Opportunity 2027 First Biennium Report

Executive Summary

In March 2021, Virginia’s State Board for Community Colleges adopted Opportunity 2027, a system-level strategic plan designed to guide Virginia’s Community Colleges over the following six years. This comprehensive plan consists of five strategic goals and 46 biennium objectives. Further, the plan was strengthened and validated by regional and national experts in areas of workforce and student success. Opportunity 2027 makes real the economic opportunity required to meet Governor Glenn Youngkin's call to “Compete to Win” by building the infrastructure to unleash a talented workforce. Nowhere is that more apparent than in Opportunity 2027’s “big goal:"

Opportunity 2027 Economic Opportunity Goal

*Virginia’s Community Colleges will achieve equity in access, learning outcomes, and success for students from every race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic group.*

In July 2021, a steering committee of presidents was established to implement the first biennial objectives. Dr. Marcia Conston and Dr. Jan Gullickson chaired the steering committee. Other presidents chaired the subcommittees that would implement the five supporting goals and objectives:

- **Communications:** Dr. John Rainone, Dr. Shannon Kennedy
- **Teaching and Learning:** Dr. Kris Westover, Dr. Jean Runyon
- **Student Supports:** Dr. Porter Brannon
- **Future of Work:** Dr. Anne Kress, Dr. Greg Hodges, Dr. John Downey, Dr. Corey McCray
- **Affordability and Sustainability:** Dr. Adam Hutchison, Dr. Kim Blosser, Dr. Quentin Johnson

The presidents led subcommittees of faculty and staff nominated by colleges based on the contributors’ expertise. Over 100 college and System Office employees shared their experience and learned from each other to lead the implementation of the biennial objectives. All colleges and the System Office directed resources of time, talent, and funds toward the accomplishment of the Economic Opportunity Goal and its five Supporting Goals (see Appendix A).
Progress to Date: Goals and Objectives

The first biennium of Opportunity 2027 implementation was largely foundation-building as colleges worked through recommendations to redesign the student onboarding process, student advising and support processes, delivery modalities, and paying for college. Through the work of its Steering Committee and other system-wide transformation activities, Opportunity 2027 is now infused into the operations of the Virginia Community College System Office and colleges.

To capture colleges’ progress toward implementing first biennial recommendations, Interim Chancellor Morrissey asked all presidents to include progress results on one Opportunity 2027 objective in their performance evaluation documentation. Additionally, presidents were required to provide evidence of implementing Onboarding Redesign Taskforce recommendations (see Appendix B).

The Advisory Council of Presidents (ACOP) meetings have included Opportunity 2027 updates and discussion, and faculty and staff have participated in professional development opportunities to attain Opportunity 2027 goals. Finally, a system-wide dashboard has been developed to share results and indicate areas in need of continuous improvement.

A qualitative and quantitative assessment of goal progress indicates that of the 46 biennial objectives, 12 have been successfully completed; 23 are underway; 9 are ongoing and will be carried as priorities into the next biennium. Only two objectives are in the planning stages and have yet to be implemented. Subsequent sections of this report provide more detail.

Data, their analysis, and reporting are essential to an effective execution of Opportunity 2027. Below are excerpted key metrics from the plan’s dashboard, significantly focused on equitable economic opportunity for ALL students. Appendices to this report contain additional detail, metrics, and indicators.

Highlight of Progress towards Opportunity 2027 Economic Opportunity Goal

The first biennial objectives were designed to initiate process changes at colleges which would ultimately lead to improvements in access, learning, and success outcomes for all students. The metrics included in the dashboard, which may be disaggregated by college, measure progress towards attainment of the Opportunity 2027 Economic Opportunity Goal.
At the end of the first biennium, the dashboard indicates that incremental progress is being made on most of the metrics. (Note: Academic Year 2020-2021 was the baseline year.)

Access Outcomes

- **Increase in Enrollment from Applications**
  - 29% increase in subsequent new student enrollment from admissions applications in Year 2 compared to Baseline Year.
    - 46% increase in Indigenous students
    - 46% increase in Hispanic students
    - 40% increase in Asian students
    - 34% increase in Multi-racial students
    - 24% increase in Black students
    - 25% increase in White students

- **Increase Diversity in Regular Student Enrollment**
  - 8% decrease in regular (non-dual enrollment) students in Year 2 compared to Baseline Year.
    - 7% decrease in Indigenous students
    - 5% increase in Hispanic students
    - 8% decrease in Asian students
    - 6% decrease in Black students
    - 13% decrease in White students

- **Increase Diversity in Dual Enrollment**
  - 20% increase in minority dual enrollment students in Year 2 compared to Baseline Year.
    - 9% increase in Indigenous students
    - 35% increase in Hispanic students
    - 24% increase in Asian students
    - 13% increase in Multi-racial students
    - 13% increase in Black students
    - 2% decrease in White students

