

VIRGINIA PARENTS ON SCHOOL RE-OPENINGS

JANUARY 2021

On behalf of N2 America, Public Opinion Strategies completed an online bulletin board (QualBoard) among nineteen public school suburban parents from across the Commonwealth of Virginia from January 12th-14th.



KEY FINDINGS

01

Most suburban parents
**strongly disapprove of
how Virginia has
handled public
education during the
coronavirus pandemic.**

*** A clear majority of parents disapprove of how the state has handled public education.**

Parents' frustrations range from lack of communication from schools and school boards to the ineffectiveness of online schooling.

There is a sense that schools have lagged in communication and execution.

There are stories from parents about the lack of consistency in how virtual school is done and how they feel *"kids are not getting the proper education [when] at home."*

Parents are highly frustrated by the state of their children's schooling situation.

A Chesapeake dad shares how *"closing school has left our kids without adequate support. Online school is not effective."*

02

Virginia parents (and their children) are “**stressed**” and “**frustrated**” with the way things have gone so far this school year, with most kids NOT excelling or even keeping up with their work.

* Parents share schools are “*unorganized chaos*,” a “*disaster*,” a “*hot mess*,” and a “*waste of time*.” From the actual educating by teachers to the work assigned and communication to parents, school this year is “*terrible*.”

A Chesapeake dad shares, “*my kids are straight A students, and all are struggling to keep B grades or doing less. They are not motivated and depressed.*”

A Fairfax mom opines that “*the teachers do not have enough time to prepare for the methods of teaching that they’ve been told they have to execute. Parents are constantly having to scramble to figure out what they’re going to do with their kids if they go back to school, if they stay home, if they’re half-and-half.*”

And, a Frederick County mom adds “*it’s frustrating because my kids HATE this kind of learning. They complain, take forever to get their stuff done. It seems when they need help, they both need help at the same time (I need to clone myself). It’s not what any of us want.*”

The main struggles parents see their kids having is the lack of motivation to do work and how they cannot socialize.

A Chesapeake dad shares how his children *"can't keep up with online assignments or miss reminders. Special clubs that motivated them have been taken away, like band, robotics, swim team."*

Other parents note how their children are *"socially and mentally suffering"* because they *"miss friends."*

A Rockingham mom makes this point saying, *"my child has struggled with the lack of interaction with his peers. Not just on a communication skills level, but an emotional one as well."*

Further, almost a third of parents say they or their spouses stay at home to help their children with remote online learning.

Several parents mention how they *"couldn't afford a sitter,"* because they just don't have the money.

A Henrico dad says he *"know[s] about six people who had to quit because schools kept closing down due to COVID and they did not have anyone to homeschool their children."*

Isolation, the lack of social interaction, and the toll it is taking on their children's mental state are by far the biggest concerns parents have for long-term effects for their children.

A Fluvanna dad believes *"long-term effects could be that children become more introverted and isolate themselves more. They may become less social and may not be retaining the information they are getting because they aren't satisfied with online learning as an alternative."*

The emotional toll remote online learning has on children is very evident to parents.

Parents simply say: "my kids are not as happy."

A Fairfax mom says, *"I am concerned about their mental state. It is not good for anyone to stare at a computer for 8+ hours a day. I also feel as if their passion for school education has definitely decreased. They have always been straight A students who loved learning, now it is a struggle to get excited about tuning into an online class. They just don't care as much about anything. I am afraid they will not get their passion back."*

03

Approximately **two-thirds** of these suburban parents think remote online learning is worse for their children's education than in-person learning and believe it leads to a multitude of serious negative long-term effects.

- * Nearly all these parents currently have children being educated in full-time or part-time remote online learning. They overwhelmingly think remote online learning is worse for their children's education than in-person learning.

These parents say the *"children don't focus and pay attention to the teacher. It's hard [for them] to stare at a screen for lengths of time"* and they *"become disinterested."*

They believe children *"need more engagement and hands-on learning"* and comment how *"students don't get the one-on-one they need."*

One Stafford dad says online education is *"absolutely worse"* because *"in-person there is a lot more attention in class than having the kids focus on [a] computer screen all day long."*

Losing interest or seeing something else, they get distracted and it's tough getting them back on track."

