

Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE

K-12 Education:

The Loudoun County Chamber believes that a top performing K-12 education system, both public and private, that equips our students with skills, training and knowledge to become productive lifelong members of our nation's workforce is vital to the future prosperity and quality of life in our community. The Chamber embraces the critical leadership role that businesses and industry leaders play in ensuring the quality of instruction, programs and results from our K-12 schools and workforce training programs. It is critical that the business and education community be active partners to ensure there is a connection between what students are taught, and how they are assessed, with the true workforce needs.

The Chamber firmly supports policies and systems in which students are expected to achieve at internationally competitive levels of proficiency, particularly within areas of critical need – such Science, Technology, Mathematics, Engineering, Healthcare and the Arts. To achieve this aim, the Chamber supports policies and practices within Virginia's educational systems that ensure the highest quality instruction, content and learning environment.

To this end, the Chamber supports the following:

- State and federal education funding that more appropriately reflects the full costs of all state and federal education mandates in addition to basic education costs. The Chamber continues to advocate for the reformulation of the state Education Funding Composite Index because it currently places Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) at a disadvantage and does not account for our County's special needs caused by continued enrollment growth, increasing numbers of students for whom English is not spoken in the home, and the added financial burden of operating in the high cost metropolitan Washington, D.C., area. It also fails to accurately reflect the limited revenues local governments' can access to pay for education at the higher percentage required through the current formula;

- Increased state funding for the revised Standards of Quality by three percent per year until the local share of education costs does not exceed 65 percent and the state share is equal to 35 percent of total costs;
- Consideration of innovative strategies, including private-sector funding, to enable availability of pre-K education;
- Full restoration of cost of competing funding for teachers and support staff;
- Funding to enable competitive and innovative compensation, as well as benefits packages, to attract and retain highly qualified teachers;
- Development of a well-constructed and fair system to ensure all involved in the education of our children are regularly evaluated and receive feedback on how to improve based on measurable standards, outcomes and innovation beyond simple standardized test scores. The Chamber also strongly supports compensation being tied to evaluation, achievement and outcomes for educators. A culture that incentivizes excellence, innovation and initiative (beyond standardized tests scores as an evaluation method), that includes meaningful professional development, must be created and fostered within our education system for it to achieve the maximum success.
- Choice for parents between traditional schools and other learning alternatives, and development of incentives to encourage “traditional” schools, teachers and administrators to innovate. With reasonable parameters of space and distance, the Chamber believes every student should be able to choose his/her school and every student should be able to find a school within the County to foster successful individual educational outcomes;
- Flexible policies that enable public school attendance alternatives, such as open enrollment to balance population among schools, and expansion of online education options for in-school and home-school students.
- Providing authority to local school boards to determine its school calendar, including whether it makes sense for the local community to begin the school year prior to Labor Day;
- Continued consideration and use of public charter schools and magnet schools that recognize that not all students learn in the same way or have the same interests, to expand the options available to Loudoun County students. The Chamber believes that local authorization and oversight of the inception, planning and support of public charter and magnet schools fosters cooperation and good will between these schools and school divisions and promotes the success of all students;

- Greater use of pilot programs within the school system to provide opportunities to consider new and innovative ideas that offer additional education choices to segments of our school population for those who choose to participate. The Chamber believes this can provide ways to determine the effectiveness of strategies on a smaller scale and respond to the growing demand for more specialized options and choices within our public school system.
- Creation of a Loudoun County Teacher Cabinet to provide an opportunity to actively engage a diverse group of Loudoun County teachers and seek input and innovative ideas from those teachers for consideration either within individual schools, as a pilot program, or system wide. This also provides an opportunity for stronger connectivity and engagement with our teachers and the opportunity to encourage them to share their ideas and successes so that others may have the chance to benefit from them as well. It also directly supports the development of a culture of excellence, innovation and initiative within our school system.
- We support addressing the teacher shortage in the Commonwealth by refining and developing multiple streamlined affordable pathways into the profession to meet the needs of a variety of individuals.

