

Issue: VA Education Business Partnerships

## Schools Cannot Do It Alone: Virginia's Education-Business Job Training Partnerships

### Summary

To participate in the competitive global economy, our educational institutions have to transition away from academic-only emphases to a model encompassing career and life readiness as well as traditional academics. The way forward must include and involve the industries and businesses that drive the new economy. Virginia has embraced this challenge with a number of programs and initiatives with bipartisan support from legislators. In addition to formal programs, many Virginia public K-12 schools form strong partnerships with local businesses to expose students to working professionals and a rich variety of learning experiences. While many of the programs and partnerships described within this paper are making progress across the state, there is still work to be done.

### Workforce Categories

In order to understand Virginia's efforts to meet educational and workforce needs, it is important to note the main categories of people who enter the job market:

- Those who do not graduate from high school
- High school graduates who do not attend a post-secondary institution
- Community college and certificate program graduates
- Those who attend but do not graduate from college
- College graduates who attain one or more degrees
- Experienced workers who need retraining for a changed job market

Keeping these workforce constituencies in mind, described below are some of the ongoing programs and initiatives in place in Virginia.

### Virginia's Education and Business Partnerships and Programs

#### Middle College

For individuals who do not graduate from high school, the Virginia Community College System offers the Middle College program to give these people a way forward. Middle College allows young adults, 18-24 years old, to re-engage and earn their GED, to take remedial courses as necessary, to learn job-seeking skills, and to take classes specific to their job interests, including those granting job certifications. Seventy percent of Middle College participants seeking GEDs through this program have earned them and half of those have gone on to post-secondary courses. Examples of successful participants include a legal assistant working at a prominent law firm, a nurse's aide with plans to become a registered nurse, and a student who, after attaining a GED, is earning an associate's degree with hopes of continuing on in biology at a university.<sup>1</sup>

Middle College is not just for young adults. High school students can enroll in community college courses to earn both college and high school credits. In addition to giving students coursework that can introduce them to various career pathways, Middle College provides coaching on how to succeed in college and help in arranging for financial aid.

Nine of the state's 23 community colleges currently offer Middle College and there are plans to expand. Those participating are: J. Sargeant Reynolds, Danville Community, Germanna, Lord Fairfax, New River, Patrick Henry, Rappahannock, Southside Virginia, and Thomas Nelson community colleges.

## **Fast Forward Program**

High school graduates who do not attend college can fill an important role in our economy if we could effectively offer them vocational training to address the “middle-skills” gap. According to the National Skills Coalition, “Middle-skill jobs, which require education beyond high school but not a four-year degree, make up the largest part of the labor market in the United States and in each of the 50 states. All too often key industries in our country are unable to find enough sufficiently trained workers to fill these jobs.”<sup>2</sup> This skills gap in the workforce affects industries ranging from shipbuilding, construction, manufacturing, health care, cybersecurity and IT. In Virginia, there are over a million unfilled job openings that do not require a college education. About half require credentials.

Virginia created the Fast Forward program to address this vital middle skills gap. Over a short six to 12 weeks, and for an average \$3,000 cost, Fast Forward trains students and provides business-verified credentials leading to 40 careers. Internships and job shadowing are included for some courses. Each community college focuses its programs on the needs of the businesses in their area.<sup>3</sup>

In May 2019, Virginia Community Colleges Chancellor Glenn Dubois asked the U.S. Congress to consider making Pell Grants accessible to cover workforce training programs such as Fast Forward.<sup>4</sup> Virginia Senator Tim Kaine introduced SB839 which would expand Pell Grants eligibility to include certain job training programs.<sup>5</sup> Currently, these grants cover for-credit academic college programs. While these requests and other bills like them are still pending, Fast Forward provides coaching to help prospective students find financial aid from government and private sources. Courses are generally offered on weekends or hours that accommodate students' full-time work schedules.

Now in its third year, Fast Forward has launched 13,000 credentialed students into the economy. Among them are students who left high school and subsequently earned a GED, high school graduates who had no interest in pursuing college degrees, college students who had left without getting a degree, and experienced workers who needed new credentials for a changing job market.

