STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA

2025-2026 SCHEV Student Advisory Committee Policy Recommendations

The recommendations in this report reflect the perspectives of SCHEV's Student Advisory Committee (SAC). They are provided to inform policy discussion by providing actionable, student-originating insights and do not reflect formal policy positions from SCHEV.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Present and emerging grand challenges facing Virginia's students and their institutions of higher education necessitate a dynamic, comprehensive policy response across stakeholders in students' success during and after their enrollment in postsecondary education programs. These grand challenges include a myriad of structural and funding deficits in basic needs supports, disparities in career readiness supports for students across institutions and needs relative to a historically turbulent job market, and persistent barriers to mental health and community for students at their institutions of higher education.

SAC affirms that student engagement is indispensable to achieving SCHEV's strategic goals. To achieve SCHEV's goals articulated in *Developing Tomorrow's Talent: The Virginia Plan for Higher Education*, SAC has identified issues affecting Virginia's students and proposed recommendations at institutional, SCHEV, and state/system levels to improve the student experience and support positive holistic outcomes for students. Each SAC subcommittee approached input for recommendations autonomously and utilized subcommittee-specific data-collection mechanisms, including quantitative and qualitative input. Across subcommittees, SAC derived recommendations from engagement with student leaders, identification of best practices, and a review of national academic literature and state-specific institutional data.

Overview of Recommendations by Each Subcommittee:

Subcommittee	Recommendations Summaries
Finance	Establish statewide standards and targeted funding for on-campus pantries, food diversion frameworks, and meal plan subsidies to ensure flexible, barrier-free food access for students.
Finance	Encourage targeted state investment for and foster institutional coordination on expand transit access, increase shuttle frequency, and reduce commuter-related time costs that limit academic participation.
Finance	Support statewide expansion of flexible academic and administrative service models that recognize employment, caregiving, and geographic constraints as structural components of student time.
Workforce Readiness	Establish and ensure maintenance of a statewide classroom guest speakers portal connecting employers, thought leaders, and experienced professionals to professors for guest speaking in classes.
Workforce Readiness	Adopt or incorporate NACE's Career + Self Development competency within SCHEV's Student Learning Assessment policy as a mandatory, assessable component for institutions of higher education.
Workforce Readiness	Advocate for increased appropriations to the Commonwealth Innovative Internship Fund and Program and expand the Student Support and Access Grant and the Transforming Federal Work-Study Grant.
Student Engagement	Modify eligibility requirements for Pell-in-Virginia awards to require grant-seeking institutions assess space-related barriers in their institutional self-study and offer third space-related remedial proposals.
Student Engagement	Develop best practices for programs and initiatives that foster self-advocacy, self-determination, and independent living skills for students, including dedicated initiatives for students with disabilities.
Student Engagement	Convene a working group, including students and other qualified higher education professionals, to evaluate which classified/professional staff and student staff roles at institutions of higher education should receive credentialed mental health training and how that should be implemented.
Student Engagement	Provide guidance and grants to institutions of higher education to support student-athlete mental health and reach appropriate staffing levels for sports psychologists relative to student athletes.

INTRODUCTION

The Student Advisory Committee (SAC) for the State Council of Higher Education (SCHEV) is "a student council consisting of at least one full-time student from all four-year public colleges and universities in the Commonwealth of Virginia; four students representing the Virginia Community College System; and two students representing private institutions of higher education. The committee assembles at least twice annually to advise SCHEV leadership on systemwide issues of concern to Virginia's college students." Statutory authorization for SAC and its functions can be found here in the Code of Virginia § 23.1-201.

The 2025-2026 SAC first met for the 2025-2026 academic year on September 19th, 2025. Before this meeting, SCHEV staff provided SAC representatives with a survey wherein representatives were given a series of policy areas and asked to provide a priority designation between one and five, one being a lowest priority item and five being a highest priority item, for each policy area. Thirty-five respondents submitted prioritization rankings for topics provided. The highest- ranked priorities were:

- College affordability,
- The 2026 General Assembly session and/or state funding of higher education,
- Internships and job opportunities post-graduation,
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion,
- Mental health and wellness.

After a full committee discussion on merging and streamlining focus areas, subcommittees to design policy recommendations for each prevailing priority were convened. The subcommittees for the 2025-2026 SAC cohort were Finance, Workforce Readiness, and Student Engagement[1]. All three subcommittees, in collaboration with SAC members at large, have prepared policy recommendations to present to SCHEV Council during its March 2026 meeting. These recommendations are written to encourage action on identified best practices across a range of policy areas by multiple stakeholders, including SCHEV, institutions, the General Assembly, and partnering organizations, depending on where authority resides.

[1] This subcommittee was originally titled Student Belonging.

Finance Subcommittee

The Finance Subcommittee examined time poverty, defined as structural barriers that constrain students' time and undermine the affordability of higher education. Because time is a finite financial resource, infrastructure inefficiencies function as an indirect cost that reduces a student's earning capacity and increases the total price of degree completion. The subcommittee was co-chaired by Piedmont Virginia Community College representative Abdul Nazary and Virginia Commonwealth University representative Anne Skelton.

Declared members of this subcommittee are:

- Germanna Community College representative Christopher Sheler,
- Radford University representative Jake Weiss,
- Christopher Newport University representative Michael Messeh,
- Virginia Commonwealth University representative and SAC co-chair Tobi Ojo,
- College of William and Mary representative Tom Chesnut, and,
- University of Lynchburg representative Trajan Waddy.

The subcommittee's primary focus was addressing student time poverty, which members identified as a structural barrier that increases the effective cost of higher education and limits students' ability to fully engage in their studies. It also focused on improving food access, expanding transportation and mobility supports, and strengthening flexible academic and administrative infrastructure to reduce time burdens created by basic needs insecurity, commuting demands, and work or caregiving obligations. Together, these recommendations provide a coordinated approach to reducing structural time constraints and strengthening student retention and degree attainment across Virginia's institutions of higher education.

Recommendation 1: Improve Food Affordability & Access through Food Pantries, On-Campus Food Diversion, and Subsidized Meal Programs

Access to consistent, nutritious food should not depend on a student's income level or the resources of the campus they attend.

Background:

SCHEV's statewide strategic plan establishes a responsiveness objective "to student needs (mental health, basic supports, alternative pathways, etc.)." Addressing student food insecurity directly advances that objective. Data from The Hope Center at Temple University estimates 41% of all college students experienced food insecurity, amounting to triple the number of those experiencing food insecurity in the general population. This challenge was shown to disproportionately affect students who are low-income, first generation, of color, parents, and veterans. In November of 2024, SCHEV released its report on "On-campus Food Insecurity in Virginia," which reported that 59% of responding institutions of higher education estimated food insecurity on their campus to be between 25% and 49%, while 32% of respondents estimated between 1% and 24%. Regardless of the exact prevalence, 80% of institutions reported that student food insecurity was 'problematic'.

