1. Analysis of Policy Environment

Virginia’s Engagement in and Readiness for a Statewide Community College Success Initiative:
The number one priority for the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Commonwealth is workforce development. Virginia was more resilient than other states during the recession, but has been slow to rebound economically. Last year, Virginia ranked 48th in GDP growth. As the number one state recipient of federal dollars and with looming defense cuts and a possible second round of sequestration, we cannot rely on the federal government for our recovery. We must diversify the economy to expand the middle class and the solution is a new and improved workforce. It is now more important than ever for the VCCS to lead the development of a globally competitive workforce to attract private industries to offset the reductions in the public sector.

The Virginia Community College System is poised to make significant changes to education in the Commonwealth through achieving its one, bold goal to triple the number of credentials earned by 2021. Our strategic plan, Complete 2021, is a clearly and publicly articulated vision for student success and improved completion. The goal is aligned with Jobs for the Future’s (JFF) Student Success Center goal to improve persistence and completion to increase the number of credentials earned by community college students. To meet our goal to triple credentials, one of our first priorities is to increase student success and completion rates of all students, especially those who are low income, students of color, and underprepared. There is no better time to learn from other states with JFF Student Success Centers to advance our strategic plan to meet the needs of the Commonwealth and the families and communities that need us most.

The VCCS Student Success Center will provide the central vision and support for Complete 2021, for all 23 community colleges in Virginia. The Center will drive the mission by engaging and convening stakeholders; by aligning current and anticipated student success initiatives to the one goal; by using data to inform decision making; by disseminating research and best practices between colleges and from national models; and by building policy for reform at local, system, and state levels. This cohesive approach will support the strategic plan’s objectives to increase student enrollment, retention, progression, and completion to meet the tripling credentials goal.

Commitment to Collective Action: As JFF describes, a laser-like focus on student success is required to ensure that our goals are met. While the VCCS has made great strides in implementing significant changes to systemwide curriculum and in developing scaled resources for supporting student and faculty engagement, these programs are seen by some as singular efforts, rather than components of a comprehensive or systemic approach. Our college partners recognize the value of the Student Success Center - a hub to align resources, policy, and research on student success. As stated in the attached letter from Presidents, Virginia’s Community Colleges have committed to advance a statewide student success and completion agenda and are committed to joint activity to accelerate the scaling of student success innovations.

Existing Student Success Initiatives: Current student success strategies such as the early alert system, online education and career building, guided pathways for students, and intrusive advising and coaching are described more fully in the Strategic Vision section, below. They have worked well independently but need guidance to evolve into an integrated and comprehensive
package of services, a new model to drive each college’s success agenda. The Center will also redirect existing systemwide collaborative convenings to incorporate a focus on sharing national, state, and local research on practices and policies for student success. These are valuable opportunities to build technical expertise. Finally, the Center will organize existing data sources to support student success and to develop a systemwide research agenda for identifying success barriers for specific groups of students. Each of these initiatives and events is currently supported by staff whose focus is spread across multiple projects and the Center will communicate a coherent message tying all of these efforts to the state’s completion agenda.

Underrepresented Populations: The VCCS annually serves around 273,000 students through 23 community colleges with 40 campuses. In Virginia, a community college is within 30 miles of every resident. With open door admissions, each community college meets the needs of its community and the Commonwealth by offering developmental education, dual enrollment, transfer programs, occupational and technical programs, and workforce development. In Fall 2015, 42% of VCCS students identify with a racial or ethnic minority; 24.7% are first generation; and 35.2% are eligible for Pell grants. A greater percentage of VCCS students are Hispanic (10.3%) than the percentage of Hispanic Virginians (8.9%). Similarly, the percentage of African-American VCCS students (19.9%) is slightly higher than the state population percentage (19.7%). While 88.4% of Virginians have completed at least a high school diploma, only 32.7% have earned at least a bachelor’s degree. In 2014-15, 40% of public school students were considered economically disadvantaged.

In 2014-15, over 25,000 students graduated from VCCS with over 31,000 degrees, diplomas, and certificates. Of these, 36% were minority, 26% were first generation students, and 51% were low income. More than 11,000 students transfer to public four-year institutions annually; 38% of these students are minority and 58% receive Pell grants; 61% of all students who transfer complete a bachelor’s degree; 56% of minority students who transfer complete a bachelor’s degree. These numbers increase significantly if a student completes an associate’s degree first.

