





**VISION** | We envision a day when all Virginia public school students receive an education that prepares them for the world and workforce, including learning experiences and environments that enable them to thrive in childhood and become positive contributors in their communities.

**MISSION** | Virginia Learns brings together business and education leaders with the shared goal of creating a more innovative, relevant and equitable public education system in Virginia. Business leaders know what will make students successful in today's workforce and global economy, and educators know how to prepare them for it. By applying our collective expertise, we can evolve and support the K-12 classroom experience so that students graduate prepared for success in the 21st century world and workforce.

# Welcome to Virginia Learns

**The importance of a quality education has never been lost on me.** My mother was an elementary school teacher for over fifty years. I witnessed firsthand her dedication to making sure students left her classroom prepared for the next level. In my professional career, I can attribute many of my achievements to having a strong educational foundation from which I could launch.

I am a banker by trade, not an educator. While I did not follow in my mother's admirable footsteps, I still realize how crucial it is for everyone to have a rich educational experience – especially during their formative years. I see this from both an education and a business standpoint. Virginia's future economy, business environment, and quality of life all depend on how well we equip the youth of today with the knowledge, skills, and behaviors they need to succeed in school, work, and life in the future. **There is an economic imperative for all of us – educators, businesses, families, and communities – to ensure Virginia has the best public schools in the nation.** When my mother finally retired from her teaching

career, I asked her why she had come to that decision. Her response was, "It just wasn't fair for me to keep teaching when I know it's time for someone new to start their teaching career." She realized the importance of preparing and making space for the next generation of educators and, by extension, their students. That preparation includes adapting the education experience to the needs and skillsets of a 21st century environment.

When Jim Ukrop asked me to join the governing board of Virginia Learns and serve as the inaugural board chair, I knew I had to accept. This work is too important, and we all must rise to the challenge. Our Commonwealth must maintain our competitiveness, and the best path to this success is ensuring that the next generation is life-ready and equipped with all they need to be productive members of their communities.

**John Asbury**  
Atlantic Union Bank President & CEO  
and Virginia Learns Board Chair

As a parent of two children in Virginia's public schools, this work is personal to me. As an educator who once taught high school math and science and coached football, who served as a principal in training, who advised a governor on education and workforce development policy, and who teaches nonprofit advocacy as a university professor, I believe this work is grounded in a moral imperative. **There is no mission more important than ensuring that, not only my children, but that all children in Virginia have the opportunity to attain an excellent education, regardless of their race, family income, or zip code.**

I accepted this challenge decades ago when I first began my career in education, and my passion for this

cause has only grown stronger. The 21st century world and workforce are evolving, and to be "life-ready" requires a different approach to learning and skills development than what we have previously known. For the sake of our students and our future, we have to adapt and invest more in our education system. Virginia Learns is a response to this 21st century challenge, and we are excited to begin this work.

**We invite you to review this report to learn more about Virginia Learns. Our work is just beginning, and we encourage you to join our efforts.**

**Robert Nomberg, EdD**  
Virginia Learns Founder, President & CEO



# Virginia Leads When Virginia Learns

For nearly a decade, Virginia has led the nation in efforts to modernize public schools. America's public schools were originally designed to train farm kids for factory work. Today, schools must be updated and upgraded to ensure students receive an education that meets their needs while preparing them for a competitive global economy.

Over these past years, Virginia leaders have steadily worked to improve our state's public education system and schools, enacting much-needed changes to policy and practice:

- In 2013, then Governor Terry McAuliffe engaged in a statewide listening tour and, based on what he heard, promised to address student "over-testing."
- In 2014, the General Assembly removed 5 of 32 mandatory tests, replacing them with age-appropriate portfolios and performance assessments. Legislators also established the Standards of Learning Innovation Committee, giving unprecedented authority to district and school leaders on education policy decisions.
- In 2015, The SOL Innovation Committee recommended the state create a "Profile of a Virginia Graduate," which would be a more accurate picture of the knowledge, skills, and experiences students need for life after high school.
- That same year, the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) issued "The New Blueprint for the Future of Public Education" and the Virginia Department of Education awarded five \$50,000 high school innovation planning grants to school divisions with bold education reforms and a focus on preparing students for future of work and learning.
- In 2016, more than 400 educators gathered at the University of Virginia for the first-ever Summit on Students Assessments. Then State Superintendent Steve Staples laid out a vision for education innovation and a comprehensive plan for getting there. His remarks caught the attention and investment of the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation.