- **Increase Completion of College-level Math within the First Year of Enrollment**
  - 3 percentage point increase in entering students completing college math within a year of enrollment in Year 2 compared to Baseline Year.
    - Black, Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander completions increased between 1-7 percentage points
    - Pell recipient completions increased 5 percentage points and non-Pell completions increased by 1 percentage point

- **Increase Completion of College-level English within the First Year of Enrollment**
  - 3 percentage point decrease in entering students completing college English within a year of enrollment in Year 2 compared to Baseline Year.
    - Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, White and Multi-racial student completions decreased between 2-14 percentage points
    - Asian student completion remained flat
    - Non-resident student completion increased by 4 percentage points
    - Pell recipient completion decreased by 2 percentage points and Non-Pell recipient completion decreased by 4 percentage points

- **Increase Part-time-at-entry Students earning 12 credit hours in the First Year of Enrollment**
- 4 percentage point increase in part-time-at-entry cohort earning 12 or more hours in the first year in Year 2 compared to Baseline Year.
  - Black, Asian, Indigenous, Hispanic, White and Multi-racial part-time-at-entry students earning 12 or more credit hours increased between 3 and 7 percentage points
  - Pell-recipients increased by 6 percentage points

- Increase full-time at entry students completing 24 or more credit hours in the first year of enrollment
  - 7 percentage point increase in full-time entering cohort completing 24 or more hours in the first year in Year 2 compared to Baseline Year.
  - Black, Asian, Indigenous, Hispanic, White and Multi-racial full-time at entry students earning 24 or more credit hours increased between 2 and 12 percentage points.
  - Native Hawaiian full-time students earning 24 or more credit hours decreased by 2 percentage points.
  - Full-time at entry Pell recipients earning 24 credit or more credit hours increased by 6 percentage points and non-Pell recipients increased by 8 percentage points.

Success Outcomes
- Increase Annual Graduates
  - 25,738 students earned degrees and/or certificates in Year 2, a decrease of 37 graduates compared to Baseline Year.
    - 20% Hispanic graduation increase
    - 11% Asian graduation increase
    - 7% Multi-racial graduation increase

- Increase On-time (three-year) Graduation Rates of First-time/full-time Cohorts
  - 5 percentage point increase in first-time/full-time women graduating on-time in the Year 2 cohort compared to Baseline Year.
  - 3 percentage point increase in first-time/full-time men graduating on-time in the Year 2 cohort compared to Baseline Year.
  - Although all racial/ethnic groups improved in graduation rates, Black men continued to have the lowest completion rates with only one out of every five graduating within three years of entry.

- Increase Pell Recipients Completing Degrees or Certificates within Eight Years of Entry
  - 1 percentage point increase in Pell and 2 percentage point increase in non-Pell cohort members completing degrees or certificates within 8 years of entry in Year 2 compared to Baseline cohort.

The Opportunity 2027 dashboard disaggregates milestone data by race, gender, and socioeconomic factors. Committees developing second biennial objectives will address areas where success metrics were not achieved.

In the following narrative, we highlight key objectives addressed by the Steering Committee in the first biennium. Detailed progress toward completion of objectives is included in Appendix A.
Supporting Goal 1: Communication

Ensure that Virginia’s Community Colleges are equipped to deliver on the promise of the equity goal by ensuring that all internal and external constituencies understand why the goal is necessary to provide a talent pipeline for Virginia employers. Virginia’s Community Colleges will launch a systemwide campaign to build awareness of the equity goal and provide intentional support to engage faculty and staff in understanding how the equity goal is reflected in their students and the communities they serve.

First Biennial Goal Progress

To grow Virginia’s workforce, improve connections between talent and businesses, and prepare Virginians to acquire in-demand, marketable skills, every student must have equitable access to and success in career education. The shared definition of equity across the system is the existence of an environment in which policies, practices, and beliefs are grounded in the principle of fairness and that acknowledges structural racism, gender disparities, and systemic poverty, while honoring the diversity of humanity. This value explicitly prioritizes the success of all students to ensure the necessary resources to fulfill their college and career goals. The definition builds on a VCCS Board policy adopted in 2012.

Provide Public-Facing Data

The VCCS Opportunity 2027 website includes the equity definition and the Opportunity 2027 dashboard, which contextualizes pertinent data relevant to providing a talent pipeline for all Virginia employers. The website is used to share the vision and results of Opportunity 2027 with internal and external audiences. The data may be viewed by aggregated system or by individual college.

The new VCCS Statistics site, developed to provide public access on key performance indicators, includes data on transfer and employment outcomes by dual enrollment, college transfer/career technical, and FastForward programs. Additionally, institutions receive annual reports on graduates disaggregated by race, gender, program, and other variables for credit degrees, certificates, and diplomas. FastForward credential data are disaggregated by race, gender, socioeconomic factors, and program. These data are shared with Chief Academic and Workforce Officers for systemwide analysis and discussion.

