

## ***Gathering Input for Statewide Strategic Plan Notes from Regional Interviews and Focus Groups***

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## Summary of Events to Gather Input throughout the Commonwealth

May 20-29 – CENTRAL (Charlottesville, Richmond) and EASTERN/ HAMPTON ROADS (Norfolk, Virginia Beach)

- High School Students (2 groups)
- High School Administrators (2 groups)
- College Students
- Business Leaders
- HE Leaders
- Individual Interviews (11 individuals)

June 11-13 – WEST CENTRAL/SOUTH-WEST/SOUTH (Roanoke, Wytheville, Danville)

- Business Leaders (2)
- College Student Affairs Officers
- HE Leaders (2)
- Individual Interviews (4)

June 30-July 1 – VALLEY (Lexington)

- HE Presidents
- Individual Interviews (6)

July 10-11 – NORTHERN (Fairfax, Annandale)

- HE Leaders
- College Leaders
- Business Leaders
- Community Service Leaders
- Individual Interviews (2)

July and August – TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

- Individual Interviews (5 to date)

*Note: The regional designations are based on the eight regions defined by Virginia Performs, <http://vaperforms.virginia.gov/Regions/regionsMap.php>.*

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To date (08/07/2014), **129 individuals** participated in either an in-person interview, focus group, or telephone interview

Another **50 individuals** participated in the private data collection instrument online

## Summary of Value from the Regional Visits and Focus Groups

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The regional visits and focus groups are valuable to the strategic planning process in the following ways:

- They provided a qualitative understanding of the differences between the regions of the Commonwealth to complement the quantitative comparison that was provided by the JBLA data team.
- The visits enabled us to assemble and engage a wide range of stakeholders in individual conversations, group discussions, and formal focus groups:
  - High school students
  - High school leaders and administrators
  - College students
  - College leaders and administrators
  - Business leaders
  - Higher education (HE) experts (not currently working for HE)
  - Policy makers and legislative staff
- These conversations enabled us to probe issues in depth and discover “big ideas” for higher education and the strategic plan.

In addition, we utilized the Regional Meetings, Focus Groups, and Interviews to use our Futuring Framework to “Plan from the Future Backward” by asking four questions to selected participants:

- Today, what is the condition of higher education in the Commonwealth of Virginia? What are our greatest challenges moving into the future?
- Five years from now, how will these challenges have changed and what forces will be shaping higher education in the Commonwealth?
- Five years from now, will learners, families, employers, policy makers, and citizens have different expectations of higher education in the Commonwealth of Virginia?
- How should these future forces, challenges, conditions, and expectations shape our Strategic Plan for Higher Education in the Commonwealth of Virginia?

What follows is a sampling of comments and perspectives that emerged from the interviews and focus groups; it is a sampling of what people actually told us about conditions, challenges and concerns pertaining to higher education. The first section is organized by participant group, as in High School Students, College Students, etc. (keeping in mind that some people speak from more than one perspective). The second section is organized by common and recurring themes: affordability/ cost, access, STEM, preparedness/ remediation, systems, and other.

Again, each of the points below represents something that an individual or group told us was a concern or challenge from their perspective. We have made no attempt in this document to validate or fact-check these statements because it is valuable to understand these varied perspectives as we move forward with the planning process, and later, as we communicate about our plan to a diverse audience.

## Sampling of What People Said: Conditions, Challenges, and Concerns

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	COLLEGE STUDENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Confusion with the paper work including: FAFSA (privacy issues also arose with this) and the common app</li> <li>▪ Confusing incentives</li> <li>▪ Unsure of how to pick and please both themselves and their parents</li> <li>▪ Started the process late and without support makes it more difficult</li> <li>▪ Would like the opportunity to shadow professionals in fields they are interested in, no way to know if they will like the program they choose</li> <li>▪ Taking AP and dual enrollment, the opportunities and cost</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Wonder how they can apply their learning</li> <li>▪ Challenge identifying the right fit for them (living in dorms, or not, etc.) and funding (grants, etc.)</li> </ul>
HIGH SCHOOL LEADERS AND ADMINISTRATORS	COLLEGE LEADERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Debt is the major concern</li> <li>▪ For some, private aid makes private schools a cheaper option</li> <li>▪ AVID<sup>1</sup> program</li> <li>▪ Increased focus of college as job preparation</li> <li>▪ HS/ college is not for everyone</li> <li>▪ College presidents making too much money</li> <li>▪ 1<sup>st</sup> generation college students are at a disadvantage</li> <li>▪ Need for better college advisors</li> <li>▪ Increased pressure on middle school and high school students</li> <li>▪ Concerned about the students in the middle and the bottom</li> <li>▪ Principal's/ administrators job descriptions do not allow for collaboration with higher education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Balancing decrease in funding with student need, so far there has been an unwillingness to address this</li> <li>▪ Shortened programs work better with more adult students</li> <li>▪ High schools are teaching to test and not preparing them for college</li> <li>▪ Students will major in what they want</li> <li>▪ Even those who could graduate in 3 years often won't do it because friends don't and they're having fun</li> <li>▪ Want to keep surplus state money if they realize savings and productivity cuts annually to set up funds instead of being forced to spend it within the fiscal year (or returning the funds to be controlled by the state)</li> <li>▪ The way SCHEV counts transfer students and graduation rates (specifically from NOVA) may not result in accurate or fair reporting</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> AVID is a global nonprofit organization dedicated to closing the achievement gap by preparing all students for college and other postsecondary opportunities. Established more than 30 years ago with one teacher in one classroom, AVID today impacts more than 700,000 students in 45 states and 16 other countries/territories. Source: <http://www.avid.org/>.

