



**Contacts:**

Grant Rissler, Ph.D.  
Assistant Director, Office of Public Policy  
Outreach, Center for Public Policy  
(804) 827-2603 or [risslerge@vcu.edu](mailto:risslerge@vcu.edu)

Farrah Stone Graham, Ph.D.  
Survey Director  
(804) 305-3447 or [stonefn@vcu.edu](mailto:stonefn@vcu.edu)

## Virginians support community-based treatment programs for non-violent offenders

RICHMOND, Va. (Aug. 23, 2018) — More than 8 in 10 Virginians favor letting nonviolent offenders with mental illness participate in community-based treatment programs instead of being sentenced to prison or jail, according to a new statewide poll by the [L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs](#) at Virginia Commonwealth University.

A large majority, 83 percent, strongly or somewhat agreed with a community-based treatment option for nonviolent offenders with a mental illness. A slight majority (51 percent) strongly agreed. Only 14 percent strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed.

These findings are statistically unchanged from a 2017 poll that found that 53 percent strongly agreed with diversion of nonviolent offenders with a mental illness to community-based treatment programs.

**Diverting non-violent offenders with mental illness to treatment instead of prison**

*Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statement. Instead of being sentenced to jail or prison for committing a crime, non-violent offenders with mental illness should be required to participate in a community-based treatment program?*

**VCU**  
L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs  
Center for Public Policy

	Strongly agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Aug. 2018	51%	32%	7%	7%	3%
Jan. 2017	53%	35%	6%	4%	2%

Source: 2018 Summer Public Policy Poll, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, VCU

The poll, a random sample of 802 adults in Virginia conducted by landline and cell telephone from July 10-30, has a margin of error of 3.49 percent.

“Since its creation in 2014, the Deeds Commission has focused on improving Virginia’s mental health system in areas such as criminal justice and emergency services,” said Robyn McDougle, Ph.D., director of the Wilder School’s Center for Public Policy. “These findings indicate the public is strongly in support of getting persons suffering mental illness who commit nonviolent crimes the treatment they need in community settings, rather than requiring the commonwealth’s jails and prisons to treat them within a prison setting. These types of policy findings are of significant interest to decision-makers such as those who serve on the commission.”

The poll also asked respondents if they would know how to start the process for obtaining mental health services if they were in need of support. Seventy-two percent said they would know how to start the process, compared to 28 percent who would not know.

Those ages 44 or younger were the most likely to know how to start the process, with 88 percent of 35- to 44-year-olds and 74 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds responding that they would know. In comparison, 68 percent of those ages 45 to 64, and only 59 percent of those 65 and older, would know how to start the process.

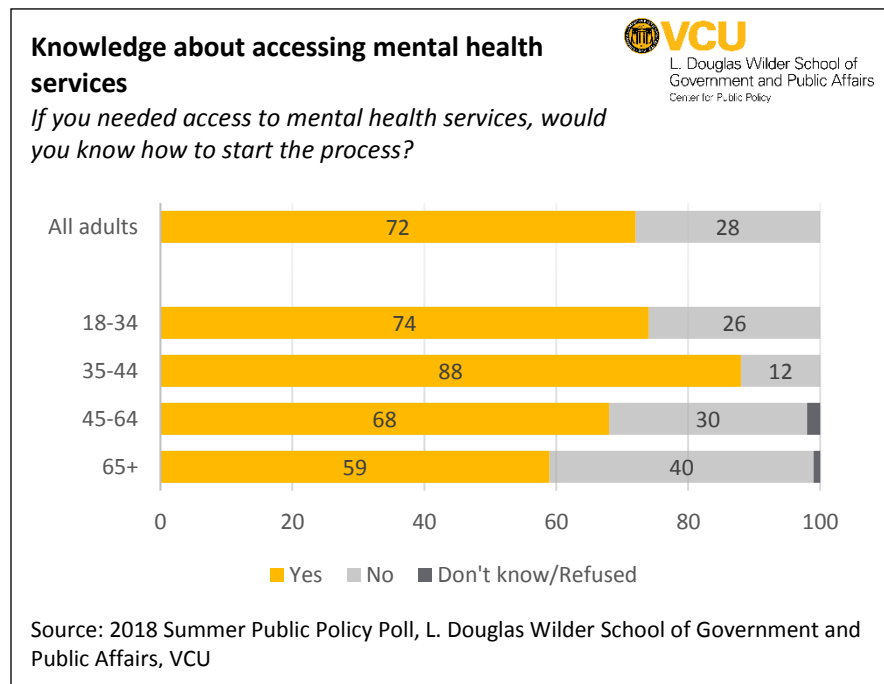
In previously released results that speak to mental health issues, more than 8 in 10 respondents (81 percent) strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that public schools should provide mental health services to students as a core part of their mission, with 49 percent agreeing strongly.

