READY FOR CHANGE:

An Education Survey of Virginia Voters

READY FOR CHANGE:
An Education Survey of Virginia Voters

Opening Letter

From our founding 15 years ago straight through to the advocacy campaigns of the current legislative sessions, 50CAN's core belief has always been that the first step in any change effort is listening. The ideas of our campaigns–and the policies we pursue–grow out of the hopes and dreams of families. This new survey brief is a continuation of that fundamental approach.

Last fall we released a 50-state, 20,000-parent survey that put a spotlight on how parents were navigating the new reality of a changed educational landscape. In this latest survey, conducted in partnership with the polling and analytics firm Cygnal, we wanted to put a spotlight in particular on how voters in a key swing state are thinking about public education and the competing ideas for improvement.

We chose Virginia both because it is a true "purple" state–with both Democrats and Republicans sharing government–and also because it is a state that proved to be a bellwether in its last gubernatorial election. In 2021, Republican Glenn Youngkin's surprise victory in the governor's race over Democrat Terry McAuliffe was a key indicator of the shifting politics of public education in the country, ushering in dynamics that are still with us today. With a new Virginia governor's race this year and big education policies under debate, it's an important time to understand what's on the minds of Virginia's voters and listen to what voters want.

Virginia is also my home state and as a dad to three high schoolers, this project hits home. Parents in Virginia had to navigate one of the longest periods of school closure in the country and many are still working every day to help their kids recover from what they lost.

In the survey that follows, five key findings stood out:

- Voters think Virginia is headed in the right direction but are more frustrated by the direction of Virginia public education.
- Voters want better reforms, not just more funding.
- Voters believe in more school options.
- Voters support the Virginia Opportunity Scholarship.
- Voters are more likely to vote for lawmakers who expand educational options.

We hope this survey helps contribute to the conversation–in Virginia and beyond–by elevating the voices of voters on the issues that really matter.

Sincerely,

**Marc Porter Magee, Ph.D.**
CEO and Founder, 50CAN

Key Findings

This survey brief is designed to put a spotlight on how Virginia voters are thinking about education in their state in a pivotal year.

Cygnal conducted this statewide survey of 600 registered voters on January 31 through February 1, 2025 using registration-based sampling (RBS) techniques via SMS-to-web and live phone interviews. The survey has a margin of error of ±3.98% at the 95% confidence level. The survey questionnaire, topline results and methodology can be found after the presentation of five key findings.

1. Voters think Virginia is headed in the right direction but are more frustrated by the direction of Virginia public education

When asked whether they would say that things in Virginia are headed in the right direction or off on the wrong track, by nearly a two-to-one margin (51% to 28%), voters say that the state is headed in the right direction. This ratio is **even higher among voters in swing districts**, who say things are headed in the right direction by a three-to-one margin (58% to 19%).

State Direction*: Generally speaking, would you say things in Virginia are headed in the right direction or off on the wrong track?*

Right Direction	Wrong Track	Unsure
51%	28%	21%
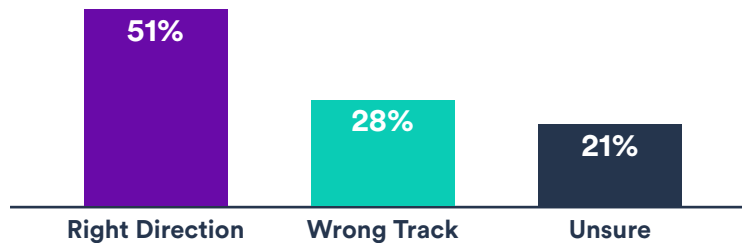
When asked the same question specifically about Virginia public education, these sentiments reverse. Overall, voters are more likely to say that Virginia public education is on the wrong track than headed in the right direction (42% to 35%). **For voters in swing districts**, **this pattern is particularly pronounced**. By a two to one margin (55% to 27%), they say that public education in Virginia is on the wrong track.

