

VIRGINIA IS FOR LEARNERS

HOW ONE STATE
MODERNIZED PUBLIC
EDUCATION TO BETTER
PREPARE HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATES FOR A
CHANGING WORLD



Commonwealth
Learning
Partnership



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was created for the Commonwealth Learning Partnership by Adria Steinberg, Cheryl Almeida, Erica Cuevas and Stephanie Krauss of Jobs for the Future (JFF), with generous contributions and insights from the following Virginia education leaders:

- Holly Coy, *Virginia Deputy Secretary of Education*
- Gena Keller, *former Virginia Department of Education Assistant Superintendent for Learning*
- Laurie McCullough, *Executive Director of Virginia ASCD*
- James Lane, *Virginia Superintendent*
- Rob Shinn, *Partner, Capital Results*
- Steven Staples, *former Virginia Superintendent*
- Atif Qarni, *Virginia Secretary of Education*
- Leah Walker, *Director of the Office of Equity and Community Engagement, Virginia Department of Education*

Capital Results created the design and managed the production. This report was created with generous funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

JFF is a national nonprofit that drives change in the American workforce and education systems to achieve economic advancement for all.

The Commonwealth Learning Partnership aims to take the Profile of a Virginia Graduate from vision to practice by investing in the continuing professional learning of educators and education leaders.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years, Virginia has made deliberate shifts from a state that prides itself on high standards and a tough, test-intensive K-12 accountability system, to a state proudly announcing **Virginia is for Learners**—reflecting a more balanced approach to ensure that students develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in a changing world. Across the Commonwealth, state leadership—along with school districts, universities, education and professional learning organizations—have united to realize a vision that embeds future-ready knowledge, skills and dispositions into the state's K-12 education system. By doing this, Virginia has made huge headway in modernizing and improving the educator workforce, systems of student assessment, career pathways programming and the teaching and learning that happens in the classroom.

Throughout this time, federal education policy shifted from **No Child Left Behind** (NCLB) to the **Race to the Top Fund**, and then to the **Every Student Succeeds Act** (ESSA). Virginia elected two democratic Governors and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) had three State Superintendents. In an unprecedented move, Virginia's educational and political leaders built off of one another to cultivate a long-term education agenda, called **Virginia is for Learners**. Motivating these leaders was the belief that fundamental evolution and change was needed to ensure Commonwealth graduates leave high school with everything they need to thrive in the emerging workforce and economy.

A robust coalition of state and local actors support and fuel **Virginia is for Learners**. Over the past few years this movement has garnered national attention and significance, including deep engagement from a number of national nonprofits and school support organizations, including JFF¹. Many of these groups have been funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (Hewlett Foundation). In JFF's case, our work began with organizing a statewide summit on performance assessments (described below), and later expanded into backbone support of **Virginia is for Learners**, coordination of a pooled fund for innovative professional development and redesign efforts, and more recently, supporting the launch of the **Commonwealth Learning Partnership**.

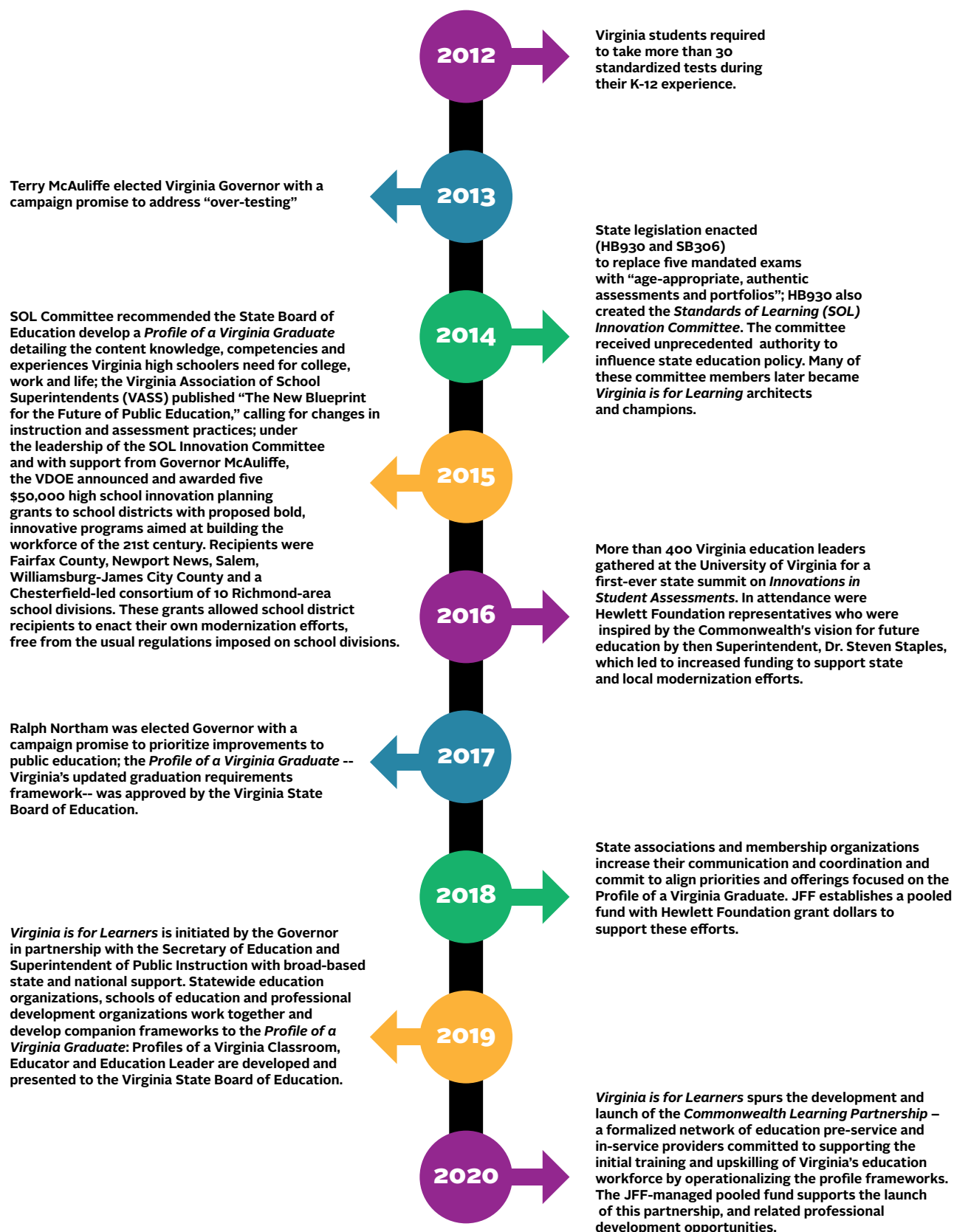
In 2014, JFF identified Virginia as one of three states making promising inroads in achieving deeper learning at scale. We worked with the Hewlett Foundation to convene state and school leaders for a first-ever state summit on innovations in student assessments. Since the summit—held at the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education—JFF has expanded and deepened its partnership with Virginia's education vanguard, including the VDOE and Governor's Office, to help brand and drive a future learning agenda and connect learning priorities and investments to bring to scale.

