



# What Matters Most

Critical Student Issues Impacting their Higher Education Experience, Persistence and Completion

November 2022



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Events over the past three years sharpened the focus on what matters most to Americans. For higher education, students matter the most and have long been the focus of higher education leadership. The need, however, has never been more acute to provide students the necessary supports for a positive higher education experience, their persistence and completion.

Identified through the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia's (SCHEV) study of student issues and support services, the issues that matter the most to Virginia higher ed students include: 1) college/life preparedness; 2) basic needs; 3) sense of belonging; and 4) mental health and well-being. These four core student issues impacting their higher education experience, persistence and completion have endured for many years.

What has changed: the events over the past few years, especially during the pandemic, catapulted these concerns to the forefront and exacerbated them. On any given week, the media or an academic article/publication highlights one of these student issues. No one can deny their significance or the tremendous work being done across the nation and, in particular at Virginia's higher education institutions, to address these challenges to support students.

To achieve the goals of *Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan for Higher Education*, SCHEV seeks to identify critical student issues, as well as the challenges institutions face when addressing them, and formulate recommendations at the institution and state/system levels that improve the student experience, persistence and completion. Through this examination, SCHEV also highlights efforts currently underway in Virginia and beyond that positively affect these student issues while shoring up additional work in this area to close completion gaps by strengthening student support services.

Recommendations derive from quantitative and qualitative input: extensive stakeholder and subject matter expert engagement; identification of best practices; and a review of academic research and mainstream literature. The two cross-cutting recommendations provide necessary structure for ongoing implementation, collaboration and innovation across all four student issue areas.

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## Cross-Cutting Recommendations

(apply to all four issue areas)

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### General Recommendation

Convene a statewide consortium of student affairs vice presidents to exchange best practices, offer continual input on issues, policy and practice recommendations, and implementation.

### System-level Recommendation

Implement state - “system”- level efficiencies to create economies of scale, foster collaboration, innovation and maximize impact.

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## Issue-Specific Recommendations

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### Student Issues

### General Recommendations

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#### **College/Life Preparedness**

- Improve the transitions between high school and college and life after college.

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#### **Basic Needs**

- Take advantage of the flexibility granted to states in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit and award criteria.
- Expand student usage of SNAP benefits.
- Broaden the definition of and supports for basic needs to include broadband, digital access, childcare for college students who are parents, and accommodations for students with disabilities.

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#### **Sense of Belonging**

- Focus resources and efforts on marginalized student groups, including first-generation students and students with disabilities, recognizing such efforts will benefit all students.
- Promote a culture of free expression by developing skills in effective dialogue across differences.

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#### **Mental Health & Well-being**

- Provide additional mental health resources to students, faculty and staff and reduce burdens on institutions, communities and the mental health workforce.

Issue-specific recommendations are intentionally general just as the ideas for implementation are intentionally specific – these topics are multifaceted. The sections that follow provide a closer look at the four student issues, recommendations and detailed ideas for implementation via policy and practice.

This report serves as a catalyst for further action by the institutions, SCHEV and the Commonwealth on what matters most to higher ed students.

## PREAMBLE

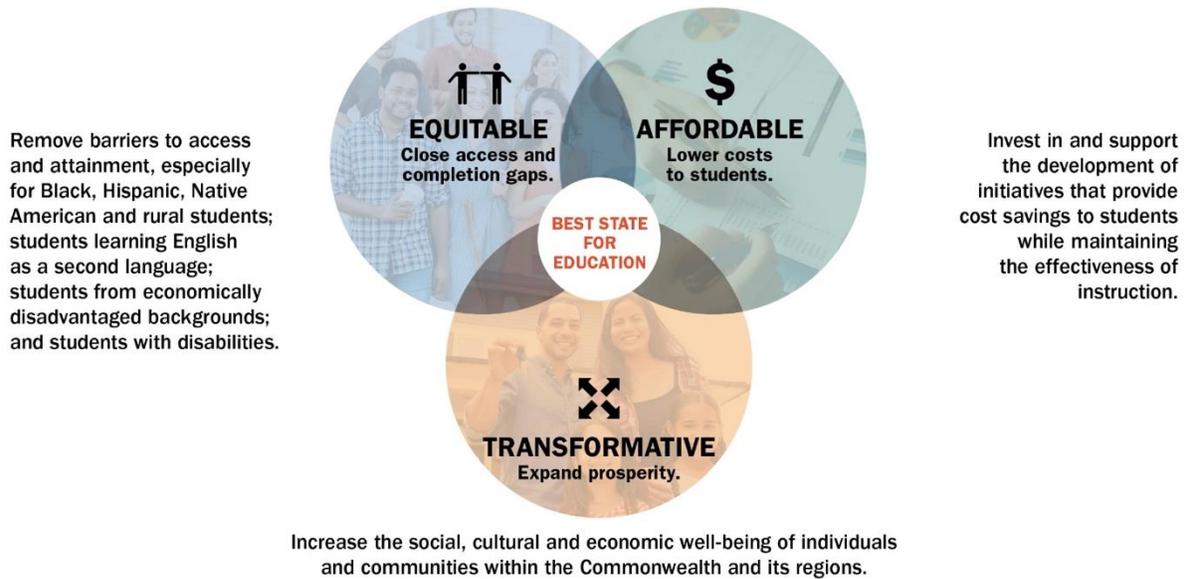
Students are the core of higher education – simply put – they are what matters most. At its best, higher education and “college” transforms students, equipping them with life-long learning skills, a degree in hand, and well-rounded academic coursework, experiences and advising to prepare for life and a career. Critical student issues, however, challenge this transformation by affecting their higher education experience, persistence (staying in “college”) and completion (finishing “college”). By default, then those issues matter the most.

This report and the contents therein seeks to identify those critical student issues, as well as the challenges that institutions face when addressing them, and formulate recommendations at the institution and state/system levels that improve the student experience, persistence and completion.

The context for the review and the process for issue identification are intentionally brief to elevate what matters most – the critical student issues. Appendix A offers more details on the background and process through which critical student issues and the challenges institutions face in addressed them were identified.

## Background

The *Code of Virginia* charges the State Council of Higher Education (SCHEV) with multiple responsibilities, the first of which includes developing and updating a statewide strategic plan for higher education. SCHEV developed the most recent statewide strategic plan, [\*Pathways to Opportunity: The Virginia Plan for Higher Education\*](#), during the height of the pandemic. As a result, the plan focuses on students and student success above all else with ambitious, inclusive and interlinked goals of equitable, affordable and transformative higher education, a vision to be the “best state for education” and to achieve 70% educational attainment by 2030.



The Plan’s equitable goal focuses on closing access and completion gaps with corresponding strategies to achieve the goal that include strengthening student support services.

To lead by example and work toward achieving these ambitious goals, SCHEV Council adopted nine biennial initiatives in fall 2021. One of those initiatives aims to strengthen student support services by identifying critical student-support-services issues and formulating recommendations that will positively affect the student experience, persistence and completion. The initiative is referred to as “What Matters Most.”

## Process

The scope of this initiative is inherently broad – identifying a range of issues that affect the student experience, persistence and completion in higher education, as well as the challenges that institutions (student support services) face when working to address those issues. To identify the issues and challenges and derive institution level and state/“system” level recommendations, SCHEV obtained quantitative and qualitative input over a months-long process. Appendix A provides a detailed look at the process.

## Quantitative Input

A comprehensive but not exhaustive review of academic research and mainstream literature informed issue identification and validation of what matters most. Appendix B offers a bibliography documenting this review.

The research and literature review encompassed best practices that informed potential recommendations and ideas for implementation. Best practices reflect those institutional or

state/system level efforts with quantifiable positive impacts as implemented by specific institutions, systems or states (i.e., policy) with a particular focus on the Commonwealth.

### **Qualitative Input**

Qualitative input complemented the review of academic research and mainstream literature via an array of stakeholders' perspectives. Most important to this effort is the perspective of students. Deep and broad conversations with students occurred throughout the review. Student input was obtained primarily from SCHEV's Student Advisory Committee (SAC). The SAC is a collection of students appointed by their respective higher education institutions representing the student bodies of two-year, four-year, public and private institutions in Virginia. The SAC offered their collective student body and personal perspectives via two annual surveys, routine committee agenda items on issues of importance, and multiple facilitated discussions related specifically to this effort, including a discussion with SCHEV Council members. This input helped to identify the most critical issues, recommendations and ideas to implement the recommendations.

It is important to acknowledge that SCHEV does not possess a student affairs unit as part of its organizational structure. Subject-matter expert input played an important part of this process to identify issues, challenges and recommendations. In addition to the SAC – students as their own subject matter experts – SCHEV engaged subject matter experts at Virginia institutions and beyond.

SCHEV engaged in extensive, repeated dialogue with personnel at Virginia institutions (public & private; two-year & four-year) including but not limited to:

- Deans of Students
- Student Affairs Vice Presidents
- Admissions Vice Presidents
- Student Support Services administrators, faculty and staff (i.e., counseling staff, academic coaches, residence life, student engagement, inclusion, campus safety, accommodations) – varied by institution.

SCHEV sought additional subject matter experts in Virginia and beyond to round out the input. Clinicians, researchers and advocacy groups weighed in. Complementing this initiative, SCHEV participated in the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Student Success Advisory Council which offered a regional perspective on issues and best practices.

Stakeholder and subject matter expert input followed an iterative process: student issue and institutional challenge identification; best practices/initiatives positively impacting the student issues; development of draft recommendations and potential policy and practice means to implement the recommendations at both institution and state/system levels. At each of these “steps,” input was shared with the various stakeholders for further refinement. This included input from and updates to SCHEV Council members and the various advisory committees SCHEV convenes.

Appendix A details the line of questions, schedule of interviews/input, etc.

## STUDENT ISSUES – WHAT MATTERS MOST

Four issues gained traction unanimously as “what matters most” to a student’s higher education experience, persistence and completion. These issues may not offer any surprises, and while separate issues, collectively influence each other. General stakeholder and subject matter expert consensus indicated all four as the most critical issues in part because of their linkages; one cannot be effectively addressed without including the others.