Public Education Direction: *Generally speaking, would you say Virginia public education is headed in the right direction or off on the wrong track?*

Right Direction	Wrong Track	Unsure
35%	42%	23%

50CAN
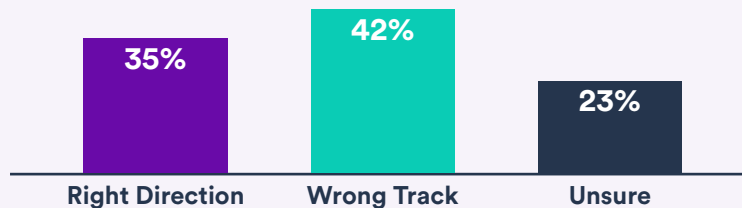
2. Voters want better reforms, not just more funding

What kind of changes do voters want to see in the Virginia public education system? When asked whether increased funding or better reforms were more important for improving education in Virginia, voters chose "better reforms" by an overwhelming margin (61% to 28%). **Independent voters felt particularly strongly about reform**, choosing it over more funding 67% to 24%.

More Funding Vs. Better Reforms: *Do you believe increased funding or better reforms are more important to improving education in Virginia?*

28% More Funding

61% Better Reforms

11% Unsure
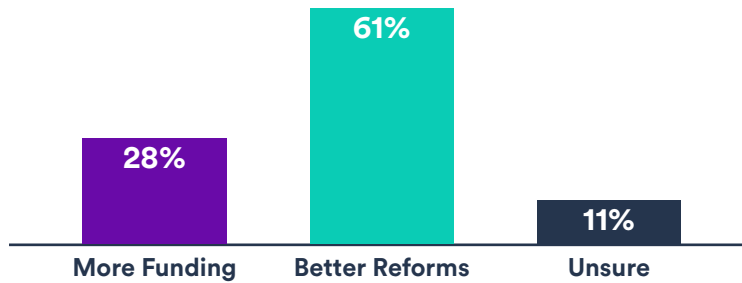
3. Voters believe in more school options

When asked about the policy of providing families with more school options by letting them choose public schools beyond the one they are zoned for, voters overwhelmingly favored this form of educational options by a nearly three to one margin (68% to 23%). **Rural voters were even more likely to support this policy**, favoring this expansion of choice by a four to one margin (75% to 18%).

Families Choose: *Generally speaking, do you support or oppose giving families more options to choose public schools other than the one they are zoned for?*

68% Support

23% Oppose

9% Unsure
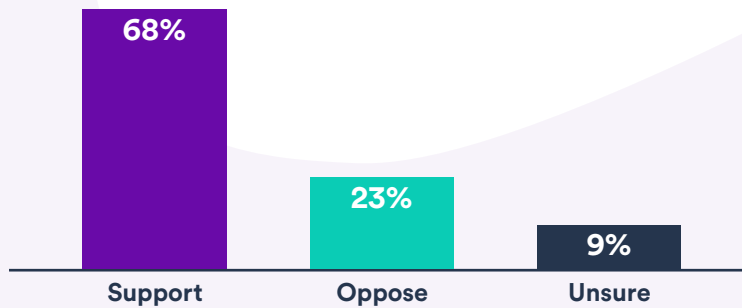
4. Voters support the Virginia Opportunity Scholarship

One hot button policy under debate this year is Governor Youngkin's Virginia Opportunity Scholarship proposal. Voters were given the following description of the proposal: "The Virginia Opportunity Scholarship program is a proposed $50 million state-funded initiative that provides up to $5,000 per year in scholarships to a maximum of 10,000 low-income K-12 students. The scholarships can be used for private school tuition, fees, textbooks, uniforms and transportation costs. Eligible students must meet income requirements and have either attended a public school for at least one year or be entering kindergarten or first grade."

Voters were then asked if they support or oppose the proposal. By a two-to-one margin (57% to 28%), they said they supported it. Support was particularly strong among Black voters (65% to 29%) and Hispanic voters who supported the proposal by a margin of three-and-a-half-to-one (76% to 21%).

Scholarship Support Among <u>All Voters</u>: *Do you support or oppose implementing the Virginia Opportunity Scholarship program in Virginia?*

Support	Oppose	Unsure
57%	28%	15%
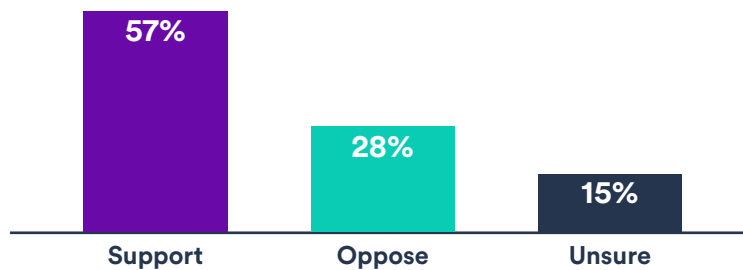
Scholarship Support Among <u>Black Voters</u>: *Do you support or oppose implementing the Virginia Opportunity Scholarship program in Virginia?*