This brief tells the story of **Virginia is for Learners** as a way of charting the Commonwealth's course and recent education history and illuminating possible pathways for other states who know it is time to modernize their public K-12 education systems. We introduce the key leaders and policy levers that made this widespread changemaking possible. Although no two states are alike, it is our hope that other states can translate Virginia's learnings and accomplishments into strategies that build their own more future- and readiness-focused K-12 education systems.

The urgency of this work has never been clearer. The world of work is evolving, and the economy is changing. And yet, our schools—designed to help farmers become factory workers—have mostly stayed the same. The success and stability of our communities and nation hinge on today's students entering adulthood ready for the work and life challenges they will face. We hope education leaders across the country can learn from and be inspired by the story of **Virginia is for Learners** as they grapple with how to modernize and repair their own public education systems.

¹ Those organizations include, but are not limited to Battelle for Kids, University of Kentucky's Center for Innovation in Education (CIE), the Aurora Institute, Envision Education, Advanced Learning Partnerships (ALP) and 2Revs.

VIRGINIA IS FOR LEARNERS TIMELINE



1. The board picked up this recommendation and developed a *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* along with modified and aligned high school graduation requirements.

Revised graduation requirements went into effect for the class of 2022. For more information, see this June 2016 board-issued briefing:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/committees_standing/accountability/2016/06-jun/progress-report-for-profile-of-a-graduate.pdf

A POLICY WINDOW AND COMMITTEE WITH AUTHORITY

When Terry McAuliffe ran for Virginia Governor in 2013, Virginia's K-12 students were taking more than 30 standardized multiple-choice exams in school—nearly double the number of tests required by NCLB. In the mid-1990s, Virginia had adopted a rigorous state testing accountability system ahead of NCLB. This was in response to extreme differences in the quality of instruction happening across the state, and the need to find struggling school districts to provide supports and/or enact accountability measures. Although well-intentioned, extreme testing negatively impacted Virginia students and placed unintended pressure on educators and districts to “teach to the test.”

Having made “over-testing” a campaign priority, the newly elected McAuliffe acted quickly to address this issue. In July 2014, the Virginia legislature passed HB930 and SB360 which removed five mandated exams and included recommendations to replace them with “age-appropriate, authentic assessments and portfolios with rubrics and other methodologies” into Virginia's K-12 accountability system³. When asked, many education leaders credit McAuliffe's bold moves to a number of factors: namely, tired and frustrated constituents (most families were feeling the real stress and strain of over-testing), aligned and well-respected leadership at the State Board of Education and the VDOE, anecdotes and evidence supporting the need for change that came from campaigning, and an early-term listening tour.

Many education leaders credit McAuliffe's bold moves to a number of factors: namely, tired and frustrated constituents (most families were feeling the real stress and strain of over-testing), aligned and well-respected leadership at the State Board of Education and the VDOE, anecdotes and evidence supporting the need for change that came from campaigning, and an early-term listening tour.

Under these landmark education policy moves and in fulfillment of Governor McAuliffe's campaign promise, then Secretary of Education, Anne Holton⁴ launched the *Standards of Learning (SOL)*⁵ *Innovation Committee* and tasked the committee with reviewing all state-mandated exams to determine the best ways to get Virginia students ready for college and work⁶. With bipartisan backing, the SOL Innovation Committee⁷—made up of school board members, superintendents, professional association representatives, academics and community leaders—began to reimagine the future of Virginia's K-12 system, including how Virginia public schools should test and be held accountable. Through this process, the group identified which five mandatory multiple-choice tests should be removed, and how to support and spur further local innovation in teaching, learning, and assessment. This included strategies to better align the state assessment system with students' academic growth and the state's graduation requirements. The committee called for less attention on tests and more attention on modernizing Virginia's education system and getting students ready for life, and the future of work and learning.

3. House Bill 930 and Senate Bill 306 (2014) requires each local school board to annually certify that it has provided instruction and administered an alternative assessment, consistent with Virginia Board of Education guidelines, to students in grades three through eight in each SOL subject area in which the SOL assessment was eliminated. The following SOL assessments were eliminated: Grade 3 History, Grade 3 Science, Grade 5 Writing, United States History to 1865, and United States History: 1865 to the Present.

Resource: <https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/ViewGDoc.cfm?gdid=5611>

4. Anne Holton, now interim president of George Mason University and State Board of Education voting member, was a recognized lawyer and judge who presided over many important Virginia decisions regarding children and youth. Anne is the daughter of former Republican Governor Linwood Holton and wife of Democratic U.S. Senator Tim Kaine.

5. Standards of Learning (SOL) refers to Virginia's K-12 academic learning standards.

6. HB 930 and identical SB 306.

7. The committee was announced June 13, 2014. The governor was a Democrat and the legislature had a Republican majority. For more, see the Secretary of Education's press release: <http://governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/newsarticle?articleId=15815>

Four months in, the SOL Innovation Committee issued the ***Standards of Learning Innovation Committee Interim Report July 2014 – November 2014***, putting forth its first set of recommendations⁸. Recommendations included the following:

- Waiving seat time requirements
- Increasing flexibility in how school accreditation ratings were determined
- Offering small innovation grants to regions and school districts to develop alternatives to standardized assessments
- Offering professional development opportunities on alternative assessments and school quality

The report highlighted an ongoing need to foster local support and build educator capacity and instructional strategies around new forms of assessment and deeper learning methods. Gena Keller, who served as the VDOE's Assistant Superintendent for Learning from 2018 -2019, described it this way: “as an advisory group of well-respected champions for education, the SOL Committee didn’t have official power, but instead it was able to provide a formalized common and respected voice closely aligned with the Virginia Association of State Superintendents, and other organized groups interested in change.”

Between 2014 and 2016, the Committee—in partnership with then Superintendent Dr. Steven Staples and key state department and gubernatorial staff—met to identify ways to move the work forward and spread the reforms that focused on preparing Virginia students for life after high school. These ideas were fueled by the need to refresh the state's understanding of what it meant for a high school graduate to be college and career ready, and to make subsequent updates to state graduation requirements.

Over time, these conversations turned out to be the genesis of ***Virginia is for Learners***, as they set in motion priority modernization efforts, primarily: the creation of a more balanced assessment system⁹, funding pockets of innovation focused on high school redesign, updating high school graduation requirements, and modernizing the way school districts are accredited to better reflect a heightened focus on education equity and graduate preparedness. A powerful contributing dynamic to these changes was the release of the 2015 Virginia Association of School Superintendents' (VASS) publication, titled ***“The New Blueprint for the Future of Public Education”***¹⁰. This publication demonstrated Virginia superintendents' belief and commitment to these prioritized policy reforms and signaled the need and buy-in for weighty changes in instruction and assessment practices. In Virginia, local school superintendents are arguably the most powerful education constituency, and their buy-in and leadership on issues is critical for moving any statewide reform forward.