1. **College/Life Preparedness**
2. **Basic Needs**
3. **Sense of Belonging**
4. **Mental Health & Well-being**

A closer look at each student issue and its importance in terms of the student experience, persistence and completion follows.

### **Critical Student Issues Impacting Their Experience, Persistence and Completion**

#### **College and Life Preparedness**

College and life preparedness can encompass many elements. Students may/may not experience challenges associated with any/all of these elements or do so to varying degrees. For students to stay in “college” and complete their program of study/obtain their degree they need to: understand what college does/does not provide, be able to self-advocate and navigate through their higher education experience, possess certain study habits, academic proficiencies and resolve. These may be developed prior to and cultivated throughout their higher education experience.

As they navigate toward life after college, in addition to academic skills and competencies necessary for a career, students must possess a certain degree of life skills to positively weather the transition to independent adulthood.

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The average K-12 student in Virginia  
**lost 15 weeks of math instruction and 11 weeks of reading instruction**  
through fall 2021 due to pandemic-related disruptions  
Source: Georgetown University Economics Lab

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The pandemic and sharp shift to remote learning, then back to in-person classes, adversely impacted students from socio-emotional, developmental/life experiences and academic perspectives. A recent Joint Legislative Audit Review Commission (JLARC) draft [study](#) referenced that the average K-12 student in Virginia lost 15 weeks of math instruction and 11 weeks of reading instruction through fall 2021 due to pandemic-related disruptions.

Key elements of college and life preparedness impact the college experience, persistence, as well as completion and include:

### ***Expectation Setting***

In its most basic sense, expectation setting refers to what higher education does/does not provide. This includes a general understanding of the higher education experience and all it entails, what is expected of the student vs. the institution with a growth mindset, and increased independence as part of the transition to college and to life after college.

For students with disabilities, expectations include a shift to self-advocacy to obtain any necessary accommodations. In this regard, higher education can find ways to streamline or improve the transition and clearly communicate expectations and processes.

### ***Resilience***

Resilience is otherwise known as “grit” or “resolve” and the ability to learn and move past failure or challenges in positive ways. In other words, it is a student’s ability to deal with life or academic challenges with an asset approach (this will make the student better or stronger) vs. a deficit approach (internalization of failure as a character flaw that cannot be overcome).

Aspects of resilience and resiliency skills include goal setting, setting boundaries and internal motivation. Resilience impacts mental health and well-being and vice versa.

### ***Independent Living***

Part of the “college” experience for most students includes a shift to more independent living. Important aspects of independent living include:

**Study Skills:** How to take notes, study, prepare for tests, projects, produce projects and papers.

**Time management:** How to balance coursework and classes with work and other life obligations. How to prepare for and meet deadlines.

**Electronic device management:** This includes time management and social skill aspects along with etiquette and appropriate use for and during class.

**Home economics:** How to prepare basic meals, do laundry, clean and care for a dorm room/apartment or other form of residence.

**Financial literacy:** Basic budgeting skills, how to set a budget, maintain a budget, etc.

**Social skills:** How to live and work with other people including conflict resolution. How to get involved on campus/in a community.

## Basic Needs

Basic needs typically constitute food and housing security. Meaning, that students have adequate food and housing/shelter. However, as both higher education and its student population are changing, basic needs can and arguably should also include: digital and computer device access (i.e., broadband and personal computer as evidenced by Covid-19-induced remote learning); childcare for student who are also parents; and accommodations for students with disabilities.

With inflation and a tight housing market, students, particularly those historically underserved, are more vulnerable to food, housing, digital/device access and childcare insecurity. For students with disabilities, accommodations are basic needs in order to learn and even reside on campus.

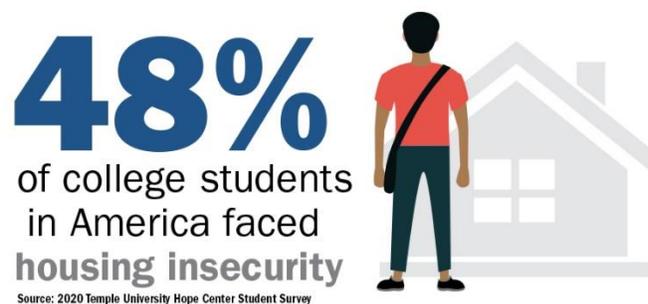
The ability of students to obtain these basic needs is impacted by the expenses they bear to attend college such as: tuition and fees, cost of books, add-on expenses and emergency expenses that crop up (i.e., medical bills, car repairs, helping a family member in need). More spent on college expenses translates to less spent on basic needs; this holds true across the above identified basic needs.

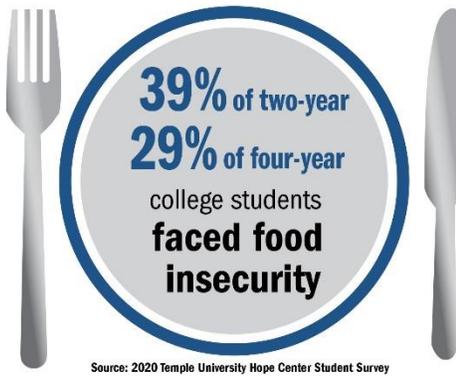
Students lacking a basic need: food, housing, digital/device, childcare or accommodations not only face obstacles affecting their higher education experience, persistence and completion but also to seeing themselves as students, as part of their institution. Shame and stigma set in for these students – who may be embarrassed and reluctant to seek help. This in turn, can impact their mental health and well-being, as well as sense of belonging.

### Food and Housing

Study after study shows students cannot learn on empty stomachs or when they are worried where they will sleep or when they will eat. Food and housing insecure college students are simply trying to survive, and getting by in college becomes secondary. If they don't have the supports to stay the course, any such insecurities will snow ball – hungry or homeless students leaving higher education with debt but no degree.

A [Fall 2020 survey](#) by Temple University's Hope Center, indicated that 48 percent of college students in America faced housing insecurity with 39 percent of two-year and 29 percent of four-year college students surveyed facing food insecurity.





Using the Virginia Longitudinal Data System (VLDS), a match of college student records with SNAP records identified nearly 61,000 students at Virginia’s institutions of higher education (IHEs) as eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) but not receiving benefits. This translates to \$9.1 million/year of resources “left on the table.” Through improved student usage of SNAP, this can then free up resources provided by IHEs

for other students or offer an additional layer of food security for SNAP-eligible students.

### ***Broadband/Device Access and Childcare***

The pandemic-induced lockdowns and shift to remote learning created additional basic needs for students. In order to attend virtual classes and complete coursework, students needed access to digital devices and broadband. Without such, course completion was challenging if not impossible.

Access to childcare has been a growing issue nationwide and affects student parents. During the pandemic as schools went virtual and childcare closed, students struggled to balance coursework, life and work with childcare responsibilities. Coming out on the other side, the pandemic adversely impacted the supply of childcare options for parents across the board and drove up the cost. Compounded by inflation, affordable, accessible child care is out of reach for many. Decisions must be made to stay in school or stay at home with a child or children. Quality, affordable childcare is a basic need for college students who are parents.

### ***Accommodations for Students with Disabilities***

The K-12 system provides a support infrastructure for students with disabilities. This includes regular assessments, transportable documentation on disabilities and accommodations to meet students’ needs. Staff facilitate the accommodations requests and practices, advocating for the student and the student’s family.

Once a student exits the secondary education system, this infrastructure disappears. Students moving into higher education must provide necessary documentation and independently navigate the “system” to obtain accommodations, as well as self-advocate for those accommodations to be fulfilled. These needs don’t occur once or twice but are required and vary for every course and faculty member each semester. For students with disabilities, accommodations are not “privileges” but rather basic needs in order to learn, stay and successfully complete college.

## Sense of Belonging

A student's higher education experience is greater than the sum of its parts. In particular, the experiences above and beyond academics. Higher education institutions embody a community of learning. Just as critical as academic success is a student's sense of belonging and engagement in the institution's learning community. A pre-pandemic, five-year study by Wendy Fischman and Howard Gardner revealed that of the 1,000 college students interviewed, more than a third expressed alienation from academics, peers and their colleges.



While students can struggle with finding their place in that learning community, marginalized student groups face the most obstacles in seeing themselves as belonging to that community. Students who feel out of place on campus feel out of place in class, impacting persistence and completion not to mention their overall higher education experience. Students lacking basic needs, first-generation students, students with disabilities and other typically underserved students struggle to see themselves (figuratively and literally) in higher education.

Sense of belonging distills into two main aspects: 1) belonging to the higher education learning community and 2) navigating through the system.

### **Belonging**

Belonging to a higher education learning community can entail: feeling welcome (students can see themselves attending college and fitting into that learning community); finding and establishing a social network; engaging in campus life and making personal connections to academics and coursework.

### **Navigating**

A student's ability to navigate through higher education affects their sense of belonging. Does the student know how to maneuver through the system in order to access necessary services (i.e., financial aid, bursar's office, advising, course enrollment, student support services)? Can the student then access those services? Students can internalize difficulties along the way (navigating the institution and accessing services) as they just don't belong. This notion of internalizing any navigation challenges is particularly acute for historically underserved students. Many first generation and basic needs-insecure students experience imposter syndrome and/or significant guilt in leaving other family members behind or

sacrificing basic needs. These feelings can affect their mental health and well-being, as well as persistence and completion.

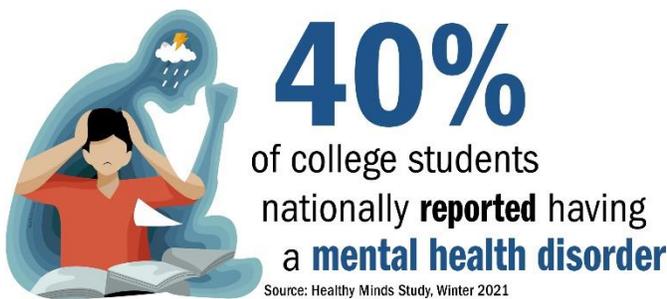
### **Unique Obstacles**

Different student populations face unique obstacles to belonging at a higher education institution. For students with disabilities come new responsibilities to self-advocate, request and obtain any necessary accommodations for multiple classes each semester. Non-traditional students (i.e., adult learners, community college transfers, exiting military) may enter an institution at a different time – second, third or fourth year and may be required to navigate additional services. Different entry points for these non-traditional students makes it more challenging to feel welcome, find and establish social networks typically formed the first semester of the first year.

