

IDEAS FOR IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT: THE PARKING LOT LIST

1. Student Pipeline and Progression

A. Pre-K-12

- i. Establish a more integrated and purposeful P-20 system. Create a “continuity of experience” from birth, especially for at-risk children. Fund programs for children that require mentorship throughout childhood.
- ii. Create a plan and budget for ensuring high-quality, statewide pre-K. Ensure affordable access to quality early-educator coursework and credentialing from high school to baccalaureate degree, in a stackable sequence. Explore and support alternative pathways for early educators to acquire competencies and skills, including coaching and apprenticeship.
- iii. Encourage school districts to collaborate and partner with local non-profits and higher ed institutions to expand pre-k education and child care and to offer after-school programs.
- iv. Focus on STEM, and especially the Computer Science SOLs, earlier and more rapidly in the educational process.
- v. Address issues of teacher pay and retention.
- vi. Invest more in shop/trades/technical curricula and marketing to students. Focus on credential attainment while still in high school. Get members of the business community into middle and high schools.

B. Dual Enrollment and Transfer

- i. Assist the VCCS with deploying more advisors for dual enrollment and addressing inconsistencies in offerings across the Commonwealth. Foster guidelines for higher standards of quality and fairer rate structures.
- ii. Incentivize additional dual enrollment for both college-track and vocational-track courses.
- iii. Establish accessible, affordable pathways – including online/distance education – for high-school students with no or limited access to dual enrollment. Highlight pathways from dual enrollment courses, especially in STEM, into regionally-aligned programs such as those at UVa-Wise and Radford.
- iv. Continue to improve the transfer process through Virginia-specific initiatives and participation in national efforts.
- v. Create more consistent programs for awarding credit for experience in business/industry and the military.

C. Adult Engagement/Re-Engagement

- i. Promote the College Transfer Grant (2+2 option), regional higher-ed centers and the Online Virginia Network in a coordinated strategy to reengage with people who have many credits but no degree/credential.
- ii. Develop adult-/veteran-targeted programs with job/skill training and certifications available.
- iii. Expand and/or replicate the RU IMPACT model, wherein students have one year to complete a certificate online with credit hours that can be transferred to a degree program (in Southside, NCI also provides an on-site component).

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2. Alignment of Resources with Outcomes

A. Pre-K-12

- i. Revise public school funding allocation formulas/methods to offset lower revenues from declining enrollments.
- ii. Increase teacher compensation, especially in districts with low attainment rates. Pursue proven strategies to address the teacher shortage and issues of teacher quality.
- iii. Implement strategies that support appropriate value and compensation for early educators who attain credentials that reflect mastery in these distinctive competencies.
- iv. Create a Virginia “Promise” program to encourage students in secondary schools to plan and prep for college.
- v. Create a need-based financial aid program for students in dual enrollment courses.

B. Higher Education

- i. Offer “free” or supported tuition at all or some (i.e., rural) community colleges.
- ii. Reduce tuition at and/or provide more aid funds to open-access public institutions in certain regions of the state.
- iii. Review funds available and distribution models of need-based state financial aid to ensure equitable provision to students who are low-income, part-time, first-generation, co-enrolled, non-traditional-pathway and/or adults. Focus more aid dollars at institutions that serve more of these students.
- iv. Assist institutions in determining the breakpoint of the percentage of “need” that must be met to ensure that each student persists and completes.
- v. Create a state program of emergency financial aid funds (and perhaps personnel/advocates) to prevent students from dropping out when unforeseen life events occur.
- vi. Fund more adequately the workforce financial-aid model.
- vii. Create a “Super TAG” (Tuition Assistance Grant) award for students who meet certain criteria at selected institutions.
- viii. Set attainment goals for public institutions using criteria relevant to *The Virginia Plan for Higher Education* (i.e., by student region, socio-economic status, race/ethnicity, gender, etc.).
- ix. Fund “learn and earn” student employment programs that provide funding and career skills during college.
- x. Implement more collaborative career training programs, tied to business internships and entry-level work programs.
- xi. Create programs that reduce or forgive tuition or loans for students who complete their studies in high-demand fields and/or through non-traditional pathways.
- xii. Expand the list of institutions to which students may use the College Transfer Grant.
- xiii. Commission a study of best practices in financial aid that maximize degree completion.