Furthermore, the subcommittee's survey of students from across four Virginia institutions of higher education reported 23.1% of respondents missed at least one academic pursuit per week because of expensive or limited food options on campus, especially for those with dietary restrictions. Inadequate food infrastructure forces students into costly time-tradeoffs; when affordable options are physically inaccessible, students must sacrifice study hours to commute or labor over meal preparation. This structural inefficiency functions as a regressive tax on student time, where the competition between basic needs and academic pursuits undermines the total value of their educational investment. Our survey as well as other sources suggest that food insecurity among students is directly linked to lower GPA and academic performance, increased absenteeism, increased attrition, reduced engagement with campus life, and poor mental and physical health metrics, including fatigue, poor sleep, increased stress, and increased depressive symptoms and anxiety.

On-campus food pantries provide students with discreet and direct access to food. Housed within the Office of Student Advocacy, located under the Division of Student Affairs, Virginia Commonwealth University involves a larger "Ram Pantry" as well as "Little Ram Pantries" at satellite locations across the campus, allowing for anonymous access to food at multiple locations without the associated stigma of students having to ask for help with food accessibility. Published data from 2024 on the Little Ram Pantries

demonstrated 7,718 total interactions across two academic years, suggesting substantial engagement by students. The measurement of actual food insecurity mitigation is ongoing. In March of 2025, $500,000 was allocated from the state budget to the Hunger-Free Campus Food Pantry Grant Program. However, with disbursement across 48 public and private nonprofit colleges in Virginia, this amounts to between $5,952 and $14,882 per institution, representing a significant funding gap.

This is coupled with the fact that on-campus dining options, particularly all-you-can-eat style dining halls, generate significant amounts of surplus edible food that could be redirected to students in need. A spring 2025 report from Virginia Tech Dining Services identified diversion of 11,000 pounds of unserved food in the Spring of 2025 from their on-campus dining to Campus Kitchen, which distributed the food to hunger relief agencies in the New River Valley. While some structured funding and policy guidance is being provided to participating institutions, without continued establishment of best practices, efforts may remain fragmented and under-resourced.

Finally, on-campus dining supports many students across Virginia's institutes of higher education, including those who live on-campus and those who do not. Guaranteed access through the purchase of a meal plan may cost between $240 (0.03 meals/week) and $3,925 (21+ meals/week) as indicated by Virginia Commonwealth University's dining plan options, which either barely provides meaningful dining options or is exorbitantly expensive for lower-income students. To address this, SB97, sponsored by Sen. Danica Roem, in the 2026 Session of the General Assembly includes a stipulation that institutions who wish to receive funding for on-campus food pantries must establish a "student meal credit sharing program, whereby students may voluntarily donate unused meal plan credits to be distributed for use by other students at campus dining halls or its on-campus food pantry." However, the procedures for donation and how students receive such donations were left to the discretion of the institutions. SAC advises that SCHEV can and should support best practices regarding implementation of such a program, as it is a critical first step in providing equitable food access if the legislation is passed. Without coordinated support, such programs do not necessarily guarantee access to on-campus dining.

Implementation & Outcomes:

SAC's Student Finances Subcommittee proposes a three-part coordinated strategy to address campus food insecurity at scale. Firstly, Virginia could encourage institutions of higher education to expand or establish on-campus food pantries and strengthen existing food access initiatives. Drawing on best practices from Virginia Tech, VCU, and Central Virginia Community College, pantries could partner with local food banks, maintain consistent operating hours, require no demonstration of need for access, and integrate referral services to SNAP, WIC, and other public benefit programs. Commonwealth funding could also support staffing, procurement partnerships with local growers and suppliers, storage equipment, and program evaluation systems.

Concurrently, in partnership with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Department of Environmental Quality, SCHEV could provide an outline for how to develop an infrastructure framework to drive cooperation between on-campus dining vendors and campus food pantries, diverting surplus food from dining halls and campus events. The framework should address safe food handling, compliance with food safety standards, storage and distribution equipment, and staff coordination. Financial incentives tied to waste reduction and environmental sustainability could be structured as Commonwealth subsidies.

SCHEV could also designate funding to establish a statewide meal plan subsidization program for students with disbursement through existing financial aid systems and tailored to individual institutional dining programs. A state-level meal assistance grant, scaled on a student's federal Student Aid Index (SAI), would allow for greater accessibility of on-campus dining options for eligible students. Using existing cost analysis from institutional dining programs, the grant could provide students with a meal plan at a reduced rate relative to their need and presence on campus. Similar to the Free or Reduced Lunch program in Virginia K-12 schools, the program would provide a meal while students are on campus. Funding amounts for each institution of higher education could be indexed to the percentage of in-state Federal Pell Grant eligible students enrolled at that institution. A significant financial return on this investment is the reclamation of student time, shifting hours from food logistics back to academic pursuit or income generating work. Additional guidance and best practices could be developed to assist institutions in designing dining services and vendor

agreements that promote extended or off-hours accessibility to food for time-constrained students.

The primary return on investment for this tripartite coordinated strategy is expected in increased student retention and graduation rates, reduced public benefit strain, decreased food waste and environmental impact, and improved public health outcomes across the Commonwealth. Reducing public benefit strain occurs as students achieve the financial stability needed to move toward independent employment. Furthermore, improved health outcomes and reclaimed time are realized as consistent on-campus nutrition reduces physical fatigue and the time lost to off-campus food logistics. This allows students to reinvest hours back into academic pursuit or work opportunities, significantly reducing the stress-related barriers to degree completion. Addressing food insecurity is not solely a welfare initiative; it is a workforce development strategy and an economic investment in Virginia's future.

SAC Finance Subcommittee Recommendation:

SAC calls for a continuance in addressing student food insecurity by establishing statewide standards and encouraging targeted funding in the next biennial budget. Purposeful investments in on-campus food pantries, food diversion frameworks, and meal plan subsidization will improve student retention and degree completion by reducing structural time barriers. By treating food access as essential educational infrastructure, the Commonwealth ensures that student time is reinvested into academic pursuit or work opportunities rather than the logistics of food insecurity.

Recommendation 2: Expand Transportation and Mobility Access to Reduce Commute-Related Academic Time Loss

Students should not lose instructional time or academic engagement because commuting constraints prevent them from reliably accessing their campuses.

Background:

A responsiveness objective in support of SCHEV's strategic goal to engage and retain non-traditional students, is undermined when transportation and mobility barriers prevent students from reliably accessing their campuses. Transportation is a structural driver of student time poverty and a barrier to academic participation that disproportionately affects low-income, minority, and adult learners. A 2023 brief from

Trellis Strategies, a nonprofit research organization with over 40 years serving higher education, found that transportation costs represented nearly 20% of total cost of attendance for commuting students; over one-quarter of students reported missing class due to a lack of reliable transportation. Despite this, only 8% of students reported using public transit regularly, reflecting a lack of accessible infrastructure. Critically, students with access to transit supports graduate at higher rates and are 6% more likely to be retained, making transportation investment a direct lever for credential completion. Peer-reviewed research in the *Journal of Planning Education and Research* further documents that as American society continues to prioritize the automobile, households without vehicles continue to be at an economic disadvantage, with many of those households being lower income.