A recent George Mason University study examined workforce projections and found Virginia needs to fill 1.5 million new jobs in the next decade with 50-65% of the jobs requiring only a postsecondary credential or sub-baccalaureate degree. Starting with the number of VCCS graduates produced this past year and multiplying it by 10 (for a decade), we meet only 33% of projected workforce demand.

Gubernatorial, Legislative, State Board for Community Colleges, and Business Policy Support: The multi-year process that developed Complete 2021 both influenced and was influenced by the following gubernatorial, legislative, board, and business policies:

1. In August 2014, Governor McAuliffe issued Executive Order No. 23, “Establishing the New Virginia Economy Workforce Initiative,” setting the goal of attaining 50,000 STEM-H credentials, licensures, apprenticeships, and associate’s degrees by 2017. EO 23 ordered all Virginia agencies responsible for workforce training to establish annual goals and strategies for increasing attainment rates in the next three years to meet the Governor’s goal.

2. Governor McAuliffe’s EO 23 also included the creation of the Commonwealth Center for Advanced Research and Statistics (CCARS) for workforce and education policy. CCARS will provide real-time data about human capital, regional skills gaps, local and state wage
data, and the availability of local and state workforce programs. These resources will help our colleges align their programs and pathways to workforce needs.

3. In July 2015, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) issued the Measures and Targets for the Virginia Plan for Higher Education. One target is 1.5 million degrees and credentials awarded to students by 2030. Another target is an annual improvement in completion rates of students to close the success gap for underrepresented populations (URPs).

4. In August 2015, Governor McAuliffe and the Virginia Business Higher Education Council (VBHEC) announced a goal to increase Virginia’s non-degree credential attainment rate from 2% to 10% of the state’s population by 2030 (based on Census data). This equates to an additional 460,000 new workforce credentials.

5. In September 2015, at the direction of the General Assembly, the VCCS submitted a plan to expand the number of workforce training credentials and certifications awarded to the level needed to meet the demands of Virginia’s workforce. The plan included recommendations for programs, accessibility, leveraging private investment, measuring outcomes, and sustaining funding. This report is the basis for pursuing our first success-focused legislative policy priority entitled Workforce Credentials: The Pathway to Virginia’s New Middle Class, an outcomes-based funding model to address Virginia’s skills and credential attainment gap.

6. Virginia was selected as one of 14 states awarded a National Governors Association (NGA) grant to increase the number of postsecondary credentials through statewide implementation of strong vision; integration of the use of education and workforce data to inform policy and track progress and measure success; build industry and education partnerships; and modify the use of resources and incentives to support the vision. The VCCS is the fiscal agent and lead of the middle skills communication plan that will be implemented.

7. SCHEV was recently awarded a grant from the Lumina Foundation. The VCCS is a partner. The project will analyze data to determine where gaps in attainment occur; identify and promote affordable pathways and student success; and review existing financial policies to identify new opportunities.

8. Virginia recently joined Complete College America and VCCS supports the mission to use data to increase the number of Americans with quality career certificates or college degrees and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations.

9. The VCCS State Board adopted a Performance-Based Funding Model for Student Success for credit-bearing programs (our second success-based policy priority). Beginning in Fall 2016, 12% of college state budgets will be based on student outcomes and performance, increasing annually to 20% by 2020. State funds will be awarded based on the numbers of students who complete gateway courses, credits earned in one year and in two years, persistence, completion of certificates and degrees, transfer with more than 16 credit hours or associate’s degrees, and bachelor’s degrees after transfer. With performance governing funding, colleges have a vested monetary interest in improving student success.

The climate in Virginia is primed to initiate a Student Success Center. The VCCS, with the addition of the Student Success Center, will form the backbone for postsecondary credential attainment in Virginia. The Governor’s goals, SCHEV’s goals, and the VCCS goal share a common agenda with similar metrics although different timelines. The Center will serve as a communication hub between the colleges and external stakeholders, while leveraging expertise from all stakeholders with reinforcing activities. This collective impact model will guide the
activities of the Center. The following initiatives and collaborations form the foundation for the work ahead to build a successful and innovative Student Success Center.

