

SPANBERGER FOR GOVERNOR

STRENGTHENING VIRGINIA SCHOOLS PLAN

“Virginia’s kids deserve strong schools that prepare them for success — regardless of their zip code.”

ABIGAIL SPANBERGER



Strengthening Our K-12 Schools



As the parent of three school-aged daughters in Virginia public schools, Abigail knows the importance of helping every child succeed, no matter their zip code. Abigail is a proud product of Virginia public schools herself — and she will work every day to make sure Virginia’s K-12 schools are the best in America. She will also fight back against the Trump Administration’s cuts to public education funding that threaten the success of our students.

She believes that all parents deserve to know that their child will receive an outstanding education — one that challenges students and prepares them for success in their next steps in a career, a registered apprenticeship program, the military, or college.

As Governor, Abigail will always listen to the voices of parents, educators, and administrators — not use them as political pawns. She will work aggressively to get schools the funding they need, boost workforce training

opportunities, and take real action to address Virginia’s chronic teacher shortage. Her administration will appoint public school champions who will demand that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is effective and efficient, with a clear mission of giving every child the opportunity to reach their full potential. That’s what Virginia families and students deserve.

Provide schools with the resources they need for every student to thrive. Work with the General Assembly to address longstanding gaps in state support to schools across the Commonwealth. Make sure students in underserved communities, those with disabilities, and English language learners have the resources necessary to thrive, especially amid uncertainty surrounding federal funding cuts. Reject efforts to divert funding from public education to pay for voucher programs.

Uphold academic excellence and rigor in Virginia's public schools.

With Virginia students ranked 41st in the country for reading recovery, direct VDOE to prioritize effective implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act. And given Virginia's 51st ranking for math recovery, work with the General Assembly to build on investments in high-quality math curriculum, math training for K-12 teachers, and math specialists. Increase access to high-quality instructional materials. Promote accountability measures for schools that both measure the growth of a student over time and make sure students are meeting or exceeding proficiency standards — and direct state resources to schools that need help. Modernize our Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments to ensure they are high-quality and effective indicators of proficiency, thus reducing excessive time spent on testing while ensuring that parents and educators have the best information possible to improve student performance. Make it easier for parents to access, review, and understand students' test scores, so that they can compare local, state, and national metrics to gauge the performance of their child and their school.

Prepare students with advanced academic programs and career-ready skills by promoting innovation within Virginia's public schools.

Stand up the Office of Public School Innovation within VDOE, tasking it with exploring the scalability of accessible, evidence-based programs shown to improve student outcomes and prepare students for the 21st century workforce — particularly for underserved schools. Promote the importance of skills employers need — like financial literacy, durable skills, and the ability to navigate emerging technologies like artificial intelligence.



Address Virginia's teacher shortage by recruiting, retaining, and providing ongoing support to high-quality teachers. Increase funding for teacher and school leader residency and apprenticeship programs. Direct VDOE to work with school divisions on strategies to expand the recruitment pool — to include federal employees, teaching assistants, and servicemembers transitioning to civilian life. Boost access to mentorship and professional development opportunities to help educators grow their careers and earning potential. Make sure teachers have and are paid for adequate planning time. Increase pay for Virginia's teachers to keep our best and brightest in the classroom.

Repair and modernize crumbling schools. Don't accept the status quo, and instead make sure our schools are preparing Virginia's kids to be competitive in the 21st century. Work with the General Assembly to allow every locality across the Commonwealth to have the option — with local support — to raise funds for school construction and renovations.

Prioritize student safety in every Virginia school.

Strengthen Virginia's safe storage laws to prevent gun violence. Direct VDOE to establish updated best practices for schools to address bullying and cyberbullying, combat cybersecurity threats, and leverage threat assessment teams to navigate challenges like swatting. Ensure school nurses and counselors are qualified to recognize signs of substance abuse — and ensure schools have access to opioid overdose medication and are working with local law enforcement to relay information quickly to parents. Promote statewide expansion of the Virginia Record of Arrest and Prosecution (RAP) Back Service to support continual background check monitoring of school staff to help all school divisions keep kids safe.