For Virginia's commuter campus students, transportation barriers translate directly into missed classes, reduced campus engagement, and lower degree completion, as is backed up by Peer-reviewed research which demonstrated that time spent commuting directly reduces on-campus participation, which is in turn correlated with lower grades and higher dropout rates. To investigate this issue within Virginia specifically, SAC's Finance Subcommittee conducted a survey across multiple Virginia public institutions of higher education. Results indicate that commuting and transportation barriers represent a significant source of academic time loss, with a substantial proportion of respondents reporting commute times exceeding 20–40 minutes one way. Many students indicate that once they leave campus, they cannot return for classes, office hours, or other essential academic activities. This return-cost friction transforms routine needs, including meals, employment shifts, caregiving, and medical appointments, amounting to 40-80 minutes of academic disruptions per week. Relatedly, students reliant on public transportation report missed classes due to delayed buses, limited route frequency, and the geographic isolation of campuses.

Implementation & Outcomes:

SAC proposes a coordinated, three-part mobility strategy. Firstly, SCHEV could encourage partnerships with regional transit authorities to increase route frequency and expand student transit voucher programs. Quasi-experimental evidence from a Hope Center study of transit pass programs at community colleges found that students with transit access were 5 percentage points more likely to be retained semester-to-semester and one year later, and 17% more likely to earn a credential. Concurrently, SCHEV

could evaluate shuttle frequency, cross-campus connectivity, and scheduling alignment to reduce return-cost friction. Mobility access indicators should be incorporated into institutional review and self-study frameworks, such as SCHEV's Pell in Virginia (PIV) Program. Funding for these initiatives could be included in the next biennial budget through targeted transportation-access appropriations or mobility innovation grants. Investment in transit coordination is expected to reduce missed academic commitments and improve retention and completion outcomes.

Investments of this kind align directly with the mandates established in The Virginia Plan for Higher Education. The plan's framework explicitly identifies affordability and access and barriers to participation as leading issues threatening the state's talent pipeline. By treating commute-driven time poverty as a structural barrier rather than merely a personal expense, institutions can better fulfill the plan's mandate to strengthen basic need supports and ensure all students have the resources necessary to persist and complete their degrees.

SAC Finance Subcommittee Recommendation:

SAC calls for Virginia's higher education community to prioritize the issue of student mobility and transportation as structural drivers of student time poverty by encouraging targeted state investment and institutional coordination to reduce commute-related academic time loss. Strategic investment in transit access, shuttle frequency, and return-cost reduction measures will directly improve retention, persistence, and equitable academic participation across Virginia's institutions of higher education. Special attention should also be paid to rural and remote areas, where students have limited or absent physical transit infrastructure.

Recommendation 3: Expand Digital and Administrative Infrastructure to Support Remote, Working, and Caregiving Students

Strategic flexibility is essential to ensure that work, location, and caregiving duties do not dictate a student's graduation timeline.

Background:

Alongside both basic needs and mobility, employment and caregiving obligations further compound time poverty; inflexible academic structures that ignore these realities work against the same SCHEV strategic objectives this subcommittee's

recommendations collectively advance. Employment consistently emerges as a significant driver of weekly time loss for college students. As working hours increase, time dedicated to academic activities decreases, with students missing office hours, tutoring sessions, advising appointments, and study time due to rigid scheduling structures that do not accommodate employment obligations.

Many respondents to SAC's preliminary survey report working 20–30+ hours per week, with a substantial number reporting 10 or more hours of academic time lost weekly due to work-related conflicts. This reflects a national pattern: research from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce finds that 15 to 30 hours per week has become the new normal for working students during the academic year, and that among low-income working learners, working 15 or more hours per week, 59 percent average a C or lower in their college classes. Federal data from NCES confirms no measurable change in undergraduate employment rates between 2010 and 2020, underscoring that this is a structural condition, not a recent trend. Caregiving responsibilities and healthcare access further compound time poverty for students balancing multiple roles. Nonacademic responsibilities are not the only barrier posed to working adults and caregivers. National research across 550+ colleges shows that outdated scheduling practices are a leading cause of these students leaving before completing their degree, and that states implementing flexible scheduling reforms have seen measurable gains in their retention and credit accumulation.

Confronting these structural barriers reflects the priorities established in The Virginia Plan for Higher Education. The plan's 'Responsive' goal tasks institutions with addressing obstacles that go beyond academics and reducing barriers to participation for working learners. Expanding academic and administrative flexibility is an essential step to fulfill these statewide mandates and ensure equitable degree completion.

Implementation & Outcomes:

SAC proposes a tripartite flexibility framework. It begins with expanding asynchronous office hours, virtual advising and tutoring, to accommodate students with work and caregiving responsibilities, provided that implementation is structured and intentional. Institutions of higher education should also be incentivized to expand evening and weekend course blocks, offer hybrid and virtual synchronous attendance options where appropriate, and evaluate predictable scheduling frameworks that reduce work-school

conflict for employed and caregiving students. Such incentives could be structured through Virginia's existing Fund for Excellence and Innovation (FFEI), with institutions applying competitively for grants tied to measurable improvements in scheduling flexibility and student access outcomes. Virginian institutions are not starting from zero: Old Dominion University, which extends advising into evening hours to serve its working adult population, demonstrates that flexible service delivery is already operationally feasible within Virginia's system. At the state policy level, momentum for structural reform is already building regionally: Maryland is among seven states participating in the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO)'s national *Holistic Advising for Student Success* initiative. While this two-year project is still in its policy-development phase, it is rooted in clear national evidence that proactive, relationship-centered advising strengthens retention and accelerates completion. Virginia could pursue a similar collaborative framework to assess its own advising landscape and proactively design scalable, holistic support systems statewide.

Ensuring these flexible models are accessible requires addressing the connectivity gap that limits their reach. Virginia's higher education community could explore options and work with partners which lead to the creation of broadband voucher pilots and rural connectivity partnerships to ensure that flexible academic models extend to students in low-bandwidth regions. According to federal data, rural students are 11 percentage points less likely than their suburban peers to have fixed broadband access at home, a disparity that directly undermines the value of any flexible or online academic model for Virginia's rural campuses and commuter students. Best practices and economic outcomes for rural broadband investment are documented in the Center on Rural Innovation's Beyond Connectivity report, and New York's Affordable Broadband Act (2025) provides a state-level policy precedent for income-based connectivity subsidies. SCHEV's role in advocating for the pilot could include synthesizing this research into implementation guidance for participating institutions. Targeted funding in the next biennial budget could support expansion of virtual academic services and shared course infrastructure.

The third pillar of this framework addresses internship access for employed students whose work schedules prevent participation in traditional models, an approach exemplified by George Mason University's Build Your Own Internship (BYOI) program for remote global internships. This Virginia flagship model provides student-driven,

credit-bearing structures that remove the need for a separate, institution-led placement process. By validating professional work that a student is already performing on the clock, the BYOI model achieves structural efficiency that enables simultaneous progress toward both career advancement and degree completion. This allows students to eliminate the need for an external, time-consuming job search and the "double commute" that often forces working learners to choose between a paycheck and a graduation requirement. This partner approach directly addresses the time poverty currently hindering degree completion for thousands of working students across Virginia.

SAC Finance Subcommittee Recommendation:

The SAC calls for higher education stakeholders across Virginia to support the statewide expansion of flexible academic and administrative service models that recognize employment, caregiving, and geographic isolation as structural components of student life. Expanding access to digital infrastructure, remote services, and flexible scheduling enables students to meet academic requirements without sacrificing work or caregiving time. By reducing these time constraints, institutions can strengthen retention, persistence, and alignment with the Commonwealth's workforce needs.

