The Importance of Early Childhood Investment

MODERATOR

Dr. Lauren Zbyszinski, Deputy Director for Early Learning Policy, The Hunt Institute

RESOURCE EXPERTS

The Honorable Kirsten Baesler, Superintendent of Public Instruction, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, The Hunt Institute | Hunt-Kean Leadership Fellow Cohort Six

Jenna Conway, Deputy Superintendent of Early Childhood Care and Education, Virginia Department of Education

Dr. Barbara Cooper, Secretary, Alabama Department of Early Childhood

KEY TAKEAWAYS

• Early care and education is not solely about the child, but also includes the child’s family. Partnerships between parents and early care professionals is integral to the development of the child.

• Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are instances of trauma that occur before the age of 18. The impact of trauma on brain development needs to be a part of the conversation to encompass the whole child approach.

• The Commonwealth is building a unified early childhood system in which the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) oversees all components of early care and education. This unification creates a single point of accountability for school readiness in the Commonwealth.

• Early childhood initiatives in the VDOE leverage parent and educator knowledge to prepare college- and career-ready children. The initiatives aim to develop both academic and social skills during a critical period for children.

• Social-emotional skills not only help children socially but also ensure they have the capacity to participate productively in an academic environment. Aligning academic and social-emotional curriculum with professional development for educators will help ensure school-ready children.

• Early care and education should be made up of well-funded, public-private partnerships that support the true cost of operation, including compensation. Such systems must balance consistency and localization.

• Early childhood educators should be paid a livable wage to increase recruitment and retention in the field. The VDOE currently offers qualified teachers’ incentives, such as wage supplements, to decrease turnover. Early analysis of the program-indicates turnover has dropped from 25 percent to 13 percent.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

• Support expansion of family choice in early education that includes qualified public, private, and non-profit entities when considering preschool providers.

• Create an early childhood system that promotes continuous quality improvement by developing accountability measures that support equitable experiences and encourage the professionalization of the early educator field.

• Increase access to child care. Families living in rural areas or need child care during nontraditional hours have limited options. Eliminate child care deserts to ensure all children have access to high-quality child care.

RESOURCES

• Elevate Early Education (E3) | A bipartisan, statewide, advocacy organization supporting Virginia’s children.

• Understanding Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Skills | 2021 report promoting a more comprehensive understanding of school readiness and success.

• What is a Public-Private Partnership and Why Do They Matter? (Administration for Children and Families) | 2014 Brief outlining the strengths of public-private partnerships for state policymakers.

• Minimum Wage Increases: Impacts for Child Care Workers and Providers (Bipartisan Policy Center) | 2021 Analysis highlighting how minimum wage increases might impact the child care industry across the country.
Educator Diversity | Leveraging Data for a Diverse Educator Workforce

MODERATOR
✉ Dr. Anthony Graham, Provost & Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Winston Salem State University

RESOURCE EXPERTS
✉ Dr. Mark Teoh, Vice President of Learning, Research, and Impact, Teach+
✉ Verletta White, Superintendent, Roanoke City Schools

KEY TAKEAWAYS

• It has been shown that a diverse teacher workforce improves outcomes for all children. Students thrive when they have positive role models who can connect with their teachers.
• There is a need for data on teachers of color in the workforce. There have been studies, but several data gaps exist. Some of the questions that need data to answer:
  o What is the distribution of teachers of color across the educator workforce? While 20% of the educator workforce identifies as a person of color, this does not take into account regional differences. The PA Research for Action created a map to try to breakdown those regional differences so that we have a better understanding of the distribution.
  o What is the pipeline for educators of color? NCTQ data showed that teacher preparation programs have diversity, yet only 6% of the overall workforce are educators of color. At some point between prep programs and entry into the profession, we are losing teachers of color. We need to identify where we are losing diverse teachers and why.
  o What is the retention of educators of color? MA Department of Education released their findings that teachers of color are leaving the workforce because they are facing hostile environments and they need more financial support, making teaching an unsustainable option.
• Districts need to identify their goal for recruitment and retention of a diverse educator workforce and then begin with that end in mind.
• There have been several ways that districts have tried to be strategic and intentional in their recruitment and retention efforts:
  o Collaborate with HBCUs for recruitment of teachers of color
  o Create mentorship programs in schools for teachers of color to be mentored by other teachers of color
  o Recruit teachers from paraprofessional ranks
  o Initiate listening groups: IL invested $2 million in infinity spaces for educators of color to hear what they need to be supported.
• Students of color tend to take out student loans at 2-3X higher rates than non-students of color. The expense of a degree combined with low teacher compensation makes teaching a less attractive profession for students of color.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

• Collect comprehensive data to match teachers with schools where they will be a good fit. To recruit and retain teachers of color, teachers need to be able to have choice. Data should be available for teachers.
• Create a state-wide strategic plan to recruit and retain teachers of color. This could include state and district support for mentorship programs, covering certification costs, and recruiting teachers from paraprofessional ranks.