2. Strategic Vision
The mission of the Student Success Center is to unify the systemwide student success efforts to advance colleges’ completion rates to meet the Complete 2021 goal. In order to meet the VCCS Complete 2021 goal of tripling the number of credentials earned annually by 2021, the VCCS Chancellor establishes biennial objectives for the system. The Chancellor requires each college and system office department to submit two-year plans for achievement of the Chancellor’s Goals. There will be three two-year periods ending in 2021.

The targets for the first biennium have been approved by the State Board and are described below. Targets are organized using the Loss-Momentum Framework for Student Success (LMF). Students progress through four main stages of interaction with colleges: Connection, Entry, Progress, and Completion. The LMF helps colleges identify where students stumble or become sidetracked, and, thus, where there are opportunities to prevent students from dropping out and improve their momentum toward program completion.

Virginia data show that for every 100 students who complete an application to attend a Virginia community college, 52 enroll in the fall, 34 return the following spring, 21 return the following fall, 14 enroll the second spring, and 3 complete within 100% of the expected length of their program of study. Of the 49 students who did not complete on time, 8 more stragglers return and complete an associate’s degree (for a total of 11) and 13 transfer to a four-year institution. Our plan is to fix this “leaky pipeline” through which we lose students at every turning point.

The Student Success Center will assist the VCCS to meet the Complete 2021 goal by aligning current and future initiatives to the four identified targets. The Executive Director and the Data Analytics Specialist, along with system office resource experts and the designated regional teams, will help colleges set local targets that align with the VCCS’s targets.

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<th>Target 1 Connection: The VCCS will increase admission applications from 110,000 to 130,000 by 2017.</th>
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**Interventions supported by the Student Success Center:**

1. **College Readiness:** We will coordinate with our public school partners to administer the new Virginia Placement Test (VPT) to rising high school juniors and implement mandatory remediation before high school graduation. The Center will assist in convening stakeholders from colleges and K-12 to discuss implementation of the VPT in high schools and the barriers to college readiness.

2. **Career Coaches:** Almost 100 high school career coaches employed by community colleges are placed in 140 local high schools to assist students in determining their educational and career pathways. The Center will assist with professional development of these coaches as well as collect data on the success of the program.

3. **Virginia Education Wizard:** The Virginia Education Wizard is a web-based career and educational planning tool for current and prospective college students across Virginia. Users can assess their interests, skills, and values; explore careers that match their interests; learn what those careers pay in their local labor market; identify which colleges and universities offer
programs related to those careers; estimate college costs and find information on financial aid and scholarships; and plan which courses they will take during which semester. High school career coaches use the tool with their students. Continuous updating includes the creation of a mobile application. New features, including one that marries the career plans developed by high school students with their academic pathway while enrolled in community college, will be released next spring. Under the guidance of the Student Success Center, the next generation of this tool will further integrate the experiences of students who are transitioning to a four-year school or into the workforce and veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce.

**Target 2 Entry:** The VCCS will increase admissions application enrollment yield from 52% to 60% systemwide.

*Interventions supported by the Student Success Center:*

1. **New Online Application:** We will redesign the online college application process to make it easier for students to complete. We will redesign student onboarding to highlight the met-major options for undecided students.

2. **New Math Options:** The VCCS will be implementing a co-requisite model for developmental math. This will increase opportunities for students to start the first semester in credit courses that count toward a degree or certificate. The Center will work with the Math Peer Group to understand new changes to courses and share best teaching practices. This math model will mirror what the VCCS has done with a co-requisite English model.

3. **Multi-Measures for College Readiness:** Currently the VPT placement test can be a barrier for students enrolling at the colleges. A Multi-Measure Taskforce, chaired by two college presidents, will make policy recommendations to the governing bodies for possible changes in VPT requirements.

4. **Blackboard Enhanced Student Services:** The VCCS initiated a Blackboard Enhanced Student Services model in July 2015 to meet the needs of the students 24/365. This new call center can access student accounts to assist with questions about applying and tracking financial aid. The Center will monitor progress of this service and provide professional development to frontline staff to serve first-generation students and students from disadvantaged populations.