Support	Oppose	Unsure
65%	29%	6%
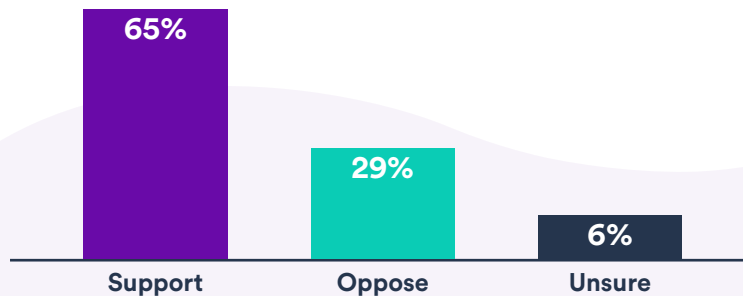
Scholarship Support Among <u>Hispanic Voters</u>: *Do you support or oppose implementing the Virginia Opportunity Scholarship program in Virginia?*

Support	Oppose	Unsure
76%	21%	3%
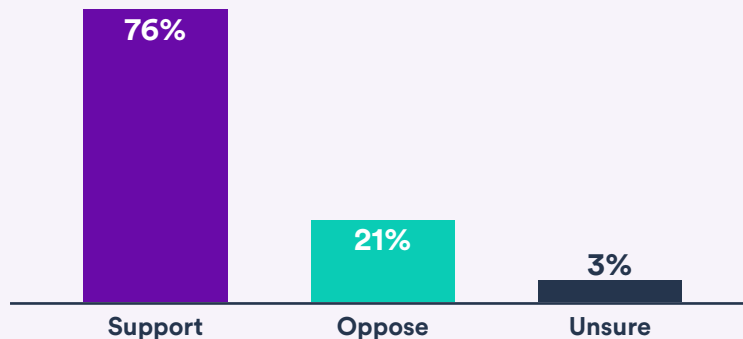
5. Voters are more likely to vote for lawmakers who expand educational options

Finally, to understand the potential political impact of this proposal, we asked voters whether they would be more likely or less likely to vote for a lawmaker who had voted for the Virginia Opportunity Scholarship. By a two-to-one margin (49% to 24%), voters said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who had voted for the proposal. Support was even higher among Black voters (60%) and Hispanic voters (76%).

Lawmaker Support from <u>All Voters</u>: *Would you be more likely or less likely to support a lawmaker who votes to pass the Virginia Opportunity Scholarship program in Virginia?*

More Likely	Less Likely	Unsure
49%	24%	27%
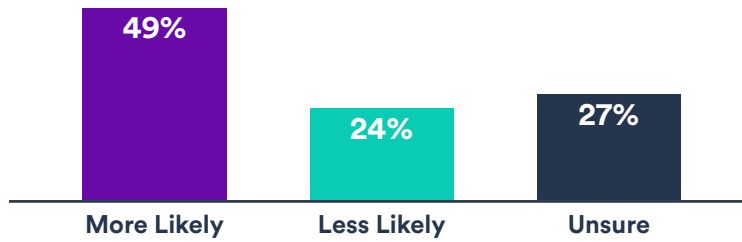
Lawmaker Support from <u>Black Voters</u>: *Would you be more likely or less likely to support a lawmaker who votes to pass the Virginia Opportunity Scholarship program in Virginia?*

More Likely	Less Likely	Unsure
60%	26%	14%
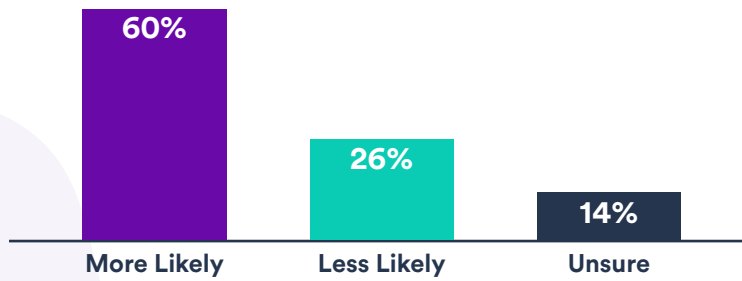
Methodology

Cygnal conducted a survey of 600 likely 2025 general election voters in the state of Virginia.