The SOL Committee was the body that suggested the Board develop a ***Profile of a Virginia Graduate***¹¹ in support of the ***New Virginia Economy***, which was Virginia's economic and employment strategic vision and framework¹². The ***Profile of a Virginia Graduate*** was created as a graduation framework, which detailed the full range of content knowledge,

8. Office of the Secretary of Education Interim Report July 2014 - November 2014, Standards of Learning Innovation Committee, Full Report, can be accessed here: <https://www.education.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/secretary-of-education/pdf/final-full-reportmrk.pdf>

9. In Virginia this meant a reduction in standardized assessments and the development and use of locally developed performance assessments.

10. The VASS blueprint can be accessed here: <https://www.vassonline.org/images/vass/blueprint/The%20New%20Blueprint%20for%20the%20Future%20of%20Public%20Education.pdf>

11. The board picked up this recommendation and developed a ***Profile of a Virginia Graduate*** along with modified and aligned high school graduation requirements. Revised graduation requirements are effective beginning with the class of 2022. For more information, see this June 2016 board-issued briefing: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/committees_standing/accountability/2016/06-jun/progress-report-for-profile-of-a-graduate.pdf

12. The ***New Virginia Economy*** is Virginia's economic and employment strategic vision and framework, developed by a statewide steering committee, chaired by the Secretary of Commerce and Trade. This committee guided the Governor McAuliffe's economic strategic plan. The ***New Virginia Economy*** priorities were: “project ready” infrastructure, diversified high-growth industries, preeminent business climate, innovation and entrepreneurs, and a “credentials to careers” workforce. For more, see this report: <https://commerce.virginia.gov/media/3501/new-virginia-economy-12052014.pdf>

competencies and experiences Virginia high school graduates need to succeed in college, work and life. The committee called on the State Board of Education to ensure test performance stopped acting as proxy for student readiness and achievement¹³. The **Profile of a Virginia Graduate** was officially approved by the Board in 2017, which updated Virginia's high school graduation requirements and opened the way for high schools to more fully embrace a focus on deeper learning, career pathways and performance assessments.

FROM A CULTURE OF COMPLIANCE TO INNOVATION

In 2014, with growing political momentum from the Governor's office, legislature and Secretary of Education's office, the relatively new State Superintendent, Dr. Steven Staples, set about the hard work of moving his department from the compliance-driven mode customary of most state departments of education to a force for innovation. "From the first day of my tenure, I stuck to the message that the agency had to do more than drive compliance," explained Staples. "A lot of people in the agency had been waiting to hear that; others had to be convinced."

As a former local school superintendent and previous executive director of VASS, Staples was popular with and respected by Virginia's education community. He was also a long-time and vocal advocate for testing reform¹⁴. Early in his tenure, he worked with the State Board to identify opportunities for local school districts to get greater flexibility and financial investment to enable and encourage new, more innovative high school approaches. As an example, the State Board rewrote regulations to eliminate seat-time requirement, freeing high schools from awarding classroom credits based on a certain number of hours of instruction. This gave local school boards the discretion they needed to award credit based on content and skill competence, rather than time. "It wasn't about bashing schools for what they were doing," recalled Holly Coy, Virginia Deputy Secretary of Education. "It was a genuine, shared agreement that for the sake of the future of our students we needed to do things differently." It was that encouragement and tone that allowed local districts, the VDOE and bipartisan policymakers—in both the executive and legislative branches—to reach consensus the state needed to make changes and take action.

The Profile of a Virginia Graduate was officially approved by the Board in 2017, which updated Virginia's high school graduation requirements and opened the way for high schools to more fully embrace a focus on deeper learning, career pathways and performance assessments

Gena Keller—who was school district superintendent in Fluvanna, Virginia, at the time—remembers Staples' leadership as "breathing life into superintendents' voices." She recalls it as a "Challenging and exciting time to be a superintendent. . . We organized ourselves such that every region had superintendents looking at legislation more regularly, sharing insights as to the implications for our districts and also taking a regional look at professional learning needs, school disciplinary practices, the needs of our underserved students and the school-to-prison pipeline."

Freedom to innovate went beyond superintendents, extending to the frontlines. Laurie McCullough, Executive Director of Virginia ASCD remembers the message this way: "We're here to lift up a network of practitioners in the state who are doing things well and whose work needs to be shared. . . [Staples] spent time connecting innovative schools with each

13. These recommendations are laid out in the Committee's 2015 report to the Virginia State Board of Education. The 2015 full report, can be accessed here: <http://education.virginia.gov/media/4963/2015-standards-of-learning-innovation-committee-full-report.pdf>

14. For more on Staple's appointment, see the Washington Post's coverage on May 31, 2014: https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/steve-staples-to-become-virginias-next-superintendent-of-public-instruction/2014/03/31/37c5034a-b903-11e3-899e-bb708e3539dd_story.html?utm_term=.0fo784507b17

other and created a grant program for high school redesign that had a real impact. He took a traditional bureaucratic agency and flipped the narrative. What's different about this reform movement is that it values and depends on the work of practitioners in the field to be the driver and not the Virginia Department of Education."

As the work of the SOL Innovation Committee and State Board progressed in pressing for and validating the importance of reforms, Staples worked closely with colleagues at the VDOE to ensure that the role of the agency would be focused on disseminating innovations emerging in pioneering schools and districts, rather than on defining or dictating such innovations. He made it common practice for state leadership to recognize and honor school superintendents doing innovative work, encouraging others to join in. As the leader of a relatively small public agency (roughly 250 staff in a state with 132 school districts), Staples believed this was the right role for the department, philosophically and practically. He encouraged his staff to get out of the office, travel the state and engage directly with practitioners, making sure local leaders understood the department would support them in trying new things and they had full permission to engage in thoughtful redesign.

Staples, in turn, had his own assurances from the offices of the Governor and the Secretary of Education, and knew they would support him. Deputy Secretary Coy remembers it this way: "We recognized and embraced the supportive and convening role the Secretary's office played in this process. We also worked to ensure that the efforts were aligned with the Governor and General Assembly's interests in reform.

After Staples retired and left the VDOE in 2018, his immediate successor, Acting State Superintendent Steve Constantino, and now State Superintendent, James Lane have continued to support and build upon this culture of innovation, all in pursuit of deeper learning and student readiness. As Superintendent Lane explains: "One thing I found when I came in was that most of the work was within certain teams in the agency and was most prevalent in certain school divisions. We needed to help everyone in the agency understand what we were doing, how it ties together, and how they can embed it in their work. . . we are providing the agency professional development so that everyone understands what Virginia is for Learners is about, and how it should be impacting all of [our] work."

