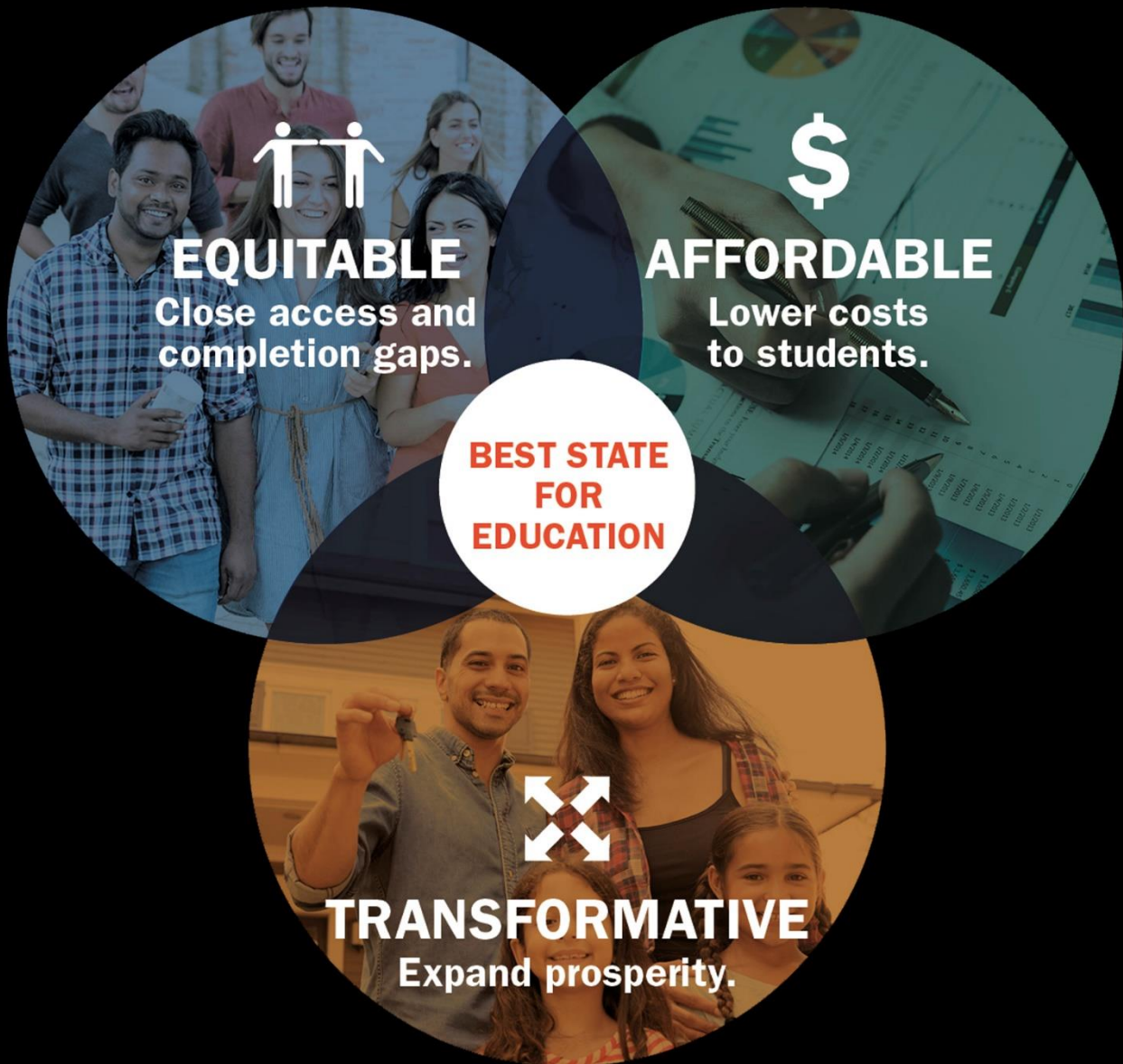



# State Council of Higher Education for Virginia



## Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan for Higher Education

January 2021






**EQUITABLE**  
Close access and completion gaps.

**WHY**  
VIRGINIANS WITH A POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIAL OR DEGREE

**54%**

RURAL POPULATION: **27%**  
MINORITY POPULATION: **31%**



**AFFORDABLE**  
Lower costs to students.

**WHY**  
AVERAGE STUDENT DEBT FOR CLASS OF 2018  
(national average is \$29,200)

**\$30,363**

**BEST STATE FOR EDUCATION**



**TRANSFORMATIVE**  
Expand prosperity.

**WHY**  
GRADUATES WITH POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION  
(degree or credential)

**\$** Have **HIGHER AVERAGE EARNINGS** for each level of college degree

**+** **TAX** **VOTE** **♥** Are more likely to **HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE, PAY TAXES, VOTE & VOLUNTEER**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Higher education transforms learners, cultivates talent and offers pathways to opportunity. Education is the rising tide that should lift all boats, and *Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan for Higher Education* charts the course for doing so. The Plan reflects those near- and longer- term issues that significantly impact the landscape of higher education in the Commonwealth.

Developing this Plan amid the pandemic and the emergence of social justice issues sharpened the report's focus on the challenges of equity, affordability and transformative outcomes—challenges not unique to Virginia. However, the Commonwealth is uniquely positioned to address these issues. The convergence of an equity-minded Council and state leadership together with support from the Lumina Foundation shows that the Commonwealth is ready to embrace the ambitious and interconnected goals set forth in The Plan. The events of 2020 reinforce that now is the time to focus on these efforts.

### Emergent Themes

Several themes emerged from the year-long planning process. Results of a quantitative data analysis of the current state of higher education in the Commonwealth and input from a diverse group of higher education stakeholders confirm that *Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan* should:

- **Emphasize the importance of equity as a specific goal and underlying element of The Plan.**
- **Ensure that The Plan's vision, target, goals, strategies and measures are linked closely.**
- **Enable clear connections between The Plan and SCHEV's day-to-day work and organizational commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.**
- **Adopt deliberate and boldly aspirational goals in light of the pandemic and social justice issues.**

In October, Council established three goals for higher education: it should be equitable, affordable and transformative.

- **Equitable: Close access and completion gaps. Remove barriers to access and attainment especially for Black, Hispanic, Native American and rural students; students learning English as a second language; students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds; and students with disabilities;**
- **Affordable: Lower costs to students. Invest in and support the development of initiatives that provide cost savings to students while maintaining the effectiveness of instruction;**

and

- **Transformative: Expand prosperity. Increase the social, cultural and economic well-being of individuals and communities within the Commonwealth and its regions.**

These goals are the framework for The Plan's 10 strategies and five measures as well as the vision of "Best State for Education" and overall target of 70% educational attainment of all 25 to 64-year old working-aged Virginians.

Developing action plans is the next step in the planning process. The actions will reflect The Plan's ambitious nature and will require innovation and collaboration.

## PREFACE

Higher education serves as a critical nexus, transforming learners, cultivating talent and offering pathways to opportunity. Strategic planning efforts undertaken by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE); State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) illustrate the importance of learning, education and talent to Virginia’s economy and overall well-being. Education is the rising tide that should lift all boats, and *Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan for Higher Education* charts the course for doing so.

The Plan is simultaneously an equity imperative. The vision for Virginia is to be the “Best State for Education.” In order to realize that vision, the Commonwealth must raise its educational attainment to 70 percent for 25- to 64-year-olds by 2030, and to do so with a sharp focus on equity. The Plan identifies the goals, strategies and measures to accomplish this effort. As The Plan developed, equity emerged as a specific goal and an underlying theme.

The goals are ambitious. The work will be challenging because equity and affordability issues are deep and complex. With the cost of postsecondary education outpacing inflation, making higher education more affordable also makes it more equitable. Students should leave higher education with improved social, cultural and economic well-being. Higher education should help students develop the skills to be gainfully employed in positions offering sustainable wages and resultant improved socio-economic standing. Such transformative outcomes are therefore connected to affordable postsecondary education.

In order to address these three complex and inter-related issues, collaboration among diverse stakeholders within and outside of higher education is required. Solutions will require innovative approaches. The results will be worth the hard and ambitious work set forth in this Plan – enabling aspirational outcomes for higher education. The events of 2020 reinforce that now is the time to undertake this work. The pandemic and racial injustice issues further amplified the widening gaps in higher education and showed where strategic efforts should be focused.

SCHEV has a codified responsibility to develop the Commonwealth’s state-level strategic plan for higher education and to review The Plan every six years to ensure its relevance in addressing critical issues. *Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan* is the latest iteration of the state’s strategic higher education plan. Details about the prior Plan and progress on its corresponding goals can be found in Appendix A.