Respondents also were asked their opinion on approaches to addressing issues of school safety, specifically whether to use additional security measures or the mental health system. Respondents were closely split, with a plurality of 41 percent (down from 56 percent in 2017) saying that additional security measures was the right approach to address school safety while 36 percent (up from 27 percent in 2017) thought that safety issues should be addressed through the mental health system. Twenty percent (up from 11 percent in 2017) volunteered that both approaches should be used.

As part of its mission to inform public policy and decision-making, the VCU Wilder School is partnering with the VCU Department of Psychiatry and the Joint Subcommittee to Study Mental Health Services in the Commonwealth in the 21st Century (also known as the Deeds Commission) to host a half-day “Mental Health Mini-University” at the state Capitol on Thursday, Sept. 6, from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

This event will feature presentations on mental health and workforce development and the health effects of marijuana, alcohol and opioids. The event will include remarks by S. Hughes Melton, M.D., commissioner of the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services.

For a PDF of the 17-page report on these poll results, including complete question wording and detailed tables of results, go to [oppo.vcu.edu](http://oppo.vcu.edu).



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### **About the Wilder School and the Center for Public Policy**

*The L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, named for the nation's first African-American elected governor, is a top 50 nationally ranked public affairs school. Located blocks from the state Capitol in Richmond, Virginia, the school enrolls about 1,000 undergraduates and 400 graduate students in eight programs. More than 10,000 alumni of the Wilder School work in Fortune 500 companies, local governments, advocacy groups and public interest firms. Drawing on the wide-ranging expertise of Wilder School faculty, the Center for Public Policy's programs provide diverse public-facing services including leadership development and training, economic and policy impact analysis, survey insights and program evaluation to clients in state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses and the general public, across Virginia and beyond. For more, please visit <https://wilder.vcu.edu/center-for-public-policy/>.*

### **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 217 degree and certificate programs in the arts, sciences and humanities. Thirty-eight of the programs are unique in Virginia, many of them crossing the disciplines of VCU's 11 schools and three colleges. The VCU Health brand represents the VCU health sciences academic programs, 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](http://www.vcu.edu) and [vcuhealth.org](http://vcuhealth.org).*

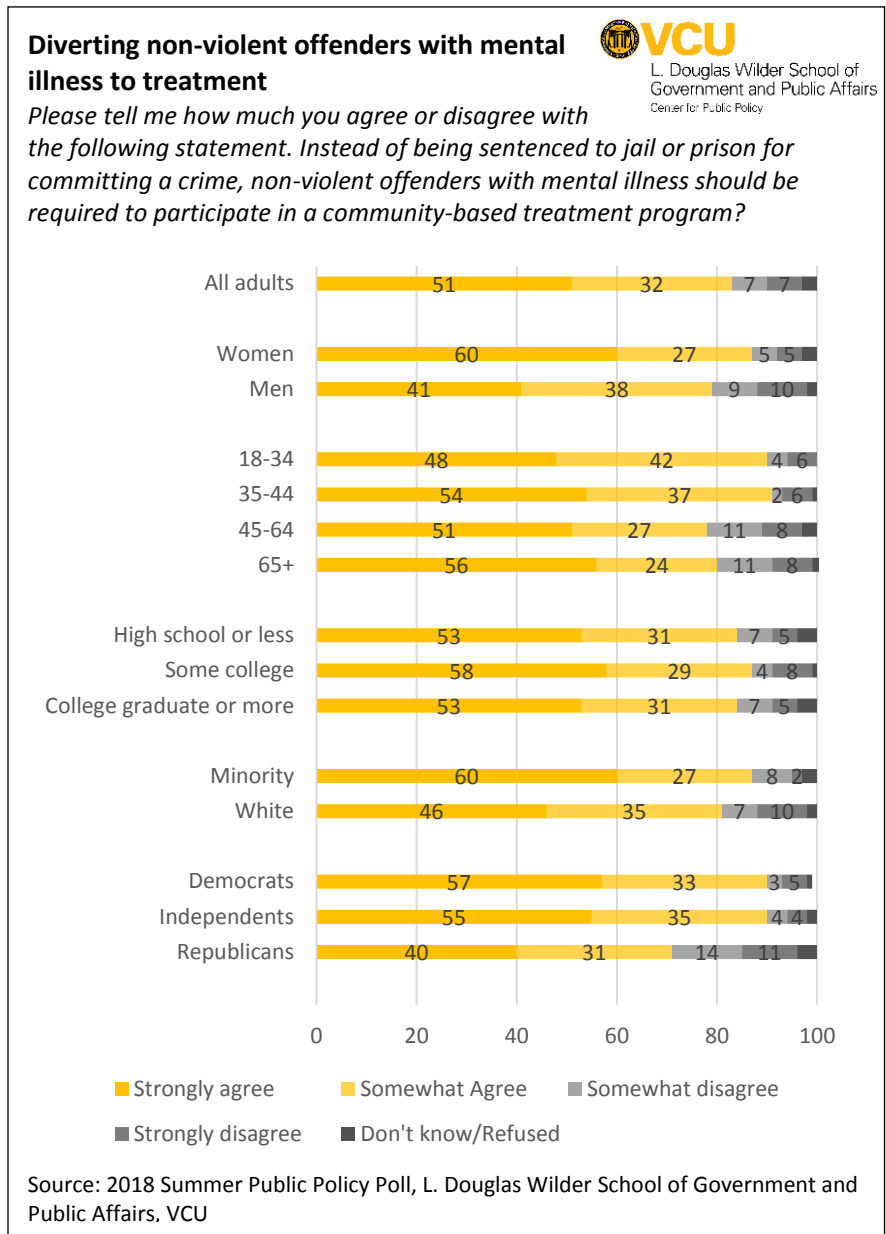
# Community-Based Treatment Programs for Non-Violent Offenders

