

20 | **WEST VIRGINIA**
24 | **LEGISLATORS**
RETREAT

PROGRAM BOOK

DAY 1. MONDAY, JUNE 3, 2024

Bridgeport Conference Center | 300 Conference Center Way, Bridgeport, WV 26330

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM REGISTRATION AND OPTIONAL NETWORKING LUNCH

LOBBY & BALLROOM C

1:00 PM – 1:15 PM WELCOME REMARKS

Allison Goff Clark, Director of State Engagement, The Hunt Institute

BALLROOM A

1:15 PM – 2:15 PM EARLY CARE AND LEARNING AS AN ECONOMIC DRIVER

The years of early childhood present important opportunities and challenges for West Virginia policymakers. For children, the earliest years of life are a critical window of development with long-lasting implications for their success in school and life. For West Virginia parents and employers, however, the lack of affordable, high-quality childcare poses an increasing threat to workforce participation – as well as to the prosperity of both families and businesses. In this session, panelists will discuss work currently underway to address West Virginia’s critical child care needs and how lawmakers can simultaneously strengthen programs for children and the state economy.

MODERATOR

Kristy Ritz, Executive Director, West Virginia Association for Young Children

RESOURCE EXPERTS

Lori Barrett, Assistant Professor & Director, Pierpont Community & Technical College

Dr. Andrea Campbell, Department Chair and Director of Teacher Education, Concord University



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2:15 PM – 3:15 PM

FUNDING HIGH QUALITY EARLY CARE AND LEARNING

BALLROOM A

After years of federal guidance requiring states to conduct market rate surveys to set childcare subsidy rates, the shortcomings of this model have become increasingly evident and may be exacerbating the nation’s childcare crisis. Cost modeling is an alternate approach that may better reflect the actual costs of quality care, to include a living wage for childcare staff. This panel will share how states have used innovative approaches to develop more effective funding policy and stabilize the industry.

MODERATOR

Kelly Eppley, Director of Early Learning, The Hunt Institute

RESOURCE EXPERTS

Dr. Philip Keith, Executive Director, Central West Virginia Community Action Inc.

Jennifer Trippett, Owner, Cubby’s Childcare Center

3:15 PM – 3:30 PM

BREAK

3:30 PM – 4:30 PM

ACCOUNTABILITY AND SCHOOL FUNDING

With increased choice options provided to students and families, policymakers are closely considering ways to ensure that allocated public dollars are producing strong student outcomes. This session will consider West Virginia’s school choice landscape, the effectiveness and impacts of school choice policies, and how policymakers and stakeholders can ensure transparency, accountability, and equity in choice systems.

MODERATOR

Melanie Claxton, Senior Program Officer, Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation

RESOURCE EXPERTS

Kelly Allen, Executive Director, West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy

Tiffany Hoben, Director of Education Partnerships & Strategy, The Cardinal Institute

4:30 PM – 5:00 PM

BREAK AND TRANSITION



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5:00 PM – 8:00 PM

RECEPTION AND DINNER

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ON EDUCATION | LOOKING AHEAD TO THE 2024 ELECTION

BALLROOM BD

Education leaders are currently navigating a time of unprecedented challenge, but also valuable opportunity in K-12 education. This session will present the most recent results from The Hunt Institute’s Across the Aisle survey of voter and parent priorities to explore the landscape that state education leaders are currently working in and to provide context for the sessions and discussions throughout the retreat.

MODERATOR

Maureen Stover, Deputy Director of K-12, The Hunt Institute

RESOURCE EXPERTS

Dr. Elisha Lewis, Assistant Professor and Chair of Education, West Virginia State University

The Honorable Bob Wise, Governor of West Virginia, 2001–2005



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DAY 2. TUESDAY, JUNE 4, 2024

Bridgeport Conference Center | 300 Conference Center Way, Bridgeport, WV 26330

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM BREAKFAST

BALLROOM C

9:00 AM – 9:05 AM WELCOME REMARKS

Allison Goff Clark, Director of State Engagement, The Hunt Institute

BALLROOM A

9:05 AM – 10:00 AM MEASURING AND IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES

Students should graduate high school equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful in postsecondary education and careers. To that end, accountability systems collectively build a framework for considering student progress along the way, as well as when interventions are necessary. Policymakers will discuss the role the General Assembly plays in creating this framework, and opportunities to better align graduation standards with readiness for life after high school.