- In 2017, Ralph Northam was elected Governor with a promise to prioritize improvements to public education and to establish a statewide education foundation. The Virginia Profile of a Graduate was completed and approved by the State Board of Education.
- In 2018, the Virginia Department of Education launched "EdEquityVA," an initiative focused on eliminating disparate student outcomes based on race, gender, zip code, ability, socio-economic status, and/or languages spoken at home. This effort—including state summits, learning series, and technical assistance—prioritized increasing cultural competency among Virginia's educator workforce, and closing opportunity gaps.
- In 2019, State Superintendent James Lane, along with Governor Northam, Secretary of Education Atif Qarni, and a broad coalition of state and local education leaders, launched Virginia is for Learners, an education campaign and rebranding effort focused on modernizing public education, addressing longstanding education inequities, and operationalizing the Virginia Profile of a Graduate.
- In 2020, momentum from Virginia is for Learners, along with continued financial support from the Hewlett Foundation, led to the creation of the Commonwealth Learning Partnership, representing more than 40 education organizations, membership groups, and schools of education.
- Later that year, the Commonwealth Learning Partnership initiated a pooled fund to support local district innovation and teacher training programs, an "Educator Heroes" campaign, and an online resource center aimed to support the educator workforce as they navigated the COVID-19 pandemic, racial uprisings, and an economic crisis. Around the same time, Governor Northam established the Commission on African American History Education in the Commonwealth, and by October 2020 the state Board of Education approved changes to Virginia history and social science academic standards, to ensure inclusivity and accuracy of the Black experience in America, and to make sure all Virginia students received culturally relevant content and curriculum.



Today, Virginia's 132 school divisions educate more than 1.2 million students. Across the state, leaders continue to improve policies and practices, while facing unforeseen and unprecedented challenges.

Maintaining our position as a national leader in education is not guaranteed. COVID-19, along with persistent and inflamed education inequities, threaten our progress. The pandemic already disrupted two years of learning, and it's about to impact a third. Over the past two years, households became homeschools, and learning moved from in-person to online, and then—for many—back again.

There have been alarming differences in education access and experience during this time. Some students have done well, in large part because they are learning in stable homes with their own digital devices, supported by active, engaged caretakers and teachers. Others have struggled to keep up and connect for various reasons—lack of broadband internet, no dedicated learning space, being expected to learn by paper packets rather than personal instruction, or—for too many—juggling school work and new or increased household responsibilities, such as part-time work or caring for younger siblings.

To recover and emerge better than ever, we must build forward together. The pride Virginians have in our schools must translate into deep involvement and

investment in educating, supporting, and preparing our students during these uncertain times.

Virginia Learns brings together business and education leaders with the shared goal of creating a more innovative, relevant and equitable public education system in Virginia. Business leaders know what will make students successful in today's workforce and global economy, and educators know how to prepare them for it.

Together we are launching Virginia Learns, the Commonwealth's first and only nonprofit K-12 public education foundation created through a joint collaboration between the business and education communities. Virginia Learns will do whatever it takes to deliver on the

promise that "Virginia is for Learners," for every student, no matter what.

**Success requires Virginia leaders' collective learning, coordination, and action. Only when Virginia learns, can Virginia work and lead.**

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# VIRGINIA LEARNS

ABOUT OUR ORGANIZATION

## AIMS AND ACTIVITIES

Inform ~ Influence ~ Initiate ~ Invest

At Virginia Learns, we:

- Inform decisionmakers
- Influence policy and funding decisions
- Initiate partnerships across and between education, business, and community
- Invest in changemaker people, places, and programs

**Inform decisionmakers** on pressing issues affecting Virginia public schools, educators, and students.

Activities include:

- Issue briefs
- Issue campaigns
- Reports, including an annual “State of our Schools” report
- Data and policy trackers
- Fact sheets and briefs
- Webinars, convenings, and conferences

**Influence policy and funding decisions** to ensure every school has the supports necessary for students to receive an education that meets their needs and prepares them for the future.