Give kids the opportunity to focus on learning and thriving at school by supporting wraparound services. Make it easier for school divisions to implement telehealth programs for mental health services in schools, especially in rural school divisions. Increase access to the community schools model, which provides tailored assistance for schools to support their students based on unique challenges impacting their community. Give parents more peace of mind by directing VDOE to issue best practices for tablet and laptop usage to ensure that devices are utilized only to

enhance learning, while also protecting student privacy. Work with the General Assembly to increase access to free school meals and encourage coordination among school divisions, regional partners, and farmers to increase the amount of Virginia-grown foods in Virginia schools. Improve access to high quality out-of-school programs that provide academic support and enrichment opportunities for students.

Make sure every student in Virginia has the tools to pick the right career for them – whether that's going straight into the workforce, attending a community college, joining the military, or going to a four-year university. Increase access to free dual enrollment, AP, and IB courses. Promote opportunities for students to participate in work-based learning through paid internships and youth apprenticeship programs — as outlined in Abigail's Growing Virginia Plan. Increase access to career and technical education (CTE) programs in middle and high schools across the Commonwealth. Improve access to programs that provide exposure to a variety of careers, such as 4-H, JROTC, and STEM programming.. Encourage early and increased engagement with parents on career pathways for their children.

Increase support for students with disabilities and their parents. Direct VDOE to provide recommendations for mitigating impacts to special education programs and resources as a result of potential funding shortfalls and staffing disruptions in the U.S. Department of Education. Work with the General Assembly and the Commission on Youth to reform the state's process for handling parent concerns, ensure VDOE has the necessary staff and resources to address concerns in a timely manner, and strengthen the special educator pipeline to ensure a high quality special education teacher for all students with disabilities across the Commonwealth.



Strengthening Higher Education

Abigail believes that Virginia has the best community colleges, public and private four-year universities, and higher education centers in the country. For students who wish to pursue a college education, Abigail is committed to working with students, parents, and college and university administrators to address the high cost of higher education while also maintaining the world-class quality of Virginia's higher education institutions. And as Governor, Abigail will focus on maintaining academic excellence and putting the strength of Virginia's public colleges and universities first — ahead of any political agenda.

Abigail recognizes that these institutions are critical for the future of Virginia's economy, particularly because many colleges are a major employer and driver of business investment in their region. She knows the

importance of these institutions for educating the next generation of Virginians, making cutting-edge discoveries in research and innovation, and benefiting the quality of life of every Virginian across our Commonwealth.

Make college more affordable and accessible for Virginia students. To respond to the high cost of college, direct SCHEV through the OpSix process to monitor efficiency efforts, especially to align with expected declining enrollment levels. Work with the General Assembly to create incentives that encourage institutions to collaborate for greater administrative efficiency. Ensure institutions are meeting their responsibility to provide opportunity and advancement for all Virginians, particularly Pell-eligible and first-generation students.



Improve financial aid options for students by streamlining and enhancing state support. Direct SCHEV to review the potential impacts of staffing shortages in the U.S. Department of Education on Virginia students' access to financial aid assistance and provide recommendations to mitigate impacts through state-level administrative support. Work with the General Assembly to combine Virginia's primary public financial aid programs – VGAP and the Commonwealth Award – to reduce confusion and encourage uptake. Continue investments in the VTAG program.

Support Virginia's Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Improve pathways between school divisions and HBCUs. Direct the Secretary of Education to work with the leadership of Virginia's HBCUs to develop an action plan to support and enhance these institutions' role in growing Virginia's talent pipeline and growing Virginia's economy. Address historical funding inequities for Virginia's HBCUs.

Support Virginia's Community Colleges. Encourage coordination between community colleges, local

industries, school divisions, and regional partners to ensure employer demands align with credentials. Strengthen the G3 and Fast Forward programs, which help low- and middle- income Virginians earn skills in high demand industries. Smooth pathways for transfer students by promoting alignment between community colleges and four-year institutions and increasing access to high quality advisors.

Increase access to college coursework for high school students. Increase access to free dual enrollment courses, particularly for courses aligning with Virginia industry and regional demands. Make AP and IB classes more accessible for students in underserved and rural areas of the Commonwealth.