MODERATOR

Donna Peduto, Executive Director, West Virginia Public Education Collaborative

RESOURCE EXPERTS

The Honorable Michele Blatt, State Superintendent of Schools, West Virginia Department of Education

Dora Stutler, Superintendent, Harrison County Schools.

10:00 AM – 10:15 AM BREAK AND TRANSITION TO CUBBY'S CHILD CARE CENTER

LOBBY



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10:15 AM – 11:15 AM | **PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD | TOUR OF CUBBY’S CHILD CARE CENTER**

CUBBY’S

11:15 AM – 11:30 AM | **BREAK AND TRANSITION TO BRIDGEPORT CONFERENCE CENTER**

**CUBBY’S/
BALLROOM A**

11:30 AM – 12:30 PM | **ALIGNING HIGHER EDUCATION TO WORKFORCE NEEDS**

BALLROOM A

As workforce needs continue to evolve in West Virginia, it is imperative that credential and degree pathways reflect the needs of business and industry. This session will focus on how state leaders can foster connections between institutions of higher education, school districts, and regional and state business leaders to ensure degrees and credentials are aligned to business and industry needs.

MODERATOR

Dr. John Deskins, Assistant Dean for Outreach and Engagement, Director of the Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Associate Professor of Economics in the College of Business and Economics | West Virginia University

RESOURCE EXPERTS

- Dr. Josh Baker**, President, Mountwest Community and Technical College
- Ericke Cage**, President, West Virginia State University

12:30 PM – 12:45 PM | **CLOSING REMARKS & LUNCH TO GO**



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CO-CHAIRS



The Honorable Mac Warner

Secretary of State, State of West Virginia, Hunt-Kean Leadership Fellow Cohort 4

West Virginia Secretary of State Mac Warner is in his second term. He is a West Point and West Virginia University graduate with Master of Law degrees from University of Virginia and the Army’s Judge Advocate General’s School. After a 23-year Army career spanning four continents, including a role as Chief of the Organizational Capacity Building Section in Afghanistan, he transitioned to state politics. Elected in 2016, he prioritizes transparent, fair elections, bolstering voter confidence and earning national acclaim for his focus on protecting voter databases and elections systems. As the state’s chief business officer, he oversees licensing for over 139,000 businesses and established the nation’s first 4-agency, single-location business and licensing center in 2018, drastically reducing registration times from up to 10 days to less than two hours. Warner, married to Debbie Law Warner for 40 years, raised four children in Monongalia County, all serving or having served in the military, and enjoys being a grandparent to their six grandchildren.



The Honorable John B. McCuskey

State Auditor, State of West Virginia, Hunt-Kean Leadership Fellow Cohort 7

John “JB” McCuskey, West Virginia’s 21st State Auditor, is in his second term and was initially elected in 2016 after serving two terms in the House of Delegates and practicing law in Charleston. McCuskey prioritizes efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency in government. He has turned West Virginia into the most transparent state in the country by allowing citizens to access real-time data about how their tax dollars are spent through WVCheckbook.gov. McCuskey also established the Public Integrity and Fraud Unit, launching over 200 investigations uncovering \$2.5 million in fraud. McCuskey advocates for more agencies, boards and commissions, and institutions of higher education to use the state Purchasing Card to streamline payments. Since taking office, the state and local governments have earned more than \$41 million in rebates from the use of the P-Card. Additionally, he serves as the Land Commissioner, reforming property tax laws to expedite processes and provide payment plans for struggling homeowners. Raised in Harrison County, McCuskey’s upbringing instilled a commitment to public service. Before attending law school, McCuskey worked as a civilian for the Department of Defense at the Pentagon in the offices of the Army and Department of Defense General Counsels. McCuskey resides in Charleston with his wife, Wendy, and daughters, Charlotte Anne and Martha Elizabeth, and their dog Pearl, operating a small business together.



