Path to a Brighter Future:
Expanding Higher Education and Connecting Virginians to Opportunities

With evidence that higher levels of education lead to higher wages and better health and longevity outcomes, it is clear education is essential to building a future that lifts up all Virginians. However, four-year degrees are not the only pathway to opportunities that have been out of reach of many Virginians for too long. With a rapidly changing economy that increasingly demands more training and skills, it is more important than ever that the Commonwealth supports our children’s futures by transforming our higher education system. Since the Great Recession, 99% of all newly-created jobs have required higher education—yet only 57.4% of Virginians earned another credential beyond their high school diploma. By 2027, 70% of all jobs in the U.S. will require some education beyond high school. Closing this skills gap and creating a flourishing economy that benefits every Virginian will require targeted changes in higher education to deliver new, affordable opportunities for every student to succeed.

In 2021, Virginia was ranked as the best state in the nation for higher education based on high overall graduation rates that top 72% and the strong returns on investment students see. Though for too many of our students, lack of childcare, unexpected bills, or work obligations can mean having to slow down or even stop their education, leading to worse outcomes for our students and economy. We must also increase support and wraparound services for students that will allow them to develop their skills and gain the experience they need to obtain a good-paying job in the workforce. In doing so, we can create a higher education system that reduces the burdens placed on our students instead of producing them. Together we will provide our students with opportunities to not only succeed but thrive, and retain the best and brightest students for jobs in the Commonwealth.

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Unlike his Trump-endorsed opponent Republican Glenn Youngkin, Terry knows the power of education to lift up Virginians and understands the barriers keeping Virginians from obtaining the skills and experiences they need to land a high-paying job in the workforce. In fact, every tax dollar invested in higher education produces more than $21 in economic benefits.\(^5\) That is why he has consistently rolled out detailed, achievable plans to move Virginia forward. And it is why President Biden’s American Rescue Plan will provide $846 million to Virginia’s colleges and universities to support financial aid and other COVID-related expenses.\(^6\)

As Virginia’s 72nd Governor, Terry oversaw the redesign of Virginia’s workforce training program and established the first-in-the-nation New Economy Workforce Credentials Act, which created a ‘pay-for-performance’ model that targeted affordable industry certifications and occupational licenses for high-demand occupations at community colleges in the Commonwealth. It also led to the creation of the Power Line Training School, which helps students gain a certificate after 11 weeks and immediately get a job making over $70,000 per year. Terry also signed Executive Order 49, which called for an increase in the number of registered apprenticeship programs in key industries such as cybersecurity and IT. That is why as Virginia’s next governor, Terry will yet again oversee the most significant transformation of Virginia’s higher education system to ensure that students are connected to the skills and opportunities needed to thrive and succeed in the Commonwealth. As Virginia’s next Governor, Terry will:

**Promote Affordability and Flexibility in Higher Education**

For the 2020-21 academic year, Virginia’s in-state undergraduate tuition and fees for public universities were expected to be the seventh highest in the country for research institutions and third highest for comprehensive institutions.\(^7\) Pursuing higher education can lead to long-term debt burdens for many students and outcomes for dropouts can be even more dire. With lower earning potential and fewer job prospects, 46.5% of college dropouts with debt default on their student loans, leading to even worse outcomes.\(^8\) Creating positive outcomes for our students will require building greater flexibility and affordability into the system so students can discover their best pathway into the workforce. Terry’s plan will:

- **Streamline financial aid programs and leverage federal dollars to increase support for students.** There are numerous financial aid programs in the Commonwealth, which can make it difficult to navigate and serve as a barrier to students.\(^9\) As Virginia’s next governor, Terry will work to centralize and streamline existing programs to ensure they are geared towards students that need support. As part of this initiative, Terry will launch a new, centralized online student center website that will enable students to easily discover which financial aid programs they are eligible for, explore pathways to various opportunities, and apply for the aid they need to succeed.

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\(^7\) SCHEV. (08/20). 2020-21 Tuition and Fees at Virginia State-Supported Colleges and Universities. Retrieved from: [www.schev.edu](http://www.schev.edu)


jobs after graduation and obtain critical consumer information about graduation rates, job placement rates, return on investment for various degree fields and more. Terry will also leverage federal funds from President Biden’s American Rescue Plan to increase funding for financial aid in the Commonwealth so that additional students in need are able to benefit.

