



**To:** Center Forward  
**From:** Global Strategy Group  
**Date:** May 2023  
**Re:** Virginia Voters Support Capping Parent PLUS Loans

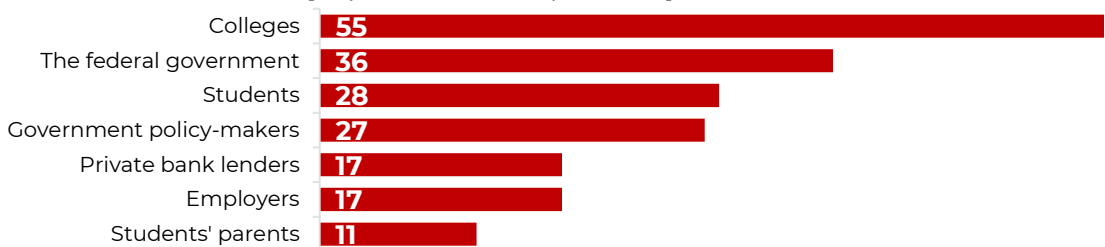
A new Global Strategy Group survey of 400 registered voters in Virginia shows that Virginia voters identify the burden of federal student loan debt as a major problem for the country, and a clear majority support capping the amount that parents and graduate students can borrow through the federal PLUS Loan program as an effective and necessary step toward addressing the debt crisis.

## The Soaring Cost of Higher Education & the Burden of Student Loans

Virginia voters say that the cost of higher education is a problem for the country right now (88%), ranking with other key issues like interest rates on mortgages and salaries falling behind the cost of living. Two thirds (65%) of Virginia voters believe the government should be doing more to make college or continuing education more affordable for regular Americans, including nearly half (60%) of swing voters. Almost three-quarters of Virginia voters agree (70%) that “unpaid federal student loan balances add to the deficit and contribute to inflation,” the top issue among Virginia voters (89% say inflation is a “major problem” in the country right now).

Almost half of all voters (55%) blame colleges, who “charge high prices for tuition and expenses and are not held accountable for student outcomes,” for the country’s student debt burden. Just over a third (36%) also blame the federal government, which “makes student loans available to students and parents without consideration of their ability to repay the loans.”

*Over the past 15 years, the burden of federal student loan debt in the United States has tripled, ballooning to \$1.6 trillion. Who do you think is most responsible for the country's student debt burden?  
[Top two most responsible]*



In addition to blaming colleges and universities for the country’s student debt burden, voters say colleges are not doing a good job making higher education a good value for students financially (56% of voters give colleges a failing grade – D, E, or F on an A-F scale), despite voters saying colleges should be responsible for ensuring this (92% responsible). Even fewer voters say that colleges are doing a good

job at making higher education affordable for students and families (65% failing grade), something that 92% of voters say colleges should be responsible for.

Virginia voters agree that “there should be a limit on how much debt federal student loan borrowers can take on” (87% agree, including 38% of voters who strongly agree), and that “parents should not be allowed to take out loans for their child’s education in amounts they cannot afford to pay back” (79% agree, 39% strongly agree). Voters also reject the idea that student loan debt “is a price society has to pay for having an educated workforce” (61% disagree), even among college graduates (63% disagree).

### Capping Parent PLUS Loans

Virginia voters are mostly unfamiliar with Parent PLUS Loans (36% have heard about the program), but initially feel favorably toward the program (71% favorable). Despite favorable ratings, Virginia voters support capping the amount parents can borrow for their child’s education (66% support / 18% oppose), in line with their feeling that there should be a limit on how much debt borrowers can take on. Almost a third of voters (28%) strongly support capping the amount parents can borrow. Support for capping Parent PLUS Loans spans demographic groups, including Black voters (62%) and Virginia voters who report a household income of less than \$50,000 per year (62%).

*As you may or may not know, Congress is considering capping the amount parents can borrow under the Parent PLUS Loan program. Do you support or oppose capping the amount parents are able to borrow for their child’s education through the Parent PLUS Loan program? – Initial Ask*



\*Note: small sample size (N=56)

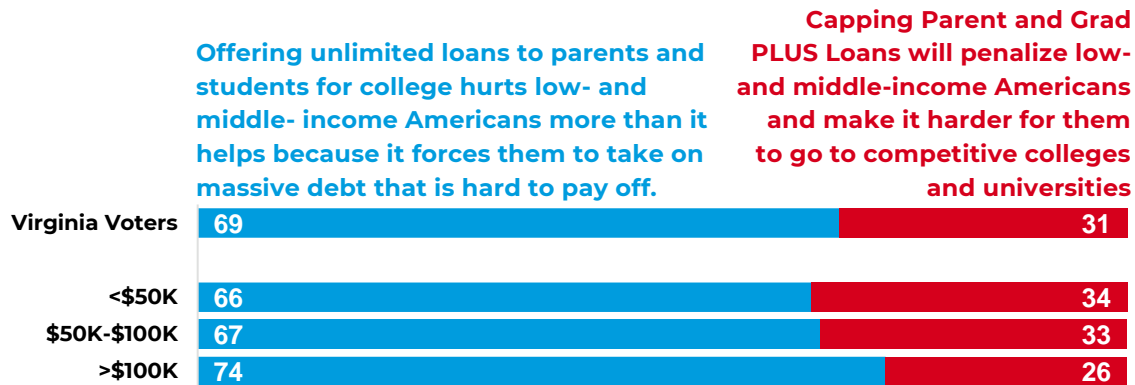
### Capping Grad PLUS Loans

Similarly, Virginia voters support capping the amount graduate students are able to borrow for their education through the Grad PLUS Loans program (65% support / 18% oppose), and a quarter of voters strongly support this cap (25%). Support for capping Grad PLUS Loans includes majorities of individuals who have or have had student debt (65% support) and college graduates (63% support).

## Understanding the Trade-offs

While a majority of Virginia voters (62%) agree that “capping Parent and Grad PLUS loans would limit access to higher education by limiting the resources available to students, particularly low-income students and students of color,” they are more concerned with the potential dangers of Parent PLUS loans. When forced to choose which statement they agree with more, Virginia voters of all financial means, agree more with the statement that “offering unlimited loans to parents and students for college hurts low- and middle-income Americans more than it helps because it forces them to take on massive debt that is hard to pay off” (69%). Just under a third (31%) agree more with “capping Parent and Grad PLUS Loans will penalize low- and middle-income Americans and make it harder for them to go to competitive colleges and universities.”

*Which statement do you agree with more even if neither is exactly right?*



Not only are Virginia voters more concerned with the dangers of student loan debt than they are with potentially limiting access for students to enrolling at a college or university, but voters also believe that capping Parent and Grad PLUS loans may help to address the student debt crisis. They agree that capping Parent and Grad PLUS Loans will force colleges and universities to lower tuition or face declining enrollment (79% agree). Capping these loans may also change the behavior of students, as they also agree that students choose more expensive colleges because their parents can borrow whatever a school says it costs to attend (70% agree), and that students don't look for more affordable programs because the government provides unlimited loans to parents (70% agree).