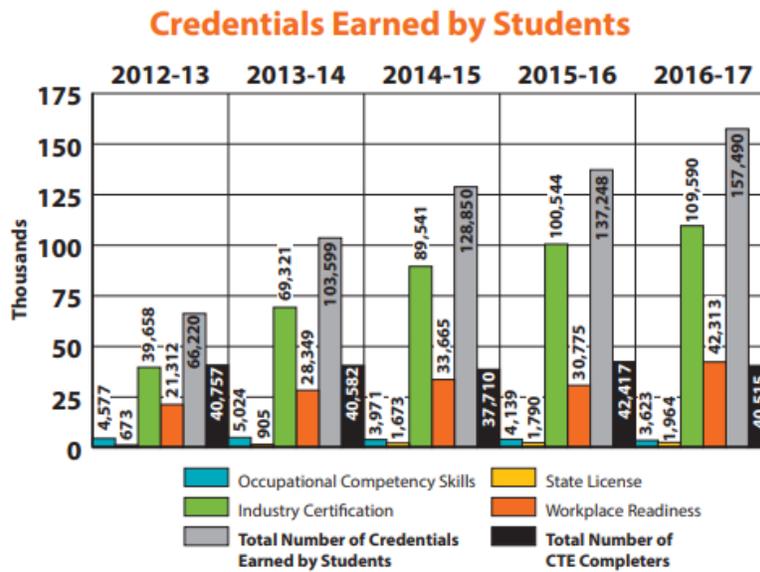
## **Workforce Credential Grant Program**

In 2017, Virginia's community colleges, with help from legislators, introduced the Workforce Credential Grant Program as a way to make training affordable for students ineligible for federal aid. The program funds up to two-thirds of the cost—up to \$3,000 per student—for those who complete their courses and obtain a job credential. So far, the program has helped about 8,000 Virginians. Many of these jobs—truck driving, power-line work, medical assistant, for example, provide good earnings, benefits, and paid time off.<sup>6</sup>

## Department of Education CTE Credentialing Initiative

For adults and high school students not going to college, the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (CTE) within the state’s Department of Education is using the state’s Credentialing Initiative. The initiative offers technical-skills tests for 350 different credentials that can then be used as credits towards high school graduation as well as demonstrating mastery of skills.

These credentials are grouped into 16 career clusters, some of which involve full industry certification and state licensure required for certain occupations. The number of credentials earned—over 157,000—has more than doubled from 2013 to 2017.<sup>7</sup> A few examples of credentials include automotive service, carpentry, manufacturing technology, welding, firefighting, and small animal care.



[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/career\\_technical/statistics\\_reports/performance\\_trends/credentialing-initiative-2018.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/career_technical/statistics_reports/performance_trends/credentialing-initiative-2018.pdf)

## Academies for STEM, Healthcare, Technology

Virginia was one of six states that won grants from the National Governor’s Association to help establish STEM Academies offering interdisciplinary high school courses that include workplace experiences and hands-on learning. Based on partnerships between postsecondary schools and local businesses and industries, there are 22 Governor’s STEM Academies and eight Governor’s Health Sciences Academies that are designed to prepare students for college and high-skill professions. The program at Stafford Academy for Technology, with over 240 admitted students at Brooke Point High School and North Stafford High School combined, includes courses in IT, Science, Engineering and Math, and Health Science. Partners with the Stafford Academy for Technology include Stafford County Public Schools, Germanna Community College, Mary Washington Hospital/Medicorp, and the University of Mary Washington.<sup>8</sup>

## Virginia Microsoft Imagine Academy Program

Created in 2012 with implementing legislation by the Virginia General Assembly, the Microsoft Imagine Academy program set a goal to reach 100,000 Microsoft-certified students during the 2018-

2019 school year. By 2018 the Virginia Microsoft Imagine Academy Program was active in 365 high schools with more than 80,000 students enrolled in 28 Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses. And on May 31, 2019, the Department of Education announced students in Virginia have earned over 100,000 Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) and Microsoft Technology Associate (MTA) certification exams.<sup>9</sup> This curriculum ranges from basic to advanced IT skills and includes teaching and certification of Microsoft Office Skills and other more advanced certifications which are commonly listed as requirements in job postings.