WORKFORCE READINESS SUBCOMMITTEE

The Workforce Readiness Subcommittee examined how Virginia's institutions of higher education prepare students for successful career transitions and long-term professional growth, strengthening their competitive advantage across the workforce. The subcommittee was chaired by University of Mary Washington representative Adam McAninley[2].

Declared members of this subcommittee are:

- Tom Chesnut representing the College of William and Mary,
- Anusha Dhungana representing Virginia Tech,
- Ashley Glover representing Radford University,
- Emma Roshioru representing Virginia Tech,
- Je'Nae Hill representing Old Dominion University,
- Jonathan Dubois representing George Mason University,
- Laila Masumi representing James Madison University,
- Sydney Fleming representing University of Virginia – College at Wise,
- Zayd Hamid representing George Mason University and as SAC co-chair,
- Christopher Sheler representing Germanna Community College,
- Tobi Ojo representing Virginia Commonwealth University and as SAC co-chair,
- Shaana Thomas representing the Apprentice School, and,
- Vivian Sievers representing the University of Virginia.

The subcommittee's primary focus was on experiential learning and paid work-based opportunities, which members identified as the most critical factor in bridging the gap between academic preparation and career success. It also focused on strengthening employer-institution partnerships and industry engagement as the essential infrastructure for creating meaningful career pathways, along with those crucial experiential learning and paid work-based opportunities. Together, these recommendations offer a comprehensive blueprint to advancing career-connected and career-relevant learning across the Commonwealth's institutions of higher education.

[2] Riverside College of Health Sciences representative John Houlahan formerly co-chaired this subcommittee alongside Adam McAninley prior to resigning from SAC.

Recommendation 1: Statewide Classroom Guest Speakers Portal

The zip code of a student's institution of higher education should not be a barrier to them accessing the wisdom, brilliance, and experience of professionals eager to connect with learners across Virginia.

Background:

SCHEV's statewide strategic plan establishes a goal to "prepare students to learn, work, contribute and lead." Associated with that goal is a strategy to "increase collaboration and commitments between Virginia K-12, post-secondary institutions and employers to improve pathways alignment and enhance career readiness via career-focused education and work-based learning (e.g., certifications in high-demand fields, apprenticeships and internships)." SAC's Workforce Readiness Subcommittee proposes a statewide classroom guest speakers portal to, as the plan establishes, increase collaboration on career-focused education between employers and Virginia's institutions of higher education.

Faculty at some of Virginia's institutions of higher education, like the faculty of George Mason University, leverage geographic proximity and connection to Washington D.C to bring in policymakers, think tank leaders, etc. to their classes. Due to these same boons, they are also uniquely able to bring students to those leaders through site visits. George Mason's geographic benefit is a unique educational-outcomes-aligned advantage for its faculty seeking to augment their courses' career-focused education through guest speakers. Studies show that, particularly for undergraduates, having guest speakers in their classes is a positive educational experience that supports career readiness. Whether faculty can reliably access a guest speaker whose subject matter expertise aligns with the learning outcomes of their course is determined by several factors, chiefly: the institution's geographic area and employer base, the institution of higher education's prestige and alumni base, and the faculty member's personal connections and network.

This inequitable status quo can be changed by SCHEV to increase access and opportunity for all Virginia's students. It can do so by learning from George Mason's example. George Mason offers a promising practice for speaker engagement that SCHEV should be used as a model for a statewide academic-oriented speakers portal:

the Mason Speakers Series. This platform, as established in its information section, provides "100 professors, researchers, and administrators who volunteer from George Mason University to provide lectures and guest presentations to external community organizations and businesses free of charge."

Implementation & Outcomes:

SCHEV should model a statewide classroom guest speakers' portal from the Mason Speakers Series' structure: searchable database of speakers by subject and keyword, request form for speaker engagements, and form wherein industry leaders and employers may request to participate in the program.

The program's speaker request form should be submittable to SCHEV by faculty at any Virginia institution of higher education. Faculty should submit their contact information, general information about the class (days of the week, times, location/modality,) description of the class's learning outcomes, and topics they would like a speaker to address. SCHEV staff should process inquiries and cross-reference desired speaker attributes and availability and provide the interested faculty member with appropriate, relevant speaker options and how they can be connected with selected speaker(s) through a responsible SCHEV-designated database coordinator that SCHEV designates to speak to a class in-person or remotely.

The program's speaker participation interest form should be open to categorized submissions from Virginia-based employers, professors of practice at any Virginia institution of higher education, and other distinguished professionals from all industries. This interest form should include applicants' contact information, biographies, headshot, and topic specialties. There should be a mechanism in this form for speakers to designate a referral to this program by a faculty member, student, or alumnus affiliated with any Virginia institution of higher education or by SCHEV's fellow Virginia Talent and Opportunity Partnership (VTOP) partners: the Virginia Chamber Foundation (extending to regional chambers of commerce such as the Prince William Chamber of Commerce) and Virginia Business Higher Education Council.

This program would, if implemented, constitute a significant but potentially absorbable investment of SCHEV staff time and resources. However, collaboration opportunities exist within VTOP and its affiliates to responsibly outsource outreach and engagement

burdens. Faculty training on this program may be done in collaboration with faculty development units at Virginia institutions of higher education. The primary time & personnel expense is expected to be on SCHEV's website management team. The primary return on investment is expected to be in augmenting students' career-focused education throughout the commonwealth as aligned with SCHEV's strategic plan. SCHEV should develop ways to measure that primary return on investment outcome and determine other associated externalities of that outcome.

SAC Workforce Readiness Subcommittee Recommendation:

SAC calls for SCHEV to establish and ensure maintenance of a statewide classroom guest speakers portal through which employers, thought leaders, and experienced professionals may designate willingness to be a guest speaker in professors' classrooms in appropriate modalities and connect with faculty for that purpose.

Recommendation 2: Incorporate NACE Competency on Career + Self-Development into SCHEV Student Learning Assessment

When best practices for student outcome competencies are not aligned with compliance requirements, students may experience unnecessary inefficiencies in learning.

Background:

Across Virginia institutions of higher education, the National Association of Colleges and Employers' Career Readiness Competencies are integrated as best practice into the career readiness strategies and communications of campus career services offices and other student-facing units. NACE competencies have also been utilized academically, such as in student staff training curriculum. These competencies are Career + Self Development, Communication, Critical Thinking, Equity + Inclusion[3], Leadership, Professionalism, Teamwork, and Technology. This overlaps in part with SCHEV's Student Learning Assessment competencies: critical thinking, written communication, quantitative reasoning, and civic engagement. Institutions may also include additional competencies beyond those identified by SCHEV.

[3] This category is currently under review by NACE.

Since July 18, 2017, when SCHEV's Council acted to approve this policy, students' expectations of career readiness in college have changed – as has the labor market, particularly in Northern Virginia. Institutions of higher education have responded, creating programs like the Global Career Accelerator at James Madison University and Mason Career Academy at George Mason University. SCHEV also has a new strategic plan, which establishes a goal to "prepare students to learn, work, contribute and lead." Associated with that goal is an objective to improve institutions of higher educations' responsiveness to students' and industry's needs. SAC's Workforce Readiness Subcommittee proposes assessment reform as a conducive mechanism by which SCHEV may hold institutions of higher education accountable to those needs while also creating opportunities for program innovation and career-connected learning statewide.