For the past four years, Virginia State Senator Creigh Deeds has led the Joint Subcommittee Studying Mental Health Services in the Commonwealth in the 21st Century to improve the efficiency of mental health services in Virginia. Topics explored by the Joint Subcommittee include the overall structure and financing of Virginia’s mental health system, crisis response and emergency services, supportive housing, and criminal justice. Ultimately, the hope is to reform Virginia’s mental health system so that it becomes more efficient and effective for those in need of services.

According to poll results, Virginians are in favor of one potential reform for the criminal justice system — providing alternate programs to incarceration for non-violent offenders with a mental illness.

When asked if non-violent offenders with a mental illness should be required to participate in a community-based treatment program rather than being sentenced to jail or prison for committing a crime, a large majority, 83 percent, strongly or somewhat agreed, with a slight majority of 51 percent strongly agreeing. Only

14 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed. These findings are statistically unchanged from a 2017 poll



that found 53 percent strongly agreed with diversion of non-violent offenders with a mental illness to community-based treatment programs.

Eighty-seven percent of women and 79 percent of men either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed. Analyzing political affiliation, 90 percent of Democrats, 85 percent of independents, and 71 percent of Republicans strongly agreed or somewhat agreed. At 25 percent, Republicans were the most likely to somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

A large majority of those ages 18 to 34 (90 percent) and 35 to 44 (91 percent) strongly or somewhat agreed, with 48 percent and 54 percent, respectively, agreeing strongly. Those ages 45 to 64 and those 65 and older were less likely to agree, with 78 and 80 percent, respectively, agreeing strongly or somewhat. Minority respondents were also more likely to strongly agree, at 60 percent, compared to 46 percent of white respondents. Those with some college experience were more likely to strongly agree with 58 percent, compared with 44 percent of those with an education of high school or less.