From her vantage point working with three successive State Superintendents, Keller sums it up simply: "There is power in leadership continuity, and there is also power in different leaders bringing fresh perspectives and new skills and talents to the table. Instead of working from the status quo, we have been permitted, in a multi-leader and multi-year fashion, to embrace and pursue the changes that people in the field have known were needed."

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

In Virginia's K-12 modernization efforts, listening to and engaging with the public was a winning political strategy. The launch pad for getting the public to engage with state leadership about the future of K-12 in Virginia was a series of public conversations—a listening tour—held across the state, primarily between 2014 and 2017. The Virginia Department of Education, in partnership with the Governor's office, helped organize and staff nine public hearings and 24 stakeholder focus group conversations. The key question they posed to participants was simple: Are our graduates prepared for the next steps in their lives? As then Superintendent Staples explained: "For years, when students got a high school diploma, we declared victory. We wanted to know: are they really ready?" This meant broadening the very conception of what readiness requires and who gets a say.

To help him reach a broad and diverse constituency, Staples hired Leah Walker. Today, Leah is the VDOE Director of the Office of Equity and Community Engagement, responsible for the department's external relations and racial equity work.

Walker—who has deep community work, but not in schools—explains her hire this way: “Traditional education stakeholders would be school district leadership and leaders of the various education associations (e.g., superintendents, principals, school boards, etc.) Staples broadened his stakeholder engagement efforts to include families, communities, higher education, the military, employers—whoever is invested in how well we do at preparing students for the future.”

Throughout the listening tour, the message was loud and clear. Virginia employers and universities needed high school graduates who were problem solvers, able to manage complex challenges and think for themselves, effective collaborators. Over and over, state leaders heard that graduates of Virginia public schools were just not prepared.

As “consumers” of Virginia high school graduates, higher education and workforce leaders were asked to define what they needed. Staples and other state leaders wanted to make sure that state graduation requirements and high school content actually matched employer needs and future demands. This inclusive process drove the state’s urgency and ultimate decision to add five employability competencies to high school graduation requirements. Known as the “5Cs” these skills are critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creative thinking and citizenship skills¹⁵.

Just as important as soliciting diverse stakeholder perspectives, the listening tour also managed to cultivate broad-based public understanding into the proposed K-12 redesign efforts—deeper learning, a balanced assessment system that included both performance assessments and standardized tests, and career pathways that made work-based learning possible for all students.

“If people don’t understand change, they’ll reject it. . . it’s about public will building to frame a future-focused system of education. It’s not a one size fits all approach...”

- Leah Walker

At least three members of the State Board of Education attended each public hearing, and at least two attended each stakeholder focus group. Before each public hearing, the hosting school district got to share what they were proudest of in their district. This combination of input—hard data and personal anecdotes--gave the Board powerful experiences to consider and share as they considered changes to regulations.

After the listening tour and in an effort to further seek out and amplify the voices of stakeholders, VDOE partnered with JFF to engage Capital Results, a strategic communications firm with deep roots in Virginia. Paid for with Hewlett funds, Capital Results contracted with JFF to work with Walker and the VDOE to shape a new coherent message and brand for the Commonwealth’s approach to public education modernization. Rob Shinn, a partner at Capital Results recalls a “breakthrough moment” in their work with the various constituencies as getting them “not to look at things as a series of distinct policy decisions on testing, accreditation and graduation requirements, but to look at the world as changing and at education needing to shift to give young people the skills to thrive in the 21st century.”

Shinn underscored the challenge of trying to convince present-day legislators who once led the charge to develop Virginia’s rigorous academic standards (“Standards of Learning”) and testing mandates. Leaders needed to be convinced that a more balanced assessment system, in favor of performance assessments and deeper learning, would not mean less accountability or undermine “the concern for consistency in the basics, which is what led to all the testing in the first place.” Modernization efforts needed to be framed as the way of “being sure that every child is getting rigorous and equivalent experiences in school.”

¹⁵. Local school districts, often with the help of national nonprofits like Battelle for Kids and its EdLeader21 network, have customized and adopted local versions of the “5Cs” (sometimes even adding more “C”s) to reflect local labor market trends and community demands.

Looking back, Leah Walker believes all of the outreach and communications work made a real difference: “If people don’t understand change, they’ll reject it. . . it’s about public will building to frame a future-focused system of education. It’s not a one size fits all approach. . . We’ve been developing different key messages for different constituencies based on what we know matters most to them. The [VDOE’s] mission is to maximize the potential of all students; our work must align to Virginia’s broader goal of being the best educated state by 2030, which is focused on multiple pathways to college and career readiness. The messages have to align, and the pathways have to make sense for all students and families.”

That alignment was fully on display on April 29, 2019, when Governor Ralph Northam along with state education leaders and partners officially launched ***Virginia is for Learners***. Building on the strong Virginia Bureau for Tourism brand of “Virginia is for Lovers,” ***Virginia is for Learners*** became the publicly branded evolution of the state’s unfolding redesign efforts and local stakeholder engagement strategies. Once announced, the state had a full-fledged public information campaign and coordinated set of future-focused education reform strategies, all directed at better preparing Virginia students for success in the emerging economy and workforce.

In his remarks at the launch event, Secretary of Education Atif Qarni spoke directly to the importance of branding Virginia public education in a way that resonates with a broad public: “***Virginia is for Learners*** is our vehicle for communicating and engaging with the public about the changes happening in their schools and promoting future reforms to build on our momentum. If we work together, we can prepare every student for a successful career in the economy of the future.”

THE SECRET SAUCE. UNPACKING VIRGINIA’S K-12 MODERNIZATION EFFORTS

The sustained nature of Virginia’s K-12 modernization efforts sets the Commonwealth apart from many other states, where changes in political climate and leadership lead to shifts in the appetite for or direction of educational changes. Elected and appointed officials in Virginia have built a future-focused educational modernization agenda across multiple administrations, leadership transitions and years. There have been a number of factors, happening at once, to make this possible.

Continuous Coordinated State Leadership

Former Governor McAuliffe believed Virginia needed to be a place that competes for jobs. That requires public schools to produce graduates who can meet the standards of businesses, the military and higher education. Virginia has one-term governors, which prevented McAuliffe from running for reelection in 2016. Democratic candidate, Ralph Northam, won the seat, and pledged to maintain the momentum in education. Northam’s election coincided with regulations enacted by the Board of Education, under McAuliffe, going into effect. Northam appointed a new Secretary of Education, Atif Qarni, and kept Deputy Secretary of Education Holly Coy in place. In her role as liaison on K-12 issues to the legislature and Board of Education, Coy was in position to provide consistency, connection and historical context among and across various agencies.

