

KIDS DESERVE BETTER IN VIRGINIA: VOTERS PUT CHILDREN FIRST

[Final Edition]

Daily Press - Newport News, Va.

Author: BEVERLY N. WILLIAMS and ANGELA FOREST bwilliams@dailypress.com | 247-4755 aforest@dailypress.com | 247-7863
Date: Aug 12, 2005
Start Page: C.1
Section: Local News
Text Word Count: 891

Document Text

Copyright Chicago Tribune Co. Aug 12, 2005

The gubernatorial candidates see poll results as proof that their plans for children and education are headed in the right direction.

A survey of some Virginia voters say education and issues affecting children are more important to them than jobs, traffic or the economy. They also think these will be the most important issues facing the next governor.

A majority of those polled list their top concerns as children's healthcare, finding better teachers and expanding after-school programs, according to a new Mason-Dixon poll. And many said these issues and what the gubernatorial candidates think about them could determine who gets their vote in November.

The poll was part of the Kids Deserve Better in Virginia campaign, which seeks to get the public more involved in the governor's race when it comes to children's issues. The campaign and the poll are a joint effort of three nonprofit groups -- Every Child Matters, the Afterschool Alliance and Voices for Virginia's children.

"Voters are clear," said Suzanne Clark Johnson, president of Voices for Virginia's Children. "Candidate's positions on children's issues have an important impact on their votes."

Eighty-seven percent of voters surveyed said children need more after-school programs, good health care and protection from abuse. Another 78 percent think people are morally responsible for making sure all children succeed and that the state should invest in their future.

This view differs from widespread beliefs that the family, not the government, should address these problems, Johnson said.

Mason-Dixon surveyed 625 people in the last week of July who described themselves as likely to vote in the November election. The results have a margin of error of 3.9 percent.

Campaign organizers noted that the results show more than half of those polled don't know where the gubernatorial candidates stand on issues affecting children.

They hope the poll will compel Republican Jerry Kilgore, Democrat Tim Kane and independent Russell Potts to be more comprehensive when talking about the needs of Virginia's youngest citizens.

None of the candidates attended the groups' press conference Thursday because all were out campaigning in different parts of the state. Their spokespeople, however, said education and other children's issues are important to the candidates.

"Education and the funding of education at the state level has been a real priority for Lt. Governor Kaine," said Delacey Skinner. "And pre-kindergarten is the centerpiece of his education plan, which calls for universal pre-kindergarten for every child."

Kaine also worked closely with Gov. Mark Warner, she said, to ensure that all children get health insurance.

"These issues are incredibly important to Virginians," Skinner said, "and Lt. Gov. Kaine is encouraged by the fact that the polls shows Virginians are concerned about them."

Johnson said Kilgore and Kaine have done a better job than previous candidates for governor in discussing topics such as gangs, domestic violence and early education, but there's still room for improvement. With the media and traditional pollsters centering only on education, she said the candidates fail to delve deeply into other children's issues like after-school programs.

Karen Washington, supervisor for the Newport News parks and recreation school-age program, knows the value of quality after-school care. Her daughter, Jessika, is enrolled in the department's summer program at Kiln Creek Elementary that serves 65 students from 6:50 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

"I wouldn't be able to work without it," Washington said. "I know that she's safe here."

Kilgore spokesman Tucker Martin said the former state attorney general has gone after child pornographers, is pushing for better pay for quality teachers and is a leader in domestic violence issues because he makes children get help when their families are being torn apart.

"Jerry is rallying for rural health clinics in rural localities because so many people there don't have health care," he said. "He also wants a tax credit for individuals or businesses who sign up for or offer long-term care."

Many voters were unsure of Potts' stance on the issues, but the state senator said his record shows that children's issues are a top priority for him.

"If you ask what the biggest cause of a lot of these problems we have in public education is, it's the deterioration of parental involvement," Potts said. And after-school programs are important, he said, because "there are very pivotal years when a youngster walk out those school doors and get in trouble if they don't have a good role model." *

[Table]

89% Percentage of people in a recent poll who want the state to

provide more incentives to recruit and prepare teachers.

SOME OF THE POLL'S RESULTS

A poll funded by three nonprofit groups found that most of those polled consider issues affecting the well-being of children among the most important issues in Virginia. Here are some statistics from a report released by the groups:

* 91% want the state to ensure all children without insurance can get health care.

* 85% want expanded afterschool programs.

* 84% want the state to improve access to child care.

[Illustration]

Staff photo (color) by HEATHER S. HUGHES; Caption: C.J. Moring, 9, of Newport News, concentrates on finishing his house created of plastic sticks while at the Kiln Creek School Age Program at Kiln Creek Elementary School on Thursday afternoon. Newport News Parks and Recreation runs the program five days a week from 6:45 a.m. till 6:30 p.m.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

Abstract (Document Summary)

The poll was part of the Kids Deserve Better in Virginia campaign, which seeks to get the public more involved in the governor's race when it comes to children's issues. The campaign and the poll are a joint effort of three nonprofit groups -- Every Child Matters, the Afterschool Alliance and Voices for Virginia's children.

"These issues are incredibly important to Virginians," [Delacey Skinner] said, "and Lt. Gov. [Kaine] is encouraged by the fact that the polls shows Virginians are concerned about them."

[Suzanne Clark Johnson] said [Jerry Kilgore] and Kaine have done a better job than previous candidates for

governor in discussing topics such as gangs, domestic violence and early education, but there's still room for improvement. With the media and traditional pollsters centering only on education, she said the candidates fail to delve deeply into other children's issues like after-school programs.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.