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3. Governance and Innovation

- i. Establish income-based family savings accounts so families are encouraged and assisted in saving for college.
- ii. Review comprehensively and regularly all higher-ed funding formulas and allocation methods.
- iii. Rethink policies regarding public institutions' setting of tuition and fees and enrollment of out-of-state students.
- iv. Provide for funding reserves.
- v. Encourage selective public institutions to rely less on standardized test scores in admission considerations.
- vi. Encourage and incentivize four-year institutions to offer 2+2 options at regional higher-ed centers, especially in high-demand fields. Aggressively market the 2+2 model in rural areas.
- vii. Utilize regional higher-ed centers to provide support services/personnel and learning resources/facilities to students taking online courses/programs and/or participating in the Academic Common Market.
- viii. Expand list of institutions eligible to apply for grants and related opportunities that seek to generate and fund solutions to educational challenges, including attainment gaps and pipeline leaks.
- ix. Authorize institutions that offer degree programs at higher-ed centers near the state border to offer in-state tuition rates to out-of-state students from neighboring non-Virginia counties.
- x. Support legislation that seeks to unify/integrate early childhood funds and programs at VDOE (e.g., this year's "Early Childhood Success Act").
- xi. Create a more aggressive economic development program (statewide and rural).
- xii. Fund the SCHEV study of outcome results for graduates of Virginia institutions.

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4. Outreach and Advising

- i. Offer college-readiness and financial-literacy programs for families of middle- and high-school students as a resource for postsecondary planning.
- ii. Utilize Cooperative Extension offices and programs to provide information, services and programs to parents, especially of young children, and potential-student adults who otherwise have no or limited knowledge and/or experience in higher ed.
- iii. Provide access through “bridge” programs and other pre-enrollment initiatives to support readiness of incoming students.
- iv. Scale a case management/social worker intervention model to provide support to students, especially first-generation students, in navigating college processes (e.g., structured counseling/coaching in decision making and strategies for success).
- v. Foster mentoring programs that target and support specific types of students/needs.
- vi. Provide funding to institutions to support technology that identifies at-risk students.
- vii. Beef up career planning/development functions in higher ed and K-12. Perhaps deploy state matching funds.
- viii. Create a nation-leading online portal to help students better understand career pathways, as well as employment outcomes tied to different educational programs, ideally for students like them (interests, prior academics, geographic preferences, etc.). Provide self-directed planning, including assessments on interests, skills and values.
- ix. Aggressively address: new simpler admissions application; on-boarding via cutting edge technology; fillable financial aid forms to eliminate intimidation; structured pathways to a clear end leading to a career; course scheduling that is focused, efficient and career oriented; credit for prior learning in a variety of ways in addition to the veteran credits in place; new marketing plan to promote student interest and career opportunity.

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5. Targeted Intervention

- i. Establish contracts with selected community colleges and private colleges to expand access for and completion by students in localities with low educational attainment (keep the students closer to home).
- ii. Invest in rural broadband to facilitate online education in underserved areas.
- iii. Incentivize college graduates to stay in or relocate to certain areas (rural; inner-city; low-income).
- iv. Create a talent-attraction tax credit program (like in Maine) for localities with declining populations.
- v. Incentivize start-up-company creation in areas that underperform economically and/or in attainment by providing time-limited tax exemptions for both the companies and their employees. Such incentives also could include assistance with student loans after an employee has remained employed with the start-up for a certain period of time.
- vi. Support apprenticeships for early childhood educators.
- vii. Ensure that parents, especially those who are low income or living in high risk communities, have access to opportunities that match low or no-cost training and education directly to open positions in fields and with employers who value trained candidates and will reward them with sufficient wages.
- viii. Ensure, through policies including within TANF, that for low-income individuals who are striving to achieve educational and employment goals, childcare, transportation, and other real-life factors are better supported.
- ix. Explore means of surveying non-completers to understand the barriers that prevent them from achieving their goals, and identify effective ways of addressing.
- x. Deploy the “skills first” concept and stackable credentials in workforce-training programs in community colleges, esp rural community colleges, where students are more likely to remain closer to home.
- xi. Support “Return to Roots” programs so that community colleges, especially in rural areas, are not educating/training people to leave their local areas.
- xii. Market and utilize better the Online Virginia Network, Old Dominion University, Liberty University and the Virginia Community College System in providing online courses and programs to underserved populations.
- xiii. Facilitate meaningful “gap year” learning opportunities for graduating high schoolers or enrolled undergraduates, esp in underserved areas, similar to the Domestic Study Away proposal below.
- xiv. Facilitate a Domestic Study Away program that employs college students in short-term jobs in high-demand fields in targeted (e.g., rural; inner-city; low-income) areas. Consider using regional higher-ed centers as hubs.
- xv. Create programs that largely pay for additional education to overcome specific barriers for specific groups (e.g., free additional English language training, including the use of technology for ESL students and “teaching the test” so that the English SOL is not an inappropriate barrier to immigrant students; free SAT prep classes for all rural students; more investment in accommodations for students with disabilities so that they have more career options and more frequently choose to further their education).