Simply put, belonging is vital to a student’s higher education experience, persistence and completion.

### **Mental Health and Well-being**

Not only did the pandemic exacerbate an ongoing mental health crisis but it also heightened awareness and the importance of mental health and well-being. The mental health needs of the general population and college-aged youth in particular have been mounting for years.



Virginia college students represent a particularly vulnerable population with unique challenges that must be addressed. “College” often marks a transition toward independent living, self-awareness and self-advocacy. Coupled with this transition, in 2021, 40 percent of college students

nationally reported having a mental health disorder (Source: [Healthy Minds Study, Winter 2021](#)). The Centers for Disease Control similarly reported the largest increases in mental health problems for those ages 18 to 29.

Mental health and well-being tremendously influence a student’s higher education experience, persistence and completion, let alone quality of life. Elements to tackle this critical issue include 1) adequate and effective prevention via health and wellness activities; 2) awareness, education and training; as well as 3) provision of services for proper diagnosis, treatment and management. These elements are challenged by nationwide and statewide behavioral health workforce shortages that cannot be solved overnight.

## **Prevention**

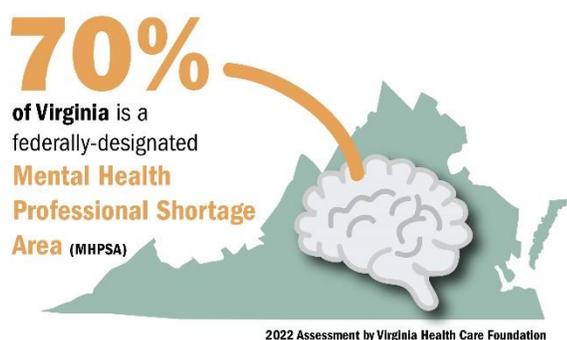
Work to address the previous three student issues of college/life preparedness; basic needs; and sense of belonging will go a long way in supporting student mental health and well-being. Additional prevention and overall well-being efforts can help students positively cope with life stresses (and academic stress), establish or reinforce good eating, sleeping and exercise habits, as well as mindfulness. Prevention efforts also can include education about negative coping mechanisms (uncontrolled anger, drug use, alcohol abuse).

## **Awareness/Education/Training**

Despite increased general awareness of mental health and well-being, there is a need for more awareness and knowledge of general signs and symptoms via training and education of students, faculty and staff. Lack of awareness of services on campus or how to connect a student in need also remains a challenge. A final piece of this challenge is the stigma associated with seeking mental health care. Despite the heightened attention resulting from the pandemic, some students are reluctant to seek help or are so overwhelmed by their circumstances or condition that they cannot seek help themselves.

## **Provision of Services**

When a student wants to seek help, access can be challenging in multiple ways. First, knowing how and where to go to seek help and second, obtaining the mental health care needed in a timely manner. Good prevention, awareness and training efforts cannot combat behavioral workforce shortages and increased need for mental health services.



Seventy percent (70%) of Virginia is a federally-designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Area (MHPSA), with nearly 40% of Virginians living in these communities. To meet the needs of their students, Virginia's higher education institutions seek to provide mental health services to students. On both the qualitative and quantitative fronts, institutions

face an uphill battle to attract and retain a mental health care workforce on campus. Their student health and counseling centers must compete with private sector compensation and address staff burnout, secondary trauma and compassion fatigue.

With a growing need for services by students with new onset, pre-existing and crisis mental health conditions, a lack of qualified mental health workers compounds the challenge to grow capacity both on campuses and across the Commonwealth and meet immediate and long-term needs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS – WHAT MATTERS MOST

To help close completion gaps, SCHEV seeks to strengthen student support services. The previous section detailed the critical student issues affecting the student experience, persistence and completion and serves as the call to action on what matters most. The second, and perhaps more important part of SCHEV’s effort, focuses on recommendations for action and how those recommendations can be implemented via practice and policy at the institutional and statewide or “system” levels to help address these four critical issues.

The recommendations build off of the tremendous work already being done by Virginia’s institutions of higher education to support students. Virginia’s institutions deserve recognition for their tireless work, in particular, over the past three years.

A few important acknowledgements help to ground the recommendations.

1. No “quick fixes” or comprehensive fixes exist to address these issues entirely in the near-term and long-term. The recommendations reflect this reality with the intention to build on the significant work being done in Virginia and by Virginia’s higher education institutions.
2. The recommendations account for the diversity of Virginia’s higher education institutions which serves as a strength and a challenge in that “one size does not fit all.”
3. Complementary efforts addressing various student issues are currently underway across Virginia including work by Governor Youngkin, the Council of Presidents, the Claude Moore Foundation, and Virginia21. SCHEV is familiar with and to various extents, collaborating on these efforts, and sharing insights gained from this review.

The following two tables summarize the recommendations. The first table identifies recommendations that cut across all four student issue areas. These recommendations provide necessary structure for ongoing implementation, collaboration and innovation across all four student issue areas.

### **Cross-Cutting Recommendations** (apply to all four issue areas)

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#### **General Recommendation**

Convene a statewide consortium of student affairs vice presidents to exchange best practices, offer continual input on issues, policy and practice recommendations, and implementation.

#### **System-level Recommendation**

Implement state - “system”- level efficiencies to create economies of scale, foster collaboration, innovation and maximize impact.

Issue-specific recommendations are intentionally general just as the ideas for implementation are intentionally specific – these topics are multifaceted.

### Issue-Specific Recommendations

| Student Issues                        | General Recommendations  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <b>College/Life Preparedness</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the transitions between high school and college and life after college.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Basic Needs</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take advantage of the flexibility granted to states in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit and award criteria.</li> <li>• Expand student usage of SNAP benefits.</li> <li>• Broaden the definition of and supports for basic needs to include broadband, digital access, childcare for college students who are parents, and accommodations for students with disabilities.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Sense of Belonging</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus resources and efforts on marginalized student groups, including first-generation students and students with disabilities, recognizing such efforts will benefit all students.</li> <li>• Promote a culture of free expression by developing skills in effective dialogue across differences.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Mental Health &amp; Well-being</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide additional mental health resources to students, faculty and staff and reduce burdens on institutions, communities and the mental health workforce.</li> </ul>   |

The sections that follow provide a closer look at each recommendation and detailed ideas for implementation via policy and practice.

### Cross-Cutting Recommendations

To effectively and efficiently implement recommendations for each of the four student issues, current networks and structures need to be leveraged. It will take a collaborative effort by multiple organizations to implement these changes successfully.

#### General Recommendation

##### What

*Convene a statewide consortium of student affairs vice presidents to exchange best practices, offer continual input on issues, policy and practice recommendations and implementation.*

##### How

A network (informal consortium) of student affairs vice presidents from two-year, four-year public and private institutions exists and meets on a regular basis to talk through issues, share ideas and support one another. This group, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators of Virginia Senior Student Affairs Officers (NASPA VA SSAO), informally

ramped up collaboration as a result of the pandemic. NASPA VA SSAO offered tremendous expertise and insight informing this review.

A missing component of this existing network is the ability to leverage that expertise to inform any state or system-level policy or practices for implementation, as well as incentivize any pilot best practices. Here, SCHEV can help fill this void aligning with its codified responsibility to establish a coordinated system of higher education.

The intent is to set up ongoing means with the NASPA VA SSAO group to obtain their input and advice on how to prioritize and implement the issue-specific recommendations. This group knows best where to focus and when.

This concept of a consortium or advisory group is not new to SCHEV as SCHEV regularly convenes formal advisory committees. The approach here can be less formal, not interfering with NASPA VA SSAO's internal conversations. Quarterly (or other frequency) meetings can be set to hear from the group on these issues, collaborate and set priorities for implementing recommendations from this review. Not all of the issue-specific recommendations can or should be acted on at once; this consortium can prioritize the roll out of actions and refine as necessary.

### **System-level Recommendation**

#### **What**

*Implement state - "system"- level efficiencies to create economies of scale, foster collaboration, innovation and maximize impact.*

#### **How**

The existing NASPA VA SSAO group exchanges issues and ideas for collaboration and innovation. Through ongoing engagement, SCHEV can facilitate action on these ideas via policy and budget recommendations and potential means to incentivize, pilot and scale best practices. To that end, both general and system-level recommendations are identified for each of the four student issues.

Insight gleaned from the NASPA VA SSAO highlights the need and desire for shared services via statewide contracts. Such creates economies of scale for efficiency, effectiveness and innovation across the system.

While SCHEV can leverage the Commonwealth's procurement processes to implement any shared service contracts or system-level contracts, other means exist. [The Virginia Higher Education Procurement Consortium](#) (VHEPC) leverages collective buying power to create efficiency and value for its member institutions; is guided by strategic sourcing principles; is

grounded in data analytics to drive the development of cooperative contracts; and provides a forum for schools to share learnings and best practices. VHEPC includes 13 four-year public member institutions, as well as the Virginia Community College System. Where and when appropriate, VHEPC's staff, resources and expertise should be used to implement system-level recommendations that create economies of scale.

## Issue-Specific Recommendations

The following issue-specific recommendations serve as an actionable roadmap of ideas to implement and complement work currently being done by Virginia's institutions to help close completion gaps, improve the student experience and persistence.

### College and Life Preparedness

Virginia's higher education institutions provide a variety of resources and programs to help students transition into college and toward more independent living. Additional efforts can further bolster the important work needed in this area to better prepare students for college and life.

#### General Recommendation

##### *What*

*Improve the transitions between high school and college and life after college.*

##### *How*

##### Policy ideas

- Identify and implement recommendations from Virginia's Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission's (JLARC) forthcoming dual enrollment review as appropriate.