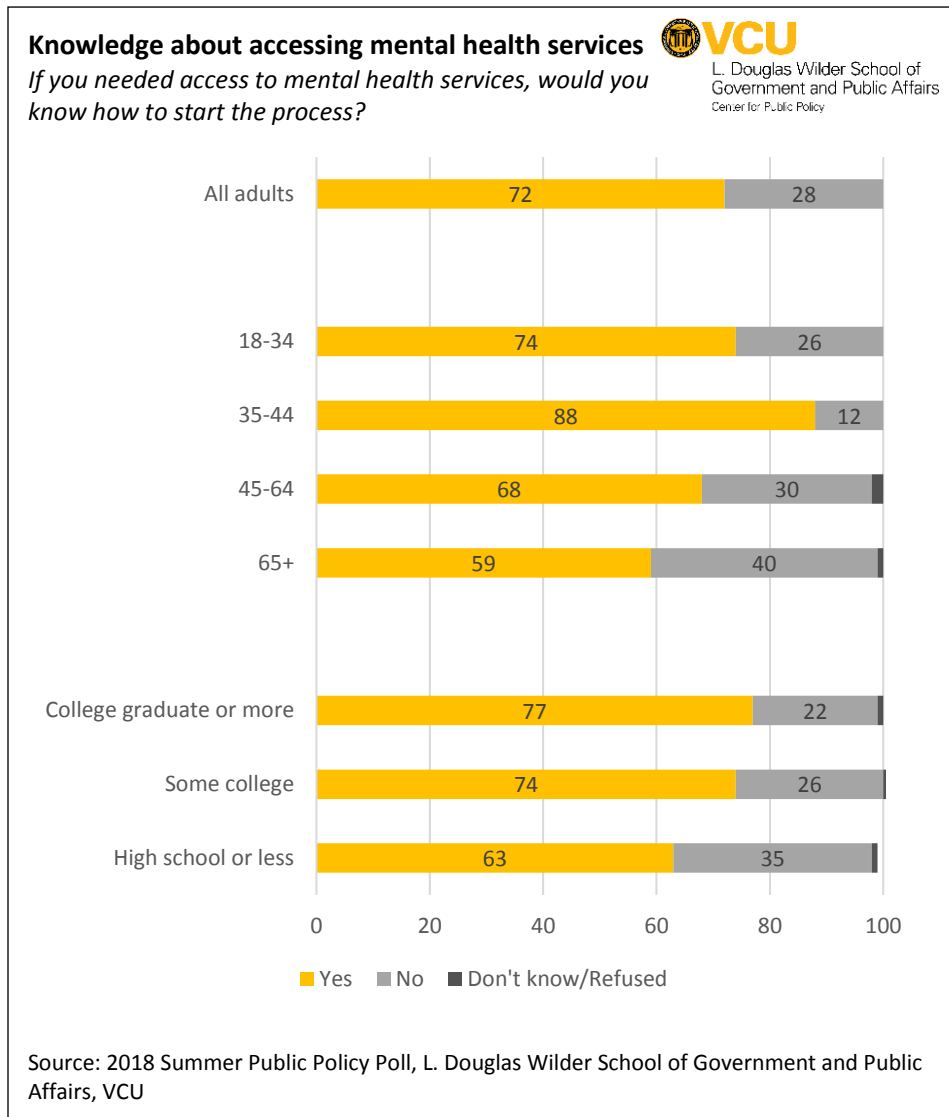
## Do Virginians Know How to Access Mental Health Services?

When asked if participants would know how to start the process if they needed access to mental health services, the majority (72 percent) reported that they would know, compared to 28 percent who would not.

Those ages 45 or younger were the most likely to know how to start the process, with 88 percent of 35- to 44-year-olds and 74 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds responding that they would know.

In comparison, 68 percent of those ages 45 to 64, and only 59 percent of those 65 and older, would know how to start the process.

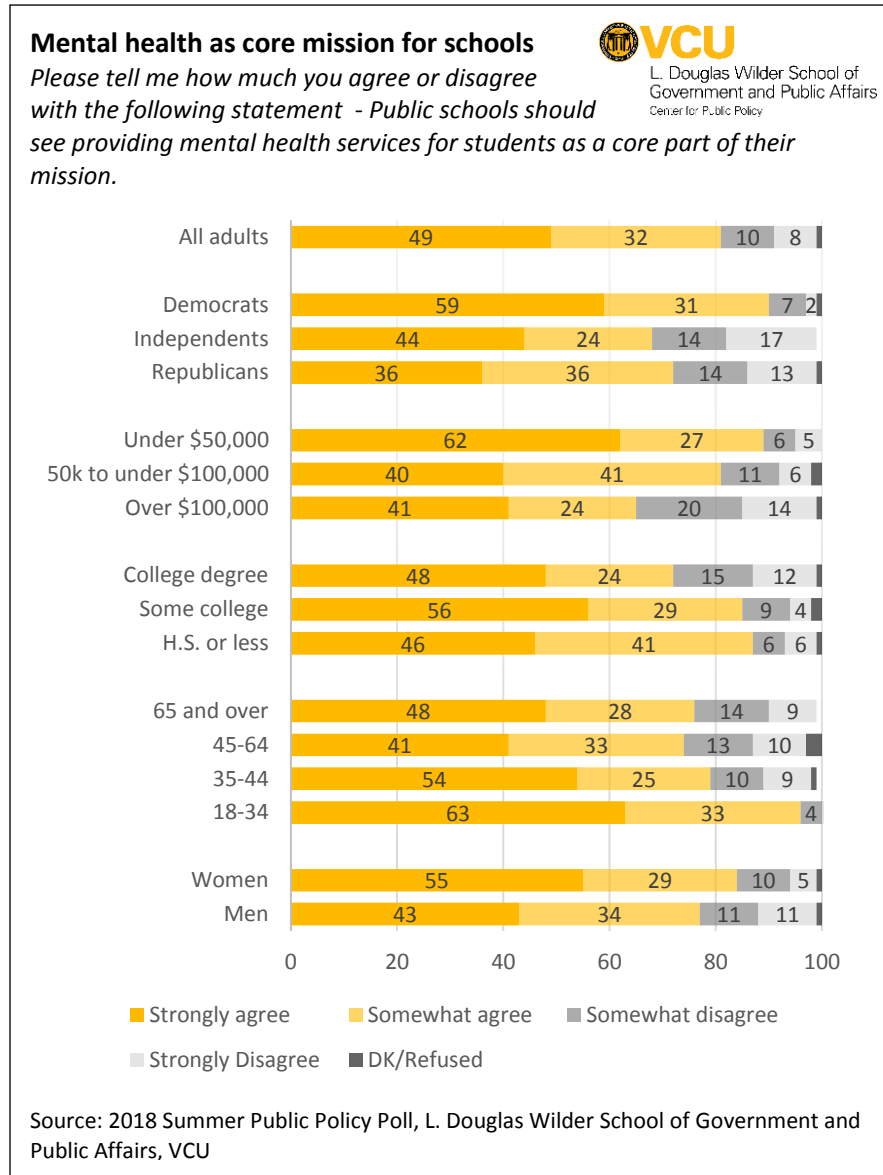
Those with at least some college experience were more likely to know how to start the process, with 77 percent of those with a college degree and 74 percent of those with some experience responding that they would know. Only 63 percent of those with an education of high school or less said that they would know how to start the process of seeking services.