Activities include:

- Leadership programs and institutes, such as fellowship programs
- Policy and advocacy work, including coalition-building
- Policy action alerts
- Leadership roundtables
- Partnership with state government
- Active governing board made up of high-profile business leaders
- Active advisory board made up of respected education, youth development, and community leaders

**Initiate partnerships across and between education, business, and community leaders** to ensure student learning and preparation is supported in school, at home, in community, and at work.

Activities include:

- Commonwealth Learning Partnership – a movement of state and local education leaders working together to support the educator workforce and to operationalize the Virginia Profiles of a Graduate, Classroom, Educator, and Education Leader.
- Build Forward Together Campaign and Coalition – a new movement that will include early childhood, K-12, higher education, youth development, and business leaders focused on an inclusive education recovery from COVID-19.

**Invest in changemaker people, places, and programs**, ensuring that education partnerships and change efforts have the start-up support, ongoing capacity, and sustaining power needed to achieve positive and transformational results.

Activities include:

- Pooled fund
- Fundraising to support state and local innovation efforts

## VALUES

Virginia Learns has four core values driving our direction and decisions. These values are as important to our organizational health as they are to the field efforts we start and support.

At Virginia Learns we:

- Relentlessly focus on students and their futures
- Commit to what works
- Expect and practice integrity
- Demand resource equity

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Virginia Learns is a nonprofit and statewide education operating foundation. We started because of the need for a post-partisan voice in education and a platform for amplifying, aligning, and advancing the needs and interests of students, the educator workforce, and the business community.

## 2021 - 2026 PRIORITIES

Over the next five years, Virginia Learns commits to these five priorities:

- 1. Inclusive education recovery from COVID-19**
- 2. School resource equity**
- 3. Balanced systems of accountability**
- 4. Effective, diverse, and supported educator workforce**
- 5. Stronger education-employer partnerships**

### 1. Every community has schools and an educator workforce that is ready and able to help students overcome obstacles brought on by COVID-19.

- Expanded school funding for student support services and school-community partnerships
- Support for expanded learning and before-and-after-school programs or programming
- Support for increased mental health and counseling staff and resources
- Support for increased tutoring and academic remediation services
- Support for statewide high-speed broadband connectivity
- Campaign for grade-level reading

### 2. Every school has sufficient financial resources for students to experience an excellent and equitable education, including the supports and opportunities they need to thrive.

- Optimal use of federal and state funding, especially recovery funds
- Equitable state schools funding formula
- Equitable offerings across divisions, including sports, enrichment activities, and advanced coursework
- Increased private funding to support state and local education efforts

### 3. Every school is accountable for providing an excellent and equitable education to every student, including through the balanced use of assessments for and of learning.

- Reduce total number of SOLs
- Incentivize the use of rigorous and relevant performance assessments
- Update and upgrade policies on student assessments and school improvement to focus less on compliance and more on learning, growth, and innovation

### 4. Students continuously benefit from a well-prepared, representative, and supported educator workforce.

- Strong education career pathways
- Competitive and attractive compensation and benefits for educator workforce – including for substitute teachers, para-professionals, counselors, bus drivers, and cafeteria workers
- Affordable, alternative, and high-quality teacher training programs and postsecondary credentialing opportunities for other school staff, such as counselors

### 5. Every community works together to support the continuous learning and preparation of students so they can thrive in learning, work, and life.

- Renewed and strengthened state and local education-business partnerships
- Robust and expanded community-school partnerships
- Strengthened collaboration between education and youth development professionals
- Support for work-based learning opportunities, including internships, and apprenticeships

## SIGNATURE PROGRAMS

**Commonwealth Learning Partnership** – Virginia Learns supports what works and what’s needed in schools and classrooms through the Commonwealth Learning Partnership. The Commonwealth Learning Partnership, which began in 2020, includes more than 40 state and local education organizations, membership groups and associations, schools of education at the university level, and the Virginia Department of Education. As a group, the Partnership is committed to supporting the educator workforce and operationalizing the Virginia Profiles of a Graduate, Classroom, Educator, and Education Leader.