In 2019, to fulfill a Code requirement and more important, to identify the main near- and long-term issues facing higher education, SCHEV began work on The Plan, which sets forth goals and strategies to address critical issues and includes measures to assess progress toward those goals. The project staff spent a year reviewing quantitative data and suggestions and comments from an array of stakeholders. The staff also reviewed Virginia’s higher education institutions’ plans and other states’ plans, all of which helped shape *Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan for Higher Education*.

Virginia strives to be the “Best State for Education” by 2030. In order to do so, it will fulfill its mission of advancing equitable, affordable and transformative higher education.

## **PATHWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY: THE VIRGINIA PLAN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

*Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan* reflects those near- and longer-term issues that significantly impact higher education in the Commonwealth. Developing this Plan in 2020 further sharpened its focus on the identified challenges of equity, affordability and transformative outcomes – challenges not unique to Virginia. However, the Commonwealth is in a unique position to address them. The convergence of an equity-minded Council and state leadership together with support from the Lumina Foundation, a premier national philanthropic organization working to advance equity in higher education, shows that the Commonwealth is ready to embrace the ambitious and interconnected goals set forth in The Plan.

### **Near-term issues**

The COVID-19 pandemic ranks as one of the top near-term issues facing higher education and may alter it in the longer term. The pandemic triggered a sharp and immediate shift to remote learning, heightened the importance of broadband and digital access, and exacerbated financial strains, enrollment pressures (on students and institutions). The pandemic also clearly showed the pressing need for support services on campuses to help students who are beginning college or workforce training and to encourage and help students complete their programs. Near- and longer-term impacts on all education fronts continue to unfold, with long-term ramifications on college preparedness, enrollment, completion and widening equity gaps.

Racial justice concerns also are a near-term issue and are at the top of stakeholders' minds. Unlike the pandemic, which took the world by surprise, racial tensions have been rising for years. Awareness, frustration, loss and pain collided in 2020 as families sat at home during the pandemic and watched multiple acts of violence against Blacks. As a result, an awakening to historical social injustices and protests ensued. However, like the pandemic, the social unrest and racial reckoning may also have long-term impacts. An opportunity exists to improve campus life experiences, curriculum and administration to foster a higher education culture of inclusive excellence.



## Longer-term issues

The pandemic may exacerbate the issues of affordability and transformative outcomes. Graduates and those who leave early are exiting higher education with increasing debt. The planning process also revealed that stakeholders are keenly interested in the correlation between improved socio-economic and employment outcomes and higher education. Stakeholders repeatedly asked how graduates fare in the marketplace and how education improves graduates' financial situation and overall well-being. As industries evolve and, in some cases, become obsolete, students must develop skills and competencies to sustain those changes.

Equity also is another key longer-term issue. The work to address fully this complex and broad problem transcends higher education. Developing sound and comprehensive solutions requires a new approach that will take time and patience. These issues helped shape the goals, measures and strategies found in *Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan*.

## **The Planning Process**

Several themes emerge from the year-long planning process. The Plan should:

- **Emphasize the importance of equity as a specific goal and underlying element of The Plan.**
- **Ensure that The Plan's vision, target, goals, strategies and measures are linked closely.**
- **Enable clear connections between The Plan and SCHEV's day-to-day work and organizational commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.**
- **Adopt deliberate and boldly aspirational goals in light of the pandemic and social justice issues.**

Three core issues face higher education: equity, affordability and the transformative outcomes of higher education. Stakeholders' comments during the planning process and an assessment of "where we are now"<sup>1</sup> clearly demonstrated their importance. These issues shape the following three goals approved by SCHEV Council in October 2020.

- **Equitable: Close access and completion gaps. Remove barriers to access and attainment especially for Black, Hispanic, Native American and rural students; students learning English as a second language; students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds; and students with disabilities;**

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<sup>1</sup> For more context on the state of Higher Education in the Commonwealth as The Plan was developed and a look at the previous plan, accomplishments and challenges, refer to Appendix A at the end of the document.

- **Affordable:** Lower costs to students. Invest in and support initiatives that provide cost savings to students while maintaining the effectiveness of instruction; and
- **Transformative:** Expand prosperity. Increase the social, cultural and economic well-being of individuals and communities within the Commonwealth and its regions.

These goals are the framework for The Plan’s strategies, measures, vision and achieving the 70% attainment target. The table below compares the four goals of the 2014-2020 Plan and the three goals of the new six-year Plan.

2014-2020 The Virginia Plan Goals (then)	<i>Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan Goals (now)</i>
<b>Affordable Access:</b> Provide affordable access for all.	<b>Equitable:</b> Close access and completion gaps.
<b>Student Success:</b> Optimize student success for work and life.	
<b>Innovation and Investment:</b> Drive change and improvement through innovation and investment .	<b>Affordable:</b> Lower costs to students.
<b>Prosperity:</b> Advance the Economic and Cultural Prosperity of the Commonwealth and its Regions.	<b>Transformative:</b> Expand prosperity.

## Vision: Best State for Education by 2030

The Plan’s goals of equitable, affordable and transformative higher education are linked inextricably to each other and to the vision to make Virginia the “Best State for Education” by



2030. In order to realize this vision, the Commonwealth must focus on these three goals.

Stakeholders support an aspirational, qualitative vision that resonates with diverse higher education constituents and that addresses the concerns that have been articulated. The vision of “Best State for Education” continues to support the 70 percent educational attainment target and is inclusive. Also, the “Best State for Education” vision conveys the critical role higher

education plays – as the bridge between Pre-K-12 learning and talent cultivation. It also stresses the importance of Pre-K-12, higher education and talent development to Virginia’s economic and overall well-being.

Becoming the best state for education signals the desire to be more than just “Best Educated.” It means delivering a comprehensive education system that is equitable, affordable and transformative – with higher education at the nexus. The title, *Pathways to Opportunity*, communicates the important role of postsecondary education and the many choices available, including workforce credentials and two- and four-year pathways. All will serve to make Virginia the “Best State for Education.”

### **Target: 70% Educational Attainment by 2030**

Equity gaps persist despite progress made in the last six years toward the 70 percent attainment target. Stakeholders want to maintain this target because it helps guide goals and strategies and aligns with the broader vision of “Best State for Education.” This target signifies work will continue to achieve the desired outcome, and the three goals of The Virginia Plan show where more work is needed.

### **Plan Goals**

The three goals are the product of a year’s worth of research and a close study of the comments and suggestions from stakeholders. The information they gave, in turn, became strategic themes of this report. Please see Appendix B, Table 2 for more information on the specific activities and topics that helped refine the strategic themes. The goals and strategies for *Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan* are shown in the table below.

## Pathways to Opportunity Goals and Strategies

Goal 1 Equitable: Close access and completion gaps	Goal 2 Affordable: Lower costs to students	Goal 3 Transformative: Expand prosperity
<p><b>Strategy (access):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Expand</b> postsecondary opportunities and awareness to Virginians who may not view higher education as an option.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategies (completion/attainment):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Advance</b> digital access, adoption and literacy, as well as high-quality, effective remote-learning programs.</li> <li>• <b>Strengthen</b> student support services for persistence and completion: mental health, mentoring, career services, social, student basic needs, information technology, disability support and other services.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategies (cost to students):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Align</b> tuition and fees, financial aid and state appropriations such that students have broader access to postsecondary education opportunities regardless of their ability to pay.</li> <li>• <b>Cultivate</b> affordable postsecondary education pathways for traditional, non-traditional and returning students.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategies (funding and effectiveness):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Update and reform</b> funding models and policies to improve equity, affirm return on investment and encourage increased and consistent levels of state funding.</li> <li>• <b>Foster</b> program and administrative innovations that enhance quality, promote collaboration and improve efficiency.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategy (personal prosperity):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Support</b> experiences that improve students' employment outcomes, income and community engagement.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategy (economic prosperity):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Improve</b> the alignment between post-secondary academic programs and labor market outcomes.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategy (cultural and economic prosperity):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cultivate</b> a climate of inclusion and innovation through scholarship, research, a diverse faculty and other programming.</li> </ul>

The following sections offer a closer look at each goal and its supporting strategies.

### Goal 1 - Equitable: Close access and completion gaps

Equity emerged as a deliberate, specific goal and also undergirds all strategies and measures. *Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan* must be specific in deciding where equity work is needed, as shown in comments from stakeholders. Additionally, an examination of other states' higher education plans reinforced the need to be specific. The Plan also must carefully decide which groups need more attention. Work to make higher education equitable must address all marginalized groups. Recent issues related to the pandemic and the social justice movement sharpened this equity focus. More information on the context of this Plan is in Appendix A.

#### **Corresponding Strategies**

Stakeholders communicated the need to address near- and longer-term issues exacerbated by COVID-19, including access, college preparedness and the digital divide.