Although there have been three Virginia state superintendents of education in the past five years—Steve Staples, Steve Constantino, and now James Lane—all three leaders were active drivers of the future-focused modernization efforts even before their roles as state superintendent and, in the case of Staples and Constantino, after their time as state superintendent¹⁶. When Governor Northam took office and appointed Lane to be state superintendent, the VDOE well underway in helping schools implement new regulations aligned to change efforts that prioritized performance assessments, deeper learning and career pathways, including revised school accreditation standards and updated

16. Today, Staples and Constantino are both adjunct professors at the William & Mary School of Education, where they continue this work by training and supporting education leaders across the state.

graduation requirements¹⁷. This positioned Lane and his team to take the work to the next level, all with a solid historic foundation and the backing and political gravitas of the offices of the Secretary of Education and Governor. Superintendent Lane credits the longevity and success of Virginia's modernization efforts to the "stability in the [State] Board of Education, with new appointees sharing their vision for the **Profile of a Virginia Graduate**; stability of State Superintendents who understand that how the work is done at the district level is key." The commitment to future-focused deeper learning remained constant: "When I was being considered, I believe that my depth of understanding of deeper learning and my commitment to continuing the work of previous state leaders helped me get the job." Lane went on to point out: "Having constant partners in JFF and Hewlett helped us to take the time to do the right visioning and capacity building and made the difference when Superintendents and Board changed membership."

Superintendent Lane credits the longevity and success of Virginia's modernization efforts to the "stability in the [State] Board of Education, with new appointees sharing their vision for the Profile of a Virginia Graduate; stability of State Superintendents who understand that how the work is done at the district level is key."

Investment in Public Understanding and Will-Building

The involvement of a broader range of stakeholders, especially from the business community, has provided a crucial constituency for the K-12 modernization efforts sparked by the McAuliffe's administration and Staples' tenure. The buy-in from a critical mass of local school superintendents further solidified this base for the reforms. Several years ago, knew it was time to deepen and extend its public reach, so it partnered with JFF. Together, they were able to secure additional Hewlett Foundation funding and bring on Capital Results, a politically-credible, Richmond-based public relationships firm with a long track-record of bi-partisan work with various administrations. Capital Results' stayed with VDOE across state superintendents, primarily partnering with Walker's office of equity and community engagement. This led to a cohesive and sustainable public will-building campaign—**Virginia is for Learners**—that made sense of priority reforms while evolving messages on why things needed to change in K-12 education in Virginia, in ways the public and policymakers could understand.

A Vibrant, Cross-Sector State Board of Education

All of this was made possible because of the visionary and steady leadership of the Virginia State Board of Education. As in the majority of states, the Virginia Governor appoints members to the Board and each board member serves a four-year term—which can be renewed once. These terms are staggered among board members, so each year some members stay while others leave.

During Governor McAuliffe's term, the General Assembly passed legislation requiring that at least two of the nine board members have a business background. They wanted to ensure that in addition to educators, the Board would include people on the "demand-side" of high school graduation. McAuliffe expected the Board to come up with appropriate parameters and guard rails for the reforms that his State Superintendent and Secretary of Education were helping to spearhead, and to make sure those reforms would ultimately prepare graduates for work and the economy. "The Governor wanted the Board's work to be collaborative and reflect the interests and perspectives of a variety of key stakeholders. But he was also very clear that he expected them to take bold action after that collaboration," explained Deputy Secretary Coy. Today, the chair of the State Board brings extensive business experience. Other board members

17. To read more about these changes, check out the *Virginia is for Learners* website by accessing this URL: <http://www.virginiaisforlearners.virginia.gov/preparing-every-student-for-what-comes-next/>

include a President and CEO of a community-based organization focused on cradle-to-career programing, a former apprentice and now director of learning and development innovation at Newport News Shipbuilding, a high-level administrator from the Fairfax County schools, a former Secretary of Education, current and former principals, and a representative from higher education.

Driving Change Through Department Evolution and Professional Profiles

Over the past five years, education leaders have understood that policy change, public will-building and practice innovations must go hand-in-hand. This requires attention to and investment in Virginia's educator workforce. As Superintendent Lane has said: "The best decisions about students are made by teachers, families and students together, and the best decisions concerning teachers are made by principals and teachers together. . . We pull together teams across and within school divisions to spend time at [the Department of Education] to develop performance assessments, curriculum, etc. that become part of a roll-out strategy. Our job is to build capacity of the Department leadership and then that leadership will build capacity of superintendents and principals, who will in turn support the capacity building of their teachers."

Gena Keller played an important role building the VDOE's practices and capacity in these areas. Before her time at the VDOE, which started under Dr. Staples, and continued with Steve Constantino and Superintendent James Lane, she was one of those innovation-minded local superintendents working on the ***VASS Blueprint for Reform in Public Education***: "We started as volunteers sharing ideas about what needed to happen in Virginia schools for all our children, and how to use the depths of our understanding of student engagement and equity to impact policy decisions." This voluntary and pioneering group took those ideas forward and turned them into the foundation of VASS's blueprint, ***The New VASS Blueprint for the Future of Public Education (2015)***¹⁸.

While at the VDOE, Keller expanded an inter-agency "Performance Assessment Work Group" and created a "Deeper Learning Work Group," which included representatives from several historically siloed departmental offices. Just as field-based education groups were increasing their coordination, this group worked together to rewrite academic standards, help content specialists embed deeper learning competencies, such as critical thinking and collaboration, into their work, and to adopt what Keller has called a "Help Desk approach" to work with regions and school districts. "In the Deeper Learning Working Group," says Keller, "we challenged each other to think differently about our responsibilities to those practitioners in the field and, ultimately, to our students. We [kept] each other honest through dialogue that challenged our thinking about our next steps. We know we can't just mandate a curriculum for all 7th grade Civics, that's up to the local boards, but we can show exemplars and bring in other school divisions ready to share their journey."

Similar to the value and importance of continuous leadership in the Secretary of Education's Office because of Deputy Secretary Coy's tenure, this working group included agency staff with long tenures and a deep commitment to the need to innovate and improve. This cross-cutting work group also became increasingly engaged in national initiatives and communities of practice, including those facilitated by the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) ***Innovation Lab Network*** and the University of Kentucky's ***Center for Innovation in Education*** (CIE). This national-to-local feedback loop enabled the working group individuals to be learners in national communities of practice, which strengthened their leadership in the state. These communities of practice also provided dedicated time for reflection and relationship-building among work group members.

18. The New VASS Blueprint for the Future of Public Education (2015), <https://www.vassonline.org/images/vass/blueprint/The%20New%20Blueprint%20for%20the%20Future%20of%20Public%20Education.pdf>.
In late 2020, VASS will release an updated blueprint, which will be available on their website.