- **Improve the transfer and reverse transfer process.** Students in Virginia that take 60 credits at community colleges before transferring to a four-year institution can save nearly $20,000 in tuition and around $5,000 in student loan interest.\(^\text{10}\) Recently, Virginia has taken steps to allow greater flexibility for transferring credits at community colleges to four-year institutions. The 30-credit Uniform Certificate of General Study (UCGC) and the shorter 16-credit Passport Program allow students attending community college to easily apply their credits to their general education requirements, reducing cost burdens for students.\(^\text{11}\) As governor, Terry will build on this program to allow even greater flexibility for transferring students’ course credits. Additionally, some students that enter a four-year institution may choose to change course on their degree, or be unable to complete it as originally planned. To ensure these valuable credits are able to benefit students, Terry will work to strengthen reverse transfer programs, which allow students to transfer their credits from a four-year institution to a community college to earn their associates degree.\(^\text{12}\) Terry will improve student attainment by working with all higher education stakeholders to implement reverse transfer agreements and more flexible degree options at all public schools in the Commonwealth.

- **Expand eligibility for Governor’s Northam’s Get Skilled, Get a Job, Give Back (G3) program.** Many of the jobs lost because of the COVID-19 pandemic are unlikely to return until 2023 or later, meaning that Virginians are going to be seeking new opportunities, potentially in brand new sectors.\(^\text{13}\) These shifts will require new knowledge bases or skill sets, and we must seize this opportunity and ensure that we can retrain people of all ages to step into new, high-demand jobs. In addition to the higher earning potential for participating students, Virginia’s workforce development programs can generate up to five dollars in benefits to the Commonwealth through lower welfare costs and higher tax returns for every dollar invested by the state.\(^\text{14}\) Governor Northam’s G3 program covers the cost of tuition, fees, and books for low- and middle-income students, and it will be up to the next governor to implement and build on this program.\(^\text{15}\) As Virginia’s next Governor, Terry will expand eligibility for G3 so that more students are able to benefit from the program in additional education and training fields. He will

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also dramatically increase the availability of credentials that students can attain within a number of weeks, allowing them to step into high-demand jobs like information technology, nursing and health care, construction, transportation, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, and public safety.

- **Protect borrowers.** In Virginia, as many as 1.2 million borrowers collectively owe more than $44 billion in outstanding student loan debt averaging more than $30,000 per student. These students have made thousands of complaints of mishandled student loans to Virginia’s newly established Student Loans Ombudsman who is charged with advocating on behalf of borrowers and mediating disputes between borrowers and lenders. Whenever disputes requiring legal action arise, they must be forwarded to the Attorney General’s office. As Virginia’s next governor, Terry will increase resources for the Student Loans Ombudsman in order to better support students, and will ensure the Attorney General’s office has the capacity to investigate and pursue legal action in egregious cases.

**Create Strong Pathways to Job Opportunities**

In order to grow the workforce of the future, we must take action to ensure Virginia’s higher education system delivers the best outcomes for students, aligns with our workforce needs of today, and remains nimble to adapt and meet the needs of tomorrow. During the COVID-19 pandemic alone, two-thirds of adults on unemployment thought about switching jobs or fields and a third reported taking steps to get the education and training needed to do so. As governor, Terry will establish strong pathways to the workforce so every Virginian can thrive and reach their fullest potential. Terry’s plan will:

- **Eliminate the workforce skills gap.** While 70% of jobs by 2027 will require higher education, only 57.4% of Virginians earned a credential beyond a high school diploma. Virginia must drastically increase attainment of certifications and degrees beyond high school to keep up with industry demands for highly skilled workers. To address this gap, we must better coordinate educational offerings in K-12 settings, community colleges, and technical schools to align with workforce needs and quickly adapt to meet new and emerging trends. As governor, Terry will work with the business community and legislature to collect more detailed data around unemployment, to include the types of jobs that are open, and then target resources to train workers and close workforce gaps. Additionally, in order to ensure swift approval for new or realigned higher education curricula, Terry will build capacity at the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) to eliminate lengthy wait times. Finally, Terry will work to increase access to

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18 Ibid.


dual enrollment programs, and programs that allow students to obtain relevant certifications while they pursue a degree.

