

Education

Virginians in every ZIP code need access to strong, well-supported education and training programs – from children entering preschool to adults looking to retool their skills.

Our future depends on having a talented, well-educated workforce that attracts and creates opportunities. To accomplish that, Virginians of every age need access to strong, well-supported education and training programs. The strength of our schools and training programs is what builds the foundation on which our communities and economy grow.

While some areas of training have seen renewed interest and support in recent years, such as Virginia’s apprenticeship programs and non-credit credentialing, not all areas have seen this same commitment. The centerpiece for education and training – Virginia’s preK-12 schools – had dramatic reductions in state support during and after the recession that equaled over one billion dollars in real dollars at the height of the cuts in 2012. Only about 40 percent of the per student cuts in real dollars have been restored since then.

Most alarming, these cuts hit areas of the state with the highest school-aged poverty rates particularly hard – almost three times larger in the highest poverty communities compared to the lowest poverty communities. That means the state took the most out of schools where localities have the least ability to fill in for state cuts and where families have limited means to supplement instruction.

For Virginia to grow a strong workforce and economy, we need a strong foundation, and that starts with our investments with preK-12 schools. Doing so will provide all Virginians with real opportunities to achieve their goals and career ambitions and will lift the state as a whole to new heights.



The strength of our schools and training programs is what builds the foundation for our communities and economy to grow upon.

Strengthen Virginia's early education

Students that start behind in the classroom tend to stay behind, and this poses a serious hurdle for teachers and parents trying to help all children reach their potential. Early childhood education is a proven, cost-effective strategy that helps lift students up so that they can enter elementary school better prepared to succeed. Here in Virginia, the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) has long-demonstrated success in serving at-risk 4-year-olds by providing high quality early education.

VPI is a proven strategy for improving educational outcomes and a worthwhile investment to ensure all students are empowered to reach their potential. Yet, over 7,400 at-risk children did not get the opportunity to attend VPI in 2016 because there was not sufficient state and local funding to support them or because of insufficient space. In Virginia, less than half of students living in low-income families are enrolled in school when they are 3 to 4 years old. That is a missed opportunity to invest in Virginia's students early and gain improved outcomes down the line.

Virginia Preschool Initiative is a proven strategy for improving educational outcomes and a worthwhile investment.

Tools

Boost investment in the Virginia Preschool Initiative to maximize participation.

Outdated state estimates of preschool costs leave local school divisions on the hook for more than their fare share. The result is schools aren't using all available VPI slots. Using the most recent estimate of preschool costs to boost state support would create the right incentives for local school divisions to participate and start to fill more seats.

Encourage partnerships with high-quality private providers.

Sometimes it's not a cost issue, but a space one. Partnering with high quality private providers can foster more opportunities for kids to have a preschool education.



Investing in Virginia's students and future workforce

It takes commitment from leaders to fully support its schools and students for Virginia to be at the forefront of innovation and economic opportunity. Sustained investment in K-12 schools has been shown to improve children's performance in the classroom and increase their future earnings, with students from low income families showing more pronounced benefits. Increased state spending also raises students' performance and narrows the achievement gap between low-income and wealthier school divisions.

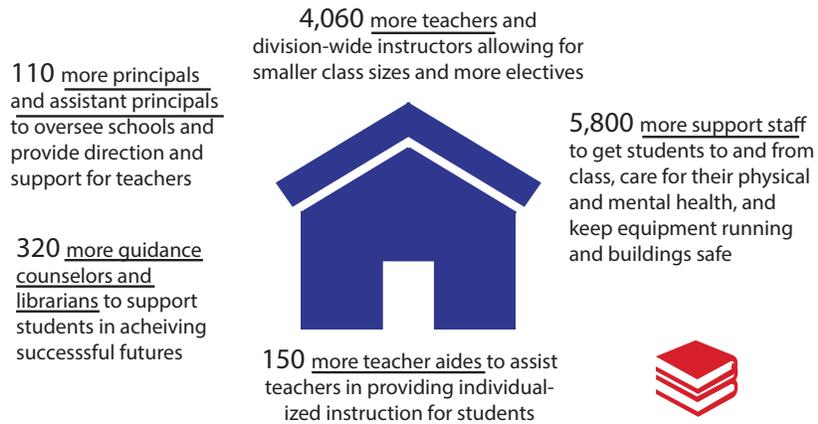
Yet Virginia made dramatic cuts to its support for K-12 schools during and after the recession and these cuts disproportionately impacted school divisions in high poverty communities where heightened funding can have the greatest impact. Even worse, Virginia has consistently been ranked among the worst in the fairness of how its funding is distributed. In Virginia, state and local governments spend 14 percent less per student in Virginia's highest poverty school divisions compared to the lowest poverty divisions. That means we're investing less in schools with students that start out with less and have the

playing field tilted against them. That's not fair and it's no wonder the national report gave Virginia an "F" grade for the fairness of our school funding.