Dual enrollment provides a means for high school students not only to obtain college credit for courses taken in high school but through doing so, helps set expectations for what college is like in terms of academic coursework.

##### Practice ideas

- Through the [GEAR UP Virginia](#) (GUV) initiative, support and expand the network of college advisers who connect with middle and high school students to navigate college expectations and equip them with life skills.

GUV, a grant program implemented by SCHEV, offers college preparatory services and skills development to middle and high school students with emphasis on serving a cohort of students in low-income communities. Services include: tutoring; mentoring; summer bridge programs for students transitioning to college; counseling and advising

related to college and career; academic preparedness for college, etc. GEAR UP is a proven national model for helping students prepare for and access higher education.

GUV places college advisers in high need schools where there is no local access provider. During the seven years of the grant, these newly placed college advisers support students through the process of researching college, applying to college, applying for financial aid, and ultimately deciding where to attend. Typically, school divisions recognize college advisers' contribution to their student's success and sustain the investment and partnership after GUV grant dollars and support are no longer available.

Supporting and expanding GUV's college adviser network will enable this program to serve more students across the Commonwealth and prepare them for what to expect in college and beyond high school.

Examine and consider other proven models for scaling across Virginia where and when appropriate. (See Appendix B.)

- Support adequate funding for school counselors for optimal K-12 counselor-to-student ratios. This will enable counselors to better serve students in terms of college and career advising, goal setting, resiliency and social skills. Existing counselor-to-student ratios along with growing mental health needs of students, stretch counselor's' abilities to sufficiently serve students in these comprehensive ways.

The [Virginia School Counselor Association](#) (VSCA) sets a policy agenda for the General Assembly session each year which can include advocating for smaller counselor-to-student ratios in line with best practices. Supporting these ratios will enable counselors to better prepare secondary students for college and life after high school.

## **System-level Recommendation**

### **What**

*Implement state-“system”- level efficiencies.*

### **How**

#### Practice ideas

- Develop principles and guidelines for accommodation practices for access to and success in higher education.

Students with disabilities experience unique obstacles when preparing for and accessing higher education. While institutions must meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

accommodations, no statewide principles or guidelines exist and accommodation practices are inconsistent within and across institutions.

SCHEV's Disabilities Access to Higher Education Advisory Committee is working to develop principles and guidelines for accommodation practices, offering a consistent framework for institutions to use while seeking to minimize burdensome practices that leave some students to give up accessing or completing higher education.

The guidelines can help with expectation setting for students with disabilities in terms of admissions requirements, documentation and obtaining accommodations while in higher education. In turn, this supports persistence and completion of students with disabilities. Subsequently, this effort reinforces a sense of belonging in terms of navigating services.

- Establish statewide training or “course” contracts for college students. Use system-level procurement resources such as the VHEPC to establish training and course contracts developed by and for use and modification across institutions. Such courses can address key college and life preparedness elements as: resiliency/goal setting; self-advocacy; summer bridge/expectation setting programs; study skills; “independent living” courses on home economics, financial literacy, etc.

Institutions can use these core courses and tailor/deploy based on their unique needs and student populations. This can also create more consistency in terms of fundamental content and efficiency so that each institution does not need to start from scratch. A few examples of such course platforms are included here.

<https://www.udemy.com/course/adulting/>

<https://www.wichita.edu/calendar/index.php?eID=5237>

<https://www.k-state.edu/lafene/programs/wellcat-ambassadors/events.html>

- Use available, existing resources produced by the state and tailor/deploy as appropriate for each institution. A survey of Virginia's IHE is also under way as directed by the General Assembly to assess student debt collection practices and current financial literacy services. Results of the survey can inform additional system-wide or specific institutional efforts as needed.

Existing financial literacy and student loan education materials, training modules and other resources include:

<https://www.schev.edu/students>

<https://www.schev.edu/students/applying-for-college>

<https://www.schev.edu/financial-aid/financial-aid>

<https://virginiastudentloanhelp.org/> (includes modules on budgeting, student loans, financial literacy etc.)

<https://www.schev.edu/students/making-decisions-about-college>

<https://www.ecmc.org/students/opportunities-guide-workbook.html>

## Basic Needs

Food pantries, meal swipe cards, campus thrift stores, emergency assistance grants and other campus and community resources help food and housing insecure students. Combined resources can help fill in the gaps but cannot completely address the broadening basic needs of students.

## General Recommendations

### What

*Take advantage of the flexibility granted to states in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit and award criteria.*

### How

#### Policy idea

- Formerly known as food stamps, SNAP is a federally funded monthly benefit available to individuals and households meeting predetermined asset and income criteria. College students enrolled at least half-time and participating in a local, state or on-the-job training program are exempt from the general ban of college students from SNAP. Virginia has flexibility in terms of interpreting these criteria. For example, expanding the definition of job-training programs to include the [Workforce Credential Grant](#) (WCG), [Get a Skill/Get a Job/Get Ahead](#) (G3 program) and other job training and internship programs as eligible on-the-job-training programs means more students meeting the pre-existing income criteria would be eligible.

Such a state policy action will enable students to complete a training program or other work-based learning opportunity while providing additional resources for food security. This is particularly critical for Virginia's community colleges that are not authorized to provide such support services to students, unlike their four-year public counterparts.

Recent federal legislation also temporarily allows students not to have to meet such exemptions, and instead now are eligible if they have a zero estimated family contribution (EFC) or are eligible for work-study.

## **What**

*Expand student usage of SNAP benefits.*

## **How**

### Practice ideas

- SCHEV can disseminate state-level materials and provide webinars that clearly articulate SNAP eligibility guidelines and the application process for students, including training higher education staff to identify and assist students directly with completing the process.

In addition to state flexibility in terms of benefit and award criteria, more training, awareness and identification of eligible students (estimated at around 61,000) is needed to ensure those students who are eligible can navigate the process and obtain the resources.

SCHEV in collaboration with other state partners such as the Department of Social Services (DSS), should develop a toolkit for institutions that outlines the eligibility guidelines and application process for students in an effort to improve awareness and education of key institutional staff. The development and offering of training webinars by SCHEV can help educate staff on the step-by-step application process so that they can directly assist students. Navigation of the SNAP application process, as well as the stigma of SNAP, can be deterrents for students unsure and unclear about how to apply.

- Institution use of financial aid data to identify eligible students for awareness of basic needs resources per letter of authorization from the federal government.

Many students do not know they are eligible for SNAP benefits or where to start to apply for those benefits. Recent communication from the federal government indicated institutions can use the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) information (usually reserved for financial aid) for two uses: 1) to confirm eligibility and 2) to estimate student eligibility to be used in direct outreach to students. This will help institutions identify potentially eligible students. Toolkit materials (referenced above) can be used by institutions to reach out to students identified via FAFSA and other means. The next step will be for institutions to help students navigate the application process.

Training, identification of students via FAFSA data, and targeted application assistance can improve student usage of SNAP benefits.

## System-level Recommendation

### What

*Implement state-“system”- level efficiencies.*

### How

#### Policy idea

- Establish a task force to explore affordable childcare options via a viable business model for students with consideration for a statewide subsidy based on income.

College students who are also parents face additional burdens impacting their higher education experience, persistence and completion. Institutions have tried numerous approaches to provide childcare to staff and students and struggle to make the business model work.

New ideas can be piloted to determine financial feasibility, sustainability and scaling. A few are summarized below as a starting point for a task force (composition as identified by NASPA VA SSAO) to consider.

Build upon statewide interest in experiential learning. Pilot student-intern staffed on-campus child care facilities to serve faculty, staff and students. Student interns from education, developmental psychology and other appropriate academic programs gain direct experience while providing a basic need for childcare. Consider incentivizing such pilots via statewide policies.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Education launched the [Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program](#) (CAMPIS). Use the NASPA VA SSAO group to share this opportunity widely across eligible institutions. [CAMPIS](#) offers competitive grants to support or establish campus-based childcare programs primarily serving the needs of low-income students enrolled in institutions of higher education. Grants also may be used to serve the child care needs of the community served by the institution. Consider steps to launch a similar, state-level program to fill in eligibility gaps.

#### Practice idea

- Explore a collective partnership with various housing vendors (regionally and/or statewide) to identify times of vacancies, minimize off-campus housing costs and vendors that can provide lower cost, quality off-campus housing and/or address food insecurity issues.

Through the consortium (NASPA VA SSAO) and the collective bargaining power made possible through the VHEPC, discussions can be facilitated regionally or statewide with

major off-campus housing providers (developers, real estate firms, community development groups, etc.) to better meet student and community needs in potentially creative ways to be determined. This abstract concept can enable out-of-the-box ideas to be generated, piloted and scaled where they meet all parties needs around quality, affordable housing.

## **Sense of Belonging**

A student's sense of belonging plays a powerful role in their overall higher education experience. The recommendations and implementation ideas below build off of the solid work being done at Virginia's higher education to foster this sense of belonging for all students.

### **General Recommendations**

#### ***What***

*Focus resources and efforts on marginalized student groups, including first generation students and students with disabilities, recognizing such efforts will benefit all students.*

#### ***How***

##### Policy idea

- Allocate adequate funding to enhance ADA compliance and accessibility of institutions' facilities given the growing population of students with disabilities.

The need for enhanced accessibility and ADA compliant-facilities should be quantified via institutions' six-year plans. The six-year planning process, as facilitated by SCHEV, serves as the vehicle for identifying, planning for and obtaining sufficient resources to meet these needs.

##### Practice ideas

- Statewide recognition and proclamation of [First-Generation College Celebration Day](#) (annually on November 8).

Institutions of higher education (IHEs) serve as proving grounds for successful programs to help students, in particular, marginalized student groups feel like they belong in higher education. One such area of focus has been around recognizing first-generation students and First-Generation College Celebration Day to raise awareness, foster a sense of belonging and pride. Building on this work, the Commonwealth should issue a proclamation recognizing this day, highlighting institutional efforts and activities as well as first-generation college graduates working for the Commonwealth.