- **Expand postsecondary opportunities and awareness to Virginians who may not view**

### **higher education as an option.**

This strategy encourages close collaboration between higher education and VDOE. By co-owning this issue, higher education and VDOE can open pathways to opportunities for all students and develop skills and talents. The end result will put Virginia closer to the 70% attainment target and the “Best State for Education” designation. More broadly, higher education must collaboratively address access and the existing equity gaps. The work will be hard and complex, building on current initiatives and requires thinking outside of the bounds of higher education.

- **Advance digital access, adoption and literacy as well as high-quality, effective remote-learning programs.**

Digital access (broadband and devices), literacy and remote learning transcend access and completion issues. These challenges have been further heightened by the pandemic-induced shift to remote learning and have strengthened the barriers facing many students from marginalized groups. Gaps in learning may be compounded and some previous progress may be lost. In order for students to successfully complete their higher education and receive their desired credentials, near-term work is needed to address these urgent issues.

- **Strengthen student support services for persistence and completion: mental health, mentoring, career services, social, student basic needs, information technology, disability support and other services.**

Recent events have exacerbated the growing need for student support services, especially mental health, mentoring/career and student basic needs. The Commonwealth must explore work already underway in this area, discover where existing gaps exist and determine which policies, programs or resources will facilitate completion and attainment.

### **Goal 2 - Affordable: Lower costs to students**

The rising cost of higher education coupled with inconsistent state funding placed higher education affordability at the forefront of issues prior to the pandemic. Conflate those issues with the global pandemic and racial justice issues, and the topic becomes even more pressing and remains one of the top three issues facing higher education.

Prior to COVID, this was to be a banner year for higher education funding from the General Assembly – the most in years. However, the funding was unallotted due to financial concerns resulting from the pandemic. The CARES Act funding helped stabilize some of these issues for students and institutions alike. The impacts of ongoing remote learning, COVID-19 on-

campus testing, contact-tracing and PPE costs, among other continued costs, are yet to be determined.

Stakeholders engaged in the planning process made it clear that this topic deserves focus at the student level, as well as institution level, to offer lower costs to students while preserving quality and effective instruction.

### **Corresponding Strategies**

- **Align tuition and fees, financial aid and state appropriations such that students have broader access to postsecondary education opportunities regardless of their ability to pay.**

Stakeholders recommended recalculating the base adequacy calculations used to estimate the basic operations and instruction need of each public institution of higher education.

- **Cultivate affordable postsecondary education pathways for traditional, non-traditional and returning students.**

Students emphasized the need for diverse, affordable higher-education pathways, especially as they began and completed their studies. Ongoing work already focuses on this topic. However, stakeholder concern indicates that a phased plan of action is needed. It will identify work already being done and where the next steps and foci should occur (e.g., [TransferVA](#)).

- **Update and reform funding models and policies to improve equity, affirm return on investment, and encourage increased and consistent levels of state funding.**

These strategies focus on the long-term financial stability of institutions and the myriad actions and approaches that support it. Stakeholders supported developing institutional reserve protections or similar mechanisms. More effective communication with the legislature and other entities that influence funding was recommended, especially regarding the value of higher education and return on investment of higher education.

- **Foster program and administrative innovations that enhance quality, promote collaboration and improve efficiency.**

Potential actions could involve employing financial stability tests or indices to assess when financial strains on institutions would trigger proactive actions. During times of remote learning, stakeholders expressed the desire for institutions to collaborate on best-practice remote learning platforms, assessment tools and professional development, which also may result in cost-savings and economies of scale.

### **Goal 3 - Transformative: Expand prosperity**

The third and final goal focuses on the transformative outcomes from higher education in the broadest context: the social, cultural, and economic well-being of individuals and communities within the Commonwealth and its regions.

#### ***Corresponding Strategies***

- **Support experiences that improve students' employment outcomes, income and community engagement.**

This goal and its corresponding strategies, like the previous ones, are inextricably linked with the issue of equity. Higher education should provide students with experiential learning opportunities well before graduation, as part of their career explorations. These opportunities also will help forge employer relationships which have positive implications for heightened employment outcomes and improved socio-economic status. SCHEV's current work with the [Commonwealth Innovative Internship Fund and Program](#) supports this strategy.

Stakeholders also stressed the benefits of undergraduate research, clinical experience, capstone courses/projects and entrepreneurial experience.

Higher education should facilitate the [improved socio-economic status \(social mobility\)](#) of graduates, enabling them to earn sustainable wages and have the opportunity for increased income. Student loan debt should not impede social mobility, especially for already marginalized groups.

- **Improve the alignment between post-secondary academic programs and labor market demands.**

Many groups involved in the planning process emphasized the importance of aligning higher education with labor market demands. This topic caught the attention of the SCHEV Council in 2019, resulting in the [Alignment report](#). Its recommendations included creating an Education and Labor Market Alignment Office to closely analyze and translate labor market and education data into further action; program productivity review process modifications to recognize students as consumers; short-term credential programs to respond to job losses or underemployment; and examples of ways to strengthen employer partnerships (e.g., [Virginia's Tech Talent Initiative](#)).

- **Cultivate a climate of inclusion and innovation through scholarship, research, a diverse faculty and other programming.**

Last, but not least, stakeholders affirmed the value and contributions of diverse higher education scholarship, research and faculty to Virginia's economy. The broad benefits of

liberal learning and cultural enrichment that result from the array of higher education experiences support the social and cultural well-being of individuals and communities within the Commonwealth and its regions.

Detailed actions in support of the three goals and 10 strategies will follow once *Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan for Higher Education* is adopted. This work will be challenging. It demands fresh approaches and new partnerships, working in collaboration with existing efforts. Results will not happen overnight, but rather through a steadfast years-long effort.

## **Equitable Measures**

The themes that emerged from the planning process helped form a new approach to the measures that will assess the efficacy of The Plan. These measures assess goal fulfillment with an equity lens and:

- **Signal the importance of equity as a specific goal and as an underlying theme throughout the process. The proposed measures use equity to assess goal fulfillment: equitable enrollment, attainment, borrowing, degrees and wages.**
- **Strengthen the linkages between the components of The Plan, including Plan name, vision, target, goals, strategies and measures. The revised measures support the vision of “Best State for Education” and the main goal of 70 percent educational attainment. The measures also reinforce the realization that the work must focus on equity to close gaps and meet the goals of The Plan.**
- **Develop clear connections between The Plan and SCHEV’s day-to-day tasks as well as its ongoing internal equity and values work. The measures will be tracked by SCHEV’s equity dashboard, which is under development. The data can be categorized by race, ethnicity and income (in some cases). More work is needed to assess English language learners, students with disabilities and other underrepresented groups. Specific references to these groups in the goal statements serve as a reminder of their importance to this ambitious endeavor.**
- **In light of the pandemic and social justice issues, The Plan should be deliberate and boldly aspirational. The targets reflect this aspiration by seeking to close gaps instead of meeting incremental increases.**



Measures to Assess Goal Fulfillment			
Goals	Measure	Definition	Target
<b>Goal 1 - Equitable: Close access and completion gaps.</b>	Attainment	Percent of 25 to 64-year-olds with a postsecondary degree or credential	Close gaps in attainment of selected groups
	Enrollment	Fall headcount of public and private undergraduates	Enrollment reflects Virginia's population
<b>Goal 2 - Affordable: Lower costs to students.</b>	Awards	Undergraduate degrees and credentials produced each year	Undergraduate degrees and credentials awarded each year reflect enrollment
	Borrowing	Average debt of graduates	Close gaps in borrowing by selected groups
<b>Goal 3 - Transformative: Expand prosperity.</b>	Wages	Graduates' wages 10 years after graduation	Close gaps in median earnings of selected groups

The measures represent the highest order means to assess goal fulfillment. SCHEV research staff developed a comprehensive list of potential measures and related indicators. Higher education constituents, policy makers and advocates determined that these data points were the most appropriate ones. A second tier of measures will assess progress made on the issues. These indicators will become part of SCHEV's equity dashboard and be included in a larger inventory of research data.

For more details on these measures, please see Addendum C (forthcoming).

## PATHWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY: NEXT STEPS

This Plan embodies significant work from a wide array of higher education stakeholders. The effort is bold and intentional. Recent events surrounding the pandemic and social justice issues reinforce the need for decisive action. The higher education imperative, based on a critical examination of the current context and progress yet to be made, also serves as an equity imperative. The Plan provides a strategic roadmap that will deliver results and meet the vision, “Best State for Education,” and the main target of 70 percent educational attainment by 2030.

Next steps include obtaining additional input on actions that will support the strategies and achieve the goals—those in progress and those still to accomplish. The Plan will become a living document of ongoing, daily work.

The forthcoming action plans also will provide options for the SCHEV Council to consider each year, recognizing ongoing, important work in other areas. Furthermore, this next step links The Plan components (vision, goals, strategies and measures) to work already under way by SCHEV and others. It provides accountability and ownership.