5. **Intrusive Advising:** VCCS has invested heavily in increasing the advisors and coaches available to at-risk student groups. The Chancellor has funded 18 student success advisors at 9 rural colleges charged with increasing retention and completion of underrepresented students. Generous private donors have also funded campus coaches at 18 colleges as part of the Great Expectations Education Program for Foster Youth (GE). Colleges have also independently implemented coaches or intrusive advisors serving other populations, such as veterans, Middle College students who lack a GED, pregnant and parenting students, and students who plan to transfer to four-year colleges. All of these advisors as well as career coaches are eligible to participate in the Virginia Adult Career Coach (VACC) certification program, which leads to the nationally recognized Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) certification. All intrusive advising programs would benefit from technical assistance from or consolidation under the Center.

**Target 3 Progression:** The VCCS will increase overall Fall-to-Spring retention from 70% to 71% systemwide and increase overall VCCS Fall-to-Fall Retention from 48% to 60% systemwide.

*Interventions supported by the Student Success Center:*
1. **Performance Funding:** As mentioned, the VCCS adopted a new Performance-Based Funding Model for Student Success for our credit-bearing programs. The Center will provide data analytics and technical assistance to help colleges target areas for improved performance.

2. **Structured Pathways:** Faculty teams will create eight meta-majors; structured pathways for specific programs will flow from those. We will implement changes to student information system (SIS) tools to support these new pathways. Math pathways will better align math requirements with programs of study. Third-party workforce credentials will be embedded in the pathways. The Center will support progress on these initiatives as well as communicate changes to the colleges.

3. **QUINN: Question Information Navigator:** This decision support tool includes data from four Peoplesoft modules – student, financial aid, budget/finance, and human resources. QUINN staff will provide data support to the Center and more broadly to college and VCCS leaders.

4. **Data-Informed Decision Making:** In addition to using QUINN dashboards to inform colleges’ outcomes performance, we will develop predictive analytics models to support decision making. The VCCS will identify resources for a proposed performance funding outcomes measure related to job placement. Data sharing amongst our stakeholders will be a priority. The Center, along with the regional centers described below, can help colleges implement the predictive analytics models and form interventions to assist the students.

5. **SAILS: Student Assistance and Intervention for Learning Success:** The Starfish early alert system was implemented at all 23 community colleges using funds from a Round 1 DOL TAACCCT award. Faculty teaching newly redesigned developmental education courses were the early adopters of this technology. Now 18 colleges use the alert system for all credit courses. Wider implementation and opportunities for additional services, along with evaluation and continuous improvement for this service, will be guided by the Center.

6. **VCCS Professional Development, Peer Groups, and Regional Centers:** The VCCS coordinates disciplinary peer groups for faculty, who meet periodically to discuss substantive issues related to curriculum revision, integration of instructional technology, instructional innovations, and discipline updates. Since over one-third of student success can be attributed to skill in teaching and thoughtful pedagogy, we will re-focus these valuable, creative problem-solving teams on student success under the guidance of the new Center. The VCCS Office of Professional Development (OPD) also offers competitive mini-grants each year. These grants will have a new focus on college and faculty student success initiatives. Finally, OPD provides technical assistance through the five VCCS Regional Centers for Teaching Excellence. These regional centers will transition to a stronger focus on student success, for example training systemwide technical assistants for student success, offering training in the pedagogy matters practice improvement model and in reviewing and using data, and support the implementation of best practices in student support.

### Target 4 Completion: The VCCS will increase annual associate’s degrees, certificates, and career studies certificates by 6,000 over FY2015. To increase workforce credentials, the VCCS will collect baseline information on top business-industry certifications available and awarded and set new benchmarks for Year 2.