Re-Build the Brand

In 2022, VCCS partnered with Brand Federation to launch the development of a new VCCS-wide branding campaign. Although this campaign was paused in April 2022 due to the search for a new chancellor and will restart in the fall 2023, parts of the
rebranding campaign were implemented in cooperation with the local colleges. One aspect of the new brand strategy, emphasizing workforce education, was the “Find Your Answer” billboard campaign earlier this year featuring career technical education in each of the college service areas. The Find Your Answer campaign is being relaunched this summer through social media, TV, radio, and print media across the Commonwealth.

As part of Onboarding Redesign, all colleges placed career pathways prominently on their landing pages. Colleges also combined credit and non-credit offerings under the same pathways. This redesign brings more consistency and commonality to college websites. (See Laurel Ridge Community College for an example.)

Build the Case
The economic opportunity equity case for the strategic plan was provided to internal and external audiences throughout the biennium. Examples include presentations to the State Higher Education Executives Organization (SHEEO); regular updates to the Advisory Council of Presidents (ACOP), Academic and Student Affairs Advisory Council (ASAC), Council of Deans and Directors (CDDD) and Workforce Development Advisory Council (WDAC); a New Horizons Conference focused on Opportunity 2027 and equity outcomes; and local college boards. Contextualized data to support the equity goal are included in the Opportunity 2027 Dashboard.

The FY 2023 legislative campaign, HIRE Virginia, focused specifically on developing the workforce needed in the commonwealth to fill gaps in middle-skills employment. The key components of the plan correlate to Opportunity 2027: removing or reducing tuition costs for low- and middle-income students; providing additional advising to support students from entry through completion and job placement; providing career services, internships, and apprenticeships to connect students to jobs that match their skills; and updating the community college funding model so that our colleges can better serve part-time and working adult students. The HIRE Virginia workforce goals cannot be met without the deep equity work of Opportunity 2027, which aims to give every student the opportunity to succeed.

Because of Opportunity 2027, VCCS and three community colleges received a grant from Jobs for the Future and Achieving the Dream called “Economic Mobility for Adult Learners.” Northern Virginia Community College received a companion grant from Jobs for the Future called “Pathways for Equity in Healthcare.” Both grants are guided by the strategic plan, which is grounded in an aspiration to eliminate gaps in student outcomes and increase workers for middle-skills jobs.
Next Biennium

With the completion of the college landing page redesigns illustrating career pathways and the creation of the Opportunity 2027 Dashboard, VCCS will focus on analyzing disaggregated data in the areas of access, learning outcomes, and success to continuously improve equitable educational and employment outcomes for all students. Secondly, the VCCS will continue its rebranding efforts across the system and with individual colleges so that employers and students recognize that the VCCS is the first choice for career education. To support this goal, the Office of Strategic Communications is working with college public information officers to develop a case for support, which will include compelling student stories and workforce outcomes data, to be published later this summer.

Supporting Goal 2: Teaching and Learning

Provide all students with access to high impact practices that support educational excellence and equity in student success through the development of a world class cadre of diverse employees focused on equity-minded principles and practices.

First Biennial Goal Progress

Build A Talented and Diverse VCCS Workforce

Students learn best when they are actively engaged in their own learning through a high-value curriculum. Attracting highly skilled faculty with diverse backgrounds means that students are more likely to be taught by those who have the talent to engage students with different learning styles and backgrounds. Additionally, with a teaching cadre of mostly 50+ year olds, the VCCS must attract and retain an increasingly diverse, younger workforce. These and other realities inform efforts to recruit the next generation of VCCS employees. (For example, see Rappahannock Community College's Human Resources page.)

To unleash a talented VCCS workforce, equipping all students ready to compete, every college has trained search advocates and has included a search advocate on most searches since 2021. Search advocates assure that candidates are considered based on their merits and not left out of the process even though qualified. By mid-July 2023, VCCS will surpass having 500 search advocates across the VCCS workforce, including deans, directors, chief human resources officers, vice presidents, presidents, and faculty. Ongoing training will ensure that colleges adopt best practices regarding the use of search advocates. Additionally, search advocates have received training specifically on diversity recruitment strategies, and the System Office human resources office
created a tool that identifies graduate programs, by discipline, at higher education institutions in Virginia, including four Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Individuals at every college, the System office, and the State Board participate in training and conversations intent on increasing the recruitment and retention of talented employees and students. These activities include book clubs, extensive teacher preparation, speakers, and workshops. Colleges evaluate professional development efforts with an eye towards improving outcomes for all students. (For example, see Virginia Western Community College Professional Development.)

In July 2022, the State Board approved the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Council (DEIC) as an advisory body to ACOP, the Chancellor’s Faculty Advisory Committee (CFAC), ASAC and the State Board. The DEIC’s goals include increasing faculty diversity, identifying professional development opportunities, and identifying practices that increase feelings of belonging (and a desire to complete) for our students.