The Commonwealth is proud of its outstanding higher education system and its diverse institutions and pathways. It serves as the nexus, transforming learners and cultivating talent to support Virginia’s economy. In order to achieve a 70 percent attainment target by 2030, recognizing that over 95%<sup>2</sup> of jobs created during the recovery have gone to workers with at least some college education, the Commonwealth must strive to deliver equitable, affordable and transformative higher education. Then and only then will Virginia succeed as the “Best State for Education.”

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<sup>2</sup> Source: [Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce](#)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan for Higher Education* is the culmination of a collaborative stakeholder engagement process. The Plan reflects the most critical issues facing higher education in the near- and longer-term and discusses how those issues shape its vision, goals, strategies and measures. SCHEV extends sincere gratitude to all of the institutions, entities, groups and individuals who helped develop this document. For a complete list of stakeholders and the process by which input was obtained and themes were subsequently developed, please refer to Appendix B.

# APPENDICES



## **Appendix A: Building the Case Through Context – The Virginia Plan in Action (2014-2020)**

Much progress has been made since 2014, and although higher education continues to face many challenges, the recent achievements shown below illustrate how The Virginia Plan's programs have benefited higher education policy and programs.

### **Notable Accomplishments**

In devising the *Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan for Higher Education*, it was important to review The Plan's recent accomplishments. The achievements of the last six years include:

- **New Economy Workforce Credential Grant Program (2016):** The first-of-its kind, pay-for-performance model funds noncredit workforce training that leads to an industry credential in a high-demand field.
- **Virginia Research Investment Fund and Committee (2016):** The Virginia Research Investment Fund, which serves public colleges and universities, invests in innovative and collaborative research and development projects, as well as commercialization projects and programs. The fund was established to invest in research and development projects, as well as commercial projects and programs that are being developed at Virginia's public colleges and universities. The investments are targeted at efforts which have a high economic development potential. The Virginia Research Investment Committee oversees the fund and approves all grants.
- **Commonwealth Cyber Initiative (2018):** The collaborative effort among Virginia's higher education institutions and private employers established by the General Assembly to promote research, innovation and commercial development of cybersecurity technologies. The initiative also addresses the urgent need in the Commonwealth for people with advanced and professional degrees in cybersecurity.
- **Commonwealth Innovative Internship Fund and Program (2018):** By collaborating with Virginia employers, the program expands paid and credit-earning student internships and similar work-based learning opportunities. It comprises institutional grants and a statewide initiative that facilitate the readiness of students, employers and institutions of higher education to participate in work-based learning opportunities.
- **Institutional Open Education Resource Policies (2018):** This guidance document serves as a model of practice for college and university governance officials and administrative staff who develop institutional policies for open education resources. Open education resources are freely accessible assets for learning, teaching and research. The guidance document

provides language for core elements of institutional Open Education policies in order to create a framework that promotes quality and sustainability.

- **Student Loan Ombudsman (2018):** The General Assembly established the Office of the Student Loan Ombudsman to support student loan advocacy. It is part of SCHEV and assists qualified education loan borrowers who reside in the Commonwealth.
- **Transfer Pathways (2018):** This program, and its corresponding transfer legislation, facilitates the transfer of community college students to institutions where they can further their education or training. The Transfer Pathways staff, which is shared by SCHEV and the community college system, coordinates the efforts of SCHEV and the community colleges, ensuring affordable, efficient and effective pathways that improve the transfer process. SCHEV and the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) partnered with the Aspen Institute and three other states to develop this program.
- **Lumina Foundation Talent, Innovation and Equity (TIE) Grant (2019):** Virginia received a \$500,000 grant from the Lumina Foundation to help close gaps in educational attainment for students of color by five percentage points by 2023. SCHEV invested in leadership and culture, advanced equity initiatives, improved communication about equity challenges and solutions, and provided subgrants to institutions.
- **Passport Program and Uniform Certificate of General Studies (2019):** This effort pertains to formal transfer agreements, dual admissions and guaranteed admissions to be offered at each comprehensive community college.
- **Strategic Finance Plan (2019):** In cooperation with HCM Strategists and Lumina Foundation's Strategy Labs, SCHEV published the Strategic Finance Plan for Virginia: *Aligning Higher Education Finances and Strategies*. The findings from this report informed SCHEV's recent 2020-22 budget and policy recommendations. The recommendations included an increased focus on investments in associate and certificate programs at community colleges, increasing need-based aid for students and continuing to support institutional operations that reduce the size of tuition and fee increases.
- **Tech Talent Initiative (2019):** As an outgrowth from the winning proposal to secure Amazon's HQ2, the Commonwealth made a historic investment in the Tech Talent labor market pipeline. The investment will increase the number of computer science graduates by 31,000 over 20 years via agreements signed with 11 universities. The program will benefit students and tech employers across the Commonwealth.
- **Higher Education and Workforce Alignment Project (2020):** This Council-led project resulted from ongoing conversations about the relationship between higher education academic programs and employer needs. The project culminated with report offering a series of recommendations. The core recommendation included creating an Office of

Education Economics within SCHEV. It will primarily analyze data used to inform the actions of policymakers, educators, students and employers. Strada Educational Network, a nonprofit corporation assisting students into post-secondary education, awarded a \$250,000 Recovery Incubator grant to SCHEV and its partners to develop the implementation plan for the new office.

- **Digital Divide Report (2020):** In response to the pandemic, SCHEV produced a report analyzing and highlighting the digital divides that exist within the Commonwealth— regional divides, racial divides and income divides. The report highlights the stark disparities as well as the ramifications for remote learning and college preparedness and also offers practical solutions.
- **Equity Institutions Grant (2020):** SCHEV is awarded a \$725,000 Equity Institutions grant from Lumina Foundation to support progress in closing achievement gaps as demonstrated by six public Virginia institutions. Grant dollars are also provided for SCHEV and VCCS to administer the grant and integrate institutional efforts with state-level strategies addressing inequities in higher education.

## The Virginia Plan (2014-2020)

The Virginia Plan for Higher Education served the Commonwealth well for six years. The successes described above demonstrate the outstanding work done by many people. Their efforts helped move Virginia closer to achieving the vision of “Best Educated State” with a target of 70 percent education attainment by 2030.

Since 2014, the Commonwealth has made significant strides toward meeting its vision, target and four main goals of affordable access, student success, innovation and investment, and prosperity.

### ***Vision: Best Educated State***

The Plan (2014-2020) aspired for Virginia to become the “Best Educated State” by 2030. According to the Lumina Foundation,

**The Virginia Plan for Higher Education**  
**VIRGINIA WILL BE THE BEST-EDUCATED STATE BY 2030**

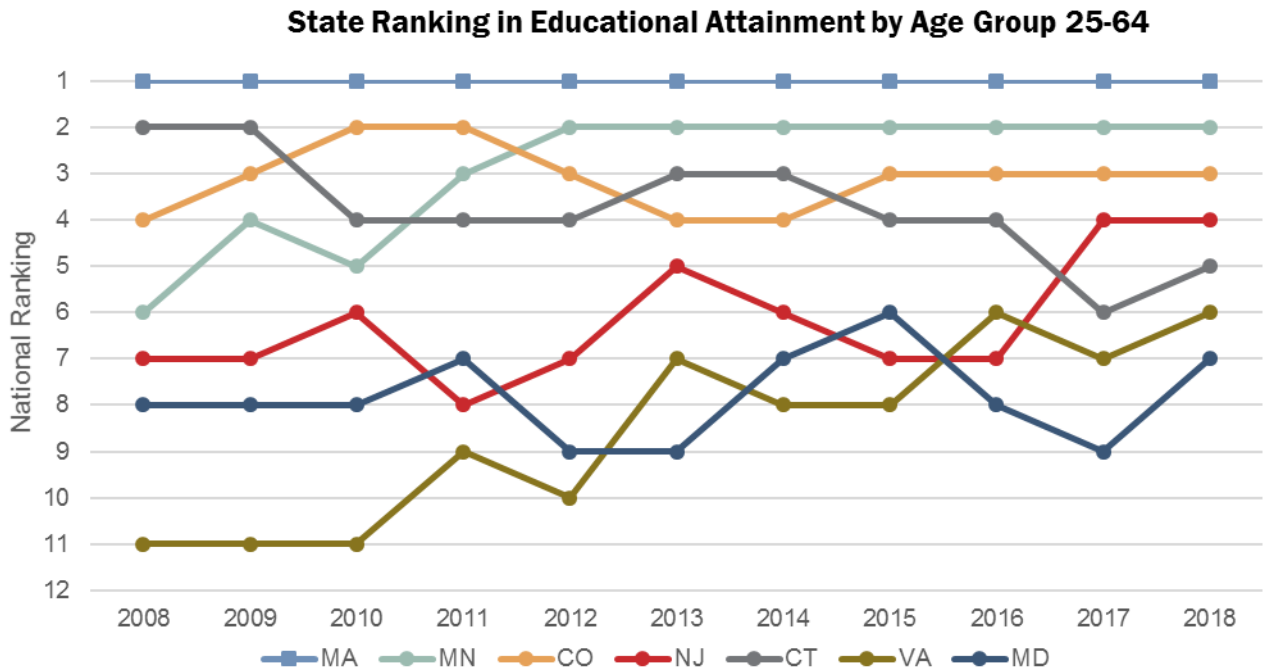
**Seventy percent of the working-age population will hold a postsecondary degree or workforce credential.**