In 2019, Keller retired from the VDOE as Assistant State Superintendent for Learning, having joined the agency several years before as the Coordinator of Professional Learning. In her last role, she was responsible for increasing the agency's understanding of commitment to deeper learning, performance assessment and career pathways, as well as supporting the development of the **Profiles of a Virginia Educator, Education Leader and Classroom**. Keller and JFF used Hewlett Foundation funds to select and invest in a small group of university partners and professional organizations to develop these professional profiles: the William & Mary School of Education was charged with developing the **Profile of a Virginia Leader**; George Mason University's College of Education and Human Development, **the Profile of a Virginia Educator**; and, Virginia ASCD, **the Profile of a Virginia Classroom**. In each case, the assigned lead entities engaged a broad network of educators from across the Commonwealth who informed and helped iterate the various profiles. Close partners to these efforts included three other professional organizations: the Virginia Association of State Superintendents (VASS), the Virginia School Consortium of Learning (VaSCL) and the School-University Resource Network (SURN). Field-derived, final versions of each profile were presented to the Board of Education in June 2019.

In early 2020, this group decided to formalize their ongoing collaboration by creating a new network committed to improving and modernizing Virginia's education workforce. The **Commonwealth Learning Partnership**, launched in March 2020, is a formal collaborative of education pre-service and in-service providers who commit to advance and operationalize the profile work, aligning their offerings to improve and drive better supports for the educator workforce along the way. The founding group has established an open invitation for other Virginia-based professional development organizations and schools of education to join, so long as they have a shared commitment to modernizing public education through better supports and training to the educator workforce.

"We think of the various Profiles as legs of a stool," says Virginia ASCD Executive Director, Laurie McCullough. "The Profile of a Graduate lays out the kinds of competencies students graduating from Virginia high schools should have. This led to conversations about how the skills and dispositions educators need must evolve and about how school leadership will need to look different. Finally, all of this leads to the question, what classroom practices are aligned with deeper learning outcomes?"

As an example of one of the professional profiles, the **Profile of a Virginia Classroom** focuses on five areas of pedagogy and practice most critical to deeper learning and operationalizing the **Profile of a Virginia Graduate**: planning for deeper learning; building culture and relationships; feedback and assessment practices; instructional practices to promote deeper learning; and, redefining teacher and student roles¹⁹. As McCullough describes, "We talk to teachers often about 'deeper learning' and [Virginia's] 5C's, and a lot of them say 'it sounds good, but that's not how I was trained. I was trained to get kids to get high test scores.' 'Where do I start?' is the question from teachers. This is a resource to answer that question."

For the VDOE to effectively support the field-derived professional profiles, agency leadership had to rethink its engagement with field leaders as well as the way to align various efforts taking place across the agency towards the goal of promoting **Virginia is for Learners** and actualizing the **Profile of a Virginia Graduate**. Agency leadership have done this by being actively involved in the design and launch of the Commonwealth Learning Partnership and by being vocal supporters of the professional profiles, without insinuating that these are somehow state mandates.

This mutually supportive field-and-state relationship did not happen overnight. While at VDOE, Keller systematically leveraged common commitments between VDOE and outside partners to bring coherence across many similar but haphazard modernization efforts. Keller understood that having “lots of eyes and ears on the work” would keep the work focused and moving forward. She sees a key need moving forward to be the continued connections and bridge-building between efforts. A huge strength of Virginia’s K-12 modernization efforts is the obviously vibrant relationship network that exists among education leaders. Local and state education leaders seem to truly enjoy one another, and many have decades long relationships and friendships. Even as their various roles have changed (e.g., moving from a local superintendent to state superintendent role, or from school administration to higher education), their connections to each other have continued on.

A Little Goes a Long Way

The past five years of Virginia’s K-12 modernization has largely proceeded **without** a large infusion of new public or private funding. Even so, all of the leaders we interviewed point to the importance of even small amounts of flexible dollars from philanthropic sources and associated backbone supports.

The partnership between Virginia and JFF began after a chance meeting between former Superintendent Dr. Staples and Rebecca Wolfe, then an Associate Vice President of JFF. They connected at a convening sponsored by Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). From there, JFF was able to direct a small amount of passthrough funding from the Hewlett Foundation and staffing support to help Virginia hold a statewide education summit focused on performance assessment (abovementioned). The summit, held in 2016, provided some definition and glue to what had begun as a number of related, but fragmented, change efforts across the state²⁰. Building on excitement generated at that summit, JFF staff began a long-term engagement with Virginia’s education vanguard, including both state and field leaders. “We were able to use some foundation dollars and a modest state innovation fund to support the work of a set of national, state, and regional partners,” recalls Stephanie Krauss, JFF senior director, and point person for JFF’s Virginia efforts. “From there, we were able to offer backbone support to a coalition of actors and agencies to grow the work and strengthen coordination and forward movement.”

Former Superintendent Dr. Staples echoes and further explicates this view: “Virginia Department of Education is pretty small, 250 employees in a state with 1.3 million students. Our capacity to take on work and develop new expertise was limited.” This meant that the VDOE alone had limited capacity to move beyond compliance tasks or to develop new messaging and communication vehicles. Philanthropic resources and JFF support changed the capacity challenge. Suddenly, there was critical assistance and capacity offered by JFF and Capital Results, which enabled the state to go further than they ever had -- developing a strong and strategic new brand of public education, ultimately leading to the creation and launch of ***Virginia is for Learners*** and the ***Commonwealth Learning Partnership***.

Creative Funding for Local Change. Virginia is for Learners Innovation Network

A core aspect of JFF’s partnership has been the establishment of a pooled fund to support innovative programming across the state. This fund has been made exclusively of Hewlett funding, and has supported training and innovation efforts across the state, focused on operationalizing the ***Profile of a Virginia Graduate*** as well as the companion professional profiles. Over the course of two years, this fund has supported leadership academies and training for Virginia superintendents and their administrative teams, principals, teachers and educators-in-training.

One of these efforts is led by the Virginia School Consortium for Learning (VaSCL). With strong VDOE partnership, plus support from JFF's pooled fund as well as the Ted Dintersmith Foundation, James Madison University, and the Advanced Learning Partnership, VaSCL formed a statewide network of local teams to put the profiles and redesign strategies into practice. Now in its second cohort, the Virginia is for Learners Innovation Network has engaged more than 60 communities across the state, who regularly come together to receive training, peer learning, community and strategic advising.

Selected local teams are made up of school and community leaders. They come together virtually and in-person to learn about school leadership and innovation from nationally recognized experts and each other. Throughout the cohort experience, teams work on their own innovation project, which culminates in an end-of-cohort Innovation Summit. Throughout the cohort year, community teams surface and codify the lessons they are learning, so that others can benefit from their own experiences and reflections.

The innovation network demonstrates the creative opportunity that mixed public and private funds have in driving Virginia's local K-12 modernization efforts forward. The network is funded by combining federal Title II dollars with JFF pooled funding (Hewlett dollars) along with a matching grant from individual philanthropist, Ted Dintersmith.

Looking Ahead

As Virginia's educator leaders look back at the past five years, they see the importance of setting the stage—the conditions—for education modernization. The state made a big promise when it said that **Virginia is for Learners**. Today, the movement is about delivering on that promise. Moving forward, Virginia's education leadership is intensifying its commitment to modernize and improve education pre-service and in-service opportunities. Many see future success being tied to the level of investment in the state's educator workforce.