RESOURCES

• Distribution, Pipeline, and Retention | Data Packet with full list of Teach+ collected resources covering data, policy, and practice issues in teacher diversity, teacher distribution, teacher pipeline, and teacher retention.
Ready to Read | Embedding Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction Across the Continuum

MODERATOR

✉ Kelly Butler, Chief Executive Officer, Barksdale Reading Institute

RESOURCE EXPERTS

✉ Dr. Kymyona Burk, Senior Policy Fellow, ExcelinEd
✉ Dr. Emily Solari, Edmund H. Henderson Professor of Education, School of Education & Human Development, University of Virginia

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The General Assembly passed the Virginia Literacy Act in 2022. This bill aimed to improve early literacy outcomes for young students and will provide schools with appropriate tools, resources, tech assistance, and funding to improve student success.
2. Approximately 90 percent of brain development happens by age five, making early childhood educators critical to building a solid foundation for school and life.
3. Teachers must be properly trained on the science of reading to effectively build literacy skills and provide the individual support many students need. Faculty in teacher prep programs must also know the science of reading; additional professional development for educators is crucial as prep programs vary in their embrace of the science.
4. Additional efforts to strengthen curriculum and professional development immersed in the science of reading have gained traction in states across the country. Last year, Arkansas banned the three-cueing system of reading and visual memory to teach reading. States like Connecticut and Colorado have passed legislation to ensure the science of reading is baked into curriculum and other classroom materials.
5. While the research is clear that the science of reading is essential to student reading development, challenges to implementation persist. In Virginia, there is a need to ensure long-term funding for science of reading professional development, coaching, and curriculum development.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

- Consider how to develop teachers’ skills for teaching literacy across the full education continuum, not just kindergarten through third grade.
- Ensure all teachers receive training in evidence-based instruction so they are prepared to teach literacy. Doing so includes training both teacher candidates in Education Preparation Programs as well as in-service teachers.
- Consider aligning other resources with the science of reading including evaluations, standards, and assessments.

RESOURCES

- Aligning Educator Preparation Programs to the Science of Reading Policy Brief (ExcelinEd) | This resource outlines the fundamental principles for ensuring educator preparation programs align to the science of reading.
- Aligning Educator Preparation Programs to the Science of Reading Model Policy (ExcelinEd) | This resource for policymakers is model policy to ensure that preparation programs provide evidence-based literacy instruction.
- Virginia Literacy Act, Virginia Department of Education | The Virginia Department of Public Education oversees the development of literacy instruction for the advancement of all student outcomes.
Policy Discussion | Creating a Culture of Innovation

MODERATOR

✉ Michael Weinberg, Education Policy Officer, Thornburg Foundation

RESOURCE EXPERTS

✉ Dr. Kume Goranson, Executive Director, CodeRVA Regional High School
✉ The Honorable Aimee Guidera, Secretary of Education, Office of Governor Glenn Youngkin
✉ Dr. Kim McKnight, Director, Center for Teacher Leadership, Virginia Commonwealth University School of Education

KEY TAKEAWAYS

• Innovative school models such as CodeRVA Regional High School, make personalized learning the basis of their curriculum while still maintaining effective accountability systems and ensuring equitable and diverse learning experiences.
• Innovative school models such as lab schools allow for more applied learning experiences such as, immersive internships, CTE and STEM focused curriculum, and career exploration.
• Virginia’s biennial budget includes $100 million in funding for lab schools in Virginia to provide more opportunities for high school students to learn specific career fields including STEM, CTE, and coding.
• Currently, any public or private institution of higher education in the Commonwealth with an approved teacher-preparation program can establish a college partnership laboratory school.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

• Strengthen and fund partnerships between K-12, higher education, and the business community to increase opportunities for lab school partnerships, and internships for K-12 and higher education students.
• Consider how flexibility and guidance can be built into state education regulations. School leaders may need support with meeting new or changing state mandates and expectations.
• Consider state-level accountability structures to better track both how states allocate funding to districts and how districts allocate funding to schools.