Leverage Virginia's institutions of higher education as engines for economic development to promote innovation. Increase investments in research and development, particularly in emerging technologies. Work with the private sector to connect investors to these developments and promote innovation in biotechnology, manufacturing, and defense.



Enhance support services to allow students to focus on academic success. Work with the General Assembly to expand the Higher Education Mental Health Workforce Pilot program to increase access to mental health services for college students and grow the mental health workforce pipeline. Conduct a review on the impact of SNAP cuts to college students and recommendations to mitigate effects. Ensure effective implementation of the Hunger-Free Campus Food Pantry Grant Program. Expand access to college navigators for first generation college students.

Protect Virginia's institutions of higher education from political influence. Pursue reforms to Virginia's process for gubernatorial appointments to Boards of Visitors (BOV) to prevent any future governor – Democrat or Republican – from using our best-in-class colleges and universities as political pawns. Appoint nonpartisan, mission-driven individuals, primarily with BOV experience, to the Commission on Higher Education Board Appointments and leverage the Commission for BOV recommendations of serious individuals whose responsibility and allegiance is to addressing the needs of the institutions they serve.

Strengthening Early Childhood Education & Affordable Child Care

Abigail knows that early childhood education is one of the strongest investments Virginia can make in setting kids up for success later in life. In Congress, she was recognized as a champion for Head Start programs and an unwavering advocate for securing child care funding. As the next Governor of Virginia, she will stand up against the federal government's attacks on critical early childhood education programs in Virginia — while also reinforcing the need for the Commonwealth to help provide parents with more high quality options for their kids.

As Governor, Abigail wants to make sure parents have access to the child care opportunities they need to enter, rejoin, or stay in the workforce. Because as a parent of three kids, she knows the peace of mind that safe and reliable childcare options can bring to working moms and dads. She also knows that child care is unaffordable for many Virginia families. She wants to give Virginia parents more breathing room, so that they can get ahead.

Create greater access to the Child Care Subsidy Program. Increase investments to allow more families to participate in the Child Care Subsidy Program. For

families in the program or on the waitlist, ensure the state is communicating other available services and programs.

Make sure parents have access to high-quality childcare options in their area. Incentivize childcare providers to participate in VQB5, which provides parents with meaningful information about center quality to ensure children are ready for kindergarten. Promote professional development, support services, and training materials for providers, particularly those classified as needing support.



Expand public-private partnerships to make childcare more affordable for Virginia parents. Work with the General Assembly to establish an Employee Child Care Assistance Pilot Program to incentivize employers to assist with the cost of childcare for their employees. Pilot cost-sharing models that leverage public, private, family, nonprofit, locality, and other dollars to lower the cost of childcare for working families.

Help more Virginians enter the early child care sector and improve worker retention. Direct the Virginia Department of Education to work with school divisions and community colleges to expand the availability of free dual enrollment courses for early childhood career pathways. Provide bonuses for early childhood educators working in hard-to-staff regions and age groups. Direct VDOE to establish best practices for centers to improve coaching and encourage professional development.

Increase the physical supply of childcare, particularly in areas of the state with childcare deserts, by cutting red tape and addressing zoning hurdles. Direct state agencies to review the availability

of empty public properties for potential childcare centers. Cut red tape and work with localities to address zoning challenges so that small providers and providers in rural areas of the Commonwealth can more easily navigate the system. Establish economic incentives for employers to provide on-site childcare for their employees and work with Virginia's community colleges to increase the availability of on-site childcare.

Prevent benefit cliffs to support more hardworking families. Work with the General Assembly to evaluate program benefit phase-outs, establish reasonable tapers, and prevent benefit cliffs so that working Virginians can secure economic mobility without being penalized for getting ahead.

Increase access to enrichment activities, wraparound services, and healthcare for infants and toddlers. Expand access to early intervention services for children in Virginia exhibiting developmental disabilities. Encourage collaboration among childcare providers, preschools, localities, school divisions, nonprofits, and the private sector to bolster children's access to activities like music education, sports, STEM education, and problem solving.