# Mental Health as Part of Public Schools Core Mission

Schools have traditionally been framed as focusing on core curricula such as reading, writing and arithmetic. In more recent years, however, the range of services seen as important for a school’s mission has expanded to include nutrition (via school lunches) and extra-curricular activities such as athletics and after-school programs. In light of research showing the prevalence of mental health concerns among youth, some have called for schools to become engaged in providing mental health services.

More than 8 in 10 respondents (81 percent) to the poll strongly or somewhat agree that public schools should see providing mental health services as a core part of their mission, with 49 percent agreeing strongly. Only 18 percent disagreed strongly (8 percent) or somewhat (10 percent).



When broken down by demographic group, the following significant differences appear:

- Gender: Women were more likely to strongly agree (55 percent) than men (43 percent).

- Age: Younger respondents, ages 18 to 34, were more likely to agree strongly (at 63 percent) compared to 45- to 64-year-olds (41 percent). Those 65 and older (48 percent) and those ages 35 to 44 (53 percent) fell between those two groups.
- Education: Those with some college experience (at 85 percent) and those with only a high school diploma (at 87 percent) were more likely to agree strongly or somewhat that mental health should be part of the core mission, compared to those with a college degree, where agreement was only 72 percent.
- Income: Those making less than \$50,000 were more likely to strongly agree (at 62 percent) compared to only 40 percent of those making \$50,000 to \$100,000 and 41 percent of those making more than \$100,000.
- Party: Democrats were more likely to strongly agree (at 59 percent), compared to 44 percent of independents and 36 percent of Republicans who said the same.