RESOURCES

• CodeRVA | This website outlines CodeRVA Regional High school and houses information for students, families, and prospective students who are looking for resources on the magnet high school.
• Blueprint Virginia 2025 | The Virginia Chamber’s strategic plan that provides business leadership, direction, and long-range economic planning for the Commonwealth.
Professional Perspectives | The Challenge of Maintaining School Innovation

MODERATOR

✉ Julia Cunningham, Deputy Director of State Engagement, The Hunt Institute

RESOURCE EXPERTS

✉ Dr. Kristy Somerville-Midgette, Superintendent, Brunswick County Schools
✉ Darlene Brown, Dean of Students, Totaro Elementary, Brunswick County Schools
✉ Dr. Ken Nicely, Superintendent, Roanoke County Public Schools
✉ Kim Bradshaw, Principal, Green Valley Elementary, Roanoke County Public Schools
✉ Dr. Sarah Calveric, Superintendent, Caroline County Public Schools
✉ Dr. Herbert Monroe, Assistant Superintendent, Caroline County Public Schools
✉ Dr. Robert Graham, Superintendent, Radford City Schools
✉ Kelly Linkenhoker, Principal, Belle Heth Elementary School, Radford City Schools
Fireside Chat: The Importance of Internships in a Future of Higher Ed Uncertainty

MODERATOR

✉ Dr. Winn Decker, Deputy Director of Higher Education, The Hunt Institute

RESOURCE EXPERTS

✉ Donna Price Henry, Chancellor, UVA Wise
✉ The Honorable Kirk Cox, President, Virginia Business Higher Education Council
✉ Valerie Keating, Director, K12, State & District Partnerships, The College Board

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Uncertainty in higher education is related to the rise of tuition costs, shifting student demographics, and the often-asked question the return on investment for higher education.
- Part of the Virginia Chamber’s strategic plan, Blueprint Virginia 2025, was increasing work-based learning opportunities, internships, and apprenticeships throughout the education system. One way that Virginia is creating these learning opportunities is through VTOP, the Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership, which connects higher education institutions, students, and businesses with paid internships through a streamlined process.
  - Many students who participated in internships reported that the internship was a catalyst for their current employment or helped create the skills necessary for their current employment.
  - Internships also help students try out relevant experiences without the fear of failure.
  - Internships also allow students to build skills and a vocabulary around their chosen work and field.
  - It is particularly relevant for community college spaces where there are high demand programs in fields like information technology and healthcare and early childhood education. VTOP can track the programs which are in high demand and tailor the internships to the needs of Virginia’s students.
- VTOP is off to a good start, but it is still in its infancy. Eventually, all students who attend VA institutions should be able to get a paid internship. There are a lot of students in VA who use financial aid, but many can’t afford to participate in an internship because they have to work and cannot take time off for an internship.
  - UVA Wise pays half of the internship and the business partner pays the other to make sure that students are getting paid internships and are able to afford to gain the skills they need.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

- Strengthen and fund partnerships between K-12, higher education, and the business community to increase opportunities for paid internships for K-12 and higher education students and to improve the opportunities for all of Virginia’s higher education students to be able to participate in paid internships.

RESOURCES

- Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership | This website outlines the VTOP program and houses information for institutions, students, and employers who are looking for resources on participating in the paid internship program.
- Blueprint Virginia 2025 | The Virginia Chamber’s strategic plan that provides business leadership, direction, and long-range economic planning for the Commonwealth.
- Unpaid Internships: National Level Data from the NACE 2021 Student Survey | NACE’s snapshot report on access, equity, and outcomes from unpaid internships.
- What Everyone Should Know about Designing Equity-Minded Paid Work-Based Learning Opportunities for College Students | New America’s study on work-based learning opportunities highlighting case studies of program models and concluding with recommendations for best practices.
Assessment and Accountability | Using Evidence-Based Interventions to Get Students on Track to Succeed

MODERATOR

✉ Nadja Young, Director, Education & Civilian Federal Government, US Public Sector, SAS

RESOURCE EXPERTS

✉ Rashard Wright, Chief of Staff, Newport News Public Schools
✉ Kimberly Richey, Deputy Superintendent of School Quality, Instruction, and Performance, Virginia Department of Education

KEY TAKEAWAYS

• In spring 2021, Virginia passed legislation to establish a through-year growth assessment system with at least one beginning-, mid-, and end-of-year assessment in lieu of a single end-of-year assessment.
• These through-year growth assessments were also created to help norm the assessment process and allow for a direct comparison of student learning across Virginia, regardless of student or district factors.
• Virginia’s new through-year growth assessment system utilizes computer adaptive technology which uses test items at, below, and above a student’s grade level to evaluate knowledge and mastery of skills.
• How within-year tests should matter within the accountability system is to be determined. This uncertainty can pose technical challenges for how within-year scores are evaluated as well as how they inform instructional practices.
• Local education agencies (LEAs) are permitted to use additional diverse assessments to evaluate student knowledge. With heightened testing the most likely outcome, policymakers might consider rethinking the accountability system to prevent over-testing and demotivation of teachers and students. Districts must have flexibility to work with students and teachers to determine what accountability looks like in practice.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

• Ensure that schools and educators are assessed in ways that include information and data shown to drive success.
• Find ways to allow teachers to provide contextual information and data that can be difficult to quantify through assessments; all learning cannot be condensed to a specific set of testable measures.
• Develop efficient testing strategies to prevent burnout of teachers and students often associated with over-testing.
• Create a balanced/comprehensive system of accountability that norms how within-year student performance is evaluated and used to influence instructional strategies.
• Consider strategies to inform the public about testing changes to ensure stakeholders understand why policymakers adjusted Virginia’s assessment practices and why these changes matter for students in the Commonwealth.

