



Preparing for a New Commonwealth: The Virginia Plan for Higher Education

By Peter Blake

Virginia faces new challenges and opportunities for higher education. In our evolving economy and increasingly interwoven world, Virginians will need deeper and broader knowledge and skills to be productive participants. At the same time, the demographics of Virginia are changing. Increasingly, our youth come from populations which historically have been underrepresented in both higher education and the highly skilled sectors of our workforce.

In the 1970s, when I was an undergraduate at Virginia Commonwealth University, about one in 100 people in Virginia were born outside the United States. By 2012 that figure was one in nine, according to the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia. These changes transpire at a time when the price of attending Virginia colleges and universities has increased at unsustainable rates.

These converging trends led SCHEV, with help from students, families and stakeholders in business, higher education and legislative and executive branches of state government, to create The Virginia Plan for Higher Education. The plan, approved in 2014, sets forth a bold objective:

to make Virginia the best-educated state in the nation by 2030. To achieve this, SCHEV plans to increase the number of awards granted from about 80,000 per year to 118,000 by 2030 – 1.5 million awards in all (including workforce credentials and associate’s and bachelor’s degrees). We’ll also support this objective through our four main goals:

- *Provide affordable access for all.*
- *Optimize student success for work and life.*
- *Drive change and improvement through investment and innovation.*
- *Advance the economic and cultural prosperity of the Commonwealth and its regions.*

Clearly, each goal requires collaboration and commitment from Virginia’s institutions of higher education, political leaders, citizens and business leaders. Each is daunting on its own. But the stakes are high.

The Plan requires bringing together many strands of our economy, society, educational institutions and policies. We

believe that through our painstaking work over the past two years, we at SCHEV, along with our partners and stakeholders, have gained the knowledge, insights and tools to achieve this. By working with legislators in the General

Assembly, the Governor’s office, businesses, educators in K-12 schools, and students and parents in all the regions of Virginia, we can make our system of higher education stronger and more inclusive than ever. To do less would shortchange our citizens and our state.

For more information regarding the Virginia Plan for Higher Education, please visit our website at www.schev.edu



“The plan sets forth a bold objective: to make Virginia the best-educated state in the nation by 2030.”



Photo credit: Virginia Commonwealth University

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2015 Activities to Support The Virginia Plan

Upon passage of The Virginia Plan, SCHEV began to align its work with the four goals. Below is a sample of significant activities undertaken in 2015 to support The Virginia Plan. It represents only a partial accounting of the great work being done by the people at SCHEV and its partners.

1. Provide affordable access to all

Secured need-based aid for attainment of industry credentials through non-credit instruction to make postsecondary education more affordable. In fall 2014, Council members recommended funding to support need-based funding for non-credit training to provide greater access to students who may not seek a traditional degree. The governor and General Assembly approved \$1.075 million during the 2015 session for Virginia's community colleges for non-credit training to support industry-based credentials. This is the first time Virginia has provided funding for this type of training.

Initiated research on development of a cooperative degree program to provide greater access and affordable opportunities for students. As part of HB2320, SCHEV reviewed the development of a cooperative degree program at a cost of \$4,000, or a cost that is achievable, per academic year. The initial review found that the most cost-effective path to a baccalaureate degree is attendance at a community college and transfer to a four-year institution, which can be accomplished for less than \$26,000 total (less than \$6,500 per academic year), particularly if dual enrollment courses and standardized tests (Advanced Placement/AP; International Baccalaureate/IB) also are used.

Conducted a follow-up review of college access services and resources statewide. In partnership with Virginia529, SCHEV undertook a follow-up review to a 2009 study focused on availability of access services. The report updates the progress made in several areas, including early awareness, computer skills training, preparation for college entrance exams, financial literacy work, parental engagement, and postsecondary transition and college success. A copy of this study is available on the SCHEV reports page at www.schev.edu/reports/reportsindex.asp.