**Provide High Quality Faculty Development to Advance Student Success and Equity**

Five colleges have provided Association of College and University Educators (ACUE, https://acue.org/) training leading to a nationally recognized teaching credential endorsed by the American Council on Education. The training presents evidence-based teaching practices needed to make students feel welcome to learn, motivated to stay, and inspired to succeed. Because not all colleges have set aside funds for this professional development, the Goal 2 Steering Committee requested funding for at least one faculty member from each college to participate. Through funding provided by the System Office, 43 English and math faculty have completed a module entitled, “Promoting Active Learning,” and a second cohort of 29 faculty is enrolled in a module entitled “Designing Learner-Centered and Equitable Courses.” A follow-up survey will be conducted to collect participants’ reflections and determine what strategies or changes they have made to their courses.

**Improve Onboarding and Retention of New Employees**

System Office Human Resources staff engaged a committee that created a Retention Report which recommended several practices for onboarding and retaining employees. This report was shared broadly with Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROS) and presidents. Colleges are testing new employee onboarding techniques to retain employees. These include extensive, year-long orientations, assigning onboarding buddies or mentors, and referral bonuses. This work will continue into the second biennium.
Next Biennium

The establishment of guided pathways on all college websites; the launch of TransferVA; investments in professional development and evaluation; and curriculum and services review for equitable outcomes are underway and ongoing across the VCCC. The second biennium will center on reviewing and revising faculty and staff evaluation processes. Measurable SMART goals, faculty ownership and accountability, high performance expectations, and feedback that supports faculty development and growth will be incorporated. ACOP has asked ASAC to review the current faculty evaluation policy with recommendations due no later than March 2024.

As important, curriculum based on best practices in work based learning and expedited time to credential will be enhanced through robust connections among businesses, universities, and investors. Concerted efforts will continue to build and grow meaningful work based learning opportunities for all students.

Supporting Goal 3: Student Supports

Provide all students with a culture of care that responds to the needs of our diverse student population and supports and inspires their educational and career success.

First Biennial Goal Progress

The student bodies of the VCCS are the most at-risk of all higher education students for economic catastrophe and its concomitant strains. Approximately 89% of VCCS students are members of the state’s ALICE population: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. Challenges facing ALICE Virginians include pandemic learning loss, rent and other bills in arrears, mental and physical health barriers as well as having no financial safety net.

These challenges accompany the student attending a VCCS college. They threaten their success and entrance into the workforce or continuing to further education. To learn and compete in the economy of today and tomorrow, students require a culture of care, one where the community college culture and operations consistently act in ways that help students thrive. It is a holistic approach to student support, which includes quality advising and coaching; easy access to social and community benefits; financial stability services; and the adoption of a telehealth platform to provide immediate connection to mental health counseling. These recommendations from the VCCS Power of the Possible Taskforce (see Appendix C) describe the critical attributes of a community college culture of care.
The Goal 3 Steering Committee began its work by visiting Roane State College in Kentucky to learn about their best practices in onboarding and advising students. Roane State’s evidence-based best practices were incorporated into the Onboarding Redesign recommendations, which Virginia’s community colleges have adopted and implemented.

**Conduct Onboarding Process Mapping and Develop New Enrollment Processes to Reduce Equity Gaps**

To better understand what is needed for ALICE students and others, the VCCS process mapped the entire student experience to eliminate redundancies, identify gaps, and correct process flow. The Onboarding Redesign Taskforce used the map to make recommendations for offsetting specific policy and process barriers that lead to disparities. Subsequently, the Taskforce identified optimal processes and structures for onboarding VCCS students based on evidence-based best practices. ACOP adopted the Onboarding Redesign recommendations in February 2022, and as of June 2023, all colleges have implemented the Redesign. (For an example of the redesign, see Mountain Empire Community College’s Enrollment One-Stop.)

**Remove Unnecessary Registration Barriers**

One critical onboarding barrier identified by the taskforce was registration holds. As of June 2023, all college presidents reported that their colleges have reviewed registration holds and removed all unessential barriers, such as prohibiting students from registering because of unpaid library fines. As a result, several presidents reported increases in returning student enrollments. Some colleges have redeployed student services, financial services, and foundation staff to work with registered students to find scholarships, financial aid, and other support to prevent them from being dropped from classes for nonpayment. Central Virginia Community College, for example, launched a “Yes/No” campaign to find financial resources for students who wanted to remain enrolled but could not pay for their tuition and fees. The college also eliminated scholarship applications and embedded scholarship awards as part of the financial aid process. As a result, more low-income students who never applied for merit aid because they did not think they were eligible are now receiving scholarships.