Implementation & Outcomes:

Because SCHEV's Council approved the standing Student Learning Assessment policy through appropriate action, it may amend that policy through the same process. One option would be to adopt the competency language established by NACE: "Proactively develop oneself and one's career through continual personal and professional learning, awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, navigation of career opportunities, and networking to build relationships within and beyond one's organization." Alternatively, the Council could work with SAC, the Assessment Policy Advisory Group, and other stakeholders to develop Virginia-aligned language for inclusion in the policy.

SAC believes updating the policy would be a tangible way to promote institutions of higher education, innovating in their career readiness programming and to recognize positive steps taken to support students' professional development and learning outcomes. SAC also views assessment as a structurally sound mechanism for ensuring institutional participation in advancing the career-related items in the strategic plan while supporting the best interests of students navigating a fraught, unstable job market.

SAC Workforce Readiness Subcommittee Recommendation:

SAC calls for SCHEV to revise its Student Learning Assessment policy to adopt/incorporate NACE's Career + Self Development competency within that policy as a mandatory competency that institutions of higher education are regularly assessed on.

Recommendation 3: Expand the Commonwealth Innovative Internship Fund to Close the Student Barrier Gap

Virginia has built the infrastructure to connect students with paid work-based learning. The remaining gap is financial: students who want these experiences often cannot absorb the costs of getting there.

Background

SCHEV's statewide strategic plan establishes a goal to "prepare students to learn, work, contribute and lead" and calls for increased collaboration between institutions and employers to advance career readiness through work-based learning. Virginia has invested in building that infrastructure. The Commonwealth Innovative Internship Fund and Program (CIIF), administered by SCHEV through VTOP, distributed more than $3.9 million in institutional grants to 20 institutions in a single grant cycle, supporting capacity-building, employer partnerships, and student access. The Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP)'s InternshipsVA program separately reimburses qualifying employers with 150 or fewer Virginia employees for 50% of intern wages, connecting students to paid opportunities through Handshake.

Together, these programs address two sides of the same problem: employer capacity and student access. But there are financial barriers. InternshipsVA's matching grant explicitly does not cover student-side costs, including housing, transportation, and professional attire, noting these "may be available through the student's college or university." SCHEV recognized this gap and in 2024 launched the Student Support and Access Grant within the CIIF, awarding funding to 12 public four-year institutions of higher education that supported 659 students through transportation assistance, housing stipends, professional attire, and required materials. Phase 2 is currently open, offering up to ten grants at $100,000 per year per institution. A 2021 SCHEV survey of approximately 15,350 Virginia graduates found that fewer than half had completed an internship as undergraduates. With Virginia's 70% postsecondary attainment goal by 2030 dependent on career-ready graduates, and with federal funding for student support programs under sustained uncertainty, the most fiscally responsible path is to strengthen the state-funded infrastructure Virginia already controls.

Implementation & Outcomes

SAC recommends that SCHEV advocate to the Governor and General Assembly for increased appropriations to the Student Support and Access Grant within the CIIF, to expand both the number of institutions served and the number of students reached per institution. The current cap of ten grants limits the program's reach across Virginia's 39 public institutions of higher education, which include fifteen four-year universities, Richard Bland College, and twenty-three community colleges. The program has not yet been extended to community colleges or eligible private nonprofit institutions. Expanding the grant pool within the CIIF would allow more institutions to fund direct student barrier removal without requiring new administrative infrastructure or new program legislation.

SCHEV should also work through the existing Memorandum of Understanding between SCHEV and VEDP, established by the General Assembly to coordinate the academic and employer-facing sides of Virginia's internship programs, to align the Student Support and Access Grant with VEDP's InternshipsVA matching grant. When a student secures a position with an InternshipsVA-participating employer, SCHEV's grant funds should be readily available to cover the student-side costs that InternshipsVA does not. One program subsidizes the employer: the other removes barriers for the student. Both operate under the same legislative framework and are funded by the Commonwealth.

Additionally, SCHEV should expand the Transforming Federal Work-Study grant program within the CIIF. This program supports institutions in converting existing Federal Work-Study positions into structured, internship-like work-based learning experiences that meet federal program requirements while advancing Virginia's workforce readiness goals. Scaling this program increases the number of students, particularly Pell-eligible students who disproportionately rely on FWS awards, gaining substantive work-based learning through an existing institutional and federal funding structure.

The SCHEV Council should adopt public reporting standards as a condition of all CIIF Student Support and Access grant awards, requiring institutions to submit outcome data through SCHEV's existing semi-annual CIIF grant performance reporting process, covering the number of students served, Pell eligibility, first-generation status,

experience types, and post-experience employment outcomes. SCHEV should incorporate this data into its student-level collection within the Virginia Longitudinal Data System, consistent with how other Commonwealth financial aid programs tag and track student outcomes. Published reporting will enable SCHEV to track equity gaps, support future appropriations requests to the General Assembly, and refine grant criteria over time. The November 2024 grant cycle demonstrated that broad institutional participation is achievable; the goal now is depth, equity, and extension of that participation to community colleges and eligible private nonprofit institutions not yet served by the program.

SAC Workforce Readiness Subcommittee Recommendation

SAC calls for SCHEV to advocate to the Governor and General Assembly for increased budgetary appropriations to the Commonwealth Innovative Internship Fund and Program, specifically to expand the Student Support and Access Grant to reach a broader audience. This outreach should include including community colleges and eligible private nonprofit institutions of higher education not yet served by the program. SAC further calls for SCHEV to coordinate the Student Support and Access Grant with VEDP's InternshipsVA matching grant program through the existing SCHEV-VEDP Memorandum of Understanding, so that employer-side wage subsidies and student-side barrier removal function as a unified support system; and to scale the Transforming Federal Work-Study grant program to increase the number of Pell-eligible students gaining structured work-based learning through existing institutional and federal funding.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE

The Student Engagement Subcommittee examined campus life and needs for various student populations. The subcommittee was chaired by University of Mary Washington representative Amira Said.

Declared members of this subcommittee are:

- Tom Chesnut representing the College of William and Mary,
- Adam McAninley representing University of Mary Washington,
- Anusha Dhungana representing Virginia Tech,
- Ashley Glover representing Radford University,
- Cameron Lowery representing Longwood University,
- Emily McKenna representing Christopher Newport University,
- Emma Roshioru representing Virginia Tech,
- Je'Nae Hill representing Old Dominion University,
- Jonathan Dubois representing George Mason University,
- Tobi Ojo representing Virginia Commonwealth University and as SAC co-chair,
- Laila Masumi representing James Madison University,
- Lena Bryan representing Norfolk State University,
- Ryan Arsenault representing Northern Virginia Community College,
- Sydney Fleming representing University of Virginia – College at Wise, and,
- Zayd Hamid representing George Mason University and as SAC co-chair.