The Chamber supports broader use of technology in the classroom, along with adequate professional development for teachers, so that technology can have the maximum benefit for all. The Chamber encourages the school system to seek broader collaboration efforts and exchange of ideas with neighboring school districts as technology takes a greater role in education. With this, the Chamber believes it is also critical that technology infrastructure be available that meets the LCPS' needs so that all schools and students throughout the County have access to affordable, reliable internet access.

The Chamber believes LCPS, the School Board and the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors must continue to work to implement cost reduction and operational efficiencies within our school system. In addition to supporting efficient use of current resources by LCPS, the Chamber also supports implementation of creative approaches to maximize and supplement traditional education funding, such as:

- Consideration of services currently provided by school system employees that may be outsourced to provide greater efficiency, cost savings, competition and business opportunity in the private sector;

- Consideration of consolidation of County and school functions to achieve increased efficiencies and cost savings;
- Aggressive efforts to access all existing but untapped revenue sources to support current state and local funding, including grants, programs, and initiatives that provide opportunities for additional funding to support educating our next generation;
- Continued and increased partnerships with non-profit organizations and foundations in both funding and programming given the demonstrated success of such programs and the geographic access to additional potential partners; and
- Continued and greater use of school-business partnerships as a way for businesses to provide valuable resources of time, energy and funding to support the schools.

The Chamber also calls on the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors, the School Board and LCPS to continue their efforts to work together to outline a new framework for school site selection and land use permitting that streamlines the process and locates new schools in a manner that supports both the education and economic development mission of our community. The Chamber continues to strongly oppose the use of commercially planned or zoned land for school sites, given the importance of preserving this land for future economic development opportunities.

The Chamber supports development of innovative efforts which help enhance Loudoun's traditional K-12 efforts, providing a pathway for Loudoun students to further education or immediate employment in the region's high skill, high demand, and high wage employment sectors. This should include opportunities to complete one or more years of college credit while in high school through dual enrollment, Advanced Placement, industry certifications or a combination of these strategies.

In recognition of the vital link between schools and the region's potential skilled workforce, the Chamber further supports:

- Strong business-education partnerships to develop training programs for specific industries, particularly in the Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Healthcare (STEM-H) sectors;
- Stronger focus on college and/or career readiness for students earlier in their K-12 education experience to better prepare them for success in whatever path they choose; and

- Emphasis on ensuring digital literacy by our students, including dual enrollment STEM-H academies in partnerships with Loudoun County's local universities, given proficiency in those basic technology skills critical to jobs across a wide range of industries, better preparing students to effectively enter the workforce.

The Chamber supports the Academies of Loudoun as a center for STEM and other career and technical education programs that will create unprecedented opportunities for Loudoun students to innovate and collaborate.

Higher Education and Workforce Development:

The Loudoun County Chamber recognizes the importance of and supports all of the colleges and universities, both public and private, which provide high quality high school dual enrollment opportunities, in addition to undergraduate, graduate and professional education to Loudoun's residents. The existing need for life-long education and training demands a higher education infrastructure that is accessible, both online and on campus, that is dynamically changing to meet the demands of the times and the diverse workforce, and that is supported by adequate state funding, local capital support, loan guarantee programs and other financial means. The Chamber supports positioning the Commonwealth's public and private higher education institutions to play a full role in shaping job creation in a global knowledge-based economy. The Chamber calls on the Commonwealth's elected leaders to continue investing in state funding for higher education in order to shift some of the burden of funding from students and families. The Chamber believes, however, that any new state investment, must be targeted toward specific goals that will provide the best return on investment for every dollar spent, including:

- *Increasing significantly the percentage of college-age Virginians enrolling in institutions of higher education and attaining degrees or workforce credentials.* Continuing aggressive expansion of the number of high quality certificate programs and associate, bachelors, and graduate degrees awarded in an effort to prepare more Virginia residents to be employed in the diverse knowledge-based economy.
- *Encouraging the creation of high-quality internship experiences (preferably paid) for college students.* College graduates with real-world job experience are at a significant advantage when launching their careers.