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The Honorable Ben Queen

Senator, West Virginia Senate, District 12, Hunt-Kean Leadership Fellow Cohort 8

Senator Ben Queen is a lifelong resident of Bridgeport and represents the 12th Senatorial District. In 2016, he was elected to his first of three terms in the WV House of Delegates. At that time, Delegate Queen was just 21 years old and a student at West Virginia University. He was re-elected in 2018 and in 2020. Because of his keen interest in the legislative process, over the last six years Delegate Queen was selected to serve in a number of important leadership positions. He has been a conservative member of the powerful House Judiciary Committee for six years. He was just 13 years old in 2008 when he started his first business – Ben Queen Photography. It was later that same year that the Harrison County Chamber of Commerce named him as their “Young Entrepreneur of The Year”. Ben Queen is the owner of Ben Queen Photography that provides sports and event photography for local, regional and national media outlets. He is a 2013 graduate of Bridgeport High School and attended WVU. He is the son of Paula Carter and Michael Queen, both of Bridgeport. In 2013, Ben was one of six national finalists for the prestigious “Young Entrepreneur of the Year” award hosted by the National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB). Ben Queen is a ninth generation West Virginian. He is also the fourth generation of his family to be elected to public office.



The Honorable Patricia Rucker

Senator, West Virginia Senate, District 16, Hunt-Kean Leadership Fellow Cohort 6

Patricia Puertas Rucker is a West Virginia State Senator serving the 16th District. She is a former teacher who is raising and homeschooling her 5 children with her husband of 25 years. Her life activities include membership in the St. James the Greater Catholic Church, 4-H and WV4Life-Jefferson County chapter, local clean-up projects, volunteer work for Jefferson County Community Ministries, and attendance in local public forums. Patricia is a co-founder and former president of We the People of West Virginia-Jefferson County. Patricia is a first generation American citizen, born in Caracas, Venezuela, coming to the US, Montgomery County Maryland, in 1981 when her father, Jose Puertas, an international correspondent, was assigned by Agence France Presse to the Washington DC desk, eventually becoming its Latin American Editor. She has been a Harpers Ferry resident since 2001 and her hobbies include gardening, beekeeping and raising chickens and ducks on her small hobby farm. Patricia taught social studies in the Montgomery County Public School System before starting a family. She was first elected to the West Virginia State Senate in 2016. In terms of education, Patricia attended Montgomery County, MD, public schools, including Magruder High School (where she served one year as the mascot!), and earned a degree from Trinity College in Washington, D.C., with a B.A. in History and a minor in Latin American studies.



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RESOURCE EXPERTS



Kelly Allen

Executive Director, West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy

Kelly Allen is the Executive Director at the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy (WVCBP). She is a lifelong West Virginian who joined the WVCBP team in 2018 to advocate for a prosperous West Virginia where everyone has a meaningful opportunity to thrive through equitable access to health care, education, jobs, housing, and safe communities. Prior to joining the WVCBP, she advocated for health policy and saw the importance of the Medicaid expansion for the people of our state. As director of the WVCBP, Kelly appears frequently in the media and is a regular speaker to civic organizations and lawmakers on tax and budget issues, health policy, and the needs facing West Virginia families. Kelly holds a B.A. in Political Science and Communications from West Virginia University and a Master of Public Administration from Penn State University. She resides in South Charleston with her family, which includes her toddler, Hudson.



Dr. Josh Baker

President, Mountwest Community and Technical College

Dr. Baker is the President of Mountwest Community and Technical College. He has over ten years of higher education leadership experience. Dr. Baker's past roles include the positions of Campus/Academic Dean, Assistant Academic Dean, Faculty, Coordinator, Program Manager, and more. Dr. Baker holds a Ph.D. in Community College Leadership, as well as an M.S. and a B.A. from Brigham Young University.



Lori Barrett

Assistant Professor & Director, Pierpont Community & Technical College

Lori Barrett is a lifelong resident of West Virginia and has been teaching in the state for over 25 years. Barrett earned an education from West Virginia University. At Pierpont, Barrett was first employed in the Laboratory Preschool and is now the Director of the Laboratory Preschool and the Early Childhood Program Coordinator.



