

Council input regarding SCHEV priorities, arranged by the 4 pillars of the Virginia Plan

July 8, 2020

1. Affordable Access:

- a. **Increase digital access** - Given the shift to remote/online learning modes, which is likely to persist, we need to broaden our definition of affordable access to include the ability to effectively access these modes. That includes access to broadband, devices and appropriate spaces to attend classes and do class work.
- b. Need more focus on and investment in **enrolling under-represented students** into post-secondary programs (e.g. minority students, adults, rural students). Demographics are working against us and we won't achieve the overall goal if we don't increase the size of the pool.

2. Student Success:

- a. **Equity** – Needs to be more prominent in our discussions and recommendations overall.
 - i. SCHEV should **develop a data set** that measures performance and progress for each institution and the Commonwealth overall.
 - ii. Need to create additional ways for black and other minority students and graduates to develop **professional networks**, build their resumes and engage in career-oriented work and internship opportunities.
- b. **Reinvent and invest in guidance counselors and advisors** – Need more advisors and more development/training of advisors for pre-K-12 and VCCS and four-year institutions. They need to be able to explore the full range of options in terms of programs (not just at their institution) and help students address non-academic needs as well (e.g. food, housing). Access to this guidance should persist even for high school graduates who initially choose not to go on (something likely to increase this coming semester due to pandemic impacts). Engagement with these young people should continue and they should be provided with ongoing support to help them make decisions about their future education.
- c. **Ensure the quality of distance/on-line learning** – Given the speed at which our schools had to make the switch to remote and online learning, they did a commendable job, but there is still a considerable range in terms of quality and the effectiveness of what is being delivered. Since these modes of learning will continue to be prevalent in the coming year (and perhaps permanently) ensuring quality becomes more important. Are there standards that need to be developed and consistently applied? Are there approaches to assessing quality that need to be implemented? Are there ways to support professors through training or additional technology support or platforms (e.g. a sophisticated exam platform that provides robust authentication and proctoring that could be used by all schools)? Failure to do this could jeopardize student outcomes and increase disparity, could put some school's accreditation at risk along with their ability

to charge full fare and could negatively impact Virginia's overall ranking as one of the best states for higher education.

- d. **Dramatically increase student achievement and completion** – Currently approximately 40% of students who begin a program at a Virginia higher education institution drop out with only debt to show for their efforts. This should not be viewed as acceptable. We should have a goal that **every student ends up with something of value** – a “reverse Associate’s degree,” a workforce aligned certificate, a bachelor’s degree – even if it is not the credential the student anticipated receiving when they first started. While 100% might be impossible to achieve, it should be the goal and could help us raise performance to something in the 80% range overall.
- e. **Ensure academic freedom** – Student success requires great professors and to attract and retain the best faculty, we need to ensure that academic freedom is not impinged upon. What can SCHEV do to ensure that academic freedom within Virginia’s public system of higher education is not compromised?
- f. **Increase access to mental health care** – There is a significant deficit in the availability of mental health care services for students. Stress levels are likely to rise even further and this will become an even greater issue due to fears associated with the pandemic.
- g. Need to develop strategies that better define this as a **pre-K-20 system**, not two separate systems. For example, if students don’t develop adequate math skills in pre-K-12, they won’t obtain advanced STEM degrees later in life no matter how much we invest in those programs.

3. Innovation and Investment

a. **Financial stability analysis**

- i. SCHEV should work with institutions within the public system of higher education to identify those that may be **financially challenged** by the pandemic and recession, understanding their full financials (foundations, debt loads, medical centers, non-E&G etc., could determine 12-24 month solvency under a few scenarios, focusing on liquidity; similar to a rating agency assessment as one approach); work with said institutions to develop contingency plans, flag risks to students and the state (but in a way that doesn’t create further risks to these schools); identify opportunities for consolidation (a concept brought up by at least a half dozen Council members) at the institutional and administrative function level.
- ii. A similar though less intensive analysis should be done with the private colleges and universities given their importance to higher education in Virginia (especially with regard to access) and the damaging impact closures have on students and communities.
- iii. Assuming that some schools will need to **eliminate programs** to weather the storm, SCHEV could produce a **data set** that would identify opportunities based on metrics (e.g. cost per degree, # of students, alignment with workforce needs, grad salary and employment outcomes etc.); perhaps even develop

recommendations for program consolidation based on SCHEV's ability to take a system-wide point of view.

- b. Revise calculations for base adequacy and other state funding**
 - i. Could take into greater account the various **price versus value** relationships for each institution. Those whose degrees have the highest value should be allowed to charge higher tuition and fees to offset a reduction in state funding, which could then be reallocated to the other institutions to support their core financials and create more affordable pathways.
 - ii. Allocations could be based to a greater extent on the **student populations** that each school serves; those with greater need (e.g. low income or first-generation college students) would receive more per student in recognition that these students need more support to succeed.
 - iii. State funds could be allocated to a greater degree based on the **degree program**. This is done now but needs to be refreshed and more fully aligned with actual costs.
 - iv. Incentives could be created to encourage schools to graduate students that have the **credentials and competencies that are needed by employers**.
- c. **Increase number of out of state students** – Continue efforts to increase the number of these students, especially top talent. What are the barriers and how can they be removed? We have out-migration now and some of these students would stay and offset that. We need the talent and it would help the schools financially.
- d. **Reinvent the 6-year planning process** – SCHEV needs to reform the 6-year planning process. It is too divorced from the state plan and priorities and may need other stakeholders involved (e.g. board and Council members, public, students). The plans could benefit from a much deeper review and assessment.
- e. **Reopening plan reviews** – While SCHEV is not a health expert, it should provide some degree of assessment when reviewing plans for those elements that have the most direct impact on student outcomes; perhaps identifying best practices or innovative actions and having direct discussions with institutions regarding any noted “soft spots.”
- f. **Take a greater system-wide view** to reassess/validate/refine the Virginia Plan – SCHEV could do an analysis on how the various institutions within the system have evolved over the past decade (e.g. mission/philosophy, populations served, programmatic emphasis, footprint etc.). This could help us identify positive/negative trends, ways to better leverage strengths to fill gaps, opportunities for increased consolidation and coordination – could create a view of what we want our system to look like 5-10 years from now and work backward from that to determine what we need to be doing to get there.
- g. Provide a platform to **identify and promote innovations** being driven by presidents and institutions, both public and private.

4. Prosperity

- a. Complete the **workforce alignment project**. In particular, develop the definition/creation of a core data set and the recommendation to create an entity to own it, governed by stakeholders and enhanced by dedicated staff both within an agency and at the schools.
- b. Create a more **robust system for competency assessments**, including “digital literacy” to further align with workforce needs and provide greater signaling for students.
- c. **Focus on “Retooling”** – In the short and mid-term, we need to focus resources on retooling our existing workforce as many of the recently lost jobs (e.g. retail) are not coming back. This will require increased emphasis on shorter length programs aligned with specific workforce needs and greater outreach to the un/underemployed.