<b>BUSINESS LEADERS</b>	<b>HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERTS (NOT CURRENTLY WORKING DIRECTLY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Now hiring people with degrees into positions that did not previously require a BA/BS</li> <li>▪ Graduates are prepared but not loyal</li> <li>▪ Academics are too theoretical and have a hard time applying themselves to workforce issues</li> <li>▪ Community colleges do a better job with the application of knowledge</li> <li>▪ Newport News Shipyard Apprentice school could be a model for higher education that is not a four-year degree</li> <li>▪ Remediation should take place in K-12 not in college</li> <li>▪ Change the amenities and infrastructure to make it more affordable</li> <li>▪ Want graduates with analytical skills</li> <li>▪ Want skilled workers—whether it's degrees or credentials or other</li> <li>▪ Minerva model<sup>2</sup></li> <li>▪ Think we should make academic content available to others</li> <li>▪ Pooling services together</li> <li>▪ Global competition in manufacturing is a big challenge and makes it hard for hiring</li> <li>▪ In affluent places where parents went to college, parents encourage their kids to do 4-year not community/technical colleges</li> <li>▪ Need creative/ critical thinkers in knowledge economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No incentives for higher education institutions to collaborate with each other</li> <li>▪ Want to see online learning addressed in the strategic plan, and hybrid may make sense</li> <li>▪ Local governments are working on community development/ brain drain/ education in rural areas</li> <li>▪ In-state students who can't get into state schools because of enrollment limitations are crushed</li> <li>▪ Lack of understanding in General Assembly of what HE can do in Virginia</li> <li>▪ GA spends too much on K-12 and not enough on HE</li> <li>▪ Philanthropy is an avenue to fund HE</li> <li>▪ Nothing will change without great leadership</li> <li>▪ Question the data on affordability/neediness/student debt—the conversation is inflated</li> <li>▪ Transportation is an issue for HE, across the state and in/out of airports</li> <li>▪ If families can afford it, they should pay it</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Minerva Schools at KGI offers a unique undergraduate program that is based on the science of learning and comprised of four-years of global cultural immersion. It was “established in 2012 to provide an extraordinary liberal arts and sciences education to the brightest, most motivated students in the world. We believe that preparing such students to become the next generation of global leaders and innovators will positively impact our collective future.” See <http://www.minervaproject.com/>.

<b>POLICYMAKERS/ LEGISLATURE</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Some think that tuition rates should be low for all</li> <li>▪ High tuition model will be hard to maintain</li> <li>▪ There was a crisis wasted in 2008, schools need to reform but they haven't and are still doing things the same way and continuing to grow campuses</li> <li>▪ Make sure the community colleges and HBCUs have financial commitments</li> <li>▪ Community colleges are doing well</li> <li>▪ The pool of money in the general fund is not going to drastically increase in the next few years</li> <li>▪ State institutions are prohibited from advertising which may harm them (private and for profit institutions are able to advertise)</li> <li>▪ K-12 is the priority for funding because it is a Constitutional mandate</li> <li>▪ Looking forward, the money available for construction will decline</li> <li>▪ For the academic side, it is hard to evolve and be nimble and creative to adapt to the outside working world</li> <li>▪ Centralization would be helpful when it comes to resources and administrations (i.e. statewide online program)</li> <li>▪ Need a repository of best practices to share</li> <li>▪ AP and dual enrollment are not getting students out the door any faster</li> <li>▪ K-12 and higher education not working together adequately across the Commonwealth</li> <li>▪ Money should be allocated for specific reasons and not just doled out to everyone</li> <li>▪ The concept of "if you build it, they will come" has not worked in S/SW Virginia</li> <li>▪ Institutions do not open their books enough; they're like free-agents</li> <li>▪ The impetus for the 6-year plans was to understand where the money is going and why in some cases, state is paying for 100 kids to go to college but only 50 are coming out with degrees; and also the 6-year plans were to help understand and address the differences in regions</li> </ul>	