- *Targeting new degrees in high income, high demand job sectors.* Virginia's economy will depend on increasing the number of workers able to take on jobs in high demand fields of technology, engineering, science and math, and in areas experiencing shortages, like healthcare, which is particularly important in Loudoun County.
- *Expanding career-specific training at community colleges.* The Chamber has long supported public and private efforts in job-specific training and believes this unique resource should be expanded and enhanced through increased and more consistent state funding and expanded access to certification programs, increased funding for financial aid for those students seeking industry certifications, matching state funding to encourage the private-sector to partner with the community college system to train workers, and an education effort to increase awareness of job opportunities for students achieving industry certifications. Accordingly, the Chamber supports preserving the state funding identified to support the Commonwealth's Workforce Credentials Initiative. Further, the Chamber strongly supports efforts to increase the number of students graduating, transferring to four-year institutions, and/or receiving workforce credentials, with particular emphasis on industry certifications and other credentials that provide a pathway to high-wage, high skilled jobs. To the extent that these ventures could be offered at four-year colleges and universities the Chamber supports that as well.
- *Increasing public-private collaboration for university-based research.* Innovation drives the northern Virginia economy. Loudoun businesses need an expanded way to interact with the area's higher education institutions to produce and commercialize original research. The Commonwealth remains one of the few states that do not have dedicated funding for technology transfer. University-based research can only be brought to market quickly if the Commonwealth supports it.
- *Making colleges affordable for low- and middle-income students and families.* The Commonwealth and our higher education institutions must do more to encourage a greater number of students to seek education beyond high school in areas of application to workforce need. The cost of education should not be a barrier to getting a degree. Financial aid is a key ingredient in this affordability challenge. Without increases in state-funded financial aid, access and affordability will remain a problem.
- *Encouraging partnerships among two-year and four-year institutions – both public and private.* In today's economy, encouraging partnerships that build on strengths of various institutions allows for the best use of limited resources. Two- and four-year institutions should

be allowed and encouraged to partner in ways that reduce the total cost of degree completion. For example, the Chamber fully supports ongoing funding for programs like SySTEMic Solutions, a collaboration between NVCC, higher education institutions and public schools, which prepares students for careers in STEM fields.

- *Increasing the amount and availability of Community College Transfer Grants.* Enhancements to the established State transfer grant program, particularly for students in STEM fields, helps to increase the rate of bachelor's degree completion for students moving from two-year to four-year institutions.
- *Increasing access to higher education for active duty members of the military, veterans and military families.* Help for programs that provide veterans and their families with access to job training, education programs and credit for documented military training and experience gained during their service is essential for filling job vacancies, especially in cyber security and other IT fields; and
- *Supporting establishing varied pathways for students to earn credits toward graduation and/or career and technical education credentials.* This would allow for a more individualized path to achieving a career and college ready designation at the secondary level. In addition, the Chamber supports added state funding to allow school divisions to adjust their career and technical education programs to better meet the changing workforce needs within their communities.

With regard to our publicly funded institutions, the Chamber advocates a sustained, long-term program of higher education investment, reform and innovation – embodied in state law – to ensure affordable access for students and to generate strong economic activity, revenue growth for the County and lower social service costs. Overall funding for public higher education institutions remains inadequate to fully address the workforce development needs of our region. The Chamber opposes any action to cap tuition increases as that will only exacerbate the funding reductions, forcing the institutions to limit class offerings and rely more on tuition from out-of-state-students, which would result in less space for in-state students at our Virginia schools. The Chamber believes that each institution must be provided the flexibility to address any fiscal shortages by balancing the needs of mission-critical activities against student affordability. The Chamber continues to support sufficient Tuition Assistance Grant funding, both for undergraduate and graduate students, and notes that a periodic Cost of Living (COLA) adjustment for college and university employees should occur more regularly than in recent years.

The Chamber strongly supports maintaining funding for new, and much-needed, facilities for George Mason University and NVCC.

The Chamber also supports a state budget authorization allowing NVCC to partner on a second Loudoun Campus/Center.

The Chamber welcomes and supports state budget authorization to support ADVANCE, A NOVA Mason Partnership to increase graduation rates and smooth the path to a degree while saving students time and money. The Partnership will work in collaboration with Loudoun employers to adapt and create high-demand programs to fill the region's critical workforce needs.