**GOALS**

AFFORDABLE ACCESS: PROVIDE AFFORDABLE ACCESS FOR ALL	STUDENT SUCCESS: OPTIMIZE STUDENT SUCCESS FOR WORK AND LIFE	INNOVATION & INVESTMENT: DRIVE CHANGE & IMPROVEMENT THROUGH INNOVATION & INVESTMENT	PROSPERITY: ADVANCE ECONOMIC & CULTURAL PROSPERITY OF THE COMMONWEALTH & ITS REGIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand outreach to PK-12 and traditionally underserved populations.</li> <li>Improve the college readiness of all students.</li> <li>Cultivate affordable postsecondary education pathways for traditional, non-traditional and returning students.</li> <li>Align state appropriations, financial aid and tuition and fees such that students have broader access to postsecondary education opportunities regardless of their ability to pay.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen curricular options to ensure that graduates are prepared with the competencies necessary for employment and civic engagement.</li> <li>Provide effective academic and student services infrastructures focused on persistence and completion.</li> <li>Increase on-time completion of certificates and degrees.</li> <li>Engage adults and veterans in certificate and degree completion and lifelong learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and implement public funding strategies to sustain long-term planning and responsiveness.</li> <li>Cultivate innovations that enrich quality, promote collaboration and improve efficiency.</li> <li>Foster faculty excellence, scholarship and diversity.</li> <li>Enhance higher education leadership, governance and accountability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build a competitive, future-ready workforce for all regions.</li> <li>Become a catalyst for entrepreneurship and a model for business incubation.</li> <li>Target funding, resources and partnerships to support research and development.</li> <li>Expand participation and engagement in public service &amp; institutional service to the community.</li> <li>Demonstrate the impact of higher education on state and regional economic development.</li> </ul>

**STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA**

between 2014 and 2018, Virginia’s rank rose from #8 to #6. The chart below shows the rankings of selected states.



Source: Lumina Foundation, 2018.

At face value this suggests positive movement toward “Best Educated State.” Recent scrutiny as planning got underway, however, raised the following questions:

1. **What does “best educated” mean? Should this vision focus strictly on educational attainment? Is that too limiting?**
2. **How does “best educated” relate to affordability and outcomes from education? If Virginia ranks #1 in attainment, at what cost does it do so? Where do improved socio-economic status and well-being come into play?**
3. **Who is the most educated? Who is primarily reflected in this ranking and who is left behind?**
4. **With whom does this vision resonate? Policy makers? Students? Industry? Higher Education stakeholders? If this vision is too narrow, should Virginia consider a more inclusive one?**

An array of stakeholders viewed this as a “stodgy vision.” Furthermore, an analysis shows that in order to meet this vision and corresponding target, the state must effectively address equity gaps because traditionally under-represented groups account for more than 50% of the student population. In other words, Virginia cannot be best educated or meet its attainment



target without closing persistent (and in some cases widening) equity gaps as discussed in the following sections.

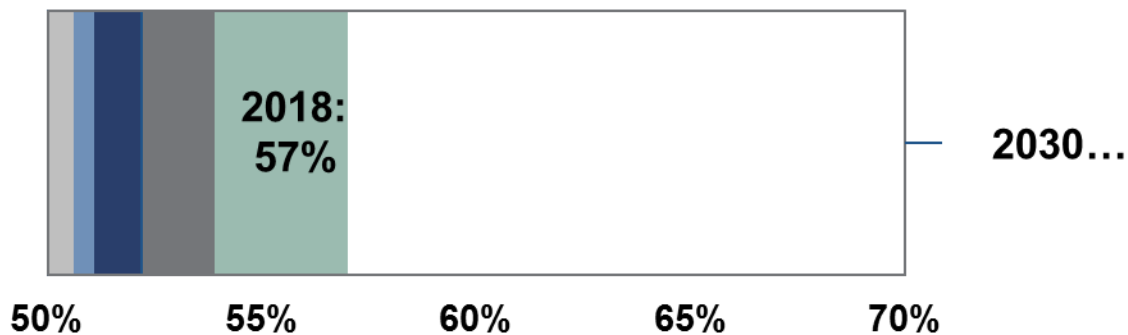
### **Target: 70 Percent Education Attainment**

The previous Plan targeted 70% educational attainment for working-aged Virginians ages 25-64. This aspirational target continues to have strong support.

According to the 2018 U.S. Census data, the most recent available, 57% of working-aged Virginians ages 25-64 have earned a post-secondary degree or credential. Overall, Virginia is headed in the right direction but further investigation shows that equity gaps remain. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial justice movement may adversely impact further progress toward this target. The chart below shows progress toward the 70% attainment target since 2014.

## **Progress toward Virginia Plan for Higher Education Goal**

Rate of adult Virginians (25-64) with Postsecondary Degree or Credential



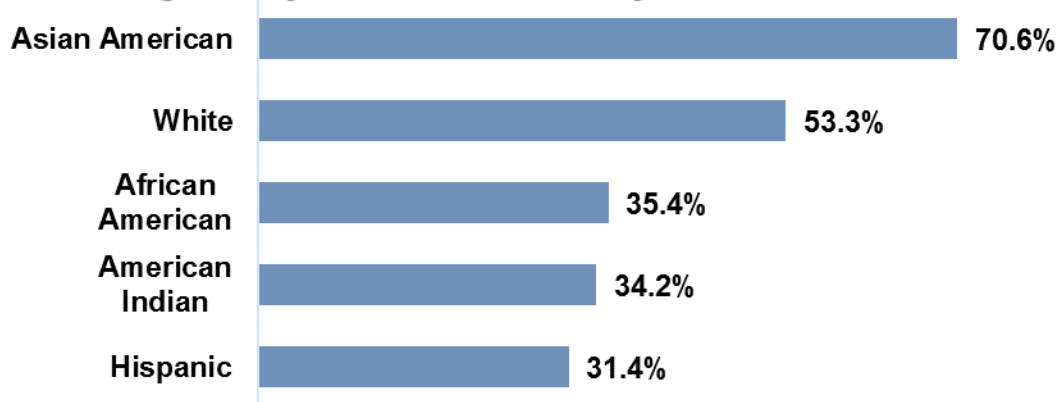
Source: Lumina Foundation, 2018 Stronger Nation

- With 11 measurable years remaining until 2030, Virginia needs to increase the number of people with credentials or degrees by 1.1 percentage points per year to reach 70% by 2030.
- Virginia has averaged an annual percentage increase of 1.6 points since 2015.

### **Attainment by Race and Ethnicity**

Attainment rates differ significantly by race and ethnicity in the 25-64 age group. While Virginia has the ninth-most Black residents of any state, according to the Lumina Foundation, the rate of Black adults with degrees is 18 percentage points lower than white Virginians. Similar disparities exist for Hispanic adults. This data further support a broader vision and a specific goal addressing equity while maintaining the overall target of 70 percent attainment. The chart below illustrates the attainment gaps by race and ethnicity.

## Virginians (25-64) with Associate Degree or Higher by Race & Ethnicity



Source: Lumina Foundation, 2018 Stronger Nation

### Affordable Access



**AFFORDABLE ACCESS:**  
PROVIDE AFFORDABLE  
ACCESS FOR ALL

Expand outreach to  
PK-12 and traditionally  
underserved populations.

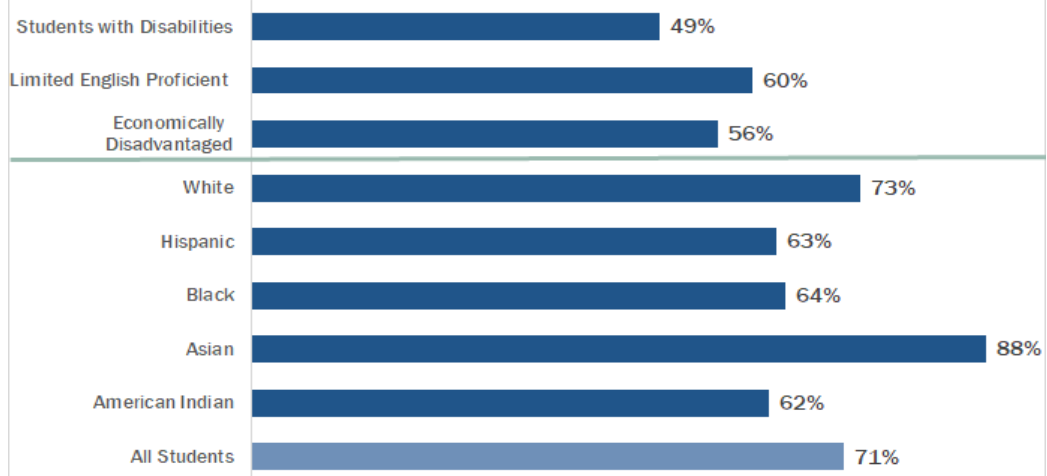
Improve the college  
readiness of all students.