The subcommittee's primary focus centered on creating places for belonging on campus, which members identified as most necessary through tangible space creation. It also focused on ensuring specialized support for students with disabilities and students with mental health needs. These recommendations, taken together, provide an integrated approach to care for Virginia's diverse, unique student population across its institutions of higher education.

Recommendation 1: Third Space Survey Requirement in PIV Program

Students need places to connect, socialize, and connect outside of their classrooms and residence halls. These third spaces function as physical places where students can experience campus community.

Background:

SCHEV's statewide strategic plan establishes a responsiveness objective "to student needs (mental health, basic supports, alternative pathways, etc.)." Associated with that objective is a potential initiative to "study/publish best practice (student-perspective not just researcher) in terms of sense of belonging initiatives that show promise/success." Across various data collection means, SAC has identified the establishment and maintenance of physical campus third spaces, defined as "informal, accessible places where people gather voluntarily, build relationships, and create shared meaning," as a belonging initiative that shows promise/success.

Third spaces, such as the University of Virginia – College at Wise's (UVA-Wise) TRIO Lounge and George Mason University's Contemporary Student Lounge, at Virginia's institutions of higher education should be further explored and supported by those institutions and by SCHEV. Inquiries into the best practices for establishing these spaces, which specific student populations would benefit from tailored spaces and how such spaces should be designed, etc. should be pursued. As such, statewide and campus-specific data collection is necessary.

Implementation & Outcomes:

The data SCHEV would need for this is best collected through integrating that exploration as a requirement within SCHEV's existing PIV grant application and subsequent institutional self-study process. The latter tasks applicants with undertaking an institution-wide barrier review (IwBR) and submitting a report to SCHEV with those findings. As such, time and resource investment for this policy recommendation is levied on grant seeking institutions of higher education rather than SCHEV. However, SCHEV must provide implementation guidelines to institutions that cover: breadth of physical spaces review, timetables for data collection and submission, and other relevant guidance on submission content to facilitate forward-looking grant review. The data attained from this will enable SCHEV to provide comprehensive, actionable

guidance to Virginia's public institutions of higher education on best practices for establishing and maintaining campus third spaces as a strategic student initiative.

The PIV process was identified by SAC as the most viable means for this data collection as it is an existing process oriented toward identifying and addressing structural barriers at institutions, which affect the holistic experiences and outcomes for Pell-eligible students enrolled at each participating institution. SAC affirms, though, that structural barriers to community-building impact all students, regardless of Pell eligibility status, who seek to build and maintain campus student community. The intent of this recommendation is not to oblige institutions to build physical campus spaces for specific student sub-populations, but institutions may see fit to do so should that decision meaningfully result in diminished barriers to engagement for student populations. Belonging is demonstrably a unique phenomenon across the Commonwealth's institutions of higher education, thus responsiveness to belonging needs through third spaces will naturally and appropriately vary by institution.

SAC envisions this recommendation as a mechanism by which institutions may produce and receive the data, state support, and resources necessary to ensure that students – both as a population and across subpopulations as relevant – have enough designated physical third spaces to support vibrant life and engagement unique to that institution's students' needs. SAC defers as appropriate to SCHEV staff on the frequency and particularities of that data collection, also to ensure that such collection is not unduly burdensome. SAC further defers to institutions, in consultation with their students, on how that data is used to support their students.

SAC Student Engagement Subcommittee Recommendation:

SAC calls for SCHEV to modify eligibility requirements for PIV awards to require that grant-seeking institutions of higher education, as part of their comprehensive self-study, include an assessment of space-related barriers to student belonging and proposals on how to address any identified barriers through establishing third spaces for student populations.

Recommendation 2: Promoting Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are a vital part of the campus community across Virginia, yet they are often underrepresented in traditional student engagement strategies and policy conversations.

Background:

SCHEV's statewide strategic plan establishes a responsiveness objective "to student needs (mental health, basic supports, alternative pathways, etc.)." Associated with that objective is a supporting strategy to "establish formal partnerships between VDOE, SCHEV, and institutions to align exit and entry standards regarding college readiness. Topics include academic skills, soft skills, life skills, career exploration, and SOL Alignment to work/careers." SAC has identified self-advocacy as a fundamental life skill for all students, but one of particular importance to students with disabilities as a means of securing proper basic supports.

Students with disabilities are an essential part of Virginia's campus communities, yet they often encounter complex and inconsistent processes when seeking disability services and engaging in campus life. Many students transition from K–12 schooling with general awareness of available support but lack clear, institution-specific guidance on how to apply for disability services, request accommodations, understand their rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), or navigate grievance procedures. As noted by SCHEV staff in an November 2025 Insights Blog, only 38% of students with disabilities nationwide complete a bachelor's degree within eight years, compared with 51% of their peers without disabilities. These findings, explored in SCHEV's November 2025 report on postsecondary education transition and planning services barriers, constitute a redressable grievance for students with disabilities. Several SAC members, joined by other invited students from George Mason University, participated in the development of that report.

The report's recommendations include "integrating student self-advocacy, self-determination, and independent living skills into transition planning" and "providing case managers with transition staff with training on ADA requirements, higher education processes, and how these differ from IDEA, so that they can better support students in developing self-advocacy, self-determination, and independent living skills." SAC echoes these recommendations. The report's recommendations also call for

SCHEV to work with and solicit input from SAC on updating the "My Summary of Performance" document and "Virginia's College Guide for Students with Disabilities." SAC is willing to do so and be engaged for the above by SCHEV's Student Access, Success, and Engagement Unit alongside other relevant stakeholders.

Implementation & Outcomes:

Recognizing the impactful work of SAC members and other students on SCHEV's Disabilities Access to Higher Education Advisory Committee, recommendations on supporting students with disabilities' self-advocacy should be solicited first from those students. This should, in the long term, take the form of a permanent standing students with disabilities subcommittee of the Disabilities Access to Higher Education Advisory Committee that includes SAC members with disabilities and other students with disabilities. Such a structured opportunity for students with disabilities to engage with SCHEV will ameliorate workflows for other self-advocacy initiatives.

Public institutions of higher education should be evaluated regularly on their work as part of compliance with SCHEV's Student Learning Assessment's Critical Thinking core competency. Thus, SCHEV should amend its Student Learning Assessment policy to integrate skill development on self-advocacy, self-determination, and independent living skills within the broader Critical Thinking competency. Council should also work with SAC, the Assessment Policy Advisory Group, the Disabilities Access to Higher Education Advisory Committee, and other stakeholders to determine appropriate language for that purpose. These initiatives should, taken collectively, empower students with disabilities to articulate their needs to administrators, share perspectives on inclusion, and contribute meaningfully to institutional decision-making processes.

Furthermore, SCHEV and Virginia's public institutions of higher education should implement a coordinated strategy that standardizes student-facing resources, strengthens feedback mechanisms, and creates structured leadership opportunities for students with disabilities. Institutions should provide accessible training toolkits that clearly outline how to apply for disability services, request accommodations, understand ADA rights and responsibilities, and navigate grievance procedures. Student organizations should be leveraged to normalize and disseminate this information. Collectively, these efforts would increase transparency, strengthen self-advocacy and leadership development, improve institutional responsiveness, and foster

a stronger sense of belonging and representation for students with disabilities across the Commonwealth.