Continued support of the 1,2,3 GO! initiative to increase access for underrepresented populations. In partnership with Education Credit Management Corporation (ECMC), the governor's office and the Council of Independent Colleges in Virginia and participating high schools, SCHEV continued the 1,2,3 Go! initiative that focuses on having more students: (1) explore options for education through College Nights across Virginia, (2) apply to postsecondary institutions through Virginia College Application Week and (3) finance their education through the Super FAFSA project. Learn more about 1,2,3 Go! at www.schev.edu/123Go.asp.

2. Optimize student success for work and life

Joined the Complete College America initiative to focus on improving on-time completion and student success. Virginia joined Complete College America, which focuses on improving completion rates for students. SCHEV, in partnership with the governor's office, will be working with institutions to pursue strategies highlighted by the initiative. More information at <http://completecollege.org/>.

Secured a Lumina Foundation grant to support The Virginia Plan initiatives related to student success and underrepresented populations. In June, Virginia received a Lumina grant of \$50,000 to focus on efforts that support increased student success and access opportunities for underrepresented populations. Activities of the grant include: further identification of access and success programs at institutions, use of data to identify factors impacting student success and identification of policies to improve success and completion.

Established the Sexual Assault Advisory Committee to support campus safety and promote promising practices. In December, SCHEV convened the first meeting of its new campus sexual assault advisory committee. The committee membership represents various roles in campus safety, including law enforcement, legal counsel and Title IX coordination for the public two- and four-year institutions as well as several private institutions. It will identify priority focus areas for the coming year in the spring.

Increased opportunities for completion through transfer of general education courses in participating states by joining the Interstate Passport initiative. The initiative is designed to improve graduation rates, shorten time to degrees and save students' money through development of agreed upon standards for general education across institutions based on learning outcomes. Developing common standards allows for greater transferability across institutions within Virginia and in other states. See more at www.wiche.edu/passport/home.

Snapshots

To prepare for 2030, higher education will need to adjust to a changing world of work. The Virginia Plan aims to make the commonwealth the best-educated state in the country by 2030.

3. Drive change and improvement through investment and innovation

Recognized faculty excellence through the Outstanding Faculty Award (OFA) program. Each year, SCHEV, through support of Dominion, awards faculty for their contributions to students, institution and the Commonwealth. Thirteen faculty members at public and private institutions across the state received the award. OFA awardees attended a luncheon and were recognized on the floor of the General Assembly.

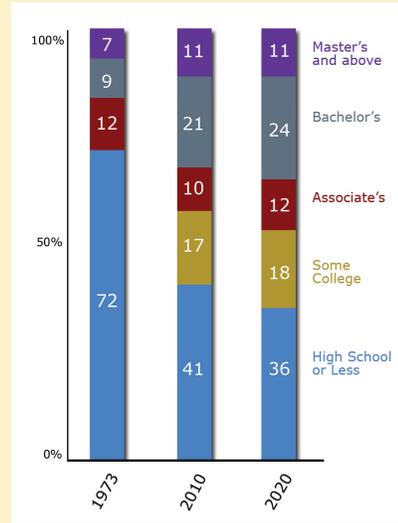
Organized a summit focused on quality in higher education. In partnership with the Virginia Assessment Group, SCHEV hosted a one-day summit on quality in Virginia's system of higher education. Over 200 participants from public and private, two-year and four-year institutions; board members; businesspeople; and leaders from government agencies and advocacy groups attended the event.

Aligned education and training of newly appointed members of public institutions' boards of visitors to raise awareness of issues facing higher education. SCHEV coordinated the annual boards of visitors orientation. The sessions focused on the national and state level higher education landscape, including a focus on the areas of access, affordability, innovation, governance and economic prosperity aligned with the goals of The Virginia Plan.