Cultivate affordable postsec-  
ondary education pathways  
for traditional, non-traditional  
and returning students.

Align state appropriations,  
financial aid and tuition  
and fees such that students  
have broader access to  
postsecondary education  
opportunities regardless of  
their ability to pay.

While this previous goal statement embraces access for all, recent data show significant gaps exist. Stakeholders indicated that the goal is not intentional or aspirational enough. They also recognized the inextricable linkages between access and attainment and the importance of equity in ensuring affordable access.

### Percentage of 2017 High School Students Enrolling in College



Source: Source: Virginia Department of Education. Postsecondary enrollment report

- For the 2017 high school class, approximately 25,000 high school students—30% of the class—did not enroll in college within 16 months of graduation.
- Only 56% of economically disadvantaged students (defined by the VDOE as eligible for free and reduced lunch or Medicaid or receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) enrolled in college, 15 percentage points below the state average.
- African-Americans enrolled at 64% and Hispanic students did so at 63%.

In order to reach the Commonwealth’s attainment target, postsecondary opportunities must be available to more Virginians, especially Black, Hispanic and Native American students; rural students; English learners; students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds; and students with disabilities. This translates to closing equity gaps.

The impact of COVID-19 on access has yet to be determined. However, the pandemic has heightened concerns about remote learning and college preparedness. Both are issues that influence access. Also, Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) [completions to date](#) are down 3.8%, a possible early indicator of fall enrollments. Virginia’s national ranking in FAFSA completions has remained consistently in the middle (22 out of 50 states).

### ***Implications of Remote Learning***

Because of COVID-19, remote learning became a dominant issue in American education practically overnight, and the impacts from it are likely to affect students’ access to postsecondary education. To afford more Pre-K-12 students the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education, digital access, literacy (understanding) and adoption (use of digital tools) are more important than ever before. Existing barriers to remote learning are identified below. The impact of these barriers on widening enrollment gaps is still unfolding.

- A recent [SCHEV study](#) found that statewide, one in five Virginia students (Pre-K-12 and college) lack either high-speed internet or a computer in the home, both of which are necessary for successful distance learning.
- Students in rural areas are less likely to have broadband internet in the home compared to urban students. However, nearly 40% of all students without broadband live in or around Virginia's cities. Half of all students without devices live in urban areas. In short, digital access is a statewide issue.
- Black and Hispanic students are twice as likely as white students not to have a computer in the home, even though these groups have broadband subscriptions at similar rates as white students.

The question remains: How will digital access, adoption and literacy issues resulting from the abrupt shift to remote learning impact Pre-K-20 students and access to higher education?

The people and organizations involved in the planning process also raised concerns about the impacts of remote learning (and COVID-19 more broadly) on access, success and attainment. Recent reports<sup>3</sup> sound the alarm. Closer to home, [articles](#) highlighting Virginia’s Pre-K-12 public schools show a dichotomy between students who thrive in remote learning environments and those who show significant increases in failing grades.

Advocacy groups in Virginia voiced similar concerns over a potential “lost generation,” cut off from postsecondary education opportunities as result of the pandemic, and widening equity gaps. Without in-person education, proper digital literacy and access, will Pre-K-12 students be prepared adequately for college or will the pandemic further widen the access and completion gaps, particularly for under-represented students?

### Student Success



**STUDENT SUCCESS:**  
OPTIMIZE STUDENT  
SUCCESS FOR WORK  
AND LIFE

Strengthen curricular options to ensure that graduates are prepared with the competencies necessary for employment and civic engagement.

Provide effective academic and student services infrastructures focused on persistence and completion.

Increase on-time completion of certificates and degrees.

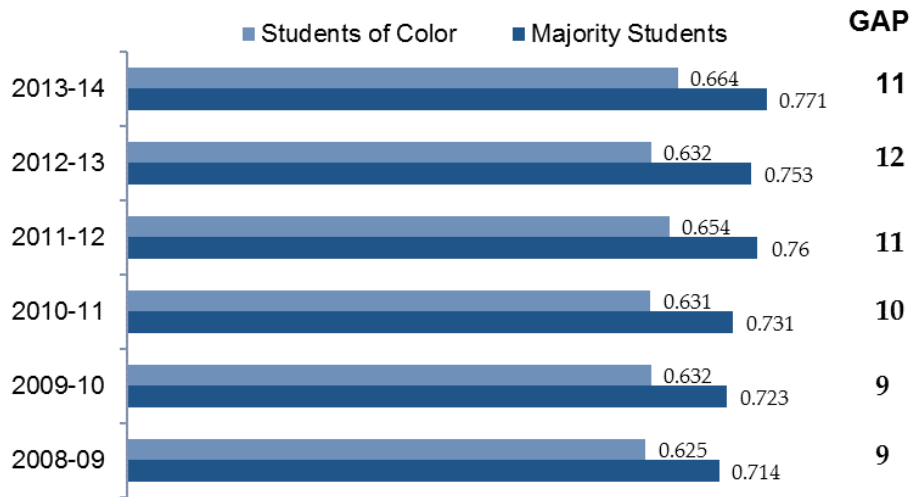
Engage adults and veterans in certificate and degree completion and lifelong learning.

The previous Plan called for reducing the gap in success rates between under-represented and non-under-represented students. Recent data show success rate gaps increasing among under-represented students. Equally important, as noted in this document, is that more than 50% of Virginia’s students enrolled in public four-year institutions meet the definition of under-represented. In other words, under-represented students are the majority. This complicates efforts to understand the specific gaps in attainment rates between groups. Success rates also vary by institution, reflecting student enrollment, as well as institutional resources and practices. Some public institutions have received accolades for closing graduation rate gaps, further complicating a close examination of student success rates, which are shown in the following index.

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<sup>3</sup> Reports such as those released by: [McKinsey](#), [UNICEF](#), [NWEA](#) and articles from The [New York Times](#) and [NPR](#)

## Success Index for Four-Year Public Institutions



Source: SCHEV Research

Looking specifically at race and ethnicity, Black students' success rate is 58%, trailing 17 points behind white students, whose success rate is 75%. Hispanic students are also behind white students, but only by four percentage points.

Comments from stakeholders echoed the complexity of assessing student success and its relationship with equity and access. While Virginia has advanced toward its attainment target in the past six years, equity gaps persist and are widening. Stakeholders want the strategic plan to emphasize equity.

### Innovation & Investment



**INNOVATION & INVESTMENT:**  
DRIVE CHANGE &  
IMPROVEMENT THROUGH  
INNOVATION & INVESTMENT

Identify and implement public funding strategies to sustain long-term planning and responsiveness.

Cultivate innovations that enrich quality, promote collaboration and improve efficiency.

Foster faculty excellence, scholarship and diversity.

Enhance higher education leadership, governance and accountability.

This goal addressed investment and improvement in higher education while focusing on affordability. It encouraged and supported new and promising efforts from faculty and staff and promoted new programs across the board, including ways to make higher education more affordable and to enhance quality. This goal focused on affordability related to institutions,

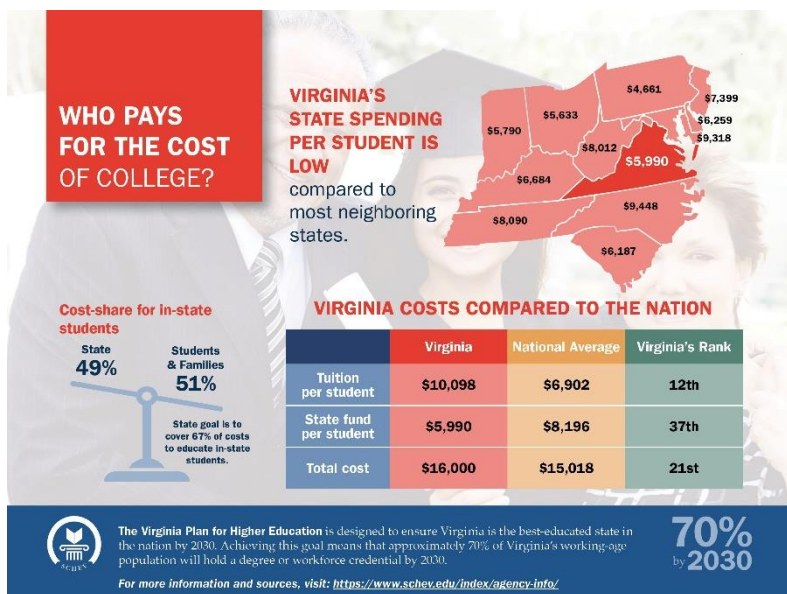
### Financial Stability

Financial stability of higher education institutions has become increasingly important and recent events make it more pressing. The impact of COVID-19 on institutions' financial stability has yet to be determined and directly impacts quality, innovation and investment. Below are a few salient points about the financial state of higher education in Virginia.