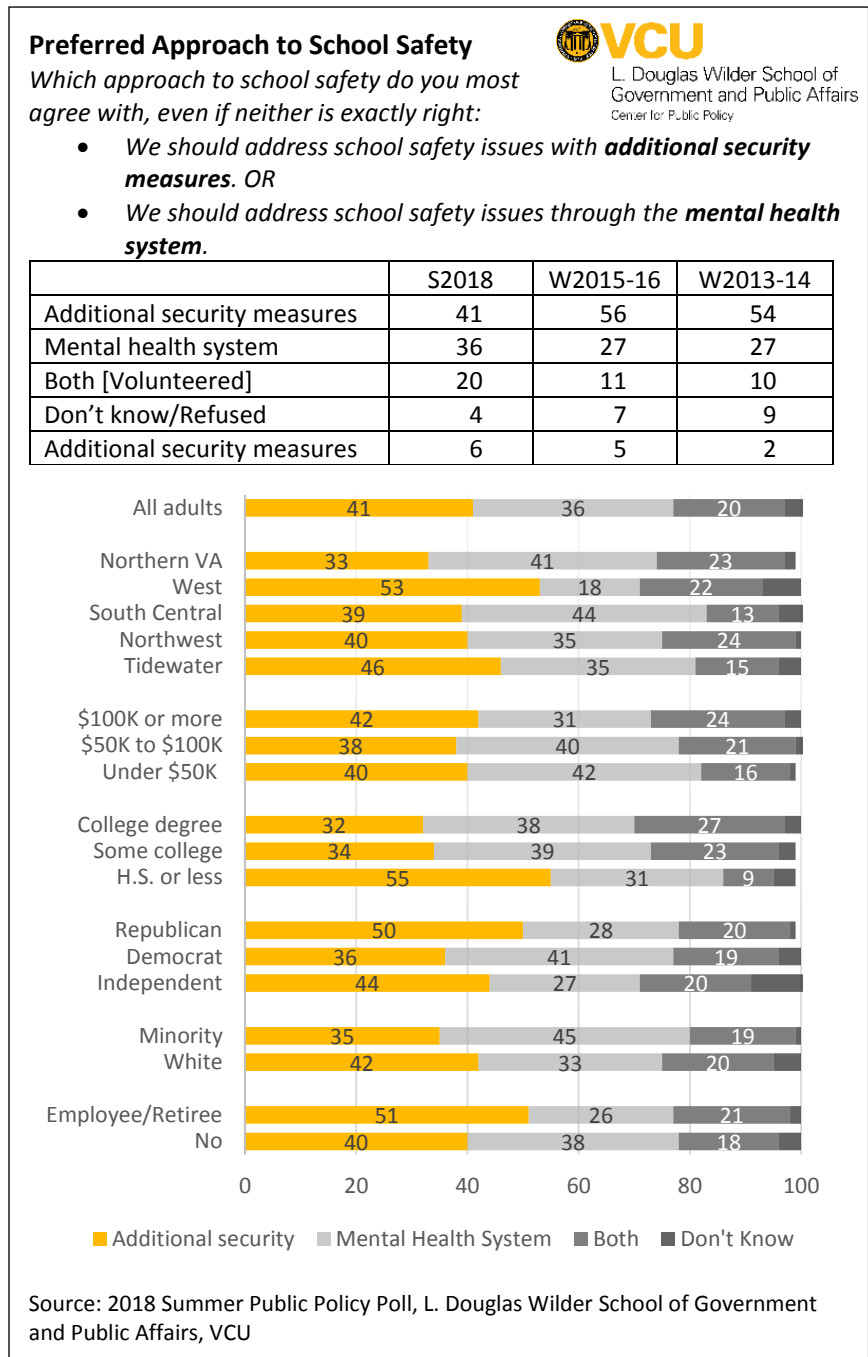


# Preferred Approach to Addressing School Safety

Respondents were also asked their opinion on approaches to addressing issues of school safety, specifically whether to use additional security measures or the mental health system. Respondents were closely split, with a plurality of 41 percent saying that additional security measures was the right approach to address school safety and 36 percent thought that safety issues should be addressed through the mental health system. Twenty percent volunteered that both approaches should be used.

These findings mark a significant change from two prior surveys in January 2014 and January 2016. Those saying additional security measures were the right option dropped by 15 points compared to early 2016, while the portion selecting the mental health system increased by 9 points

from 27 percent to 36 percent. The number saying both should be used also increased by 9 points from 11 percent to 20 percent. Looking at the change in more detail, in 2016 every demographic group analyzed preferred additional security to working through the mental health system. In the current poll,



a plurality of respondents preferred a mental health approach in the Northern Virginia and South Central regions, among those with incomes below \$100,000, those with some college or a college degree, Democrats and minority respondents. A more detailed examination of the significant differences within demographic groups follows.

The regional differences regarding which approach to use were significant. Respondents from the Tidewater (46 percent) and West (53 percent) regions were significantly more likely to think additional security measures should be used. This compared to 40 percent in the Northwest region, 39 percent in the South Central region and 33 percent in Northern Virginia who said the same. Conversely, South Central (44 percent) and Northern Virginia (41 percent) were more likely to think that the mental health system should be used compared to respondents in the Tidewater (35 percent), Northwest (35 percent) and West (18 percent) regions.

Family income, education level, party, ethnicity and working in a school also played a role. Respondents with a household income over \$100,000 (at 31 percent) were less likely to agree that the mental health system should be used, compared to 40 percent of those with incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 42 percent of those with incomes less than \$50,000. At the same time, respondents with a household income over \$100,000 (at 24 percent) were more likely to volunteer that both strategies should be used, compared to 21 percent of those with incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000 and 16 percent of those with incomes less than \$50,000.