## **Dream It. Do It.**

Launched in 2005 by the Manufacturing Institute, the “Dream It. Do It.” program’s mission is to change American workers’ and potential workers’ perception of the manufacturing industry as a viable, thriving career option. In promoting manufacturing as an up and coming career, the program targets three distinct markets: student, parents, and educators through a national platform and network of interested professionals with the goal of filling the pipeline with future job applicants. Their research shows that just 35% of parents would encourage their children to pursue a manufacturing career. Why? The Institute believes this negative perception is based on outdated generalizations about dead-end manufacturer jobs, rather than a realistic appreciation of the advanced skills and strong career prospects and pay actually offered by the manufacturing sector today.<sup>10</sup>

Dream It. Do It. Virginia (DIDIVA) was established in 2007. Recently, Virginia hosted nine free manufacturing summer camps in which students competed in the design and manufacture of a product. Dream It. Do It. shares best practices, support and resources with all participants. They use the Department of Labor’s term of “Earn & Learn” to describe their model toolkits for designing competency-based apprenticeships.<sup>11</sup>

## **Examples of Partnerships Between Public Schools and Local Business**

Prince William County Public Schools’ education foundation, known as SPARK (Supporting Partnerships and Resources for Kids), supports training programs such as the Virginia Student Training and Refurbishment Program (VA STAR) that teaches students to refurbish surplus computer hardware which is then donated to families, organizations, and school districts in need. Through the program, students can earn industry-standard certifications from companies such as CompTIA, Cisco, Microsoft, and Oracle, “which paves the way for both higher education and well-paying jobs.”<sup>12</sup> SPARK also establishes relationships with local businesses and issues several awards each year in recognition of successful partnerships with schools. In 2018, SPARK recognized IBS Millwork for its hosting of an annual open house to show students a high-end manufacturing environment. In that same year, Mason Game and Tech Academy was recognized for teaching Unity software for creative game design.<sup>13</sup>

Newport News Public School District actively solicits businesses to provide internships, sponsorships, and science fair involvement on their website. Christopher Newport University provides tours of their business school to local students and has university students help in after-school math programs at local schools. The Riverside Health System introduces students to health care careers. The Virginia Educators Credit Union shows elementary and high school students how to set up a student-run credit union, while Newport News Shipbuilding introduces students to high-tech ship design.<sup>14</sup>

Loudoun County Public Schools partner with a variety of local businesses. In the past year, Virginia Regional Transit offered transportation to the local high schools so that students with disabilities were able to “go where they needed to live their lives.” HSBC Bank participated in the EDGE program (Experiences & Design for Growth & Excellence) to expose young students to cutting edge technology in interesting group projects. The Novac Gainesville Technical Center, a public utility, offered high school students exposure to their professional setting and helped develop a career and transition lab so graduating students with disabilities could learn independent living skills. This included a donation of a washer, dryer, and stove, which they retrofitted for unusually safe operation.<sup>15</sup>

In Virginia Beach, the public schools and businesses have formed partnerships including a 10 year partnership with ATC Cybersecurity Systems in which interested students learn to repair and refurbish donated computers. Several hospitals in the Sentara Healthcare group offer nursing students from the Virginia Beach Technical and Education Center hands-on experience including lab and diagnostic studies and telemetry readings. GMF+ Architects partnered with Landstown Elementary School to research, design and help build an outdoor sustainability lab. This led to students’ awareness of local efforts to create an environmentally friendly city.<sup>16</sup>

In Falls Church City Schools, Capital One partnered with Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School to teach coding over 10 weeks. At the end, each student had taken part in creating and presenting a new app. Students were given laptops to take home over the summer to enable continued coding. Famille Café offers complimentary meals to teachers and job shadowing for students from George Mason High School Transitions Program. The local branch of Sylvan Learning, Inc., helps at STEAM events, setting up educational stations, and the local Sylvan manager serves on an advisory committee.<sup>17</sup>

## Continued Challenges facing Virginia’s Employment Picture

As tempting as it is to celebrate progress, Virginia’s businesses still struggle to find sufficient numbers of skilled workers to sustain continued growth. While the programs described herein have achieved much in closing the gap between what traditional education provides and what businesses need, these programs and others like them will need to expand and broaden their reach in order to connect with all those who could be helped. Many industries, including construction, healthcare, and manufacturing continue to look for qualified workers to fill their skilled job openings.<sup>18, 19</sup>

Another challenging aspect centers around the fact that expansion in the Virginia economy has been remarkably uneven. Urban areas’ economies are robust, while rural areas have been left out.<sup>20</sup> If businesses are not thriving, they cannot support business education partnerships. While urban area schools’ websites highlight their opportunities for extracurricular learning and business supported programs, most rural area schools can only point to GED test centers and online advice on how to pursue a college education.<sup>21</sup> The low unemployment rate, approximately 3%, does not reflect those in rural areas who have long ago stopped looking for work. An Old Dominion University Dragas Center for Economic Analysis and Policy report on the State of the Commonwealth shows that up to two-thirds of the rural Virginia workforce have stopped looking for a job, a fact that is missed when measuring unemployment.<sup>22</sup> New and creative solutions are needed to solve this problem.