- Implement priority actions from SCHEV's Action Plan to Address Higher Education Barriers faced by Students with Disabilities. Led by SCHEV's Disabilities Access to Higher Education Advisory Committee, work entails developing principles and guidelines for accommodation practices for access to and success in higher education. (See also ideas under basic needs section of this report.) Longer term work includes: 1) establishing transportable documentation processes for students seeking accommodations and 2) identifying and establishing universal design principles for incorporating accommodations into curriculum design.

### **What**

*Promote a culture of free expression by developing skills in effective dialogue across differences.*

### **How**

#### Practice ideas

- Participate in the [Constructive Dialogue Institute's](#) (CDI) Civic Evidence Project, forming a multi-campus cohort and community of practice to scale implementation. CDI helps educational institutions improve campus culture by providing tools and resources that demonstrably improve students' mindsets toward differences, thus reducing conflict, polarization and toxicity in communities. An outgrowth from SCHEV's summer 2022 Day of Dialogue on civic engagement includes potential statewide participation in CDI's Civic Evidence Project whereby a cohort of institutions would scale implementation of such lessons, strategies and efforts across their respective institutions and state more rapidly.

### **System-level Recommendation**

### **What**

*Implement state-"system"- level efficiencies.*

### **How**

#### Practice ideas

- Leverage use of technology platforms for student navigation of services and alert systems across institutions via a statewide contract.

Each institution uses some platform or tool for early alerts and/or students to navigate support services. Consider using the collective buying power of a statewide contract, such as facilitated by VHEPC, for various vendors to meet individual institution needs. This could be modeled after the TimelyMD system-level contract.

- Provide state-level training for Title IX service and various staff responding to Title IX complaints. To improve efficiency and reduce duplication of efforts while meeting a need, to fund, develop or outsource training development for use across institutions. With a variety of staff involved within any given institution and across institutions, all IHEs could benefit from available, consistent training for staff. Doing so at a system-level creates a shared benefit with the potential to share costs.

## **Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Unresolved matters associated with college/life preparedness, basic needs and sense of belonging impact the mental health and well-being of students. Unmanaged, pre-existing and new mental health conditions of students additionally affect their higher education experience, persistence and completion.

These issues compounded with behavioral health workforce shortages and the stigma make accessing care a challenge for all parties involved. The following recommendations and ideas for implementation account for these realities and complexities.

### **General Recommendations**

#### ***What***

*Provide additional mental health resources to students, faculty and staff to reduce burdens on institutions, communities and the mental health workforce.*

#### ***How***

##### Policy ideas

- Allocate greater funding toward the hiring, training and retention of mental health and well-being professionals at higher education institutions.

Assess the impact of the [Higher Education Mental Health Workforce Pilot](#) for creation of a permanent fund to support and scale across Virginia's higher education institutions. The pilot addresses immediate demand for services and the longer-term development of a mental health workforce serving higher education. Consider replicating or modeling the pilot for other types of mental health and well-being professionals in high demand or at various parts of the education spectrum (i.e., higher education counseling center training programs, internships, practicums, residencies such as at [UR](#), [UMW](#), [VCU](#) and [VT](#)).

Consider a pilot program similar to (or participation in) the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) [Regional Contract Program](#) which offers in-state tuition (and reduced for private institutions) for those in high demand behavioral health programs with specified years of service in Virginia/at a higher education institution.

Provision of mental health and well-being services to on-campus mental health and well-being professionals to reduce burnout, secondary trauma and compassion fatigue. This can include additional services through health benefits or add-on services, such as through a system-level contract.

- Provide additional funds to community colleges, HBCUs and other notably under-resourced institutions.

Particular attention (funding and programs) should be given to under-resourced institutions. For example, Virginia’s community colleges do not have the ability to provide on-campus mental health services. Consider necessary policy changes and/or fully fund third-party mental health providers via existing contracts to ensure equitable student access to mental health care professionals.

#### Practice idea

- Identify, collaborate on and support complementary efforts and structural solutions that address overarching behavioral health workforce issues.

Any efforts that seek to address behavioral health and human services workforce shortages across the Commonwealth will inherently benefit IHEs and vice versa. A few examples of complementary efforts to align with and support include:

Youngkin Administration Work: Dept. of Health and Human Services, Dept. of Education listening sessions with students and IHEs to inform policy and budget priorities for the next legislative session.

JLARC recommendations from the report on the [Pandemic Impact on Public K-12 Education](#).

The Claude Moore Foundation’s Health and Human Services Study: Broad and long approach to include any necessary regulatory and licensure requirement changes.

Themes include:

- Evaluate regulatory and licensure requirements for unnecessarily burdensome requirements – what was the intention behind such requirement? Is the requirement serving its purpose or can it be addressed in a more effective manner?
- Improve professional self-advocacy and marketing to policymakers and the public (“Find your Firetruck”);
- Identify/assess/promote creative ways to provide financial and other means to retain and grow human services professionals while mitigating burnout:

- Rotation and stipend for lead licensed clinical social worker (LCSW);
- LCSW and licensed professional counselor (LPC) “exchange programs” across the state;
- Paid sabbaticals after so many years of service;
- Pilot/scale the creation of new career pathways that engage non-traditional works such as ex-offenders, veterans, retirees; and
- Promote the use of scribes and paraprofessionals to assume transactional process elements of the job so the professionals can focus on transformative work with clients.

[Virginia 21's student mental health forums](#) - To identify policy agenda priorities from the student perspective in advance of the next legislative session.

### **System-level Recommendation**

#### **What**

*Implement state-“system”- level efficiencies.*

#### **How**

##### Policy ideas

- Establish statewide mental health training contracts and framework for use and modification by institutions for students, staff and faculty.

Secure funding to continue SCHEV’s partnership with the Virginia Mental Health Access Program (VMAP) which provides training for continuing medical education (CME) credit to on-campus health care providers on key mental health topics. Training will enable on-campus health care providers (i.e., physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants) to better diagnose, treat and manage common mental health disorders to serve as a relief valve for counseling centers and mental health professionals to handle the most urgent, complex and on-going needs.

SCHEV and VMAP partnered to deliver a CME webinar on “Managing Anxiety In College-Aged Youth” in May 2022. More than 60 on-campus health center practitioners from over 20 Virginia IHEs (public and private) registered to attend the training. On-campus health center directors at IHEs expressed interest in additional VMAP training on ADHD, multiple medication management and other topics.

With additional resources, use system-level procurement, such as the VHEPC, to establish training and course contracts developed by and for use and modification

across institutions. Such courses can address topics such as: [mental health first aid training](#) for students, faculty and staff; wellness and positive coping skills, etc.

Developing a core “system” framework for such training will enable efficiency and use by IHEs to tailor to meet their specific needs and methods of delivery. This will also facilitate a system-wide “library” of resources to be developed and modified over time and assessed for impact and ROI.

- Evaluate institutional and “system” ROI on an existing statewide contract for institutions to access additional, external mental health services and support to include detailed usage data at institutional and state levels. Assess the impact, need and identify sustainable funding sources for ongoing services as evidenced from evaluating VHEPC’s “system” [contract with TimelyMD](#) for tele-mental health services serves and any scaling needed over time.

The existing TimelyMD contract can serve as a model for (or source of): additional system-wide or centralized options for 24-7 crisis lines/providers offering efficiencies during peak student need times after hours; system-wide tele-mental health offerings for faculty and staff well-being services or third-party well-being platforms for student, faculty and staff usage. As part of the evaluation, consider the impacts/ROI of other third-party providers (i.e. UWill and Meta, etc.,) offering virtual mental health services at Virginia’s IHEs that are outside of the TimelyMD contract.

Other well-being platforms include [Headspace](#), [Wellbeats](#), SilverCloud, etc.

### Practice idea

- Identify, assess and consider incentivizing adoption of successful pilots, best practices and signature programs from various institutions.

Virginia IHEs continue to pioneer innovative approaches to address complex student mental health issues. Every VA IHE has piloted or scaled least one if not multiple unique programs on campus that has positively impacted student mental health (as well as the other issue areas).

A small sample of some innovations include:

1. Longwood University’s – on-staff trauma specialist;
2. Virginia Community College System - trauma-informed care training;
3. Virginia State University - pairing of a counselor with law enforcement on after-hours patrol beats;

4. Virginia Tech counselor-in-residence - counselors living in dorms to reduce burdens on student resident hall assistants;

5. UVA's embedded CAPS counselors across grounds and in various schools along with an IRB- approved student health research database. The latter database can be scaled across Virginia institutions with real-time uploads of data to enable trend analysis.

6. UMW's Counselor Training Program – cultivates behavioral health talent, increases exposure to working in a higher education environment and helps to meet the immediate student need for mental health care.

Virginia's IHEs offer a rich testbed of ideas and activities, that when proven successful, can be shared or incentivized for scaling system-wide.

- Engage in existing research study/opportunity (i.e., [UVA's SHORE](#)) to connect de-identified student data through an Institutional Review Board (IRB)- approved Student Health Research Database for following mental health trends. This model could be scaled across all Virginia institutions with real-time uploads of data to enable the following of trends.

## NEXT STEPS

A conclusion is intentionally absent from this report; this is not the beginning nor the end. This report serves as a call to action on “what matters most,” building upon the tremendous work done at Virginia’s institutions to support a positive higher education experience, student persistence and completion. The offered recommendations and ideas to implement them serve as a roadmap for the ongoing work.

Next steps include surveying the NASPA VA SSAO to set up regular communication, prioritization of implementation ideas and when to engage partners such as the VHEPC to leverage economies of scale/system contracts.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SCHEV expresses sincere gratitude to all of the stakeholders and subject matter experts who contributed to this work. In particular, SCHEV seeks to acknowledge: 1) the Student Advisory Committee for their candid insight on critical issues impacting students and proactive interest in finding innovative ways to address them; 2) to Virginia’s IHEs for facilitating broad and deep conversations on this topic with their respective expert teams; and 3) to NASPA VA SSAO for engaging in a months-long conversation, offering continual input and working tirelessly to support students regarding what matters most.

SCHEV also acknowledges the efforts of the Virginia Academy of Science, Engineering and Medicine (VASEM) Commonwealth of Virginia Engineering and Science (COVES) Policy Fellow who assisted with various aspects of this review.