RESOURCES

• Supporting High-Quality Statewide Assessment: What Every State Policy Leader Needs to Know (Center for Assessment) | This 2020 report outlines the foundational concepts of student assessment.
• Virginia Overview The Nation’s Report Card Data | The National Assessment for Educational Progress assesses each students academic performance. Data can be found on district, state, and federal levels.
• Assessment and Accountability Recommendations for the Next Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Center for Assessment) | The Center for Assessment produced a series of recommendations for improving assessment and accountability systems in the next reauthorization of ESEA.
Balancing Free Speech: Academic Civility and Inclusivity

MODERATOR

✉ Farnaz Farkish Thompson, Partner, McGuireWoods

RESOURCE EXPERTS

✉ The Honorable Jim Douglas, Governor of Vermont | 2003-2011; Board of Directors, The Hunt Institute
✉ Dr. Irma Becerra-Fernandez, President, Marymount University
✉ Adria Merritt, Director for Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion Pathways, Virginia Department of Education
✉ Dr. Bret Danilowicz, President, Radford University

KEY TAKEAWAYS

• Uncertainty in higher education is related to the way that tuition costs are rising, the way student demographics are shifting, and the often-asked question of if higher education gives back a return on the investment.
• All Virginia Universities are required to have their freedom of speech policies published on their public website.
• Students must be taught the skills to effective civil discourse and a college campus is a direct way to encourage and teach debate and social discussion.
• College campuses should be pluralistic environments that encompass not only the racial diversity of our society, but also cognitive diversity.
• Students learn directly from modeled behavior. Campus leadership, faculty, and staff should model effective civil discourse for students to learn proper civic engagement.
• Before students arrive to postsecondary institutions, they can be exposed to an essential skillset during their K12 years. Teaching civic engagement, respectful debate, and diversity can build a strong foundation for later years.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

• Explore ways to highlight effective civil discourse across the Commonwealth. Holding public civil debates with members of the House of Delegates and State Senate can model respectful civic discussion for constituents.

RESOURCES

• Academic Leaders Task Force on Campus Free Expression | This website outlines the task force on campus free speech and expression, developed by the Bipartisan Policy Center. This website contains the report on Campus Free Speech as well as evidence-based best practices for academic leaders.
Postsecondary Funding | Linking State Higher Education Goals with Postsecondary Funding Opportunities

MODERATOR
✉ Secretary Peter Blake, Executive Director, State Council of Higher Education in Virginia

RESOURCE EXPERTS
✉ Dr. Sharon Morrissey, Chancellor, Virginia Community College System
✉ Dr. Makola M. Abdullah, President, Virginia State University

KEY TAKEAWAYS

• While Virginia’s attainment rate – that is, the number of working age adults with some form of postsecondary degree or credential – is 6.5 points higher than the national average (57.4 percent compared to 51.9 percent nationally), there are still equity gaps for Black, Latino, and low-income students.
  o In Virginia, the attainment rate for white adults is 41 percent, compared to 28 percent for Black adults, and 21 percent for Latino adults.
  o Nationally, roughly 34 percent of enrolled postsecondary students are Pell Grant eligible, meaning they qualify for federal student aid; however, in Virginia only 25 percent of students are Pell eligible.

• Roughly 50 percent of Americans believe that a college degree is worth the time and money involved in attainment.

• In Virginia, over 50 percent of students enrolled in postsecondary education are community college students. Virginia has seen a robust growth of the community college system and expansion of opportunities.

• To close equity gaps, it is not enough to expand access to postsecondary education. Rather, postsecondary leaders must also support students once enrolled to ensure they attain a postsecondary degree or credential.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LEGISLATORS

• Support more flexible learning opportunities in higher education, such as credit for prior learning, reverse transfer, and military learning competencies.

• Consider how to make higher education more accessible, such as with greater financial support and flexibility, as well as the provision of academic and career guidance, counseling, and coaching before and during postsecondary enrollment.

RESOURCES

• Virginia G3 | G3 is a tuition assistance program for any Virginia resident who qualifies for in-state financial aid and whose family income falls below an identified threshold. G3 can be used for designated programs in five of Virginia’s most in-demand industries: Early Childhood Education, Healthcare, Information Technology, Public Safety and Skilled Trades.