**Secure Funding for New Advisors**

A major result of this optimization of services is that all colleges have hired or assigned and trained navigators/advisors with common job functions. Over the two years of the biennium, VCCS successfully advocated for state funding for 100 new full-time advisors/coaches for Virginia’s community colleges. In addition, two Virginia 529 grants provided funds for an additional 14 FastForward coaches and additional resources to place Great Expectations coaches at every community college.
Included in the cadre of new full-time advisors are specialty advisors, called “Navigators,” who guide students through the enrollment and registration process. Advisors/Navigators are deployed according to a college’s specific needs. At Patrick & Henry Community College, for example, the Navigators are assigned to assist students by “meta majors,” such as healthcare or manufacturing and skilled trades. At Piedmont Virginia Community College, the Navigators onboard students and remain with them through their first 30 credits, when there is a soft hand-off to faculty advisors. At Mountain Gateway, Navigators/Advisors are cross trained to support credit and noncredit students. In all cases, navigators/advisors are thoroughly trained through a standardized curriculum provided through the VCCS Student Success Center (https://opd.vccs.edu/).

Provide Professional Development for Student Support Staff
The Onboarding Redesign Taskforce created training to ensure that Navigators are cross trained in a variety of areas, including financial aid, student support services, tuition payment, and debt management. The Summer 2022 Navigator Institute was facilitated with tracks for Navigators and Navigator Supervisors and attended by more than 100 colleagues responsible for new student onboarding.

In addition, the VCCS developed a Canvas course site to share insights and knowledge toward the common work of attracting, enrolling, and retaining students. The site includes a Navigator toolkit which provides information on the core job functions and responsibilities of the Enrollment Navigator within the VCCS.

Create Program Pathways that Inform Students of Progress and Milestones
As part of Guided Pathways and Onboarding Redesign, colleges have created easy-to-access career pathways information on their websites to show stackable credentials, awards, program cost, and links to regional job market data. (For an example, see New River Community College’s Advanced Manufacturing and Skilled Trades.) Colleges have also implemented changes to enhance the student experience and provide more comprehensive resources to make sure that students stay on track to completion. Trained advisors use Educational Advisory Board’s (EAB) Navigate, an online advising tool, to customize completion and milestone communications so students stay on track.

“Colleges are offering enrollment events throughout the service region to ensure applicants can access support as they navigate the onboarding process. Ready, Set, Enroll events were created by College Navigators to address the barrier of transportation and accessibility of our campuses for our adult learners. Locations for these events are strategically chosen throughout the area that are on the public transit routes, are easily accessible, and are in neighborhoods that do not have a campus nearby.” (VCCS Staff)
and don’t take unnecessary classes. (Chatbots help, too! For an example, see the Blue Ridge Community College chatbot.)

The System Office recently developed system level reports from EAB Navigate and will begin tracking and reporting student advising outcomes next year.

**Address Non-Academic Barriers to Success**

System-wide adoption of TimelyCare, an online counseling tool, provides mental health and wellness support for all VCCS students, free of charge. Since its launch in December 2021, a total of 10,595 students have registered for TimelyCare services.

Since 2021, all colleges have implemented SingleStop, an information kiosk that matches students to external support resources, such as food stamps, housing assistance, legal assistance, and other services. Additionally, each college has identified at least one person to assist students in making connections with external social service agencies. (For example, see Single Stop at Tidewater Community College.) To date, 30,251 individuals have completed a SingleStop screening. The total potential benefit value available to those individuals was $135 million. Students have confirmed receiving nearly $34 million in benefits.

**I believe that every student should at least enroll in TimelyCare and use it at least once. It is a great free Mental Wellness service for Students and where can you go to get help for free? The service helped me to find ways to focus and think. The mass principle is group self-help and if something more is needed beyond that scope it is there as well. (VCCS Student)**

A director of a student resource center shares that students who complete the online Single Stop screening are very impressed with how the program allows them to quickly see all their resources and eligibility in one place. She believes this contributes to more students achieving career, academic, and personal success because they can be connected to needed resources.

**Assess Technology Tools to Meet the Needs of Students and Colleges**

At the request of the Goal 3 Steering Committee, the VCCS I-Tech Executive Committee has launched an evaluation of existing technology tools to discover unused functionalities, duplications, missing functions, and integrations. Their goal is to assess, align, and replace existing technology tools through a cost-efficient approach. System Office IT will provide a report with specifications. This review will assist in long term technology planning, implementation, use, and evaluation of software, particularly in student-facing tools. This work will be ongoing in the second biennium.
Next Steps

The workforce development mission of Virginia Community Colleges is on the forefront of changing the lives of ALICE Virginians from one of economic insecurity to that of economic opportunity. This transformation of both individuals and the workforce demands both high touch and high tech with a heavy dose of employer engagement.

Evidence of the institutionalization of Opportunity 2027 work is found in the adoption of services, processes, and policy changes recommended by the Onboarding Redesign and the Power of the Possible Taskforces as well as the attendant professional development to develop a culture of care. Going forward in the next biennium, the VCCS will make progress toward the systemic integration of serving student and employer needs through people and technology.