## APPENDIX A: PROCESS

The scope of this initiative is inherently broad – identifying a range of issues that affect the student experience, persistence and completion in higher education, as well as the challenges that institutions face when working to address those issues. To identify the issues and challenges and derive institution level and state/“system” level recommendations, SCHEV obtained qualitative and quantitative input over a months-long process.

### Qualitative Input

In early 2022, stakeholders were initially apprised of this effort and asked to identify the most critical issues impacting the student experience, persistence and completion. SCHEV staff first sought input and asked this question of the Student Advisory Committee in February 2022 along with other advisory committees that SCHEV convenes to include the:

Instructional Programs Advisory Committee (IPAC), Finance Advisory Committee (FAC), General Professional Advisory Committee (GPAC), and the Council of Presidents along with SCHEV Council. The Secretary of Education and Deputy Secretary of Education also attend the Council meetings.

In March, the same question was asked of the NASPA VA SSAO members collectively and included input from two-year and four-year, public and private IHEs in Virginia. For purposes of this review, the SAC and NASPA VA SSAO are considered to be subject matter experts.

SCHEV facilitated a roundtable discussion between Council and the SAC in May, asking this same question. Through this process, four student issues consistently rose to the top as “most critical” across the board: college/life preparedness, basic needs, sense of belonging, and mental health and well-being.

At this same time, SCHEV began a non-exhaustive literature review (academic research and mainstream) that further validated and quantified the significance of these four student issues on the student experience persistence and completion.

The identification of the most critical issues led to a second line of questions to stakeholders and advisory committees. A list of these questions follows.

- This effort identifies the most critical student issues impacting the higher education experience, persistence as: college/life preparedness, basic needs, sense of belong, and mental health and well-being. Is anything missing?
- From the student-support-services perspective, regarding each of the above issues:
  - What is working well on campus in addressing those issues?
  - Where do issues persist?

- If/how can those issues be addressed from a system level (for example: a statewide contract for certain services, offering economies of scale and other efficiencies; a pilot program or a scaling of best practices)?
- What are other states and their institutions doing in this area that Virginia might use as models/best practices.?

Individual meetings with various institutions took place over the spring and summer. Meetings with specific institutions entailed broad and deep conversations with faculty, staff and administrators around the above questions. The composition of participants varied by institution to highlight unique efforts and programs with general participation by: Deans of Students; Student Affairs Vice Presidents; Admissions Vice Presidents; and Student Support Services Administrators, faculty and staff. In some instances, the Deputy Secretary of Education participated in these conversations.

Concurrently, additional input on the issues (best practices and potential recommendations) was obtained from a broader group of subject matter experts such as: clinicians (pediatricians and psychiatrists), researchers and Student Affairs VPs from the southeast as part of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Student Success Advisory Council on which SCHEV served. The SREB's Student Success Advisory Council undertook a similar, southeast region-wide effort during the same timeframe. Appendix B incorporates some of the literature shared by the SREB Student Success Advisory Council.

SCHEV sought input from advocacy groups including the Virginia Mental Health Access Program (VMAP), Virginia21 and the Claude Moore Foundation. The latter includes input as part of a broader Health and Human Services Workforce Study led by the foundation and Deloitte Consulting. SCHEV was also invited to a listening session with student-interns from the Governor's Office on this topic of critical student issues.

Input from stakeholders broadly, subject matter experts and institution-specific conversations shaped a lengthy list of best practices and potential recommendations at the institution-level and system-level for further consideration. Collective and detailed notes were organized using Mind Maps to visualize the issues, idea flow, emerging themes and relationships between various issues, their topical components, best practices and potential recommendations. For the mind maps, refer to Appendix C.

This process derived a series of general recommendations modified over time based on stakeholder feedback. SCHEV iteratively circulated draft recommendations and a few detailed ideas for implementation with the advisory committees, SCHEV Council, the

Council of Presidents, as well as other stakeholders and subject matter experts. Over the course of several months, the resultant recommendations in the report emerged from this iterative process.

The SAC and NASPVA VA SSAO offered additional suggestions for refinement and ideas for implementation prior to seeking Council's endorsement of the recommendations at the October Council meeting.

### **COVES Policy Fellow**

SCHEV was fortunate to receive a Virginia Academy of Science and Engineering and Medicine (VASEM) Commonwealth of Virginia Engineering and Science (COVES) Policy Fellow over the summer to assist with certain aspects of this review. The COVES Policy Fellow, a doctoral clinical psychology student at Virginia Tech offered an additional clinical lens to this effort, reviewed much of the literature referenced in Appendix B and participated in several of the interviews with the institutions and other stakeholders.

The COVES Fellow helped connect the qualitative and quantitative facets of this review, the latter of which are documented in the section below.

### **Quantitative Input**

No shortage of academic research and mainstream literature exists on these four student issues. In fact, the volume of articles, reports and studies alone validates their importance to students' higher education experience, persistence and completion. With the overwhelming amount of literature, bibliographic references were tracked by issue area: college/life preparedness, basic needs, sense of belonging, and mental health and well-being and by focus: national, state or institutional level. SCHEV used a format similar to SREB's Student Success Advisory Council references/resources for ease of use.

The literature review served three main purposes: 1) validated the topics as being of critical importance; 2) provided quantitative data on student issues which in turn further substantiated their significance and 3) identified best practices to consider as part of the recommendation development process.

A bibliography of these publications is included in Appendix B.

## APPENDIX B: BIBLIOGRAPHY

### College/Life Preparedness

#### National Focus

| Author/Source   | Title/Link (if available)   | Type of Publication          |
|---|---|------------------------------|
| Chalkbeat   | <a href="#">Math and reading scoring plummet on national test, erasing 20 years of progress</a>   | Article                      |
| Delta Cost Project                                    | <a href="#">Trends in Higher Ed Spending (cost of student support services)</a>   | Report                       |
| Howard Gardner and Wendy Fischman                     | <a href="#">The Real World of College</a>   | Summary/Book                 |
| Hechinger Report                                      | <a href="#">Students are Arriving at College Unprepared</a>   | Report                       |
| Inside Higher Education (IHE)                         | Educating and Supporting the Whole Student  | Compilation Report           |
| Inside Higher Education                               | <a href="#">Why Would-Be Students Aren't Choosing College</a>   | Report                       |
| National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)    | <a href="#">Nation's Report card</a>  | Interactive data tool        |
| National Library of Medicine                          | <a href="#">Association of Children's Mode of School Instruction with Child and Parent Experiences and Well-being During the COVID-19 Pandemic – COVID Experiences Survey</a> | Report and Survey            |
| Penn State University                                 | <a href="#">Comparing Undergraduate Satisfaction with Faculty and Professional Advisers: A Multi-method approach</a>  | Research Abstract and Report |
| SREB  | <a href="#">SREB College and Career Readiness Initiative</a>  | Report                       |
| SREB  | <a href="#">2020 Dual Enrollment Research: A Comprehensive Review</a>   | Report                       |
| SREB  | Student Success Advisory Report   | Report                       |
| Western Michigan University/Journal of College Access | <a href="#">Student Readiness of Colleges: A Qualitative Study</a>  | Report                       |

## State Focus

| Author/Source  | Title/Link (if available)  | Type of Publication   |
|--|--|-----------------------|
| Institute of Education Sciences, Regional Education Laboratory Southwest | <a href="#">Identifying Indicators that Predict Postsecondary Readiness and Success in Arkansas</a>  | Article               |
| Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education                              | <a href="#">Dual Credit &amp; Student Success: The Effect of High School Dual Credit on Educational Outcomes at Kentucky Public Universities</a>   | Report                |
| Joint Legislative Audit Review Commission                                | <a href="#">Report on Pandemic Impact on Public K-12 Education</a>   | Draft report          |
| National Student Clearinghouse   | Completing College: National and State Reports   | Reports               |
| SCHEV  | Virginia Student Loan Help: Series of Resources, Modules, etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="https://virginiastudentloanhelp.org/">https://virginiastudentloanhelp.org/</a></li> <li>• <a href="https://www.schev.edu/students/making-decisions-about-college">https://www.schev.edu/students/making-decisions-about-college</a></li> <li>• <a href="https://www.ecmc.org/students/opportunities-guide-workbook.html">https://www.ecmc.org/students/opportunities-guide-workbook.html</a></li> </ul> | Web links and modules |
| TICAS  | <a href="#">Evidence-Based Completion Programs at Four-Year Postsecondary Institutions</a>   | Article               |

## Institutional Focus

| Author/Source                             | Title/Link (if available)  | Type of Publication                          |
|---|--|--|
| The Chronicle of Higher Education         | <a href="#">College and High-School Partnerships</a><br>Colorado College's summer Stroud Scholars Program<br><a href="#">Purdue Polytechnic High School/Purdue University</a>  | On-demand panel discussion and virtual forum |
| The Chronicle of Higher Education         | The Faculty's Place in Student Success   | On-demand panel discussion and virtual forum |
| The Chronicle of Higher Education         | <a href="#">Helping Students Help Themselves</a>   | Issue Brief and Report                       |
| The Chronicle of Higher Education/Civitas | <a href="#">Increase the Human and Financial Benefits of Student Success Initiatives</a>   | Report/ROI Guide                             |
| EdTech                                    | <a href="#">Colleges Innovate to Support At-Risk Students, Inside and Outside the Classroom</a><br>KY and Gammon Universities  | Article                                      |
| EdTech                                    | <a href="#">Higher Ed Turns Data Analytics Bolster Student Success</a><br>KY and Gammon Universities   | Article                                      |
| Hechinger Report                          | <a href="#">Mandatory advising looks more like social work as colleges try to meet student needs during pandemic</a><br>San Antonio College  | Article                                      |
| UA Little Rock                            | <a href="#">Adviser vs. success coach</a>  | Flyer  |
| University of South Carolina              | National Resource Center for the First-year experience and students in transition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/national_resource_center/">https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/national_resource_center/</a></li> <li>• <a href="https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/national_resource_center/publications/index.php">https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/national_resource_center/publications/index.php</a></li> <li>• <a href="https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/national_resource_center/research/center_projects/index.php">https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/national_resource_center/research/center_projects/index.php</a></li> <li>• <a href="https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/national_resource_center/award_recognition_programs/index.php">https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/national_resource_center/award_recognition_programs/index.php</a></li> </ul> | Website and Research Center                  |