Those with a high school diploma or less (at 55 percent) were more likely to think additional security measures should be used, compared to those with a college degree or higher, where only 32 percent, and those with some college, where only 34 percent said the same. With regard to party identification, 50 percent of Republicans believe additional security measures should be used compared to 44 percent of independents and 36 percent of Democrats.

Additionally, minority respondents were more likely (at 45 percent) to say that the mental health system should be the primary approach compared to 33 percent of white respondents who said the same. Finally, school employees or retirees were more likely to agree with using security measures (51 percent) compared to those who were not (40 percent).

# Methodology and Sample Information

## VCU Wilder School 2018 Summer Public Policy Poll

### SUMMARY

The Summer 2018 Public Policy Poll, conducted by the Office of Public Policy Outreach at Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, obtained telephone interviews among 802 respondents. The telephone surveys were conducted with respondents 18+ years old, living across five areas/regions in Virginia. Issues and Answers Network, Inc. conducted the surveys between July 10 and July 30, 2018. Interviews were conducted with 400 landline (49.9%) and 402 cell (50.1%) phone with soft quotas implemented by region and gender. The average interview length was 15 minutes and conducted in English.

As with the previous wave, the same contact procedures were used for the landline and cell samples. For the landline sample, the program was set up to ask for the youngest adult male/female currently at home. If the specific gender was not available at the time of the call, the interviewer would ask to speak with the youngest male/female currently at home. For the cell phone sample, interviews were conducted with the person answering the phone. The program was set up to verify the respondent was an adult and in a safe place to take the survey. Both sample sources verified they were residents of Virginia.

The data was weighted using an iterative raking technique in WinCross that uses iterative proportional fitting techniques. This method avoids negative weights. Respondents were weighted on several demographics to match a previous wave of this study data and to maintain levels of non-response for each question. The previous study was weighted to 2010 U.S. Census data. The demographics weighted on were:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Race/Hispanic identity
4. Education
5. Region
6. Population Density
7. HH Telephone Use

The survey's margin of error is +/- 3.49 percentage points, meaning that we are 95 percent confident that the actual result lies within 3.49 percentage points (in either direction) of the result our sample produced. The chart on the following page shows unweighted and weighted data for demographic items including those used in developing weights.

# Topline

2018 Summer Public Policy Poll, VCU's Office for Public Policy Outreach,  
L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

State-wide survey of Virginians<sup>1</sup>

July 10-30, 2018

Number of Respondents: 802

## QUESTIONS 1 THRU 8 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

[Q9 originally released on August 14, 2018]

Q9. Which approach to school safety do you most agree with, even if neither is exactly right: **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

- We should address school safety issues with additional security measures. OR
- We should address school safety issues through the mental health system.

	<b>Aug 18</b>	<b>15-16</b>	<b>13-14</b>
	%	%	%
Additional security measures	41	56	54
Mental health system	36	27	27
Both [Volunteered]	20	11	10
Don't know/Refused	4	7	9

## QUESTION 10 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

Q11. If you needed access to mental health services, would you know how to start the process?

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
	%	%	%
Aug. 18	72	28	1

[Q12 originally released on August 14, 2018]

Q12. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statement [READ] - Public schools should see providing mental health services for students as a core part of their mission.

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
	%	%	%	%	%
Aug. 18	49	32	10	8	1

Q13. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statement. Instead of being sentenced to jail or prison for committing a crime, non-violent offenders with mental illness should be required to participate in a community-based treatment program.

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
	%	%	%	%	%
Aug. 18	51	32	7	7	3
Jan. 17	53	35	6	4	2

<sup>1</sup> 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%.