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The Honorable Michele Blatt

State Superintendent of Schools, West Virginia Department of Education

Michele L. Blatt is the 34th State Superintendent of Schools in West Virginia. In this role, she provides organizational leadership to ensure the effective implementation of the West Virginia Department of Education's (WVDE) strategies and goals. Superintendent Blatt has enjoyed a distinguished career in education with more than 25 years of experience as a teacher, principal, and facilitator. Since joining the WVDE full-time as a Leadership Development Coordinator in 2007, she has earned promotions through the roles of Executive Director of the Office of School Improvement, Chief Accountability Officer, Assistant Superintendent for the Division of Support and Accountability, and Deputy State Superintendent. Her professional focus has centered on turning around low-performing schools and providing a variety of strategies, tools, and resources to meet the individual needs of students. During the pandemic, Superintendent Blatt played a crucial role on the state's Joint Interagency Taskforce, guiding West Virginia through shutdowns and reopening schools. Her leadership ensured schools had access to meals, resources, vaccines, and materials, supporting educators and students throughout the crisis. Superintendent Blatt's devotion to supporting every child's well-being and success has been a guiding motivation throughout her career and is a priority in her professional, charitable, and personal pursuits.



Ericke Cage

President, West Virginia State University

Ericke S. Cage, the 13th president of West Virginia State University, assumed office after unanimous selection by the WVSU Board of Governors on March 31, 2022, following his interim presidency starting in September 2021. Under his leadership, WVSU has achieved significant milestones, including the development of the Future State strategic plan, the establishment of a cybersecurity program, and the launch of a new doctoral program in educational leadership, alongside the opening of the WVSU Center in downtown Charleston. A native of Halifax County, Virginia, President Cage transitioned from Norfolk State University, where he served as executive advisor to the president and Board of Visitors. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Virginia Tech, a juris doctorate from Rutgers University Law School, and a Master of Law degree in litigation and dispute resolution from George Washington University Law School.



Dr. Andrea Campell

Department Chair and Director of Teacher Education, Concord University

Dr. Andrea Campbell is a professor of Early Childhood Special Education at Concord University. She received her Master's Degree in Low Incidence Disabilities from East Carolina University while teaching preschool special needs, and later became an early intervention provider in Kentucky. After moving back home to WV, she joined faculty at Concord and completed her Doctorate of Education from Northcentral University in Exceptional Learners. Dr. Campbell is passionate about preparing future early childhood educators and early interventionist to provide the highest quality of services to children and families. While not on campus, Andrea enjoys working on projects related to enhancing early childhood education, dabbling in crafts, spending time with her four children and husband, and cheering on the VT Hokies.



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Melanie Claxton

Senior Program Officer, Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation

As the Senior Program Officer at the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, Melanie Claxton oversees education grants. Previously, she collaborated with K-12 professionals and community-based out-of-school time providers to ensure regional youth had access to high-quality extended and expanded learning opportunities. She has bolstered local systems and capacity-building endeavors, aiming to enhance the delivery of educational services to youth. Committed to youth empowerment, she advocates for accessible resources. Ms. Claxton serves on various boards including Pennsylvania School-Age Child Care Alliance (PENN SACCA), Allegheny Partners for Out-of-School Time (APOST), Neighborhood Learning Alliance, and Contemporary Craft, West Virginia Public Education Collaborative, additionally, she is a member of the Remake Learning Cabinet. Recognized as a New Pittsburgh Courier Fab 40 honoree and an Afterschool Champion by the Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool Youth Development Network (PSAYDN), she holds a bachelor's in biology from the University of Michigan Ann Arbor and an M.S. in Public Policy and Management from Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College.



Dr. John Deskins

Professor, West Virginia University

Dr. John Deskins, Director of West Virginia University's Bureau of Business & Economic Research and Associate Professor of Economics, leads economic analysis and macroeconomic forecasting efforts, aiding statewide business leaders and policymakers. With a Ph.D. from the University of Tennessee, his research centers on economic development, small business economics, and government tax and expenditure policy. Deskins' work is featured in publications like Contemporary Economic Policy, Small Business Economics, and Tax Notes. He's quoted by major media outlets like The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and CNBC, delivering over 300 speeches and has also testified before the U.S. Senate, House, and West Virginia Legislature. Deskins has served as principal investigator or co-principal investigator on more than \$2 million in funded research and contributed to books by Cambridge University Press and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.