SAC Student Engagement Subcommittee Recommendation:

SAC recommends for SCHEV to, in consultation with the Disabilities Access to Higher Education Advisory Committee and students with disabilities, add to the best practices document for institutions of higher education to design programs and initiatives that foster self-advocacy, self-determination, and independent living skills for students, including dedicated initiatives for students with disabilities. SAC also recommends adding structured opportunities for students with disabilities to advocate for themselves to administrations at their universities to the best practices document.

Recommendation 3: Mental Health First Aid Training Expansion

The Mental Health First Aid training offered by the National Council for Mental Well-Being is a remarkable program that comprehensively educates people to care for their community's mental health needs. More campus staff, both professional and student, should receive this training.

Background:

SCHEV's statewide strategic plan establishes a responsiveness objective "to student needs (mental health, basic supports, alternative pathways, etc.)."Associated with that objective is an initiative to "study/publish best practice (student-perspective not just researcher) in terms of sense of belonging initiatives that show promise/success." SAC has identified the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training, a three-year credential from the National Council for Mental Well-Being (NCMW), as an initiative that shows promise/success for mental health promotion.

A study published by the National Institutes of Health indicates that approximately 60 percent of college students meet criteria for at least one mental health challenge, underscoring the need for widespread early-intervention capacity on campuses. Virginia law already recognizes the importance of this training. Code of Virginia §23.1-802 requires resident assistants at public institutions of higher education to complete Mental Health First Aid or a similar program prior to assuming their duties, and recently passed legislation, effective July 1, 2025, extend that requirement to intercollegiate athletics coaches.

While this statutory framework establishes a baseline expectation, implementation varies, particularly due to the phrase "or a similar program," which does not define minimum quality standards. It does, however, provide a legislative route by which proposals to increase MHFA training may be statutorily adopted. Institutions such as George Mason University demonstrate that broader adoption is both feasible and scalable. George Mason offers open MHFA training sessions throughout the year to faculty, staff, students, and alumni, and has embedded MHFA into its academic offerings through a credit-bearing course (UNIV 372). This institutional model illustrates how mental health training can function not only as compliance but as workforce development and student engagement infrastructure.

Implementation & Outcomes:

To strengthen consistency and statewide impact, SCHEV should convene a cross-functional working group composed of students, student affairs vice presidents, human resources professionals, campus mental health directors, and risk management leaders. The group's charge would be to identify high-impact student-facing roles that should receive MHFA training beyond those already mandated and to establish minimum standards for qualifying programs. Such standards should require that approved programs be nationally recognized, credential-bearing, evidence-based, and include at least six to eight hours of training with crisis recognition and referral protocols, along with a defined recertification cycle. Clarifying these standards would reduce ambiguity in statutory language and ensure uniform learning outcomes across institutions of higher education.

A tiered implementation framework would provide structure and scalability. Tier One would include roles already mandated by law, such as resident assistants and intercollegiate athletics coaches. Tier Two would strongly recommend certification for high-impact student-facing positions, including academic advisors, campus police, financial aid staff, first-year experience personnel, and athletic trainers. Tier Three would incentivize participation among students in career-connected fields such as education, nursing, public health, and social work, thereby aligning SCHEV's workforce and career readiness priorities.

Institutions should consider expanding mental health training into their six-year plans or professional development programs. Measurable outcomes should accompany

implementation. Recommended metrics include the percentage of student-facing staff certified, reductions in time-to-referral for students in distress, improvements in student perceptions of institutional support, and reductions in crisis-level escalations. Framing this initiative as both a student well-being strategy and a risk mitigation and retention measure will strengthen its policy viability.

SAC Student Engagement Subcommittee Recommendation:

SAC calls for SCHEV to convene a working group of students, student affairs vice presidents, human resource professionals, etc. that is charged with evaluating which classified/professional staff and student staff roles at institutions of higher education should receive the MHFA training (or a meaningful industry-recognized, credential-bearing alternative) and present an implementation plan to SCHEV and other appropriate higher education stakeholders.

Recommendation 4: More Sports Psychologists for Student-Athletes

"It's one thing to be trained in mental health, it's another to be trained to support student-athletes" - Anka Whelan, student-athlete alumnus of George Mason's Women's Swimming and Diving team.

Background:

Student-athletes experience distinct mental health challenges shaped by the demands of collegiate athletics and the structure of their college experience. The dual role of being both a student and an athlete creates a unique set of pressures, such as performance expectations, rigorous training schedules, public visibility, and limited personal time, which influence their well-being in ways that differ from their non-athlete peers. Student-athletes navigate a different mental health landscape that reflects the specific responsibilities, expectations, and cultural dynamics of collegiate sports.

As students, student-athletes face traditional student mental health concerns including academic anxiety over exams, homesickness, and financial anxiety related to tuition and housing. For student-athletes, academic concerns are intensified by the demands of their athletic schedules. Beyond managing coursework and exams, they must fit academic responsibilities around rigorous practices and competitions. While it is often assumed that student-athletes receive substantial scholarships, many receive only

partial or no athletic funding. As a result, they may experience financial anxiety like other students, but with less time available for work or paid internships due to their athletic commitments.

Student-athletes also face mental health concerns stemming from their athletic experiences. According to the NCAA's 2016 GOALS report, one-third of student-athletes report struggling to manage non-athletic tasks due to the physical demands of their sport, and many face a significant risk of burnout. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association, transitions into or out of a sport—due to injury, academics, transfer, or graduation—can be especially distressing for student-athletes, often resulting in identity loss, depression, and other mental health challenges. The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders reports that approximately 25% of student-athletes struggle with eating disorders, with those in weight-sensitive sports such as swimming, track and field, and dance being particularly vulnerable. In addition, performance anxiety—driven by both internal pressure and external expectations from coaches, peers, and the public—can lead student-athletes to feel they must choose between athletic success and their mental and physical well-being.

Due to the unique mental health challenges inherent in the student-athlete collegiate experience, student-athletes require specialized support best provided by sports psychologists. However, Virginia institutions of higher education represented by SAC most commonly employ between zero and one dedicated sports psychologist. Outliers include Virginia Commonwealth University, the University of Virginia, and Virginia Tech, all of whom employ several. Through engagement with student-athletes across SAC institutions, SAC has identified the need for additional sports psychologists, particularly at institutions without them or with disproportionate athlete-to-provider ratios. These findings align with guidance from the National Collegiate Athletic Association, which, while not mandating their employment, affirms the importance of qualified mental health providers in athletics.

Sports psychologists are uniquely trained to address athlete-specific mental health concerns. According to the American Psychological Association, they support student-athletes navigating transitions into and out of sport, eating disorders, performance-related mental barriers, and related challenges. Student-athletes contributing to this

report emphasized that this specialized training cannot be fully replicated by other providers typically found in campus counseling centers.

Implementation & Outcomes:

To address this gap, the General Assembly should develop formal guidance recommending sports psychologist–to–student-athlete ratios, such as one full-time equivalent provider per 300 to 400 student-athletes or a tiered ratio based on NCAA division and athlete population. Establishing a ratio framework would introduce objective standards while preserving institutional flexibility. In parallel, SCHEV should create a competitive, time-limited grant program to assist institutions of higher education in recruiting and retaining qualified sports psychologists. Grants could require institutional matching contributions and outcome reporting to ensure sustainability beyond the initial funding period.