**Interventions supported by the Student Success Center:**

1. **Chancellor’s Innovation Funds:** Each year the Chancellor dedicates funds for innovative practices that align with the strategic plan. Colleges apply for these mini-grants to pilot new student-centered ideas. The Center will oversee the award of these funds.
2. **Student Success Leadership Institute**: Modeled on the efforts of North Carolina and other states, the purpose of the Student Success Leadership Institute (SSLI) is to change the college culture by studying national best practices, examining college’s own data to find opportunities for improvement, sharing ideas with other colleges, and developing a college-wide plan for improvement around student success. Colleges have already agreed to participate in the Student Success Leadership Institute (SSLI), funded by a budget commitment from the VCCS Chancellor. College teams will coalesce during the Institute to move the completion agenda forward together. The SSLI will build the foundation for achieving the Complete 2021 credential attainment goal by providing professional development focused on increasing data-informed decision making and identifying and removing unintended student success barriers. Each college president will select a team of five individuals to attend three face-to-face seminars and participate in additional webinars and regional meetings throughout the year. They will learn about emerging information on scalable best practices from national experts, evaluate their individual college data, examine current policies and practices that might be barriers for student success, and develop an action plan for implementing change strategies to support increased student retention and completion.

At the end of the SSLI, colleges will submit an action plan based on the LMF to the system office. This plan will form the strategic basis for college-based student success efforts and will assist in identifying additional shared services opportunities at the system level. The Center will oversee the implementation of those projects and measure outcomes. The Center will ensure continuous improvement over time of those first programs, scaling of successful initiatives to other colleges, and initiation of new efforts.

VCCS realizes that change cannot happen without reflection and study, therefore it has broken its six-year plan into three biennia. During the first biennium, VCCS has begun focusing on reviewing policy and building capacity for student support services. During the second biennium, VCCS will refocus its efforts on fostering student success through faculty-centered practice improvement. During the third biennium, VCCS will evaluate and revise its efforts and work to address individual student needs. The Student Success Center will bring focus to the second and third biennium. The timeline is below.

**Year 1:** ♦ Develop a plan to provide technical assistance to the colleges, in partnership with the SSLI which starts in November 2015. ♦ Develop research questions with the external evaluator. ♦ Orient external advisory board and develop internal advisory board which will include members from the SSLI teams. ♦ Expand scope of the Office of Professional Development to focus on student success at annual New Horizons conference and Peer Group meetings. ♦ Conduct Student Success Policy Audit guided by JFF’s previous work. ♦ Pilot two regional student success centers to provide technical assistance to colleges. ♦ Facilitate activities of the external evaluator.

**Year 2:** ♦ Incorporate evaluators’ recommendations for continuous improvement. ♦ Develop three additional regional student success centers. ♦ Better integrate student success strategies into college practices. ♦ Convene regional meetings with regional experts to support colleges. ♦ Collect data regarding gaps in student “pipeline” and share outcomes and practices with colleges. ♦ Continue support and evaluation of SSLI action plans ♦ Evaluate progress toward Chancellor’s
targets and set new targets for next biennium.

3. Stakeholder Commitment
Attached is a letter of commitment signed by the presidents of all 23 of Virginia’s Community Colleges clearly demonstrating their support for a Student Success Center and their commitment to the outcome promised in the single goal of Complete 2021.

Also attached is a letter signed by Virginia’s Secretary of Commerce and Trade, Maurice Jones. His Secretariat is the host of the Governor’s Career Pathway Work Group, which will serve as the external advisory board for the Center to provide strategic direction and input on the Center’s priorities. The Governor’s Advisor for Workforce Development, Elizabeth Creamer, is the Chair of that group. The Work Group is described more fully in the letter. Briefly, it was convened in 2008 to drive the state’s cross-agency strategic plan for workforce development. It provides state leadership and an operational framework to support regional action. It includes representatives from secondary and postsecondary education (including SCHEV; Virginia Department of Education, Adult Education; VCCS Academic Services and Research; VCCS Workforce Development Services), the Virginia Employment Commission, the Virginia Department of Social Services, the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, Virginia Department of Labor and Industry, and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership. Recently, a representative from the Virginia Longitudinal Data System was added to the Work Group. This Work Group is the ideal vehicle to assist the Center to scale up and sustain cross-sector partnerships focused on increasing completion rates. If this proposal is funded, the membership of the Work Group will expand to include the Executive Director of the Center.