Tiffany Hoben

Director of Education Partnerships and Strategy, The Cardinal Institute for West Virginia Policy

Tiffany and her family recently moved from Florida to the Mountain State to enjoy the outdoor lifestyle and seasonal changes. Tiffany understands the importance of being rooted in a local community. She also understands that strong education options are vital to the prosperity of the next generation. Tiffany has faced many hurdles in the current education landscape. She wants to use her career in the implementation of Florida's education initiatives to equip parents to choose the best education for their children. Tiffany strongly believes in the link between character, liberty, and a free economy. She is driven by a passion for education and a commitment to shaping the future of West Virginia's students.



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Dr. Philip Keith

Executive Director, Central WV Community Action, Inc.

Dr. Philip Keith brings over 20 years of experience as a nonprofit leader and educator. He began his career as a teaching assistant at a local youth crisis shelter after college. Subsequently, he spent two years in the Student Support Service program at a local college, offering counseling and support to first-generation college students. For nine years, he served as the executive director of a regionally accredited nonprofit job training program before assuming the role of executive director at a Head Start agency for the past eight years. Additionally, Dr. Keith currently chairs the State’s Commission for National and Community Service and holds a position on the governor’s early childhood advisory council.



Dr. Elisha Lewis

Chair and Assistant Professor of Education, West Virginia State University

Dr. Elisha Lewis is the Chair of the Education Department at West Virginia State University. She earned her doctoral degree in educational administration and leadership, a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction, and a bachelor’s degree in elementary education. She has been an educator since 2005 and has held numerous positions, including being a self-contained elementary teacher, middle school math and science teacher, mentor teacher, and technology coach for Kanawha County Schools. She has taught education courses at BridgeValley Community and Technical College, and in her current role as a faculty member at WVSU, she provides instruction in science, technology, and educational leadership courses. She has received multiple grants involving science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), literacy, and cultural bias. She is an advocate for helping students from underrepresented populations to ensure they are prepared to be successful in college, career, and life, and is a mentor for several student organizations involving literacy and future educators.



Donna Peduto

Executive Director, West Virginia Public Education Collaborative

Donna Hoylman Peduto is Executive Director of the West Virginia Public Education Collaborative. The WVPEC has been recognized by the Power of Performance from the Small Communities, Big Solutions program and was inducted in the June Harless Hall of Fame in for exemplary statewide educational leadership in 2023. Prior to serving in this role, Ms. Peduto served as Director of Operations for the West Virginia Board of Education. She was a key liaison to the WVBE members and executive leadership, the Governor’s Office, chairs of the legislative education committees, and other leaders and organizations throughout the state. Earlier in her career, Ms. Peduto also served as Director of the Learning Lab Network Sites for the Stupski Foundation in San Francisco, Director of K-12 Initiatives for the EdVenture Group, as well as an elementary teacher for 22 years. Recognitions include induction in the June Harless Hall of Fame 2016, Education Champion of Children for WV Kids Count 2021, WV Wonder Woman 2022 and was selected as a fellow in the Appalachian Leadership Institute 2023. Ms. Peduto holds both a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and a Master of Arts in Reading from West Virginia University.



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Kristy Ritz

Executive Director, West Virginia Association for Young Children

Kristy Ritz is the Executive Director of the West Virginia Association for Young Children. Kristy is a graduate of Fairmont State University.



Superintendent Dora Stutler

Superintendent, Harrison County Schools

Dora Stutler has dedicated over three decades to improving education in Harrison County, rising from substitute teacher to superintendent. Raised in Taylor County, she values education as crucial for personal growth and community development. Reflecting on her transformative public-school experiences, she credits educators for nurturing her aspirations. Throughout her tenure as an educator and administrator, Stutler has championed holistic education, recognizing the profound impact of a well-rounded curriculum on students' growth and development. From serving as a Gifted Program teacher to assistant principal, principal, and county office administrator, she has worked to create an environment where every child can flourish. As superintendent, she remains committed to student-centric leadership. For her, each position she's held has been an opportunity to effect positive change and foster a culture of lifelong learning. Her passion for Career and Technical Education ignited during high school through the Diversified Cooperative Training program. Stutler holds a bachelor's in Elementary Education from Fairmont State College and a master's in special education and educational leadership from West Virginia University.