DATA COLLECTION

This probabilistic survey was conducted January 31 - February 1, 2025, in English, using registration-based sampling (RBS) techniques. A total of 600 respondents registered to vote in the State of Virginia participated via SMS-to-web and live phone interviews. The survey has a margin of error of ±3.98% at the 95% confidence level.

SURVEY REPRESENTATIVENESS

Voter contact lists were sourced from Cygnal's proprietary voter file, which is regularly updated and maintained to reflect current voter registrations. The sample was stratified by geography (CD groupings), modeled political party, gender and age to ensure representativeness. Each potential respondent was assigned a unique URL for survey entry through Qualtrics. Data quality protocols included checks for length of interview outliers, straightlining, duplicate IP addresses and voter demographic consistency with the voter file.

The following tables provide the demographics of survey respondents in Virginia after weighting.

GENDER	
Female	Male
53.1%	46.9%

EDUCATION	
Have At Least a College Degree	Have No College Degree
52.9%	46.3%

HOUSEHOLD INCOME						
<$25k	$25k-$50k	$50k-$75k	$75k-$100k	$100k-$150k	$150k-$250k	$250k+
3.5%	13.1%	16.5%	11.1%	18.2%	16.9%	11.3%

50CAN

PARTISANSHIP

Strongly Republican	Mostly Republican	Independent	Mostly Democratic	Strongly Democratic
19.2%	14.3%	29.5%	12.7%	22.8%

AGE RANGE

18-29	30-44	45-54	55-64	65+
11.1%	21.1%	17.5%	21.7%	28.6%

RACE/ETHNICITY

White or Caucasian	Asian or Pacific Islander	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Other
72.7%	2.4%	15.0%	2.6%	4.1%

DATA QUALITY CONTROL AND STANDARDS

The survey data were weighted to reflect the 2025 General Election Likely Voter population. Weighted variables include geography, modeled political party, gender, age, race, and education. Population estimates for geography, gender, age, and political party were derived from Cygnal's proprietary voter file. Estimates for race and education were sourced from the 2023 American Community Survey and adjusted for a likely voter audience based on historical voting patterns and stated intent to vote.

Question wording on the toplines is consistent with the survey script and delivery in Qualtrics and by live interviewers. This survey was conducted internally by Cygnal's team and was not sponsored by any third party.

Toplines

Q1. Vote Method: How do you plan to vote in the November 4, 2025, general election for Governor, Virginia House of Delegates, and other state offices?

	Freq.	%
Vote In-Person on Election Day	**348**	**57.9%**
Definitely vote in-person on Election Day	292	48.7%
Probably vote in-person on Election Day	55	9.2%
Vote Absentee by Mail	**78**	**13.0%**
Definitely vote absentee by mail	57	9.6%
Probably vote absentee by mail	21	3.5%
Vote Early In-Person	**174**	**29.0%**
Definitely vote early in-person	110	18.3%
Probably vote early in-person	64	10.7%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q2. State Direction: Generally speaking, would you say things in Virginia are headed in the right direction or off on the wrong track?

	Freq.	%
Right Direction	**305**	**50.8%**
Definitely the right direction	67	11.1%
Mostly the right direction	328	39.7%
Wrong Track	**167**	**27.8%**
Mostly the wrong track	100	16.6%
Definitely the wrong track	67	11.2%
Unsure	**128**	**21.4%**
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q3. Public Education Direction: Generally speaking, would you say Virginia public education is headed in the right direction or off on the wrong track?

	Freq.	%
Right Direction	**212**	**35.3%**
Definitely the right direction	37	6.2%
Mostly the right direction	175	29.1%
Wrong Track	**252**	**42.0%**
Mostly the wrong track	113	18.9%
Definitely the wrong track	139	23.1%
Unsure	**137**	**22.8%**
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q4. **School Funding**: Now thinking about education in Virginia... Currently, would you say that public schools in Virginia are generally underfunded, overfunded, or is the funding about right?

	Freq.	%
Overfunded	52	8.6%
Funding is about right	101	16.8%
Underfunded	337	56.1%
Unsure	111	18.4%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q5. **Families Choose**: Generally speaking, do you support or oppose giving families more options to choose public schools other than the one they are zoned for?