Supporting Goal 4: Meaningful Credentials

*Provide all students with the knowledge, skills, credentials, and degrees that enable them to thrive in dynamic and emerging 21st century careers shaped by the future of work.*

First Biennial Goal Progress

One of the primary differentiating qualities of the Virginia Community College System is that its students stay in the commonwealth upon graduation to work and live. In fact, 82% of students remain in the commonwealth after leaving a VCCS institution. With 23 colleges in 40 locations statewide, VCCS students can choose programs close to their rural, urban, or suburban homes when gaining skills, reskilling, or upskilling.

The VCCS intends to lead the commonwealth’s higher education institutions in achieving Governor Glenn Youngkin’s goal to accelerate career-ready workforce programs, including community college/K-12 partnerships, expanded work-based learning opportunities such as internship and apprenticeship programs, accelerated credentialing, and career navigation resources.

The majority of VCCS colleges are in rural areas partnering with employers to execute strategies for rural development and growth.

The VCCS recognizes that achieving the biennial goal of preparing Virginians for **21st-century economic opportunities** requires a precision
refocus of the System and colleges. Fortunately, the VCCS has 50 years’ experience meeting or exceeding employer needs and is planning to redeploy its current assets as well as requesting additional resources during the 2024 Legislative Session to meet the economy’s demands.

**Engage Industry in Curriculum Development and Design**

By **policy**, the VCCS relies on industry advisory groups and third-party credentialing and licensure requirements to ensure alignment with employer needs. Local curriculum advisory committees act to assist in the establishment of occupational/technical programs and curricula. They do this by identifying present and future occupational needs within the college region and the skills and knowledge required by prospective employees; advising the community college concerning employment practices, specific certification and licensure requirements, job entry educational levels required by business, industry and the professions, standards and regulations relating to student employment, and occupational placement of graduates; and reviewing and submitting recommendations regarding specific program and curricular proposals, and specialized equipment and facility requirements for new or innovative programs. Advisory committee members also participate in the evaluation of programs in relationship to the educational and occupational needs of the region. (For example, see Northern Virginia Community College [Advisory Boards](#).)

All programs – degree and non-degree – are reviewed at least annually at the college level with industry partners to ensure that graduates will have the right knowledge and skills to obtain good jobs with family-sustaining wages. The following examples of stakeholder partnerships illustrate the numerous connections with businesses, universities, investors, and talent in curriculum design and program evaluation:

- **Last year**, the VCCS’s Administration of Justice faculty Peer Group redeveloped courses to expand concepts related to community policing in response to recommendations from a committee of law enforcement agencies, community activists, and university transfer partners.
- **Likewise**, the Nursing faculty revised course objectives and major topics for courses in the uniform nursing curriculum to align with employer needs and licensure requirements.
- **Also**, the three colleges in Hampton Roads – Virginia Peninsula, Tidewater, and Paul D. Camp – added Marine Trades short-term training programs to quickly address the maritime and shipbuilding industry workforce needs.
- **Get a Skill, Get a Job and Get Ahead (G3)** requires colleges to review eligible career programming and, in collaboration with business and industry, identify...

In his economic development policy, Governor Youngkin summons Virginians to enhance connections among businesses, universities, investors, and talent. There are examples of these efforts existing in the VCCS and a deep desire to expand and respond as interconnected partners of a greater whole.
stackable credentials from industry certifications to associate degrees. These are approved during every State Board meeting. See, for example, the G3 programs at Reynolds Community College.

- During the biennium, VCCS convened employers and associations representing the infrastructure sectors to develop the Virginia Infrastructure Academy (VIA), a regional approach to training the workforce needed to build roads, tunnels, and bridges, expand broadband access, and support Virginia’s energy infrastructure, including wind and solar energy. A steering committee of employers and chief workforce officers developed an entry-level certification for infrastructure workers that can be offered by all colleges, with add-on certifications specific to each industry sector.

- Work based learning is a high impact practice, attracting students and employers. Some colleges have implemented work based learning as both an academic and student services goal. (See for example, Germanna Community College’s GermannaWorks). Also, the VCCS participates as a full partner with the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), which received funding to expand an internship and apprenticeship portal statewide.

- Each college uses web-based tools to inform students of career pathways, job opportunities, and salaries within their local regions. Colleges use a student software guidance program found in EAB Navigate, as well as Lightcast’s Career Coach to share career pathways with students and to track progress to completion. (See Wytheville Community College for an example of career information for truck drivers.)

- In recognition that all programs, including college transfer programs, prepare students for the workforce, the VCCS partnered with SCHEV and the public universities to develop transfer guarantees and guided pathway maps for transfer students to accelerate their baccalaureate completions (https://www.transfervirginia.org).

More consequentially, the System Office and colleges listen to the concerns of employers with an unrelenting eye toward continuous improvement. To facilitate assurance that all college programs are regularly scrutinized, the system-wide Deans' Course Review Committee has established a course and outcomes review cycle to ensure that Master Course File course outcomes are appraised and refreshed regularly to meet industry needs.