- **Modernize Virginia’s higher education funding formula and incorporate outcomes-based incentives.** Virginia’s funding formula for higher education is outdated and doesn’t incentivize key goals such as student support, affordability, or obtaining a job after graduation.\(^{21}\) SCHEV is studying the funding formula for four-year institutions, and as governor, Terry will ensure that funding adjustments are made to reflect the agency’s recommendations. Terry will also consider creating new incentives that will facilitate stronger outcomes for students, including increasing completion rates for historically under-represented students and helping students to land jobs in high-demand fields.

- **Ensure students have access to the support they need to succeed.** We must do more to support students and assist them through to degree completion. This is especially true for our community college system. In Virginia, 42% of community college students experienced housing insecurity and 32% recently experienced food insecurity.\(^{22}\) We cannot expect our students to succeed in the classroom if they are hungry or do not have a safe and stable place to lay their heads. Since launching his campaign, Terry has laid out clear plans to make housing more affordable, promote food security, and make health care more affordable. As Virginia’s next governor, Terry will work with the Biden administration to draw down additional resources to support wraparound services and will advocate for the continuation of pandemic-era SNAP flexibilities which made an estimated three million students newly eligible for federal food assistance.\(^{23}\) Additionally, Terry will work with schools to inform them about their SNAP eligibility and connect students with other resources already available to them in Virginia. Finally, Terry will establish a competitive grant program that will allow community colleges and institutions of higher education to establish or expand programs that address various student needs such as food, housing, and mental health counseling. Addressing these basic needs and ensuring students have access to the services and care they need to complete their degree or training program is critical to drive success in the classroom and improve outcomes for our students.

- **Increase funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).** Black students have the lowest college completion rate among racial groups, with only 19% of Black Americans 25 years and older having a bachelor’s degree.\(^{24}\) For the past several decades, the Commonwealth’s many top-notch HBCUs have played a key role in increasing Black student enrollment. HBCUs work to address many obstacles students face, and yet these important institutions have been neglected for decades. It is critical that we increase funding to these schools, many of which attract first-generation college students. In 2020, Governor Northam passed a budget that included $17 million to

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\(^{21}\) SCHEV. (05/17/21). Base Adequacy and Other Funding Models in Virginia. Retrieved from: [https://www.schev.edu](https://www.schev.edu)

\(^{22}\) The Hope Center. (06/21). #RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity Among Virginia Community College System Students During the Ongoing Pandemic. Retrieved from: [hope4college.com](http://hope4college.com)

\(^{23}\) Granville, P. (02/02/21). Congress Made 3 Million College Students Newly Eligible for SNAP Food Aid. Here’s What Must Come Next. Retrieved from: [tcf.org](http://tcf.org)

establish an initiative through the Virginia College Affordability Network (VCAN) to comprehensively cover educational costs for roughly 300 Pell-eligible students at VSU and NSU to address unmet student needs that can often prevent students from accessing higher education.\textsuperscript{25} As governor, Terry will work with stakeholders to expand this program to other HBCUs across the Commonwealth. He will also ensure that HBCUs have adequate funding needed to provide resources and support to students and make substantive progress towards closing achievement gaps.

- **Create new pathways to the workforce.** As Virginia’s 72nd Governor, Terry understood that to access a good paying job, students need the skills and training required for those positions, which is why he established the New Economy Workforce Credential Grant fund and program that led to the FastForward program.\textsuperscript{26} Under FastForward, over 24,000 credentials have been awarded in 40 career pathways, with graduates earning 25-50\% higher pay and being twice as hirable.\textsuperscript{27} He also set the ambitious “Pathway to 50K” initiative which sought to graduate 50,000 individuals with STEM-H credentials, a goal that his administration far exceeded. As Virginia’s next governor, Terry will create a seamless five-year pathway to a career so that high school graduates can automatically enroll with the VCCS upon graduation and transition immediately into a community college of their choice. Terry will also empower the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) to confer in-demand Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degrees. These initiatives will allow even more students to step into high-demand, good-paying careers without incurring long-term economic burdens.

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\item \textsuperscript{26} Augusta Free Press. (08/14/14). Governor McAuliffe Unveils Major Workforce Development Initiative. Retrieved from: www.augustafreepress.com
\item \textsuperscript{27} FastForward. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved from: www.fastforwardva.org
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