Qualification standards should be clearly articulated to prevent dilution of the role. Recommended personnel should hold appropriate licensure and demonstrate specialization in sport psychology, including expertise in athlete transitions, burnout, eating disorder risk, and performance-related distress. Institutions with smaller athlete populations may explore shared regional providers or tele-sport psychology models to ensure equitable access.

Implementation should be accompanied by measurable indicators, including reductions in athlete wait times for mental health services, improvements in athlete-to-provider ratios, changes in reported burnout and distress levels, and non-athletics-transfer retention trends among student-athletes. By framing the expansion of sports psychologists as both a student well-being initiative and a retention and risk management strategy, SCHEV can align this recommendation with its broader responsiveness and institutional performance objectives.

SAC Student Engagement Subcommittee Recommendation:

SAC calls for SCHEV to provide guidance to Virginia institutions of higher education on personnel needs for supporting student-athlete mental health, including assessments of how many sports psychologists each institution of higher education should have relative to their student-athlete populations. SCHEV should establish a competitive

grant for institutions to secure additional funding for recruitment and retention of sports psychologists to support student-athlete mental health.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Aligning with SCHEV's mission and its new strategic goals, SAC advocates for the implementation of recommendations to improve the student experience and student outcomes across all Virginia institutions of higher education to the greatest extent. Three subcommittees were developed in response to concerns demonstrated across the Commonwealth.

The Finance subcommittee drafted three recommendations: to improve food affordability and access through food pantries, on-campus food diversion, and subsidized meal programs, to expand mobility and transportation, and to increase flexible academic and administrative access. These recommendations address various constraints to student finances through pathways outside of tuition and scholastic assistance. The Workforce Readiness subcommittee proposed a statewide classroom guest speakers portal, a NACE competency incorporation within SCHEV student learning assessment, and an expansion of the Commonwealth Innovative Internship Fund to close the student barrier gap. To boost student belonging throughout higher education, the Student Engagement committee developed recommendations of implementing a third spaces survey within the PIV program, promoting self-advocacy for students with disabilities, administering an expansion of mental health first aid training, and increasing access to sport psychologists for student athletes. These recommendations seek to support various student groups often overlooked. It is important to resolve issues of belonging, student finances, and workforce readiness through solutions utilized and scaled across the Commonwealth in hopes to broaden its impact for all students. Innovative and structured solutions are the best pathways to addressing these key aspects affecting student success within higher education.

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SAC is thankful for the support the committee has received from stakeholders in higher education across the Commonwealth. This includes Del. Brianna Sewell, Chair of the Higher Education Subcommittee within the House of Delegates' Education Committee, who presented remarks to and engaged with SAC members at the committee's January meeting, and all policymakers who support student leadership and engagement within higher education policymaking. It also includes countless faculty, staff, and fellow students who have supported SAC members in the committee's work throughout the year. Among student peers, SAC recognizes George Mason University students Adam Rizzoli, Sofie Strompf, Anka Whelan, and June Johnson for their subject-matter expertise and insights contributed to the writing process of several recommendations presented by SAC. SAC also recognizes James Madison University student Grace Treml, who attended and contributed to a SAC planning meeting in lieu of a member from her institution that was unable to attend.

Finally, SAC commends all its members for their time, talent, and dedication invested collectively toward the advancement of our shared mission and contributions to this work. Members during the 2024-2026 academic year are listed here: Emily McKenna

and Michael Messeh from Christopher Newport University, Matt Swenson and Tom Chesnut from the College of Wiliam and Mary, Jonathan Dubois and Zayd Hamid from George Mason University, Ana Otalora Reyes and Christopher Sheler from Germanna Community College, Katrina Finch from Hollins University, Charlotte Bronaugh and Laila Masumi from James Madison University, Grace Ashbrook and Cameron Lowery from Longwood University, Lena Bryan and Isabella Norman from Norfolk State University, Ryan Arsenault and Isabella Aversano from Northern Virginia Community College, Je'Nae Hill and Akellia Niquet Francis from Old Dominion University, Abdul Nazary from Piedmont Virginia Community College, Ashley Glover and Jake Weiss from Radford University, Usra Jabri from Richard Bland College, John Houlahan from Riverside College of Health Sciences, Shaana Thomas and Daryl Davis Jr. from The Apprentice School, Trajan Waddy from the University of Lynchburg, Adam McAninley and Amira Said from the University of Mary Washington, Kathleen Pham and Vivian Sivers from the University of Virginia, Dauntae Keys and Sydney Fleming from the University of Virginia – College at Wise, Anne Skelton and Tobi Ojo from Virginia Commonwealth University, Nolan Savard from Virginia Military Institute, Anusha Dhungana and Emma Roshioru from Virginia Tech, Matt Swenson and Tom Chesnut from the College of William and Mary, and Bryan Butler from Wytheville Community College.

APPENDIX 1. TIME POVERTY SURVEY OF STUDENTS AT VIRGINIA INSTITUTES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Table 1. Demographic Breakdown and Activities that Contribute to Time Poverty

Affiliation	Percentage
Christopher Newport University	11.9%
George Mason University	40.3%
Piedmont Virginia Community College	31.3%
Virginia Commonwealth University	16.4%
Year in School	**Percentage**
First	15.2%
Second	19.7%
Third	25.8%
Fourth+	19.7%
Graduate	19.7%
Number of Current Enrollment Hours	**Percentage**
0-5	9%
6-11	25.4%
12-15	44.8%
>15	20.9%
Hours of Work (Per Week)	**Percentage**
0	13.4%
1-5	7.5%
6-9	14.9%
10-19	19.4%
20-29	26.9%
³30	17.9%
Commute Method	**Percentage**
Personal Vehicle/Car	52.5%
Bus	9%
Bike	3%
On Foot	23.9%
Another Person Drop-off/Pick-up	1.5%
N/A (Live on Campus)	12%
Length of Commute (Minutes)	**Percentage**
0-9	38.5%
10-19	21.5%
20-40	30.8%
>40	9.2%
Length of Time before Returning to Campus if Needing to Leave for Any Reason (Minutes)	**Percentage**
0-14	23.4%
15-29	20.3%
30-60	25%
>60	12.5%
Cannot Return Once I Leave	18.8%
Biggest Drain of Time Outside of Academic Pursuits on a Weekly Basis	**Percentage**
Work	62.1%
Commuting	10.6%
Food Access or Food Cost	7.6%

Healthcare Access	4.5%
Other	15%
Hours Lost Per Week	**Percentage**
0	10.4%
1-2	13.4%
3-5	19.4%
5-10	17.9%
>10	38.8%

Table 2. Number of Missed Academic Pursuits over the Last Two Weeks due to a Conflicting Obligation

Obligation	0	1	2-3	3-4
Work	53.7%	20.9%	20.9%	4.5%
Commuting or Transportation	65.7%	26.9%	4.5%	3%
Caregiving	85.1%	7.5%	4.5%	3%
Expensive or Limited Food Options	75.8%	10.6%	9.1%	4.5%
Seeking Off-Campus Medical Care	74.6%	14.9%	7.5%	3%