less Likely	81/9	76/15	85/5	81/6	76/14	83/7	77/11	85/8

## EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES USING ONLINE TECHNOLOGY

*A candidate who says colleges and businesses should work together to create talent pathways using online technology because having the option to work or study online lets more students have internships through which they get work experience and connections to future employers while still completing their degrees on time.*

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Child H.H.	No Child	Men	Women
More/Less Likely	78/9	78/10	78/8	77/9	81/11	77/9	78/8	78/10



## Policy and Poll Briefing

Spring 2025

**Crosstabs for this survey are provided at [www.Growth4VA.com/newpoll](http://www.Growth4VA.com/newpoll).**

**Please contact VBHEC if we can provide further information or assist in developing campaign speeches, position papers, or detailed policy drafts and legislation.**

**For information or assistance, contact:**

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