Virginia faces a dire teacher shortage and those already working in education find themselves responsible for implementing new and different pedagogy and practice. So many are overworked and underpaid. There is a need for deep investment support of the professional community. There is also a need for continued right-sizing of what is required and deemed most important. The state will need to continue pulling back on outdated or extraneous professional requirements, to free up time and resources that can go to the innovations needed for full-scale modernization. Other infrastructure supports include stronger educator-employer relationships and mechanisms for seeking private funding beyond the Hewlett Foundation.

As Superintendent Lane sees it: "before the new branding, people had a hard time visualizing where we were going while also building the plane. Now people can see it's ready to take off. The **Virginia is for Learners** brand is bringing that home." From his perspective, this is a moment to do some important coalition building outside the agency. "We're going to establish a statewide business council and an education foundation. This is all about developing the skills businesses are longing for, rather than preparing kids for jobs that don't exist. "The business community could be an even stronger voice in our work to modernize learning and teaching in Virginia schools."

Broadening and Deepening Community Support

Moving ahead, state education leaders know they must move beyond their strong connections with superintendents and districts to engage and enlist community stakeholders, including young people themselves, as well as their parents and neighborhood leaders. The ultimate goal is that even in places where **Virginia is for Learners** is not championed by district leadership, it is being advocated for by community leaders, families and young people.

At the same time, the speed of moving forward depends on how state legislators move beyond voting for funding of separate initiatives to invest more strategically in the alignment of a comprehensive future learning agenda, including policy on student assessments, district-level accountability, educator workforce issues, career pathways and deeper learning reforms. The Board of Education is preparing to review teacher quality standards and, under the leadership of Governor Northam and Secretary Qarni, is about to increase teacher salaries to match the national average. All of this requires a broad look at how Virginia resources its schools and an understanding and belief in how all of these efforts connect, build on each other and work together to advance a common agenda.

The hope among VDOE leaders is that the Board of Education will look holistically at all of the work that went into **Virginia is for Learners**, the next set of Profiles (of a Graduate, Educator, Education Leader, Classroom, Graduate) and the launch of the Commonwealth Learning Partnership. With a holistic view, they can shepherd a strong and aligned revision of teacher/administrator evaluation and certification, as well as future priorities and initiatives.

Getting More Explicit About Race and Equity

As the work moves forward, an explicit goal of state and field education leaders is to ensure that equity and education justice is pushed to the top of the priority list. In other words, if **Virginia is for Learners**, how can we be certain that it is for all learners? The VDOE is located in Richmond, Virginia – the capital of the Confederacy. **Virginia is for Learners** was launched just months after Governor Northam was accused of wearing blackface in his 1984 medical school yearbook. In the years leading up to the launch, the nation watched as white supremacists marched through Charlottesville. Racism, racial tensions and systemic injustice that has led to deep educational inequities is on full display across the Commonwealth.

Virginia is for Learners offered VDOE and field education leaders the on-ramp to get much more explicit when talking about race and taking on an anti-racist lens in their work. The Profiles have been built with equity as a unifying theme. Under the banner of **Virginia is for Learners**, Walker and her office were able to hold statewide education equity summits—attended by most school districts, as well as webinars and book talks on race and equity issues. VDOE leadership have committed to doing their own diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) work, which has included a partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University to train agency staff in what it means to operate with a racial equity lens.

Our success with modernizing teaching and learning in Virginia is reliant on our effectiveness in advancing equity for all students. We must stay diligent in our efforts to ensure that we provide our students with educators who possess the cultural competencies necessary to maximize the potential of all students.

At the same time, there has been a full court press on K-12 implementation of the new standards of accreditation. These standards place a new emphasis on achieving the **Profile of a Virginia Graduate**, enabling students to cultivate real-world skills, eliminating achievement gaps and incentivizing continuous school modernization efforts. Under these new standards, the state public education system is now better designed to measure what matters, give credit for student growth and focus on equity outcomes.

The accreditation standards, as Secretary Qarni explains, “highlight achievement gaps and demonstrate opportunities for Virginia to better meet the needs of students who have historically been left behind.” Virginia is taking key steps in the right direction, by injecting more funds into education with a focus on addressing students’ social-emotional needs,

ensuring appropriate supports are available in a student's native language and prioritizing investment into schools with a high concentration of students who are at-risk. "These reforms must be scalable to impact every student in every school across the Commonwealth. Culturally responsive instruction prepares students to enter an ever-diversifying, 21st century workplace. A diverse, equitable and inclusive education that addresses students' social-emotional needs and gives them the skills they need to succeed after graduation should be accessible no matter where you go to school in Virginia."

As leaders move across the state and talk with educators about the delivery of **Virginia is for Learners** branded reforms, they see a natural opportunity to embed workshops and trainings on creating culturally responsive classrooms and exploring racial justice as a priority to better engage each and every student in their learning. Walker and others championing this opportunity, want to make sure that "when students have the opportunity to engage with their learning in ways that are relevant to their lives and affirm their identities, they then become empowered to participate in the transformation of our world. The development of deeper learning competencies in our students is dependent upon students' opportunities to learn in culturally responsive classrooms and engage with culturally relevant pedagogy. Our success with modernizing teaching and learning in Virginia is reliant on our effectiveness in advancing equity for all students. We must stay diligent in our efforts to ensure that we provide our students with educators who possess the cultural competencies necessary to maximize the potential of all students."

TRANSLATION TO ACTION.

What Other States
Can Learn from
Virginia's Story



Commonwealth
Learning
Partnership



The nature of work is evolving, and the world is changing. But for the most part, our nation's schools—designed to help farmers become factory workers—have stayed the same. The success and stability of our families and communities hinge on our high school graduates being well prepared for tomorrow's world and workforce. State education leaders across the country are grappling with how to modernize and repair their public education systems and actualize a vision that embeds future-ready knowledge, skills and dispositions into their state's K-12 education system. To achieve this, improvements to, or the reimagining of, the educator workforce, assessment system, career pathways programming and teaching and learning is essential.

How states take on this work will vary depending on the opportunities and resources available to them, as well as the challenges they will have to overcome and the leaders spearheading the work. Some states have already begun updating their education system and practices in big ways, while others are just getting started. States, no matter where they are on the journey, can learn from Virginia's recent education history. Virginia's story illuminates a set of key factors that have contributed to the start and success of ***Virginia is for Learners*** and its complimentary field-building activities. Those factors have real-time implications for other states looking to fully modernize their approaches to K-12 public education.

Getting Governors on Board

Governors play a unique role advancing and setting the conditions for education modernization efforts across a state. Governors can encourage and enable conditions for success by advancing policy agendas, using their bully pulpit, galvanizing key stakeholders, and utilizing their executive powers and budgetary authority.