Accelerate Time to Completion
State Board-approved G3 credentials require colleges to provide integrated workforce and academic pathways into the workforce and/or further education in five in-demand industry clusters. Students pursuing these guided pathways complete industry recognized credentials, certificates, and degrees without loss of credit. The VCCS has
also aligned all experience-based credit for prior learning options into a single portal, Credits2Careers, allowing opportunities for current and prospective students to accelerate their program completions. For an example, please see Brightpoint Community College’s Credit for Prior Experience page.)

Grow Work Based Learning (Internships and Apprenticeships)
Some VCCS colleges have models for work based and cooperative learning programs which will support system wide scaling. The VCCS has coordinated its internship and apprenticeship efforts with the SCHEV V+TOP (Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership) project. Some colleges have used federal work study funds to support internships and apprenticeships. Furthermore, the VCCS was awarded federal monies to support internships for foster youth. Colleges are exploring how to serve as intermediaries between companies and the Department of Labor and Industry to establish additional registered apprenticeships. (For an example, see Paul D. Camp Community College’s Apprenticeship & Internship page.) This objective will be continued and scaled in the second biennium.

Schedule for Student Success
All colleges now offer shorter week terms in addition to the traditional 16-week semester, including 12-, 8-, 5- and 4-week sessions as well as 2-week intersession opportunities to provide students with accelerated pathways to completion. Patrick & Henry Community College, for example, is expanding to 8-week courses in 2023-24 and plans to offer only 8-week delivery by fall 2024. As a result of the expertise gained during the pandemic and growing student demand, more than half of VCCS transfer and workforce courses are available online and in hybrid formats. (For example, see “get ahead fast” at Virginia Peninsula Community College).

The VCCS has implemented Ad Astra analytics and scheduling tools systemwide and provides continuous training on their uses. These tools are designed to keep students on the shortest path to completion by improving the scheduling of classes for the most advantageous efficiency. Colleges have adopted the tools that best meet their needs.

In the 2023 Legislative session, the VCCS pursued resources to expand and design high demand and high-cost workforce programs through its HIRE Virginia funding requests. The groundwork laid in 2023 forms the foundation for the 2024 Legislative agenda, which is focused on investing to grow workforce development through regional and statewide collaboration. Colleges also pursue additional resources to increase courses, equipment and student financial aid through successful grants, private donor cultivation and federal earmarks. (For an example, see Southside Virginia Community College.)
Next Biennium

The VCCS acknowledges degrees and credentials readying workers to thrive in 21st Century Careers is the way forward for economic development and opportunity in Virginia. The system also recognizes that much work is left to be done. Going forward with an infusion of state capital investments, systematic and systematized partnerships with employers, program and course quality enhancement and acceleration, innovative approaches to streamlining content delivery and scheduling, and guaranteeing excellence in credential and degree attainment will be the top priorities and achievements of the VCCS.

The work of Opportunity 2027 supports Chancellor Dore’ as he leads the System Office and colleges in accomplishing the following:

- Adapt our overall delivery models to anytime, anywhere, on-demand learning around the needs of our diverse learners, including part-time adult learners needing to reskill and upskill
- Further enhance the curriculum architecture with clear stackable credentials from non-credit to credit to degree
- Implement a robust credit for prior learning model consistent across all colleges
- Incorporate competency-based models across our programs
- Leverage artificial intelligence, mobile technology, virtual reality, simulation across all disciplines.

In the second biennium, job and, when possible, wage outcomes will be added to the Opportunity 2027 dashboard so that colleges can not only track students’ attainment of credentials but also the impact of new processes and support services on students’ economic mobility outcomes.

Supporting Goal 5: Affordability and Sustainability

*Provide all students with access to affordable college educations that support their need for financial flexibility while also supporting the vitality and sustainability of our colleges.*

First Biennial Goal Progress

The Virginia Community College System is the lowest funded of all public colleges in Virginia and at about midpoint in terms of the country’s community colleges. At the same time, its students are exceptionally price-sensitive and desire high quality programs leading to good jobs. High quality programs for in-demand professions such as nursing and IT are costly for colleges to offer. Passing costs on to students through
Conduct Professional Development Across Functional Areas
The VCCS must hold itself accountable for the system’s vitality and sustainability by taking an honest, reflective look at program and service delivery costs, fee structures, transparent pricing, and the holistic financial profiles of students. Broad professional development in budgeting and finance is a necessary step in reaching a more effective, outcome-based return on investment. The Goal 5 Steering Committee produced a matrix to identify the groups requiring professional development in the VCCS specific financial and budgeting processes. The VCCS Office of Budget and Finance (OBF) holds virtual, monthly meetings of college business managers to facilitate knowledge sharing on business office processes and practices. The OBF also produced a video walkthrough of the VCCS funding allocation process, which was shared with college financial leaders. Kick-off discussions regarding broader approaches to integrating college and system financial practices were held during the Administrative Services Conference in spring 2023. Follow-up discussions are occurring over the summer with additional work meetings scheduled for fall 2023.