## Best Practices

| State/Institution         | Description/Link (if available)  |
|---------------------------|--|
| UNC-Greensboro            | Pre-register freshman for courses before orientation   |
| UNC-Greensboro            | 30-hour challenge (financial and academic incentives for completing 30 credits)  |
| VA/College Advisors       | <a href="#">How College Advising Corp is filling the college counselor gap and helping students prepare for life after high school</a> |
| UNC-Greensboro and others | Using course data, eliminate stacking of DFWI courses on student schedule (limit to one per semester)                                  |
| ODU                       | Life Coaching Program  |
| Kent State                | Stair Step Mentor Program  |
| SCHEV FFEI recipients     | Pilots that quantified clear impact  |
| GCEW                      | Life-long coach/career coach   |

## Basic Needs

### National Focus

| Author/Source                                      | Title/Link (if available)  | Type of Publication            |
|--|--|--------------------------------|
| Chronicle of Higher Education                      | <a href="#">How Colleges Health Students with Basic Needs</a>  | Trends Snapshot                |
| Education Commission of the U.S.                   | Postsecondary Basic Needs Services   | Policy Brief with useful links |
| The Education Trust                                | <a href="#">Key Policy Recommendations to Address Student Hunger in the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health</a>   | Letter/Press Release           |
| Higher Ed Dive                                     | Permanently Expand SNAP benefits to college students, researchers say <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="https://www.highereddive.com/news/permanently-expand-snap-benefits-to-college-students-researchers-say/623694/?utm_source=Sailthru&amp;utm_medium=email&amp;utm_campaign=Issue:%202022-05-13%20Higher%20Ed%20Dive%20%5Bissue:41733%5D&amp;utm_term=Higher%20Ed%20Dive">https://www.highereddive.com/news/permanently-expand-snap-benefits-to-college-students-researchers-say/623694/?utm_source=Sailthru&amp;utm_medium=email&amp;utm_campaign=Issue:%202022-05-13%20Higher%20Ed%20Dive%20%5Bissue:41733%5D&amp;utm_term=Higher%20Ed%20Dive</a></li> <li><a href="https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/supporting-low-income-students-with-snap/">https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/supporting-low-income-students-with-snap/</a></li> </ul> | Articles                       |
| Hope for College, Community and Justice            | College and Basic Needs Insecurity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="https://www.highereddive.com/news/report-over-60-of-college-students-face-hunger-or-housing-nsecurity/553832/">https://www.highereddive.com/news/report-over-60-of-college-students-face-hunger-or-housing-nsecurity/553832/</a></li> <li><a href="https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HOPE_realcollege_National_report_digital.pdf">https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HOPE_realcollege_National_report_digital.pdf</a></li> </ul>  | Report                         |
| Maya Maroto, Anastasia Snelling, and Henry Linck   | <a href="#">Food Insecurity Among Community College Students: Prevalence and Association with Grade Point Average</a>  | Paper                          |
| NACAC  | <a href="#">Supporting the 1 in 5 College Students Raising Children</a>  | Blog                           |
| NCES   | <a href="#">Undergrad retention and graduation rates</a>   | Data dashboard                 |
| National Conference of State Legislatures          | <a href="#">College Student Hunger</a>   | Conference report and summary  |
| Doug Shapiro, Mikyung Ryu, Faye Huie, and Qing Liu | <a href="#">Some College, No Degree: A 2019 Snapshot for the Nation and 50 States</a>  | Report                         |
| USDA   | <a href="#">Definitions of Food Security</a>   | Webpage content                |
| U.S. Govt Accountability Office                    | <a href="#">Food Insecurity: Better Information Could Help College Students Access Benefits</a>  | Congressional Report           |

## State Focus

| Author/Source   | Title/Link (if available)  | Type of Publication       |
|---|--|---------------------------|
| Ashley Burnside, Parker Gilkesson and Patricia Baker                    | <a href="#">Connecting community college students to SNAP</a>  | Report                    |
| Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield, Rosa Garcia, Lauren Walizer, and Carrie Welton | <a href="#">Developing state policy that supports low-income and working students</a>  | Report                    |
| CODHE   | <a href="#">Social Determinants of Student Success</a><br>CO   | Webpage content           |
| Hope Center for College, Community and Justice                          | <a href="#">Real College 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity Among Virginia Community College System Students During the Ongoing Pandemic</a><br>VA | Report                    |
| Hunger Free Campus bill   | <a href="#">Swipe out Hunger</a><br>CA   | Webpage content           |
| Ilana Raskind, Regine Haardorfer, and Carla Berg                        | <a href="#">Food Insecurity, Psychosocial Health, and Academic Performance among College and University Students in Georgia, USA</a><br>GA   | Paper                     |
| Justin Ortagus, Benjamin Skinner, and Melvin Tanner                     | <a href="#">Investigating Why Academically Successful Community College Students Leave College without a Degree</a><br>FL                    | Paper                     |
| OSHE  | <a href="#">Ensuring participation through working groups (tying student success models to state strategic planning)</a><br>NJ               | Webpage content           |
| OSHE  | Student Success Multiple Intervention Methods  | Webpage content           |
| VA General Assembly   | <a href="#">Student Emergency Aid Fund and Program: created and established.</a>   | VA General Assembly Bills |
| VA General Assembly   | <a href="#">Higher educational institutions, public: notice to students, SNAP benefits.</a>  | VA General Assembly Bills |
| VA General Assembly   | <a href="#">Pandemic response and preparedness: joint subcommittee established to study, report</a>  | VA General Assembly Bills |

## Institutional Focus

| Author/Source                     | Title/Link (if available)                                  | Type of Publication   |
|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| The Chronicle of Higher Education | <a href="#">The Student-Success Challenges Ahead</a>       | Brochure/infographics |
| Inside Higher Education           | <a href="#">The Campus Childcare Crisis</a>                | Article               |
| Ohio University                   | <a href="#">Campus marketplace to accept SNAP benefits</a> | Press release         |

## Best Practices

| State/Institution            | Description/Link (if available)  |
|------------------------------|--|
| TN Free College Mentors      | Wraparound supports connected to Promise programs  |
| CA SNAP program              | Focused on outreach to campuses (expanded CARE eligibility)  |
| OH                           | Cleveland OH city provides transit passes to all students  |
| NC                           | Case managers help students fill out forms, coach them through process for things like bus passes, food pantries |
| Central TX College           | Perkins funds for books and childcare for CTE-type courses   |
| CO                           | <a href="#">Single STOP usage</a>  |
| Seattle Colleges/King County | <a href="#">Benefits Hubs using AmeriCorps</a>   |

## Sense of Belonging

### National Focus

| Author/Source                     | Title/Link (if available)   | Type of Publication |
|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Ascendium Education Group         | National Rural Postsecondary Research Agenda  | Summary             |
| Chicago Tribute                   | <a href="#">Higher Ed Misstep: Focus on wallets vs hearts and minds</a>                                 | Op/Ed               |
| The Chronicle of Higher Education | Reimagining the Student Experience: Creating Connection through a Sense of Belonging                    | Report              |
| The Chronicle of Higher Education | <a href="#">Students are Missing the Point of College</a>   | Report              |
| Education Commission of the U.S.  | Perceptions of Postsecondary Education and Training in Rural Areas                                      | Report              |
| Student Experience Project        | <a href="#">Increasing Equity in College Student Experience: Findings from a National Collaborative</a> | Report              |

### State Focus

| Author/Source  | Title/Link (if available)   | Type of Publication |
|----------------|---|---------------------|
| Michelle Marks | <a href="#">A Sense of Belonging is Critical to College Students' Success</a> | Op/Ed               |

### Institutional Focus

| Author/Source                     | Title/Link (if available)   | Type of Publication           |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| CCCSE-UT Austin                   | <a href="#">Listen to Me: Community College Students Tell Us What Helps them Persist</a>          | Article and Report            |
| The Chronicle of Higher Education | <a href="#">Bergen Community College Enhances Student and Staff Experience Through Automation</a> | Case Study Report             |
| Ed Week                           | <a href="#">Critical Ways Leaders Can Build a Culture of Belonging and Achievement</a>            | Webinar with on-demand access |

## Best Practices

| State/Institution     | Description/Link (if available)  |
|-----------------------|--|
| The Chronicle         | <a href="#">How Emerging Technology can Chart Pathways to Completion for First-Generation Students</a> |
| Longwood University   | CLASP Program  |
| KY Predictive Model   | <a href="#">KY Analytics Factors</a>   |
| NCCS/Monty Hickman    | Use FWS students and train as peer mentors and SSS navigators  |
| Rutgers/UNC-Charlotte | Incorporate student/first-generation lingo into SSS website content and structure                      |