QUESTIONS 14 THRU 16 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

NO QUESTIONS 17 THRU 19

QUESTIONS 20 THRU 22 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

## Tables for Subgroup Analysis

Based on All Respondents

		Q9. Which approach to school safety do you most agree with, even if neither is exactly right: [READ AND RANDOMIZE]				
		Additional security	Mental health system	Both (Volunteered)	Don't know	Number of cases
All adults		41%	36%	20%	4%	802
VA Region	Northwest	40%	35%	24%	1%	111
	Northern VA	33%	41%	23%	2%	237
	West	53%	18%	22%	7%	136
	South Central	39%	44%	13%	5%	137
	Tidewater	46%	35%	15%	4%	181
Gender	Men	40%	37%	18%	5%	388
	Women	42%	35%	21%	2%	414
Age	18-34	39%	44%	13%	5%	61
	35-44	32%	38%	27%	3%	71
	45-64	44%	31%	24%	2%	338
	65 and older	44%	32%	20%	4%	284
Education	H.S. or less	55%	31%	9%	4%	135
	Some college	34%	39%	23%	3%	184
	College grad or more	32%	38%	27%	3%	470
Family Income	Under \$50,000	40%	42%	16%	1%	180
	50K to under \$100,000	38%	40%	21%	2%	213
	\$100,000 or more	42%	31%	24%	3%	250
Race	White	42%	33%	20%	5%	598
	Minority	35%	45%	19%	1%	149
Parent of public school student?	Yes	45%	33%	17%	4%	139
	No	40%	36%	20%	3%	663
School employee or retiree	Yes	51%	26%	21%	2%	175
	No	40%	38%	18%	4%	623
Party identification	Democrat	36%	41%	19%	4%	370
	Republican	50%	28%	20%	1%	324
	Independent	44%	27%	20%	10%	81

Q11. If you needed access to mental health services, would you know how to start the process?

		Yes	No	Don't know	Number of cases
All adults		72%	28%	1%	802
VA Region	Northwest	76%	24%	1%	111
	Northern VA	71%	27%	1%	237
	West	74%	25%	1%	136
	South Central	72%	28%	0%	137
	Tidewater	67%	32%	2%	181
Gender	Men	71%	27%	1%	388
	Women	72%	28%	1%	414
Age	18-34	74%	26%	0%	61
	35-44	88%	12%	0%	71
	45-64	68%	30%	2%	338
	65 and older	59%	40%	1%	284
Education	H.S. or less	63%	35%	1%	135
	Some college	74%	26%	1%	184
	College grad or more	77%	22%	1%	470
Family Income	Under \$50,000	75%	24%	1%	180
	50K to under \$100,000	75%	23%	2%	213
	\$100,000 or more	70%	29%	0%	250
Race	White	72%	27%	1%	598
	Minority	73%	27%	0%	149
Party identification	Democrat	73%	26%	1%	370
	Republican	70%	29%	1%	324
	Independent	68%	29%	3%	81

		Q12. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statement [READ] - Public schools should see providing mental health services for students as a core part of their mission.					
		Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Number of cases
All adults		49%	32%	10%	8%	1%	802
VA Region	Northwest	47%	29%	12%	7%	5%	111
	Northern VA	49%	31%	11%	8%	0%	237
	West	50%	36%	5%	8%	1%	136
	South Central	49%	34%	12%	4%	0%	137
	Tidewater	51%	27%	11%	9%	2%	181
Gender	Men	43%	34%	11%	11%	1%	388
	Women	55%	29%	10%	5%	1%	414
Age	18-34	63%	33%	4%	1%	0%	61
	35-44	54%	25%	10%	9%	1%	71
	45-64	41%	33%	13%	10%	3%	338
	65 and older	48%	28%	14%	9%	0%	284
Education	H.S. or less	46%	41%	6%	6%	1%	135
	Some college	56%	29%	9%	4%	2%	184
	College grad or more	48%	24%	15%	12%	1%	470
Family Income	Under \$50,000	62%	27%	6%	5%	0%	180
	50K to under \$100,000	40%	41%	11%	6%	2%	213
	\$100,000 or more	41%	24%	20%	14%	1%	250
Race	White	48%	30%	13%	9%	1%	598
	Minority	52%	36%	5%	5%	2%	149
Parent of public school student?	Yes	57%	21%	10%	12%	0%	139
	No	48%	34%	10%	7%	2%	663
School employee or retiree	Yes	47%	37%	8%	8%	1%	175
	No	50%	30%	11%	8%	1%	623
Party identification	Democrat	59%	31%	7%	2%	1%	370
	Republican	36%	36%	14%	13%	1%	324
	Independent	44%	24%	14%	17%	0%	81



Q13. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statement. Instead of being sentenced to jail or prison for committing a crime, non-violent offenders with mental illness should be required to participate in a community-based treatment program.

		Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Number of cases
All adults		51%	32%	7%	7%	3%	802
VA Region	Northwest	42%	41%	7%	8%	2%	111
	Northern VA	54%	30%	8%	4%	5%	237
	West	47%	33%	6%	13%	1%	136
	South Central	54%	33%	5%	7%	1%	137
	Tidewater	52%	28%	10%	7%	2%	181
Gender	Men	41%	38%	9%	10%	2%	388
	Women	60%	27%	5%	5%	3%	414
Age	18-34	48%	42%	4%	6%	0%	61
	35-44	54%	37%	2%	6%	1%	71
	45-64	51%	27%	11%	8%	3%	338
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