Additionally, efforts such as the Green Jobs Training Tax Credit bill, HB-2241, proposed by Del. Karrie Delaney (D-Centreville), must continue and not be allowed to stagnate in Republican-controlled committees as we look to reinvigorate our workforce in a meaningful way.<sup>23</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup><http://www.vccs.edu/statewide-innovations/middle-college/>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/state-policy/fact-sheets>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.fastforwardva.org/>
- <sup>4</sup>[http://www.vccs.edu/vccsblog\\_post/vccs-chancellor-makes-the-case-in-dc-for-expanded-use-of-pell-grants-for-workforce-training/](http://www.vccs.edu/vccsblog_post/vccs-chancellor-makes-the-case-in-dc-for-expanded-use-of-pell-grants-for-workforce-training/)
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/s839>
- <sup>6</sup><https://www.svhed.org/sovacme1/71-workforce/676-workforce-credential-grant-program>
- <sup>7</sup>[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/career\\_technical/statistics\\_reports/performance\\_trends/credential-intiative-2018.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/career_technical/statistics_reports/performance_trends/credential-intiative-2018.pdf)
- <sup>8</sup> [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/career\\_technical/gov\\_academies/academies/stafford.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/career_technical/gov_academies/academies/stafford.shtml)
- <sup>9</sup> <https://certiport.pearsonvue.com/About/Press-room/Press-releases/2019/Certiport-and-Virginia-DOE-Deliver-100,000-Microso.aspx>
- <sup>10</sup> <http://www.themanufacturinginstitute.org/Image/Dream-It-Do-It/Dream-It-Do-It.aspx>
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.vamanufacturers.com/dream-it-do-it-virginia-hosts-nine-manufacturing-technology-summer-camps/>
- <sup>12</sup> <https://www.aftrr.org/virginia-star/>
- <sup>13</sup> [https://www.pwcs.edu/news/2017-18\\_news/2018\\_spark\\_business\\_partners](https://www.pwcs.edu/news/2017-18_news/2018_spark_business_partners)
- <sup>14</sup> <http://sbo.nn.k12.va.us/BizEd/>
- <sup>15</sup> <https://www.lcps.org/domain/86>
- <sup>16</sup> [https://www.vbschools.com/community/volunteers\\_partners/partners\\_in\\_education/model\\_partners](https://www.vbschools.com/community/volunteers_partners/partners_in_education/model_partners)
- <sup>17</sup> [https://www.fccps.org/departments/community\\_partnerships/news\\_release\\_\\_2018\\_honored\\_partners](https://www.fccps.org/departments/community_partnerships/news_release__2018_honored_partners)
- <sup>18</sup><https://www.nascla.org/news/455080/Subcontractor-Shortages-Continue-as-Virginia-Moves-to-Alleviate-Them.htm>
- <sup>19</sup><http://www.virginiabusiness.com/news/article/help-wanted1>
- <sup>20</sup>[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/good-news-bad-news-virginias-economy-is-finally-back-from-recession-but-the-feds-could-still-mess-things-up/2018/12/14/a8e4a5bc-fef9-11e8-83c0-b06139e540e5\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.55d8fbcf76e9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/good-news-bad-news-virginias-economy-is-finally-back-from-recession-but-the-feds-could-still-mess-things-up/2018/12/14/a8e4a5bc-fef9-11e8-83c0-b06139e540e5_story.html?utm_term=.55d8fbcf76e9)
- <sup>21</sup> <http://www.dickenson.k12.va.us/>
- <sup>22</sup>[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/good-news-bad-news-virginias-economy-is-finally-back-from-recession-but-the-feds-could-still-mess-things-up/2018/12/14/a8e4a5bc-fef9-11e8-83c0-b06139e540e5\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.55d8fbcf76e9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/good-news-bad-news-virginias-economy-is-finally-back-from-recession-but-the-feds-could-still-mess-things-up/2018/12/14/a8e4a5bc-fef9-11e8-83c0-b06139e540e5_story.html?utm_term=.55d8fbcf76e9)
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.richmondsunlight.com/bill/2019/hb2241/>