## Mental Health and Well-being

### National Focus

| Author/Source  | Title/Link (if available)   | Type of Publication       |
|--|---|---------------------------|
| Assoc. of College Counseling Directors                   | <a href="#">Annual Survey</a>   | Survey                    |
| ACE  | Mental Health Task Forces in Higher Education   | Report                    |
| ACUE Community   | <a href="#">Faculty as Allies for Student Mental Health</a>   | Blog                      |
| CDC  | <a href="#">Adverse Childhood Experiences During COVID-19 Pandemic and Associations with Poor Mental Health and Suicidal Behaviors Among High School Students</a> | Survey and Report         |
| CDC  | Youth Risk Behavior Survey 10-year Trends Report  | Survey                    |
| The Chronicle of Higher Education                        | <a href="#">Trends in College Students' Mental Health</a>   | Virtual Forum             |
| Dot.com Therapy  | <a href="#">Back to School 2022: The Mental Health and Wellbeing Impact on Children in America</a>  | Research Brief and Survey |
| EdNote   | <a href="#">Recruiting and Retaining School-based Mental Health Professionals</a>   | Policy Blog               |
| Education Week   | <a href="#">Fostering Student Well-being with Programs that Work</a>  | Oct 11, 2022, Webinar     |
| Education Week   | <a href="#">Trauma-Informed Schools 101: Best Practices and Key Benefits</a>  | Webinar and on-demand     |
| Gallup   | <a href="#">Reasons for College Withdrawal</a>  | Opinion and survey        |
| Healthy Minds  | <a href="#">Healthy Minds Study 2020</a><br>Healthy Minds Study: Winter/Spring 2021 Data report   | Study and report          |
| Healthy Minds Network and American College Health Assoc. | The Impact of COVID-19 on College Student Well-being  | Report                    |
| HEERF Fund   | <a href="#">HEERF Funds for Mental Health FAQ including state examples</a>  | FAQ                       |
| Inside Higher Education                                  | <a href="#">Student Mental Health Status Report: Struggles, Stressors and Supports</a>  | Report                    |
| Inside Higher Education                                  | <a href="#">Accommodating Mental Health</a>   | Article                   |
| Inside Higher Education                                  | <a href="#">More Students Report Psychological Disabilities</a>   | Article                   |
| Inside Higher Education                                  | <a href="#">Elevating the Mental Health Conversation</a>  | Article                   |
| JED  | <a href="#">Campus Impact Report</a>  | Report                    |
| JED  | <a href="#">Elections are Stressful, But Civic Engagement Is Good for Youth Mental Health</a>   | Article                   |
| Mental Health America                                    | <a href="#">Youth Data</a>  | Webpages and data         |
| NASPA  | The Compass Report 2022: Charting the Future of Student Affairs   | Report                    |

## What Matters Most

|                         |   |                              |
|-------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| NCES                    | <a href="#">Updated April 2022 data including mental health K-12, food, health and student concerns</a> | Interactive survey dashboard |
| NCHA                    | <a href="#">Fall 2021 National College Health Assessment</a>  | Data and survey summary      |
| Richmond Times Dispatch | <a href="#">Mental Health Divide Among College Students</a>   | Article                      |
| Sallie Mae              | How America Completes College: Understanding What Helps Students Graduate                               | Report and data collection   |
| Slate                   | <a href="#">Teaching Through the Mental Health Crisis on Campus</a>                                     | Article                      |
| U.S. Dept. of Education | Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, Behavioral and Mental Health Needs                      | Report and useful links      |
| U.S. Dept. of Education | <a href="#">U.S. Department of Education Grant for Mental Health Services Providers</a>                 | Article                      |
| Wisconsin HOPE Lab      | <a href="#">Mental Health Among Community College Students</a>  | Report                       |

### State Focus

| Author/Source                       | Title/Link (if available)                                      | Type of Publication |
|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Claude Moore Foundation/Deloitte    | Claude Moore Human Services Workforce Report                   | Policy Report       |
| Ed Week/Evie Blad                   | We Talk A Lot About Student Mental Health. We Need More Action | Essay               |
| LIS                                 | Mental Health Pilot  | Budget language     |
| National Alliance on Mental Illness | <a href="#">Data on Mental Health</a>                          | Webpages/state data |
| Richmond Times Dispatch             | <a href="#">Mental Health Issues Rising on Campus</a>          | Article             |
| VCCS                                | <a href="#">Policy Changes – Mental Health Services</a>        | Press Release       |

### Institutional Focus

| Author/Source                     | Title/Link (if available)   | Type of Publication                        |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| The Chronicle of Higher Education | <a href="#">The Student-Success Challenges Ahead</a>  | Brochure/infographics                      |
| J. Edgcomb et al                  | <a href="#">Applications of Clinical Informatics to Child Mental Health Care: a Call to Action to Bridge Practice and Training.</a>   | Study                                      |
| Education Week                    | <a href="#">Professional Wellness Strategies to Enhance Student Learning</a>  | Webinar/on-demand                          |
| Education Week                    | <a href="#">Spotlight on Mental Health</a>  | Curated collection of articles             |
| Gallup                            | <a href="#">Well-being Through Volunteerism</a> - UT  | Article and survey                         |
| Hechinger Report                  | <a href="#">Effective Way to Guide Students through their Mental Health Problems</a>  | Op/Ed                                      |
| Hechinger Report                  | <a href="#">Supporting Students: What's Next For Mental Health</a>  | Compilation of Articles/Case studies       |
| Higher Ed Dive                    | <a href="#">How can colleges assess their own well-being initiatives?</a>   | Article                                    |
| Higher Ed Dive                    | <a href="#">4 Ways to Build Positive Climates for Student Well-being</a>  | Blog                                       |
| Inside Higher Ed                  | <a href="#">What's Wrong with Students? No- What's Wrong with Us?</a>   | Op/Ed                                      |
| Mental Health First Aid           | <a href="#">The Campus Suicide Prevention Center of Virginia</a>  | Webpage content                            |
| National Library of Medicine      | Socially Accountable Medicine<br><a href="https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5753826/">https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5753826/</a><br>Could a similar approach be used for mental health or student support services on campus? Consider campus as a community. | Article, project summary and press release |

SEE ALSO

- [https://nursing.jhu.edu/faculty\\_research/research/projects/capable/](https://nursing.jhu.edu/faculty_research/research/projects/capable/)
- <https://physiciansfoundation.org/press-releases/new-survey-uncovers-6-in-10-physicians-lack-but-9-in-10-want-the-time-and-ability-to-address-patients-social-drivers-of-health/>

|                     |   |  |
|---------------------|---|--|
| UVA Alumni Magazine | <a href="#">Focus on future of mental health professionals, paraprofessionals and mental health first aid</a> | Magazine article (Expanding Mental Health Support) |
|---------------------|---|--|

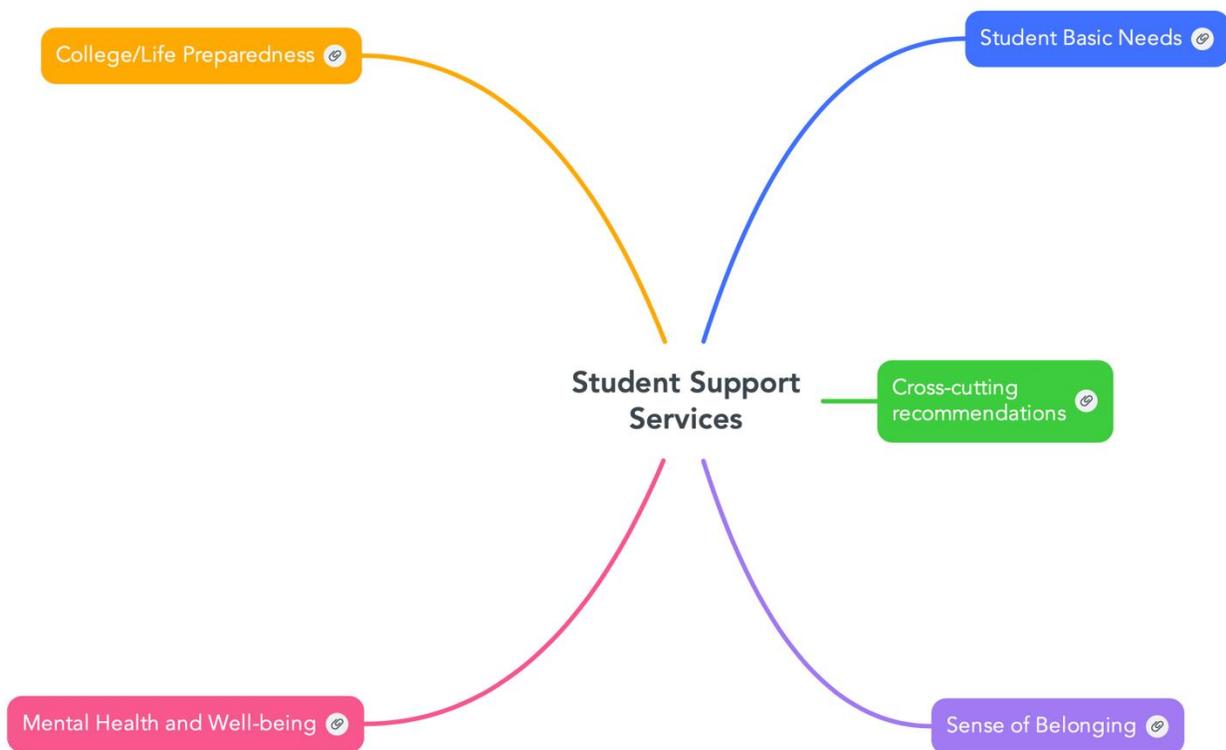
## Best Practices

| State/Institution            | Description/Link (if available)   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Longwood University          | Trauma Specialist on staff  |
| Midwestern Higher Ed Compact | <a href="https://www.mhec.org/programs/mhecare-student-health-solutions/meta-teletherapy">https://www.mhec.org/programs/mhecare-student-health-solutions/meta-teletherapy</a>   |
| Mount Rogers Crisis Center   | <a href="https://heraldcourier.com/news/local/mt-rogers-crisis-center-leads-commonwealth-in-responding-to-mental-health-emergencies/article_b6306271-fd5a-51e0-8f10-56b7dc757193.html">https://heraldcourier.com/news/local/mt-rogers-crisis-center-leads-commonwealth-in-responding-to-mental-health-emergencies/article_b6306271-fd5a-51e0-8f10-56b7dc757193.html</a> |
| UMW                          | Counselor in training program   |
| UVA                          | Data analytics: Trends Analysis of mental health service access and academic calendar deadlines   |
| UVA/VT                       | Embedded Counselors across campus/schools/residence halls   |
| VCCS/NOVA                    | Trauma informed care training   |
| Virginia State University    | Counselor/Cop beat patrol during peak hours   |

## APPENDIX C: MIND MAPS

Input from stakeholders broadly, subject matter experts and institution-specific conversations shaped a lengthy list of best practices and potential recommendations at the institution-level and system-level for further consideration. Collective and detailed notes were organized using Mind Maps to visualize the issues, idea flow, emerging themes and relationships between various issues, their topical components, best practices and potential recommendations.

The following mind maps capture this process.



# What Matters Most