### Build Forward Together Coalition and Campaign –

This initiative brings together leaders across education, youth development, human services, and business to coordinate resources, promote knowledge sharing, and develop a shared agenda and priority actions that support the inclusive education recovery of students and schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Advocacy Fellowship** – The Virginia Learns Advocacy Fellowship convenes talented and driven educators who are relentless advocates for improving student achievement through student-focused policies and practices. The Fellowship runs for one year and focuses on education policy, racial equity in education, and advocacy. The Fellowship will engage participants in critical discussions about education policy by encouraging them to speak at public events, engage with policymakers, and write about their experiences for state and national publications.

**Pooled Fund** – Through active fundraising and grant-writing, Virginia Learns will offer Commonwealth Learning Partnership partners, as well as local innovators, small to mid-sized grants flexibly designed to support capacity and general operating, or funds to support planning and start-up activities.

**Infrastructure Support and Back-End Organizational Services** – Many education coalitions, partnerships, and initiatives are time or topic-limited and do not need to become their own standalone organization. As Virginia’s operating education foundation, Virginia Learns will be open to serving as a backbone support and fiscal agent for these efforts.

**Fundraising Services** – As Virginia’s statewide education foundation, we will actively and continuously seek funding to support our shared education agenda and to redistribute to local communities and partners.

To recover and emerge better than ever, we must build forward together. The pride Virginians have in our schools must translate into deep involvement and investment in educating, supporting, and preparing our students during these uncertain times.



**State of Our Schools Annual Report** – An annual State of Our Schools report will describe Virginia’s progress improving student outcomes, describe state and local policy and practice efforts that contributed to achievement gains, and provide recommendations or calls to action aimed at continuing to prepare all students for success in college, work, and life after high school. This comprehensive report will be grounded in extensive research and feedback from educators, higher education faculty, the Virginia Department of Education, business and philanthropic partners, as well as other stakeholders.

**Listening Tours** – Each year, Virginia Learns will invite education, business, and community leadership groups from the eight education regions across the state to meet and express their concerns, priorities, and

ideas for change. Virginia Learns will also facilitate leadership roundtables focused on funding and policy change. The lessons learned from these conversations will inform issue campaigns and briefs.



# VIRGINIA LEARNS

## FOUNDING GOVERNING BOARD

Virginia Learns is committed to a vibrant and highly engaged governing board that reflects Commonwealth diversity, leadership, and geography. The Board is made up of some of Virginia's most respected business leaders.



**John Asbury**  
Atlantic Union Bank, CEO  
Virginia Learns Board Chair



**Ed Baine**  
President  
Dominion Energy Virginia



**Gil Bland**  
Giljoy Group, President  
Virginia Learns Board Secretary



**Sharon Dabney-Wooldridge**  
President & CEO  
Kleane Kare



**Elana Edwards**  
Chief Executive Officer, USA  
Allianz Partners



**Rob Estes**  
President & CEO  
Estes Express



**Barbara Johnson**  
Attorney, BLJohnsonLaw PLLC  
and Potter & Murdock, PC



**Tom McInerney**  
President & CEO  
Genworth



**Jeff Ricketts**  
President and CEO  
Anthem



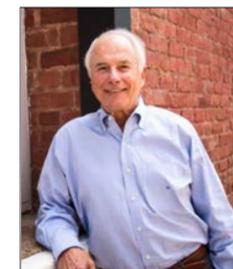
**Lisa Roday**  
President & CEO  
Firelce Solutions



**Rob Spilman**  
President & CEO  
Bassett Furniture



**Fred Thompson**  
Chief Administrative Officer  
Thompson Hospitality



**Jim Ukrop**  
Co-Founder  
NRV



**Mike Wassmer**  
President, Card  
Capital One

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## **VIRGINIA LEARNS**

is a nonprofit and statewide education operating foundation. We are the Commonwealth's platform for bringing together business and education leaders with the shared goal of a more innovative and equitable Virginia public education system. Through aligned leadership, we inform and influence local and state decisionmakers; amplify the voices of those most impacted by education policy decisions; and advance state and local partnerships that bring needed change and positive results.