Jennifer Trippett

Director, Cubby's Child Care Center

Jennifer Trippett's family purchased a 4,000 sq ft childcare center in 1996. Together with her sisters, she expanded its services to include infant care and school-age care. In 2007, they built an 18,000 sq ft center in Bridgeport, WV, while maintaining the original site. In December 2021, they added a 26,000 sq ft extension, increasing their capacity to 550 children. Cubby's Child Care Center serves families from Harrison County and surrounding areas with a waitlist of nearly two years for most age groups and employing over 100 staff members. Jennifer has actively participated in the Harrison County BOE Pre-K collaborative since its inception, representing the childcare center's core team and has been involved in advocating for childcare in West Virginia for 27 years. Her goal is to be a voice for the childcare centers that are struggling to stay open, for the staff she employs to be able to make a decent wage and have benefits, and for the families that are struggling to find affordable, accessible, high-quality childcare. Her ultimate goal is to maintain a safe, nurturing environment that fosters the development of all children and serves as a valuable resource for families.



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The Honorable Bob Wise

Governor of West Virginia, 2001–2005

Former West Virginia congressman and governor Bob Wise advocates for improving literacy as an advisory board member of the University of California San Francisco Dyslexia Center and trustee of the Chartwell School in Seaside, CA serving children with dyslexia and other learning challenges and conducting a teacher training institute for public school teachers. He was president of the national Alliance for Excellent Education (All4Ed), chaired the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and is a cofounder of the Global Science of Learning Education Network. In 2023, the Council of Chief State School Officers conferred its highest honor for working for innovative means to improve education.



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THE HUNT INSTITUTE LEADERSHIP & STAFF



The Honorable Arne Duncan

U.S. Secretary of Education, 2009-2016 | Chair, Board of Directors

After serving as a cabinet member under President Barack Obama, Arne Duncan returned home to Chicago in 2016, committed to trying to dramatically reduce the amount of gun violence in our city and allow children on the South and West sides to grow up free of fear and trauma.

[View full bio on our website](#) ➔



The Honorable Susana Martinez

Governor of New Mexico, 2011-2018 | Vice Chair, Board of Directors

In 2010, Susana Martinez was elected governor of the State of New Mexico. She became New Mexico's first female governor and the first Hispanic female governor in the history of the United States. Prior to being elected governor, Martinez was a prosecutor for 25 years along the nation's southern border and served as Doña Ana County's elected district attorney for over half that time. As governor, she prioritized keeping New Mexico's communities safe, ensuring all students receive a high-quality education, and diversifying and growing the state's economy.

[View full bio on our website](#) ➔



Javaid E. Siddiqi, Ph.D.

President & CEO

Former Virginia Secretary of Education Dr. Javaid Siddiqi is the President and CEO of The Hunt Institute. During his tenure The Institute has more than tripled its staff and has expanded its scope of work beyond K-12 to include the entire education continuum from early childhood to postsecondary and the workforce. Javaid works with the leadership team to guide the strategic plan for The Institute and develops The Institute's relationships with partners and funders across the nation. He works with senior-level elected officials across the political aisle to help design strategy, shape policy, and drive educational improvements on the national and state levels.

[View full bio on our website](#) ➔

To view a full listing of our staff, please scan the QR code to the right, or visit bit.ly/THISstaff



SCAN ME



Established in 2001, [The Hunt Institute](#) honors the legacy of James B. Hunt, Jr., the former governor of North Carolina who distinguished himself as an ardent champion of education.

The Hunt Institute brings together people and resources to inspire and inform elected officials and policymakers about key issues in education, resulting in visionary leaders who are prepared to take strategic action for greater educational outcomes and student success.

In 2016, The Hunt Institute became an independent, nonprofit entity and joined forces with Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy to pursue research, educational partnerships, and events related to improving education policy.

Learn more at www.hunt-institute.org.



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