- Prior to the pandemic, the 2020 General Assembly allotted \$2.28 billion for higher education. This \$2.28 billion makes up 10% of the state general fund in FY 2020—a four-percentage-point decline from FY 1993.
- Three-quarters of these funds were allocated to Education & General (E&G) costs, with the other 25% going to financial aid, research and other higher education programs (higher education centers, SCHEV, etc.). The state contributed \$1.59 billion to E&G in FY 2020. General fund E&G allocations peaked in 2000-01 at \$1.95 billion. As enrollment increased, more of the cost of college gradually shifted from the state to students and families.
- In response to the pandemic and its impact on the state’s budget, \$389 million was unallotted via an emergency session of the General Assembly at a time when the need for such resources was greatest. In the 2020 special session, roughly \$100 million was put back into higher education for FY 2021, and \$15 million for FY 2022.
- The federal CARES Act delivered \$429 million for Virginia institutions (public, private and for-profit), a portion of which was directly allocated to students. The CARES Act funds were instrumental in addressing the financial impact of COVID-19 on FY 2020 funding. However, ongoing costs and the costs associated with remote learning, personal protective equipment and COVID-19 testing are borne by the institution. Due to unstable enrollments and increased costs, risk exposure remains high for the foreseeable future.

Across the country some higher education institutions are assessing financial stability, cutting costs and eliminating positions, while others are considering mergers, acquisitions or the possibility of closing altogether. The financial health of higher education in Virginia combined with each institution’s mission to provide high-quality, effective, affordable and accessible instruction

emerged as a resounding theme during the development of *Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan*. Advocacy groups also support stable, ongoing funding for higher education, lower costs to students and maintaining high-quality education.



Source: SCHEV Research.

## Prosperity

By achieving the first three goals in the prior Plan, the final goal of economic and cultural prosperity and increased well-being becomes a reflection of that achievement. Students who complete higher education, receive a credential and become gainfully employed and active participants in civic life, are helping to advance prosperity in all forms.



**PROSPERITY:**  
ADVANCE ECONOMIC  
& CULTURAL PROSPERITY  
OF THE COMMONWEALTH  
& ITS REGIONS

Build a competitive,  
future-ready workforce for  
all regions.

Become a catalyst for  
entrepreneurship and a model  
for business incubation.

Target funding, resources  
and partnerships to support  
research and development.

Expand participation and  
engagement in public  
service & institutional  
service to the community.

Demonstrate the impact  
of higher education on  
state and regional economic  
development.

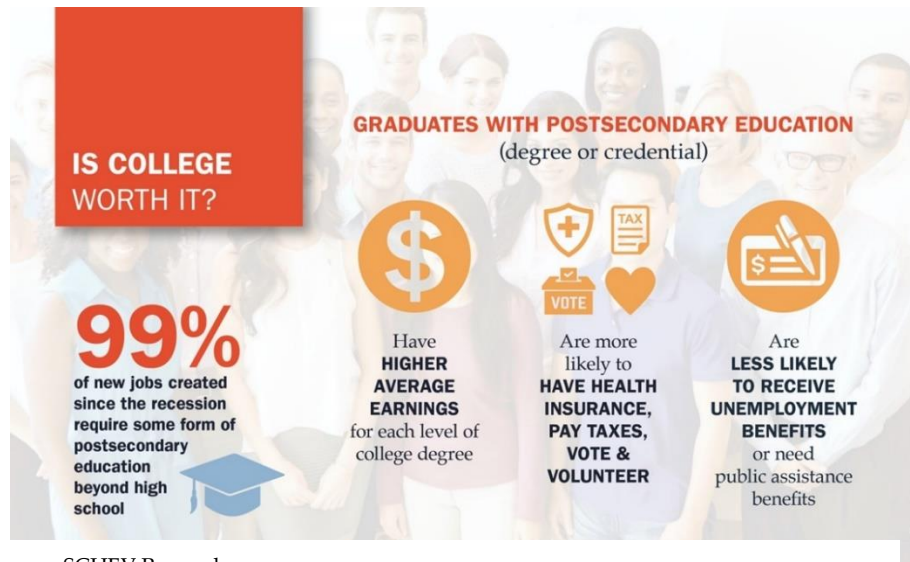
The Plan's target is for at least 75% of graduates to earn a living wage (defined as earning income over 200% of the federal poverty level) three years after graduation. Virginia has slowly made progress, roughly one percentage point per year. The most recent data shows 74% of graduates earning a living wage. Income should not be the only measure of a program's quality or worthiness. Research also suggests that parents' income is a strong predictor of the income of their adult children.

[Raj Chetty's Social Mobility Report Cards](#) measure the income brackets of students' parents as well as the income brackets of students after graduation.

Because this study used anonymized IRS tax data, it is not replicable or able to be stratified below the institutional level.

Stakeholders see improved socio-economic status as a desired outcome of higher education. They also support the talent imperative and labor market preparedness, which is acquired via broad skills, liberal learning and specific competencies.

It became clear that a goal defining prosperity more broadly was needed. It would embrace cultural, social and economic well-being not just for individuals but for the entire Commonwealth.



Source: SCHEV Research.

This close examination of the Commonwealth’s successes and shortcomings helped establish the vision and goals of *Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan for Higher Education*.



## Appendix B: Stakeholder Engagement and Input Process

The strategic planning process commenced in August 2019 with a SCHEV Council retreat that examined Virginia’s progress toward meeting the four goals of the previous plan (see Appendix A for more details). Additional work continued through the fall as interested parties put forth priority initiatives for Council to consider. Equity, affordability and transformative outcomes started to emerge as themes. SCHEV Council selected the priority initiatives at its winter 2020 meeting. Soon after, the strategic planning process temporarily stopped due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

When activities resumed in early summer, the individuals involved in the strategic planning process decided to take “a few steps back” to assess how the COVID-19 pandemic and the social justice movement might impact the planning process. The themes of equity, affordability and transformative outcomes re-emerged, but this time stakeholders asked for a more forceful statement, urging the people formulating The Plan to adopt bolder, more intentional goals, measures and strategies. Moreover, the issue of equity took center stage. The planners decided that equity must be an underlying theme throughout the planning process.

Table 1 lists the organizations that took part in the 18-month planning process. Other sections of this appendix outline the process in more detail. Virtual meetings, and the results of a survey sent to stakeholders, helped guide the work of the planning committee.

The survey included the same questions that were asked of stakeholders in virtual meetings. More than 220 responses were received, of which more than 200 represented higher education interests in the Commonwealth. Ten respondents worked in the Pre-K-12 education field and 10 others represented legislative, business and advocacy interests. Of the higher education respondents, 10 represented private institutions, HBCUs and 10 community colleges.

**Table 1: Virginia Stakeholders Engaged/Entities Providing Input**

American Association of University Professors (AAUP) –Virginia Chapter
The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis
Community colleges
Council of Independent Colleges in Virginia (CICV)
Council of Presidents
Deputy Secretary of Education
Governor’s Chief Diversity Officer
Governor’s Chief Workforce Advisor
Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)
House Appropriations Committee
Pre-K-12 Schools from various systems across the Commonwealth
Lumina Foundation
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) – Virginia State Conference
Partners for College Affordability and Public Trust (PCAPT)
Private colleges and universities
Private employers/industries
Public colleges and universities
SCHEV Council – Collectively and individual members
SCHEV Finance Advisory Committee (FAC)
SCHEV General Professional Advisory Committee (GPAC)
SCHEV Instructional Programs Advisory Committee (IPAC)
SCHEV Staff
SCHEV Student Advisory Committee (SAC)
SCHEV – Virginia Plan internal staff workgroup
Secretary of Education
Secretary of Finance
Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee
Virginia21
Virginia Business Higher Education Council (VBHEC)
Virginia College Access Network (VCAN)
Virginia Community College System
Virginia Department of Education
Virginia Department of Planning and Budget
Virginia School Counselor Association (2021)
Regional and local community groups ( ongoing in 2021)

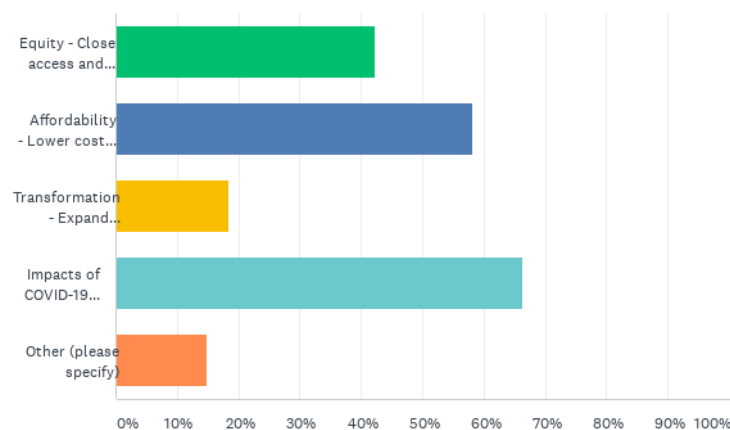
## Goals

Once the planning process resumed, the first step was to share the information presented in Appendix A. Stakeholders then discussed the following questions to ensure that The Plan addressed the near- and longer-term needs of higher education in the Commonwealth:

1. What are the Commonwealth's top two near-term issues facing higher education?
2. What are the Commonwealth's top two longer-term issues facing higher education?
3. How should The Virginia Plan's goals address these challenges?
4. What potential strategies might begin to solve the issues identified in questions 1 and 2?