In addition to this external advisory board, the VCCS will use the teams convened for the SSLI as the basis for an internal advisory board to provide feedback on the operations of the Center and its staff and ensure the Center launch and rollout are successful. We will bring in community college student representatives and board members of the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education, described below, as the Center develops. Members of both advisory boards will serve as ambassadors for the Center, connecting the work of the Center to the stakeholder groups that the board members represent and providing feedback and guidance from the field. These members are committed to joining a cross-state learning community with leaders of other new and existing Student Support Centers.

Letters of support are also attached from the Virginia Secretary of Education Anne Holton and the SCHEV Executive Director Peter Blake.

4. Data Infrastructure
VCCS Commitment to Gathering Multi-Institutional Data: Virginia has robust centralized data systems, including the VCCS’s student information system, the new workforce enterprise system for non-credit training, and the state’s almost fully developed longitudinal data system.

Description of Data Infrastructure: The VCCS maintains the student information system (SIS) for all 23 community colleges. The system of record is PeopleSoft. Student data for credit programs is collected from the online student application and from SIS registration. Cohorts of students can be identified and tracked. Data include demographics, veteran status (self-reported),
academic status, course enrollments, and graduation information. The system of record for data on students in non-credit programs is also SIS but, with funding from the Round 1 TAACCCT award, a new registration system for non-credit courses has been implemented. Data from that new system is more robust for non-credit students than the data that flows into SIS, which allows it to be included in routine student success reporting. With these systems, the VCCS can accurately track progress and outcomes of students participating in specific initiatives, such as unique participants, retention, and completion.

QUINN (QUestion INformation Navigator), mentioned above, is a data warehouse and decision support tool that is refreshed nightly from the data in SIS and provides easy access to that data for college and system staff and leaders. The data is self-service, customizable, relevant, timely, aggregated, and computed. It includes data on credit and non-credit students, financial aid, faculty, courses, completions, and transfers, as well as college operations.

The SAILS early alert system also generates significant data about students and the services they receive as they progress through their studies. The coaches and intrusive advisors now have access to a new case management system that tracks the duration and intensity of their contacts with students. Both of these systems are also operated from the system level.

The Virginia Longitudinal Data System (VLDS) is also available, linking education and workforce records over time. VLDS members include SCHEV (postsecondary), Virginia Department of Education (secondary and adult education), VCCS (both postsecondary and Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act), and the VEC (Trade Act, Veteran’s, Wagner-Peyser, Unemployment Insurance wage records and benefits). Virginia’s two USDOL Workforce Data Quality Initiative grants are enhancing the VLDS by ensuring availability of registered apprenticeship datasets and Departments of Social Services and Rehabilitative Services datasets. Agencies maintain control of their data through the federated data system model, which utilizes a double de-identification process that protects personally identifiable information (PII) from exposure. A Book of Data Governance defines roles, responsibilities, authority, and processes for partners who contribute data. A Restricted Use Data Agreement governs access to and use of the data by researchers.

Partner College Commitment to Share Comparative Data: The community colleges in Virginia have a history of sharing comparative data and have fostered an environment of data-informed and evidence-based improvement. The attached letter from the college presidents documents their commitment. To date, both the system office and the colleges lacked the research capacity to make the best use of the data we have. The Center will establish a statewide research agenda and framework to expand research and information sharing.

Research Capacity: The VCCS currently lacks sufficient staff capacity to support multiple cross-institution analyses of student data and then communicate that information for setting completion priorities and strategies. By hiring a data analytics expert to work with VCCS data staff, the Center will be positioned to assist the colleges to create predictive analytics models. The SSLI will launch this amplified emphasis on using data and inquiry to improve student outcomes. A required member on each college SSLI team is the director of institutional research.

VCCS will continue its relationship with the Community College Research Center at Teachers
College building on two Gates Foundation grant initiatives, Analysis of Statewide Developmental Education Reform (ASDER) and Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment (CAPSEE). The findings from these national studies have improved our understanding of the impact of the VCCS systemwide developmental education redesign and focused our next step of creating successful math pathways.

Additionally, VCCS will expand its relationship with Virginia university higher education programs, to identify talented students interested in community college research opportunities and to participate in future grant opportunities. Dr. Pam Eddy, professor of higher education at the College of William and Mary, will facilitate the SSLI and will engage her students in literature and data review, as well as studies related to community college student success.