## Varied Perspectives on the Common Themes

AFFORDABILITY / COST	ACCESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Often cost influences where a student decides to go to school</li> <li>▪ Underemployment and debt (this concern was not expressed by the current students)</li> <li>▪ Some schools are better at raising money than others</li> <li>▪ Possible to have incentive programs with the state for funding</li> <li>▪ Administrative costs at the institutional level are too high</li> <li>▪ Administration of students loans are too complex for parents/students (not that they aren't affordable, but they're confusing)</li> <li>▪ Challenging to get across the full scope of expenses/cost (books, tuition, and housing, etc.)</li> <li>▪ Graduated tuition plan</li> <li>▪ Because of cost of college, people are not able to buy the other things in life (houses, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students in the middle have programs to help them including Access, Upward Bound, and AVID</li> <li>▪ Changing demographics, how will we help more 1<sup>st</sup> generation students?</li> <li>▪ Demographics refer to more than race, they refer to different backgrounds, returners, veterans, first generation</li> <li>▪ Veterans should be able to get credit for service/classes</li> <li>▪ These different demographics of people will also need more assistance to go to school</li> <li>▪ Challenge of building a community with the changing demographics</li> <li>▪ Cost of test prep is leaving some at a disadvantage</li> <li>▪ There are too many out of state and students can't get into the schools especially from Northern Virginia</li> <li>▪ College is not for everyone and perhaps we're putting too much pressure on individuals to go</li> <li>▪ In rural areas, WIFI/ Internet/ Fiber is a major barrier to online learning, etc.</li> <li>▪ Some 4-year institutions don't take all community college transfer credits, which leads to higher cost for student</li> <li>▪ Financial Aid should go to Dreamers</li> </ul>

<b>SYSTEM-WIDE</b>	<b>PREPAREDNESS/ REMEDIATION</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Like that schools have autonomy</li> <li>▪ Most did not like that SCHEV was starting to track higher education as an ROI and comparing major with salary after graduation</li> <li>▪ Books need to be more open</li> <li>▪ Satellite campus possibility</li> <li>▪ Uneven declining enrollment</li> <li>▪ Is the Sentara hospital model (internal training/certification of nurses) feasible?</li> <li>▪ Do we let institutions award credentials that do not meet employer requirements?</li> <li>▪ Productivity of the institution tied to state funds</li> <li>▪ HBCUs need to have their place in the system defined</li> <li>▪ Pooling services together</li> <li>▪ Do we need all of these institutions?</li> <li>▪ Mandatory summer school to avoid building more buildings</li> <li>▪ Liberal arts is important but not for everyone</li> <li>▪ There's no traditional route or path anymore—how can we let people know any options are okay</li> <li>▪ Institutions want more data on courses, transfers, graduations—from community college through a 4-year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Some see the benefit in a gap year</li> <li>▪ Transfer students tend to do better</li> <li>▪ Test prep is an issue</li> <li>▪ Student success programs in the colleges are too high of a cost</li> <li>▪ Who should be responsible for remediation? Community college? High schools?</li> <li>▪ Coordinate higher education with K-12</li> <li>▪ Possible online remediation for the academics</li> <li>▪ Growth in budgets are in remediation; is that where we should be growing?</li> </ul>
<b>STEM</b>	<b>OTHER</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Too much focus on STEM</li> <li>▪ Concern that universities increased STEM programs to increase funding for their schools</li> <li>▪ This also lead to issues of duplication</li> <li>▪ These disciplines do not produce people with thinking, writing, and creative skills</li> <li>▪ Higher education cannot force STEM on students</li> <li>▪ If you major in STEM, it's easier to get financial aid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Duplication with programs is a concern</li> <li>▪ Each college should pick what they are good at and focus on those programs (i.e. small liberal arts institution doesn't need a full blown research center)</li> <li>▪ Liberal Arts colleges do not need to be research institutions</li> <li>▪ Tobacco Commission funded certain initiatives in the South/Southwest regions but the money could have been spent better</li> </ul>