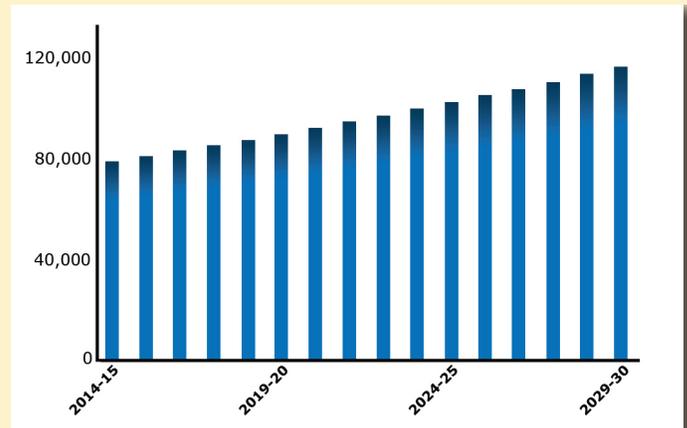
4. Advance the economic and cultural prosperity of the Commonwealth and its regions

Signed an agreement to increase collaborations between economic development and higher education. In February 2015, all public institutions presidents, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Center for Innovative Technology and SCHEV renewed a Memorandum of Understanding focused on improving collaborations between higher education and economic development.

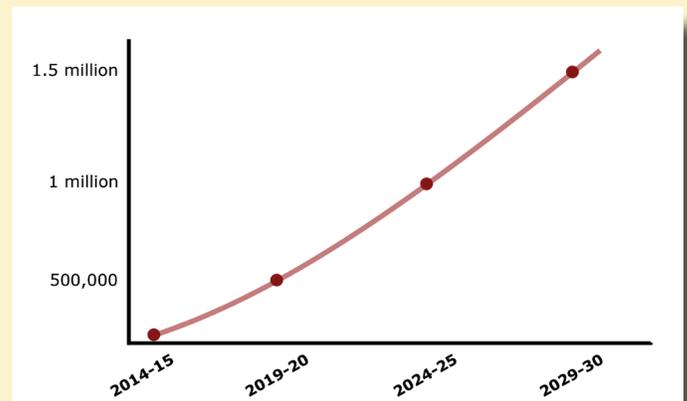
Recommended funding to support high-priority research through a pooled bond authorization fund. In October, the Council recommended a pooled bond authorization of \$50 million in fiscal year 2017 and \$100 million in fiscal 2018 to improve research competitiveness via financing of new or renovated research facilities and equipment. This fund also would allow greater flexibility of recruitment and retention of research faculty.



Jobs increasingly require more advanced education.



More degrees and workforce credentials awarded in Virginia each year ...



... Will result in 1.5 million cumulative awards by 2030.

Sources: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, SCHEV

The Virginia Plan: Six Targets

To ensure Virginia meets its four ambitious goals, the Council set measures and targets to track our progress.

By 2030 we will:

1. Grant 1.5 million total undergraduate degrees and workforce credentials.
2. Close the gap between underrepresented and “traditional” students.
3. Increase available financial resources to students, as a percentage of the cost of attendance, from 38 percent to 50 percent
4. Increase Virginia academic-research expenditures to a share of U.S. total that is 30 percent larger than in 2013.

Each year, we will:

5. Ensure that tuition and fees for in-state undergraduates is lower than national average and less than 10 percent of income for low- and middle-income students.
6. Measure whether 75 percent of graduates earn sustainable wages three years after graduation.

Photo credit: University of Virginia's College at Wise



Priority Initiatives for 2016

At the September 2015 Council meeting, members approved a list of six priority initiatives after input from stakeholders. The priority initiatives include:

1. Coordinate the development and implementation of programs that align resources from PK12, colleges, universities and other public sources to ensure affordable, efficient and effective pathways for students in all parts of the state.
2. Seek legislative changes that support stable and sustainable public funding for higher education, such as a constitutional amendment, a dedicated funding source, and a revenue stabilization fund.
3. Review and recommend potential initiatives for further restructuring and shared services that enhance institutional and administrative flexibility and improve quality and efficiency.
4. Collaborate with institutions to measure the quality of undergraduate education, including civic engagement of graduates and relevance to demand occupations across regions of the state.
5. Launch a communications strategy to address public knowledge and benefits of higher education, through Council reports, traditional media, social media and other means.
6. Promote economic development for the Commonwealth by implementing a long-term plan that supports recruitment and retention of research faculty, provides matches to federal and private research grants and enhances commercialization of higher education research.



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