And, when it comes to schoolwork, parents believe it is only *“somewhat close to actual schoolwork”* believing that *“some activities are worthy [and] some are not.”*

Some parents are concerned that their children are not being challenged enough.

A Rockingham mom makes this point saying, *“the work is engaging, but to the point. There is not so much ‘extra’ going on.”*

A Fairfax dad agrees saying, *“overall the work being assigned is useful to what they are learning, for my 4th grader some of it may not be challenging enough.”*

And, a Roanoke mom chimes in, *“I think the schoolwork she's receiving is keeping her brain active but I wouldn't say she's learning immensely.”*

04

Suburban parents say they are comfortable with sending their children to learn in-person.



Many suburban parents say they feel comfortable with schools re-opening now and sending their children back.

These parents say they “*would be beyond happy*” and “*absolutely would send [their] kids in*” to school.

A Fluvanna dad says, “*I would feel very relieved and happy for my daughter if that happened. I would feel comfortable sending my child back because I know precautions will be set-up and we can't live in fear of a virus with such a high survival rate, especially in young children.*”

**Parents express comfort because
“the risk for kids is low enough.”**

Further, parents point to other states who have in-person instruction and say, *“if many other states are doing it and some school districts in VA are too and if they haven't experienced problems, we should go this route.”*

A Frederick mom agrees saying, *“schools are open for regular instruction in other areas with very little problems.”*

Another mom points out how *“private schools have been open without problems”* and *“with the proper precautions (masks, social distancing, etc.) schools should be fine to open.”*

It is worth noting that vaccines do not really come up as a concern or stipulation for children to be allowed to attend school.

Only one dad brings it up and voices concern about his child having to be vaccinated in order to go back to school.

Parents seem to want teachers to be vaccinated, but it isn't clear whether all parents would be okay with their children being vaccinated.

05

Teachers unions are viewed as an obstacle to getting the schools back open.



When it comes to the teachers unions' job, these parents understand the union's priority is to back the teachers and represent the teachers, not the children.

But, many parents think that construct now pits the union against what is best for the children, like one Frederick County mom who says, *"I have very rarely heard of a teachers union advocating for best interest of the students."*

A Fairfax mom shares the skepticism and shares, *"it's called the 'teachers' union for a reason. They only care about the teachers. However, it is ironic because a teacher's role is to care about the children."*

Many parents report feeling more negatively towards the teachers unions since coronavirus started.

A Fairfax mom shares their obstruction to re-opening *"has given me a negative impression of the unions.*

I never really paid attention to them before but now that they are truly preventing my kids from getting a decent education, I notice them."

A Chesapeake dad adds, *"I have supported unions in the past but they are not thinking about what is best for kids or for the community. Now I do not support them."*

Another parent adds, *"they are hugely to blame. "*

"They are a big influence on the school boards. What incentive do teachers have to go back to school do their job? It is MUCH easier for them to teach while sitting home talking to a computer while claiming going back to school will 'risk their lives.' While the unions are involved, there will be no incentive for teachers to return to school."

Further, some of these parents place the lion's share of the blame on them, saying *"they are driving the fear."*

A Chesapeake dad says, *"every school board meeting is full of union plants trying to bully the school board and keep the parents and students concerns from being heard."* And, a Fairfax mom agrees, *"they are a complete obstacle. The health 'risk' is equally present for children as well as teachers. No preventative measures will be good enough for the unions though."*

CONCLUSION

Suburban parents want Virginia elected officials at all levels to make education a priority and open schools.

* By and large, suburban parents want Virginia's elected officials from the school board to the Governor's office to *"make our children and their education priority one."*

At the end of our discussion, parents were asked to share their thoughts about the state of public education today with Virginia and local elected officials, school boards, and administrators:

CONCLUSION

“Open the schools. The kids are suffering both academically, emotionally and socially. Public schools have a job and that is to provide education to our children. Parents are not the best educators for their children. Kids need social opportunities. Kids need hands on learning. Kids need normalcy.”