The responses produced an abundance of detailed topics that further supported the overarching themes of equitable, affordable and transformative higher education, as shown in the accompanying charts and word clouds. This information also was compiled (see Table 2 below) and communicated to stakeholders. It shows how these detailed topics (strategic themes) relate to the overarching themes (goals). The overarching themes served to shape the goals for the new plan. The strategic themes evolved to reflect top order strategies, as well as potential actions to support such strategies.

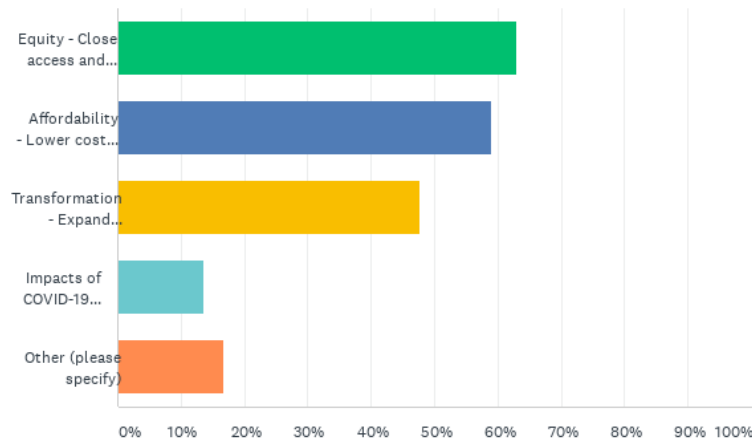
. What are the Commonwealth's top two near-term issues that need to be addressed in higher education?



Word Cloud identifying "other" in the chart above

system higher ed skills private colleges need state faculty better  
funding students policy college university adjunct

What are the Commonwealth's top two longer-term issues that need to be addressed in higher education?



Word Cloud identifying “other” in the chart above



**Strategies and Actions**

The overarching strategies identified in The Plan reflect the highest order of strategic themes that support its three goals. Table 2 below provides more information on the Plan’s strategic themes. Other themes, known as actions, include efforts already underway at SCHEV, and additional efforts that stakeholders may wish to consider. Detailed action plans for each goal will be included in a to-be-developed appendix/addendum D in winter 2021.

**Table 2: Pathways to Opportunity – Plan Goals and Detailed Strategic Themes**

<b>Goal 1 - Equitable: Close access and completion gaps.</b>	<b>Goal 2 - Affordable: Lower costs to students.</b>	<b>Goal 3 - Transformative: Expand prosperity.</b>
<p>Remove barriers to access and attainment, especially for: Black, Hispanic, Native American and rural students; students learning English as a second language; students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds; and students with disabilities.</p> <p><b>Associated Strategic Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equitable access and attainment - close access and attainment gaps for underrepresented students</li> <li>• Pre-K-12 – postsecondary opportunities and awareness               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Impact of COVID-19 on college readiness</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Digital access, adoption and literacy</li> <li>• Quality and effectiveness of remote-learning programs</li> <li>• Support services               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mental health</li> <li>○ Mentoring</li> <li>○ Career services</li> <li>○ Social, student basic needs, disability support services and other services</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Invest in and support the development of initiatives that provide cost savings to students while maintaining the effectiveness of instruction.</p> <p><b>Associated Strategic Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Align state investment/financial aid               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Revisit base adequacy calculations</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Level and consistent state funding               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “Rainy day fund” - institutional reserve protections or other strategies</li> <li>○ Communication campaign articulating the ROI of higher education</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Quality affordable pathways               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Targeted pathways                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High school students/recent graduates</li> <li>▪ Underrepresented students</li> <li>▪ Those with some college but no degree</li> <li>▪ Adults and veterans</li> <li>▪ Apprenticeships</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Credit for prior learning                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dual enrollment</li> <li>▪ Transfers/articulation agreements</li> <li>▪ Military</li> <li>▪ Work experience</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Online learning                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Effective resources, training and development for faculty</li> <li>▪ Enhanced collaboration among institutions to determine the most effective platforms and delivery methods</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Institutional stability</li> <li>• Administrative and program efficiency</li> </ul>	<p>Increase the social, cultural and economic well-being of individuals and communities within the Commonwealth and its regions.</p> <p><b>Associated Strategic Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve and assess outcomes (social mobility)</li> <li>• Experiential learning</li> <li>• Graduate outcomes</li> <li>• Post completion earnings</li> <li>• Debt to income</li> <li>• Labor market alignment</li> <li>• Competencies including digital</li> <li>• Program productivity review</li> <li>• Education Economics Office which will provide insight and action</li> <li>• Short credential programs to respond to job loss or underemployment</li> <li>• Higher education’s impact on cultural and economic prosperity throughout Virginia</li> <li>• Six-year Plan modifications reflecting the revised Virginia Plan</li> <li>• Innovation through scholarship, research and diverse faculty</li> <li>• Lifelong learning, civic and community engagement as well as cultural appreciation</li> </ul>

The strategies shown in Table 3 were developed to support the themes and goals of The Virginia Plan.

**Table 3: Pathways to Opportunity – Plan Goals and Strategies**

Goal 1 - Equitable: Close access and completion gaps	Goal 2 - Affordable: Lower costs to students.	Goal 3 - Transformative: Expand prosperity.
<p><b>Strategy (access):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Expand</b> postsecondary opportunities and awareness to Virginians who may not view higher education as an option.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategies (completion/attainment):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Advance</b> digital access, adoption and literacy as well as high quality, effective remote-learning programs.</li> <li>• <b>Strengthen</b> student support services for persistence and completion: mental health, mentoring, career services, social, student basic needs, information technology, disability support and other services.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategies (cost to students):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Align</b> tuition and fees, financial aid and state appropriations such that students have broader access to postsecondary education opportunities regardless of their ability to pay.</li> <li>• <b>Cultivate</b> affordable postsecondary education pathways for traditional, non-traditional and returning students.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategies (funding and effectiveness):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Update and reform</b> funding models and policies to improve equity, affirm return on investment and encourage increased and consistent levels of state funding.</li> <li>• <b>Foster</b> program and administrative innovations that enhance quality, promote collaboration and improve efficiency.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategy (personal prosperity):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Support</b> experiences that improve students' employment outcomes, income and community engagement.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategy (economic prosperity):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Improve</b> the alignment between post- secondary academic programs and labor market outcomes.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategy (cultural and economic prosperity):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cultivate</b> a climate of inclusion and innovation through scholarship, research, a diverse faculty and other programming.</li> </ul>

## Measures

Participants were asked to comment on measures for The Plan. Their answers to the following three questions were an integral part of the discussions:

1. **Are the existing measures and indicators relevant/applicable to the proposed goals? If yes, which ones?**
2. **Should any modifications be made to the existing measures and indicators in order to make them more relevant/applicable to the proposed goals? If so, what modifications?**
3. **Do the proposed measures sufficiently assess success (goal fulfillment)? What falls short? What is missing?**

A comprehensive list of potential measures as well as related indicators was shared at the listening sessions to spur discussion. Minimal changes were recommended. SCHEV staff, including research and policy analytics staff, determined which measures would take highest priority—those highest order measures that will best assess how well the Commonwealth meets the goals of *Pathways to Opportunity; The Virginia Plan*. The remaining measures, which

are referred to as related indicators, also will help provide a way to define success and goal achievement. Most if not all of these indicators are already tracked by SCHEV in some form.

More emphasis on those indicators will be available on a regular basis once The Plan is implemented. These indicators will be found on SCHEV's equity dashboard, which is currently under development. For the comprehensive list of related indicators and details pertaining to the five measures, refer to Addendum C (forthcoming).