	Freq.	%
Support	**409**	**68.2%**
Strongly support	243	40.5%
Somewhat support	166	27.6%
Oppose	**140**	**23.3%**
Somewhat oppose	71	11.9%
Strongly oppose	68	11.3%
Unsure	**51**	**8.6%**
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q6. **More Funding Vs. Better Reforms**: Some say increasing education funding is the best way to improve public schools, while others say reforming the education system, such as raising academic standards, reducing class sizes, expanding school choice, and improving teacher training, is a better solution. Do you believe increased funding or better reforms are more important to improving education in Virginia?

	Freq.	%
Increased Funding	**170**	**28.3%**
Definitely increased funding	89	14.9%
Probably increased funding	81	13.5%
Better Reforms	**366**	**61.1%**
Probably better reforms	132	22.1%
Definitely better reforms	234	39.0%
Unsure	**64**	**10.6%**
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q7. **Per-Pupil Spending Awareness**: Virginia's public schools receive funding on a per-student basis. What is your best guess for how much Virginia spends per student per year on K-12 public education?

	Freq.	%
Less than $5,000 per student	90	15.1%
Between $5,000 and $9,999 per student	130	21.7%
Between $10,000 and $15,000 per student	140	23.3%
More than $15,000 per student	105	17.5%
Unsure	134	22.4%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q8. **Initial VOS Support**: The Virginia Opportunity Scholarship program is a proposed $50 million state-funded initiative that provides up to $5,000 per year in scholarships to a maximum of 10,000 low-income K-12 students. The scholarships can be used for private school tuition, fees, textbooks, uniforms and transportation costs. Eligible students must meet income requirements and have either attended a public school for at least one year or be entering kindergarten or first grade. Knowing this, do you support or oppose implementing the Virginia Opportunity Scholarship program in Virginia?

	Freq.	%
Support	**340**	**56.6%**
Strongly support	165	27.5%
Somewhat support	174	29.1%
Oppose	**170**	**28.3%**
Somewhat oppose	71	11.8%
Strongly oppose	99	16.5%
Unsure	**90**	**15.1%**
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q9. **Lawmaker VOS Support**: Would you be more likely or less likely to support a lawmaker who votes to pass the Virginia Opportunity Scholarship program in Virginia?

	Freq.	%
More Likely	**294**	**49.1%**
Much more likely	130	21.6%
Somewhat more likely	165	27.4%
Less Likely	**143**	**23.8%**
Somewhat less likely	60	10.0%
Much less likely	83	13.8%
Unsure	**163**	**27.1%**
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q10. **Parental Status**: Are you the parent or guardian of a school-aged child or children? Select all that apply if you have more than one child in school.

	Freq.	%
Parent/Guardian	**185**	**30.9%**
Yes, pre-K	52	8.7%
Yes, elementary school	85	14.2%
Yes, middle school	54	9.1%
Yes, high school	81	13.5%
No	**406**	**67.6%**
Unsure	**9**	**1.5%**
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

50CAN

Q11. **Student Performance**: How would you describe your child or children's typical grades in school?

	Freq.	%
Mostly A's	102	55.1%
Mostly B's	21	11.1%
Mostly C's	7	3.9%
Mostly D's or lower	3	1.6%
A mix of grades (A's, B's, and C's, etc.)	37	19.8%
Unsure	16	8.7%
Total	**185**	**100.0%**

Q12. **Gender**

	Freq.	%
Female	319	53.1%
Male	281	46.9%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q13. **Age Range**

	Freq.	%
Under 55	**298**	**49.7%**
18 - 29	66	11.1%
30 - 44	127	21.1%
45 - 54	105	17.5%
55 and Over	**302**	**50.3%**
55 - 64	130	21.7%
65+	172	28.6%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q14. **Partisanship by Response**

	Freq.	%
Republican	**201**	**33.4%**
Strongly Republican	115	19.2%
Mostly Republican	86	14.3%
Independent	**177**	**29.5%**
Democratic	**213**	**35.5%**
Mostly Democratic	76	12.7%
Strongly Democratic	137	22.8%
Unsure	**9**	**1.5%**
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q15. Ideology

	Freq.	%
Conservative	**251**	**41.8%**
Very conservative	116	19.3%
Somewhat conservative	135	22.5%
Moderate	**182**	**30.3%**
Liberal	**152**	**25.3%**
Somewhat liberal	80	13.4%
Very liberal	72	12.0%
Unsure	**16**	**2.6%**
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q16. Community Type