5. Shared Legislative/Policy Agenda
Each year, Virginia’s Community Colleges collaborate to craft a shared legislative policy agenda. The Chancellor’s Advisory Council of Presidents (ACOP) includes all 23 presidents and they play a significant role in setting the priorities, which are then approved by the State Board for Community Colleges. The internal advisory board that will be convened during the first six months of the grant period will be charged with developing a policy framework for student success with wider input gathered from each college partner.

Using the Jobs for the Future State Policy Toolkit as a guide, VCCS will conduct a Student Success Policy Audit to provide the starting point for determining potential student success policy reforms. We will also develop a process to address policy changes, depending on the level at which they are authorized. The Center will examine legislative, state, system, and college policies. Data will help determine how much of an impact a policy has and will also be used to suggest a new evidence-based direction. One example of a system policy that might be negatively impacting student completion statistics is the requirement that students formally apply for graduation. A revision to this policy is making its way through the governance process this fall. Data will reveal whether (and how many) students who are eligible for graduation are deciding to transfer without formally graduating. A second issue ripe for reform is the guaranteed articulated transfer agreements with four-year institutions. We have heard anecdotally that transfer students frequently find that their credits will only count toward elective requirements and not toward graduation in their chosen discipline. Data will help determine the extent to which this occurs, whether students are benefiting from the guaranteed articulation agreements, and whether community college students are prepared to complete their bachelor’s degrees in a timely manner. Remedies could include modifying the articulation agreements, collaborating with senior institutions to commit to our students earlier, and summits to agree on common outcomes for key general education courses. Barriers might be identified that are practices rather than formal policies, allowing resolution at the state coordinating body level.

6. Funding and Sustainability Plan
The Student Success Center is projected to cost about $875,777 per year. Funding for the first two years is secured. Grant funds of $250,000 will fund the salary and benefits of the Executive Director (approximately $111,000 per year plus benefits) and a Data Analytics role responsible for turning the data into compelling information and communicating our story ($70,500 per year plus benefits), along with a portion of the external evaluation. For the SSLI, the Chancellor has
committed $200,000 per year for the first two years, which will fund activities and the cost of the external evaluation attributable to those activities. Portions of the salaries and benefits of six Quinn, SAILS, Wizard, professional development, and coaching system office staff who will support the Center (about $151,000 per year) have also been committed. Additional expenses related to professional development, supplies, and travel total about $21,700 per year and will be funded from the budget of the VCCS Academic Services and Research division. The Chancellor’s Innovation Fund will also provide around $250,000 in mini-grants to colleges who compete to pilot new student success initiatives.

Not included in this budget, but falling under the guidance of the new Center, are the professional development opportunities and peer groups mentioned above. Each year, the Chancellor allocates funds for those groups to meet and collaborate, which is expected to continue with a new focus on student success. Over 1,000 faculty participate in these professional development activities.

In Year 3 and after, the Chancellor will continue to commit $250,000 per year for salaries and benefits, along with the leveraged funds for the six other partial positions and the mini-grants. In addition, the Board of Directors of the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education (VFCCE) has formally adopted the Student Success Center as an element of Fund 2021, which includes eight evidence-based initiatives in support of the Complete 2021 goal. The Board will direct their energies and resources to raising funds for the Center. The mission of the VFCCE is to provide access to education for all Virginians. To ensure access to a high-quality, affordable college education, the VFCCE provides statewide leadership in raising funds for community colleges, supplementing and supporting the activities of the 23 individual colleges and securing support for system-wide initiatives that could not be undertaken by any single college. Since 2005, the VFCCE has raised almost $20 million. Other signature initiatives include the Great Expectations Education Program for Foster Youth (over $8 million raised to support programs at 18 colleges serving over 1,000 students annually) and the Rural Virginia Horseshoe Initiative (designed to raise educational attainment levels and improve workforce skills in rural localities served by 14 of Virginia’s Community Colleges; has raised over $3 million). The 50th anniversary of Virginia’s Community Colleges will be marked in 2016. The VCCS and the VFCCE will hold events to celebrate the occasion, providing special opportunities to highlight student success and to present an even more compelling vision for future investments in our work.