“You need to create one plan for bringing the children back. You need to make sure you have every bit of supplies and equipment you need so that when you bring them back it is permanent. You need to broaden your substitute teaching pool. You need to bring on more staff to support the teachers and the children.”

“Focus on educating our kids! Our kids are our future - they need to learn how to read, write how to be responsible citizens.”

“I'd tell them to continue listening to science and the medical experts. That there's really no right answer to school openings given the situation we're in. As long as they continue putting student's education first, I'll support the decisions.”

“I would tell them that we are facing difficult time and their decisions hold great weight. I would urge them to give choices and support to staff and students.”

CONCLUSION

"I would say that there needs to be more of a consensus with all aspects of education. Whether it be in person or remote learning, all children should have assistance and help if needed. Teaching platforms should remain consistent across the board. Free tutors should be offered for those that need it."

"You have a very important job. Please keep the wellbeing of your community in your mind as you make decisions. Please give all students and all schools equal resources."

"To whom it may concern, I am disgraced on the public education system now. Did you guys go to all these years of college to watch our children fall through the cracks??? No then let's do this open schools!!"

"Take a look at how learning online has affected the children mentally and how it may put some children behind because they haven't been engaged. We don't want kids not learning, not socializing and not focused on learning and being in a school setting."

"I would ask them to shift their priorities. Renaming schools is important IF everything else is taken care of first. I'd explain that I know what they're dealing with and that I understand the pressure they're under though."

ABOUT N2 AMERICA

N2 America is committed to promoting and supporting center-right policies and ideas that better the lives of families, especially in America's suburbs.

OUR MISSION

- 01** Serve as a research hub to test and distribute survey research on policies important to the suburbs.
- 02** Convene policy makers and experts to form and discuss suburban-focused policy initiatives.
- 03** Engage and educate suburban Americans on policies and issues that impact their quality of life.

LEADERSHIP



Liesl Hickey, Founder

Liesl Hickey is a veteran political strategist who has worked at the highest levels of politics and issue advocacy. She has directed large-scale campaign operations and high-profile public affairs efforts. She has spent her political career crafting messages and strategies for Republicans on how to win in suburban areas, with a focus on women voters.



Marie Sanderson, Founder

Marie currently is a Founding Partner at GuidePost LLC, Partner at 50 State LLC, Principal at Cardinal Group Policy, and Senior Advisor at IMGE. Marie serves on several boards and commissions including the statewide Mississippi Arts Commission Board of Directors and the Children's Advocacy Centers of Mississippi Board of Directors. In 2020, she and her husband, Brian, founded the MS 30 Day Fund, a nonprofit dedicated to providing financial support to Mississippi's small businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in the form of forgivable loans.



Generra Peck, Senior Advisor

Generra Peck holds more than a decade of experience leading complex political, communications, and issue campaigns. Most recently, Generra led a multi-million dollar issue advocacy campaign to get the USMCA trade deal passed in Congress. Prior to that she served as policy director on Ed Gillespie's 2017 Virginia gubernatorial campaign. Generra's speciality is taking complex policy issues and executing the most effective political and communications tactics to achieve results. She has held senior roles in more than a dozen political organizations, gubernatorial offices and transitions, and policy advocacy campaigns.

LEADERSHIP



Zack Roday, Senior Advisor

After a dozen years working in Congress and for state and federal political campaigns, Zack Roday is an experienced communications and political strategist. He has shaped winning strategies around many hotly contested issues and political debates across the country.



Robert Blizzard, Partner, Public Opinion Strategies

Blizzard's political experience includes polling for two presidential campaigns, major statewide races across the country, major party committees and Super PACs, and for dozens of Republicans in the U.S. House. And, in the last four election cycles, Blizzard has polled for GOP state legislative caucuses in Alabama, Connecticut, Kentucky, Ohio, Michigan and New York.