	Freq.	%
Rural	195	32.6%
Suburban	315	52.5%
Urban	90	15.0%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q17. Marital Status

	Freq.	%
Single	120	20.0%
Married	359	59.8%
Divorced	60	10.0%
Widowed	47	7.9%
Separated	11	1.8%
Unsure	3	0.5%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q18. Income by Response

	Freq.	%
<$50k	**100**	**16.6%**
Less than $25,000	21	3.5%
$25,000 - $49,999	79	13.1%
$50,000 - $74,999	**99**	**16.5%**
$75,000 - $99,999	**67**	**11.1%**
$100k+	**278**	**46.3%**
$100,000 - $149,999	109	18.2%
$150,000 - $249,999	101	16.9%
$250,000+	68	11.3%
Unsure	**57**	**9.4%**
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q19. **Race/Ethnicity**

	Freq.	%
White or Caucasian	436	72.7%
Asian or Pacific Islander	14	2.4%
Black or African American	90	15.0%
Hispanic or Latino	16	2.6%
Other	24	4.1%
Unsure	19	3.2%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q20. **2024 Retro Ballot**

	Freq.	%
Republican Donald Trump	269	44.8%
Democrat Kamala Harris	291	48.5%
Another candidate	21	3.6%
Did not vote in 2024	3	0.5%
Unsure	16	2.7%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q21. **Education Level**

	Freq.	%
No Degree	**278**	**46.3%**
Some high school	2	0.3%
High school diploma/GED	92	15.3%
Technical Certification	34	5.6%
Some college or Associate's Degree	151	25.1%
At Least College	**317**	**52.9%**
Four-year undergraduate or Bachelor's Degree	167	27.9%
Graduate degree or further	150	25.0%
$250,000+	5	0.8%
Unsure	**57**	**9.4%**
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q22. **General Election X of 4**

	Freq.	%
0 of 4	14	2.4%
1 of 4	79	13.1%
2 of 4	133	22.2%
3 of 4	122	20.3%
4 of 4	252	42.0%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q23. Geo - CD

	Freq.	%
GOP Seats	**241**	**40.2%**
1	71	11.9%
5	60	10.0%
6	56	9.3%
9	54	9.1%
Swing Seats	**106**	**17.6%**
2	55	9.1%
7	51	8.5%
Dem Seats	**253**	**42.2%**
3	40	6.7%
4	52	8.7%
8	48	8.0%
10	57	9.5%
11	55	9.2%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q24. Geo - DMA

	Freq.	%
Washington DC (Hagrstwn)	223	37.2%
Bluefield-Beckley-Oak Hill	1	0.2%
Charlottesville	15	2.5%
Greensboro-H.Point-W.Salem	3	0.6%
Harrisonburg	14	2.4%
Norfolk-Portsmth-Newpt Nws	117	19.5%
Richmond-Petersburg	119	19.9%
Roanoke-Lynchburg	80	13.4%
Tri-Cities TN-VA	27	4.4%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q25. Gender + Age

	Freq.	%
F 18 - 29	34	5.6%
F 30 - 44	68	11.3%
F 45 - 54	57	9.5%
F 55 - 64	71	11.8%
F 65+	89	14.9%
M 18 - 29	33	5.5%
M 30 - 44	59	9.8%
M 45 - 54	48	8.0%
M 55 - 64	59	9.9%
M 65+	82	13.7%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q26. Race + Gender

	Freq.	%
White Female	231	38.6%
White Male	205	34.1%
Asian Female	6	1.0%
Asian Male	8	1.4%
Black Female	50	8.3%
Black Male	40	6.7%
Hispanic Female	8	1.4%
Hispanic Male	8	1.3%
Other Female	13	2.2%
Other Male	11	1.8%
Unsure	19	3.2%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q27. Gender + Education

	Freq.	%
Female At least College	164	27.4%
Female No degree	153	25.4%
Male At least College	153	25.5%
Male No degree	125	20.9%
Unsure	5	0.8%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**

Q28. Marital Status + Gender

	Freq.	%
Single Female	57	9.5%
Single Male	63	10.5%
Married Female	185	30.8%
Married Male	174	29.0%
Divorced Female	31	5.2%
Divorced Male	29	4.8%
Widowed Female	39	6.5%
Widowed Male	8	1.4%
Separated Female	6	1.0%
Separated Male	5	0.8%
Unsure	3	0.5%
Total	**600**	**100.0%**