We can fix these problems. We just need to find the will to make these needed and crucial investments that are so vital to the strength of Virginia communities and the future of our families.

The Cost of Cutting Corners

If staffing levels had been kept constant since the 2008-2009 school year, then there would be 10,400 more teachers and other staff in our schools:



Note: Missing positions indicate a combination of schools eliminating positions and not hiring staff to keep up with growing student enrollment.

Source: TCI analysis of VDOE Superintendent's Annual Report (Tables 17, 18), FY 2009 -2016

Tools

Fund the blueprint laid out by Virginia's Board of Education for ensuring that Virginia schools have the staff they need to be successful.

State education leaders unanimously approved new standards in October of 2016 to increase critical staff in Virginia schools like school counselors, nurses, principals, assistant principals, and other support staff. Now it's up to lawmakers to fund these staffing improvements to ensure that schools run smoothly and students are put in position to succeed.

Better target resources to high-poverty school divisions so every student has the opportunity to succeed in the classroom.

Students with fewer supports outside the classroom should get more from schools, not less. To better align resources with needs, Virginia should put their at-risk funding more in line with other states.

Make teacher pay competitive so that we can recruit and retain the best in the profession.

High-quality teachers are critical for classroom success, but Virginia ranks 46th out of 50 states and DC in competitiveness of teacher salaries. Virginia needs to increase teacher compensation so that we can recruit and retain the best in the profession.

Increase availability of free meals to keep all students healthy.

There is a great opportunity for schools to provide free breakfast and lunch at no charge to students, while reducing administrative work for the school. It's called Community Eligibility. Unfortunately, not all eligible schools in Virginia are taking advantage of this opportunity. They can and should.

Reducing barriers for students and helping adults retool to meet tomorrow's challenges

Access to education or training after high school is critical to succeed in today's economy and it will be even more important in the future. Here in Virginia we have built a world-class system of higher education that's helped hundreds of thousands of Virginians learn the skills they need to succeed, while also nurturing new ideas and innovation that help drive our economy forward.

Yet too many cannot afford to access that system without taking on crushing debt. Funding cuts to higher education have increased tuition and mandatory fees across the state, making college less affordable and jeopardizing the ability of many students

to receive the college education they need. We should reinvest in our higher education institutions and boost financial aid to ensure all Virginians have the opportunity to pursue promising careers.

At the same time, not everyone needs a college degree to find and to succeed at work. Still, more and more fields require skills beyond those taught in secondary schools.

The passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014 created an opportunity for all states to revamp workforce training and education programs by encouraging partnerships with employers, coordinated education and training opportunities, and common accountability and assessment tools. It also directs states to target services and opportunities to those individuals with

the greatest barriers to employment so that everyone can earn a paycheck.

We've started down the path of implementing stronger training programs. Virginia leaders have shown initiative in setting new expectations for business leaders to have a voice at the table and for targeting training opportunities to in-demand fields. Yet, in other areas, we have fallen behind some of our neighbors. For example, other jurisdictions have spelled out clear expectations for staffing bilingual specialists and translating key documents at their workforce centers and set performance benchmarks for targeting services to low-income individuals and high-need adults to make sure these individuals aren't left out. We can strengthen our employment and training opportunities so that all Virginians can earn a paycheck and grow our economy.

Tools



Set benchmarks for offering employment services to low-income individuals and other high-need adults to ensure everyone has the opportunity to earn a paycheck.

WIOA requires states to give priority to low-income individuals and other high need adults. Virginia has not yet mapped out how they are going to target services to these individuals. This is needed to make sure they have access to workforce training services so all Virginians can earn a paycheck.



Increase financial assistance and investments in higher education so students can afford postsecondary schooling and noncredit training.

Virginia is in the top third of states in the country with the most severe reductions in per-student state investment from 2016 to 2008. This has forced schools to increase tuition and mandatory fees, which have skyrocketed across Virginia's public two-year and four-year colleges and universities from 33 percent all the way to 123 percent. This places a greater burden on students and their families. We can fix this problem by restoring support for our higher education institutions, including our community colleges, and boosting financial aid.



Make a two-year community college degree debt-free for all Virginians.

Education and training beyond high school is becoming the expectation for job seekers and that is only going to increase. Two-thirds of jobs are projected to require some level of post-secondary education in Virginia by 2020. We need to shift our thinking on education to meet this changing expectation. Other states like Arkansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, and Tennessee have already taken that next step by creating programs that offer free community college to eligible students. Here in Virginia we can take this step too and make sure we're in position to meet the needs of tomorrow



Offer translation services at all Virginia workforce centers to harness the skills and talent of all our workforce.

Virginia's current WIOA plan does not provide direction to local workforce development boards in which translation services they should offer or bilingual staffing they should provide. The state should take the lead in helping all workforce centers provide these essential services.