The Chamber also supports funding for a study to further enhance the quality and availability of a dual enrollment opportunities at LCPS as offered through NVCC.

In addition, we urge the Governor and General Assembly to make the existing program that reimburses institutions when they use their own funds to advance planning for critical capital projects permanent for public four-year institutions and community colleges.

Housing Diversity:

The Loudoun County Chamber supports more robust state and local policies directed at increasing the availability of a wide range of housing options, both rental and for sale, to meet the needs of Loudoun's growing population and workforce. We encourage Loudoun County to adequately plan for a wide range of urban, suburban and rural housing choices to support future economic development and job growth. The Chamber believes federal, state and local programs supporting workforce housing should be utilized and leveraged to the maximum extent practical.

Specifically, the Chamber supports:

- Development of a comprehensive County-wide Housing Plan that addresses the need for market rate, workforce and affordable housing throughout the County, and includes establishing goals for workforce housing based on credible demographic studies of needs;
- The consideration of the conclusions and recommendations of the Affordable Housing Stakeholders Group and Housing Advisory Board, including adequate maintenance and

investment in a single local housing trust fund, leveraging this fund to provide the highest possible impact;

- Competing for and leveraging funds available through flexible financing and low-interest loans under the Virginia Housing Trust Fund;
- Promoting the use of County-owned vacant or under-utilized land and/or assets to be used or exchanged for the creation of affordable housing units or mixed-use development that includes affordable units;
- Adoption of higher densities in appropriate locations, particularly those areas surrounding and in the proximity of mass transit stations, to enable a greater number of quality housing products at all price points to be available for sale or rental;
- Use of property tax credits, down payment programs, low interest loans, an expedited approval process, and other programs by the County to increase home ownership for low- to moderate-income households;
- Use of the Economic Development Authority (EDA) to investigate alternative project solutions, attract non-profit developers, provide financing alternatives for potential projects, and potentially act as a housing authority;
- Maintain and strengthen Virginia’s existing Rental Housing Act as it pertains to the discretion of the housing provider to accept rent subsidies or other public assistance from a political subdivision of the Commonwealth or from the federal government;
- Prioritizing housing affordability as an economic development issue to increase the visibility, prioritization and effectiveness of Loudoun County’s housing opportunity programs through the reallocation of existing resources;

In addition, the Chamber supports reduction of capital facility fees, which inflate the cost of housing to the point of creating a disincentive for businesses to locate in Loudoun County. The Chamber also opposes imposition of the fees for by-right development.

Immigration:

The Chamber supports efforts by the federal government to strengthen national security by providing thorough screening of foreign workers and creating appropriate incentives for legal immigration. The Chamber also advocates that all businesses strictly comply with state and federal labor laws regarding the screening of citizenship documentation provided by employees, to avoid the hiring of individuals who are not lawfully residing in the U.S.

The Chamber, however, opposes increased penalties on employers who unknowingly hire undocumented workers until a consistent, reliable process for worker verification systems is established. Further, the Chamber advocates that any worker verification system not unduly burden employers, be properly funded, and have a high data integrity confidence factor.

The Chamber also recognizes that immigrants play a key role in the prosperity and growth of northern Virginia, filling key jobs in every sector of our economy and contributing to the rich cultural and intellectual experience that characterizes our region. To remain competitive and grow to meet future demands for products and services, businesses need access to skilled and unskilled foreign workers to fill jobs.

In support of these objectives, the Chamber supports comprehensive immigration reform that will:

- Secure our borders;
- Ensure an adequate supply of workers to support businesses in this region, including a limited guest worker program to fill gaps in our workforce;
- Continue and expand H-1B, L-1, and EB visas for professionals and highly skilled workers, and H-2B temporary visas that support seasonal industries, temporary labor shortages, and small businesses;
- Address delays, backlogs, and disruptions in our immigration and border management systems that impede the movement of legitimate cargo and travelers across U.S. borders;
- Resolve the status of undocumented workers already contributing to the economy, provided that they are law-abiding and prepared to embrace the obligations and values of our society, by meeting specific conditions and obligations in order to earn the legal right to remain in the U.S.; and Prohibit arbitrary increased costs and administrative burdens for businesses related to immigration issues.