Convene Stakeholders and Develop Policies to Address Best Practices for Holistic Financial Supports
The Onboarding Redesign Taskforce convened college finance and student services staff with other leaders to study the impacts of student financial policies and practices and to identify holistic and integrated student financial ecosystem best practices. The resulting recommendations required colleges to review debt holds, rework student payment plan options, engage financial aid professionals in onboarding, and encouraging student payment discussions earlier in onboarding. These best practices were documented for student financial services and navigators/advisors in the VCCS Student Success Center Canvas Modules. A request for proposal for a new VCCS
student payment plan solution has been issued and proposal evaluation is underway. (For an example of student payment options, see Southwest Virginia Community College.)

Additionally, the Goal 5 Steering Committee conducted a VCCS-wide Student Financial Processes survey in April 2022 to document all college practices. Based on the survey results, the committee made further recommendations on assessing service fees for processing credit card payments, managing payments from non-attending students, canceling enrollment for non-payment, requiring tuition payments at the time of enrollment, and offering payment plans. Approved in Spring 2023, the steering committee’s recommendations are discussed with Chief Financial Officers during their monthly meetings.

Transparency in total costs of education prevents sticker shock and helps students tap into the many financial resources available. (For an example, see Eastern Shore Community College or Danville Community College.)

**Fund the Costs of Professional Certifications and Licensure Exams**
The Goal 5 steering committee reviewed relative VCCS, Veterans Administration, and Title IV policies and regulations on the payment for third-party credentials embedded within courses and for credentials and licenses awarded post-graduation. The committee identified three potential strategies for addressing this objective, which will be vetted with the Academic and Student Services Vice President and the Chief Finance Officers in September 2023.

**Next Biennium**

Examination as to the sustainability and affordability of a VCCS education will continue with the involvement of many stakeholders—Board members; students; cross-functional college, system, and state agency teams; employers; the Governor and Legislature. Getting to the true cost of a credential or degree by program or course and their returns on investment will be tackled in the next biennium with the identification of regional high demand/high cost programs. Additional opportunities for professional development for all VCCS leaders will be offered during Administrative Services Conferences and in monthly CFO meetings.
Opportunity 2027 First Biennium Results Summary

The VCCS Six-Year Plan is a convergence of the work of Opportunity 2027, the Compete to Win charge from Governor Youngkin, and the commitment of the VCCS to work together across regions, sectors, and stakeholder groups to enhance the Commonwealth’s competitive position and accelerate economic and workforce growth.

This first biennial report of the Opportunity 2027 Strategic Plan comprehensively documents the engagement of all VCCS stakeholders to ensure the success of our students. Notably, while the VCCS staff provided invaluable assistance and guidance, in addition to technology, financial and administrative support, most of the outcomes were accomplished at the institutions. In many cases, all twenty-three colleges responded to the Plan’s objectives as evidenced by the significant actions, strategies, and achievements cited throughout the above narrative.

The process to achieve this level of success during the first biennium is acknowledged. Under the leadership of Committee chairs, all of whom were college presidents, biweekly meetings were held which served as a means of providing progress on the objectives, as well as to strategize on ways to move forward as a System. Despite the brief hiatus during the selection of the Chancellor and in response to the Governor’s priorities, the Committees remained steadfast in their efforts toward achieving the goals of the Plan, always with a view toward equity for all students. The Committee recognizes that this work could not be achieved without support from college staff who provide services directly to students, and therefore, understand the necessity and expediency in implementing services, and to determine how best to achieve effective outcomes.

This critically developed Plan addresses many of the issues impacting higher education such as mental health, workforce needs, faculty shortages, and diversity. Individuals from every demographic are recognized including first-time in college, high school students, adults, and Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed (ALICE). The evidence of this Plan is most rewarding when college services are recognized by our diverse population of students who entrust their educational and career choices to the VCCS.
Next Steps – the Second Biennium

As the Strategic Planning Committee continues its work to embark on the second biennial objectives, a series of next steps will be implemented.

1. The Committee will develop SMART and key performance indicators that align with the Chancellor’s priorities and the VCCS Six-Year Plan.

2. The Committee will address metrics for which the desired outcomes were not achieved during the first biennium, as identified on the data dashboard.

3. The Committee will continue its regular meetings to ensure and document continuous progress and listen to stakeholders’ wisdom.

4. The Committee will routinely inform all VCCS constituents of its progress. Increased and frequent succinct data points will be reported through various mediums to highlight student achievements.

The members of the Strategic Planning Committee wish to thank the VCCS Board, Chancellor, faculty, staff, and others for their support of this important initiative. A special acknowledgement is extended to members of the VCCS Board who assisted in developing the Economic Opportunity Goal which guides this Plan’s work: “Virginia’s Community Colleges will achieve equity in access, learning outcomes, and success for students from every race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic group.” We look forward to continued success during the second biennium.