In Virginia, two governors in a row used executive authority to champion education modernization efforts across the state and set an agenda to advance and champion what would become ***Virginia is for Learners***. Importantly, each governor was able to personalize how the issues were talked about. The work was carried out by a combination of appointed and career staff. Career staffers in senior positions were critical for operationalizing each governor's priorities, while simultaneously creating coherence and continuity across administrations.

Practice Change, Policymaking and Public Will-Building

Ineffective and outdated state policies can stand in the way of effective state education modernization efforts. Updates to state policy can both require and incentivize stakeholder action and engagement that improves education learning and practices. In addition to legislative action, states and communities need sufficient resources, support and funding that ensures any policy is implemented with fidelity. Resources are also required to allow states and communities to innovate, including resources to effectively evaluate the changes that may be needed in the design, delivery and assessment of instructional practices across schools.

In 2014, Virginia's legislature passed legislation (HB930 and SB306) that removed five standardized state assessments that were deemed unnecessary. The legislature, with the support of the governor's office, also provided funding for innovation grants to five school divisions that were making progress on new ways of delivering education. These legislative efforts made a big difference in supporting the Commonwealth's education modernization efforts to-date. On the one hand, they spoke directly to a pain point of voters – their children were being over-tested in schools. On the other hand, the legislation lifted up and supported local innovation efforts, rolling out new flexibilities and a different kind of relationship between local communities and the state agency.

Empowered Commissions, Committees and Coalitions

Commissions, committees and coalitions can very effective ways to assess how well a state is preparing students for the various opportunities available to them after high school, including postsecondary education, the military and the workforce. Effective committees should be composed of a diverse set of education leaders and stakeholders, including superintendents and local education leaders who are familiar with what is happening in local communities. Coalitions should reflect the fullness of the field. While committees work within the state bureaucracy, coalitions can put necessary pressure on the state for change.

In Virginia, the **Standards of Learning (SOL) Innovation Committee**, enacted in 2014, was tasked with reviewing all of Virginia's state-mandated exams to determine new ways to get Virginia students ready for college and work. With bipartisan backing, the SOL Innovation Committee—made up of school board members, superintendents, professional association representatives, academics and community leaders—reimagined the future of Virginia's K-12 systems, assessment and accountability. In the years to follow, the **Virginia is for Learners** informal coalition of state and national groups, as the more formalized Commonwealth Learning Partnership, acted as the education field “vanguard” to institute and push for ongoing practice and policy changes.

Credible State Leaders

Passionate and supportive state education leadership is critical for actualizing education modernization and deeper learning in K-12. States should appoint and employ well-respected and passionate leaders, and if possible, put them in positions that sustain changes across administrations and politics.

In Virginia, State Superintendents serve as the executive officer of the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). Virginia's last three State Superintendents have been popular and well-respected leaders with previous experience as local school superintendents. All had been active members of Virginia's Association of School Superintendents (one having served as a previous executive director). This gave them insights into local issues, deep connections and trust with their 130 superintendent colleagues. This move has provided strong foundational support and an ability for them to use a common language with practitioners across the state. The superintendent network and appointment of known and experienced local leaders into the state's top education leadership role has been essential for moving Virginia forward in a manner that provided much needed connectivity and predictability for practitioners in the field.

Investments in Professional Development

Professional development resources and support for education leaders and practitioners, especially after a state enacts a new piece of legislation or full-scale education agenda, is critical to ensuring that changes achieve intended impact in the field and in practice.

When Virginia passed legislation to reduce the number of standardized assessments offered and replace them with performance assessments, they opened the door for practitioners to develop performance assessment tools and move toward a more balanced assessment model. In order to meet the promise of the new policy, VDOE offered professional development opportunities centered around the Quality Criterion Tool, a tool developed in partnership with the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE). This tool and related trainings provide guidance for the development of performance assessments that would meet the standards of rigor and consistency across the state. VDOE staff also convened to define deeper learning and then to determine how best to support deeper learning implementation efforts in the field to assure effective shifts in practice.

In addition, JFF's pooled fund has helped fuel and support new professional development partnerships between VDOE and educational organizations like Virginia Association for School Superintendents (VASS), Virginia School Consortium for Learning (VaSCL), School University Resource Network (SURN) and VASCD. Through alignment and shared offerings, these groups now provide numerous professional development opportunities to educators and education leaders across the Commonwealth as they strive to put the **Virginia is for Learners** principles and policies into practice.

State Agency Coherence and Connections

State education departments across the country have historically been driven by compliance, and too often operate in silos with little to no process for working across departmental teams or with the broader field. As a result, state education agencies may not be well positioned to encourage innovation in the field or new ways of working. State agencies may consider efforts that encourage interagency collaboration across divisions, as well as coordination efforts that align with the efforts of education professional organizations in the field and across the state.

In Virginia, the VDOE engaged in a set of activities to break down the interagency silos. This included developing a "Performance Assessment Work Group" and a "Deeper Learning Work Group." These work groups were composed of representatives from several different offices. In recent years, these groups have worked to rewrite standards and help content specialists embed deeper learning competencies. Work group members have also engaged with field leaders and participated in national communities of practice.

Strategic Communications

Strategic communications can help ensure all stakeholders - including students, parents, educators, and education leaders - understand and believe in the need to modernize K-12 education as well as the state's plan for doing so. Strategic communication activities may include a listening tour, public hearings, tailored messaging for diverse sets of constituents, coalition-building and a central website.

In Virginia, VDOE and in field leaders engaged in early and continuous efforts to build public awareness through local hearings, a listening tour, and a carefully crafted communications campaign. These conversations and communications efforts included and were among the State Superintendent's Leadership Council, regional superintendent groups, key instructional leads and presentations to school board members, all of which helped galvanize the "why" for the work. By connecting with a diverse set of stakeholders, the VDOE built the platform they needed to launch Virginia is for Learners and transform from being seen as a compliance and regulatory entity, to supporter of innovation.

Philanthropic and Intermediary Investments

Philanthropy can play a significant and catalyzing role in modernizing K-12 education across states. Philanthropic investments and shows of support, however big or small, can provide state and local actors with the cover and credibility to move forward with their innovations. Funding support can also enable trusted intermediaries with political and field-building expertise to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to the work and by providing needed backbone support.

In Virginia, Hewlett funding made the Virginia Department of Education's partnership with JFF possible. Together, VDOE and JFF were able to create a flexible pooled fund that fueled professional development and innovation opportunities that VDOE was unable to financially support. JFF's partnership also supported and sped up the work to

launch ***Virginia is for Learners***, the professional companion profiles to the ***Profile of a Virginia Graduate***, and the launch of the ***Commonwealth Learning Partnership***. Instead of a set of individual grants, the VDOE/JFF partnership and pooled fund facilitated even deeper connections between professional organizations and schools of education, leading to their genuine desire to establish a formalized network. This network, the ***Commonwealth Learning Partnership***, can now take over the intermediary functions and build out the next generation of the work and funding.