The Center will become the natural home for future grant-funded student success initiatives that cross VCCS departments and involve multiple colleges. As already mentioned, intrusive advising coaches, SAILS early alert system, and portions of the QUINN decision support system were funded by the Round 1 TAACCCT grant. The Virginia Education Wizard has been funded from a variety of sources, such as the Virginia Department of Education, Virginia 529 Plan, subawards through SCHEV from their federal College Access Challenge Grants, and Round 1 TAACCCT. Other currently existing student success initiatives have been funded including the Veterans Demonstration Project (a project that crosses multiple state agencies) through the U.S. Department of Labor and Open Education Resources through the Hewlett Foundation.

As for future grant funding, for example, the VCCS recently partnered with Dr. Ben Castleman at the University of Virginia, Curry School of Education, to submit a proposal to the U.S. De-
partment of Education for the Scalable Strategies to Support College Completion competition. If successful, students at five colleges who have earned substantial credits toward graduation will receive text messages designed to nudge them to completion. This and other grant-funded projects or research initiatives could be housed in the Center, with the funds braided to support full-time personnel who possess the necessary expertise to ensure the success of these innovations.

Evaluation Plan
In December 2013, the VCCS issued a Request for Proposals to secure a pool of qualified program evaluators. The process complied with all federal and state procurement regulations. From that pre-qualified pool, in accordance with state procurement guidelines, the VCCS requested quotes for this project in September 2015 from 13 vendors; four responded. Proposals and quotes were reviewed by the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Institutional Effectiveness, the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Services, the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Services and Employer Partnerships, and the Director of Grant Development. The external evaluator for this project is Hezel Associates, a firm with nearly 30 years of experience assisting community college clients (including the VCCS) and grant recipients with their evaluation needs.

Hezel will serve as an objective third party to assess annual progress toward Center goals, provide recommendations on structure and change, and help develop future priorities. The evaluation will focus on continuous improvement during two years of the initiative, recognizing the goals of improving persistence and completion, particularly for underserved groups.

Hezel will use a theory-based approach to study design, employing collaborative, utilization-focused models of evaluation that involve program stakeholders as partners in the inquiry and allow for timely application of findings to meet knowledge and use needs, a conceptual approach well suited to the “critical friend” role of the third party evaluator for this initiative.

First, Hezel will convene a virtual project kick-off meeting to finalize evaluation details and establish research questions. The evaluation will use a mixed-method, triangulation design in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected concurrently, analyzed separately, compared and contrasted, and ultimately interpreted in light of the research questions. This approach will allow Hezel to assess implementation and progress of the Center in performing its primary functions and activities including: (a) convening and engagement, (b) student success strategy alignment and coherence, (c) improving data usage to guide priorities and initiatives; (d) research and knowledge management, and (e) policy development and advocacy.

Evaluation activities include document review, questionnaire of stakeholders, and key informant interviews for deeper inquiry into project activities and their relationship to developing coherence, connections, communication, and collaboration. Data will be analyzed separately, then summarized, compared, and synthesized in order to understand project implementation and progress. Qualitative data will be analyzed using constant comparison and thematic analysis techniques using a pre-ordinate scheme based on the research questions developed at the outset. Quantitative data from questionnaires will be analyzed in the aggregate and disaggregated by pertinent variables. Using the research questions as a framework, important findings will be identified and used to inform recommendations for program improvement. During the two-year contract, Hezel will provide three informal data summaries and one final report.
October 9, 2015

Chris Baldwin  
Senior Director  
Jobs for the Future  
88 Broad Street; 8th Floor  
Boston, MA 02110  

Dear JFF Student Success Center Network,

We, the undersigned Presidents of all 23 of Virginia’s Community Colleges, are pleased to write this letter committing to our participation in the activities to be led by a new Student Success Center, should the Virginia Community College System’s application for start-up funding to join the Jobs for the Future Student Success Center Network be successful.

We are appreciative of the VCCS Chancellor’s funding for this year’s Student Success Leadership Institute and have named our college team members. We are confident that this guided study of national best practices, examination of our college data to find opportunities for improvement, sharing ideas with other colleges, and development of a college-wide action plan for implementing change strategies to support increased student retention and completion will be instrumental in the future achievement of the goal of Complete 2021.

We understand that the role of the Student Success Center will be to provide continued guidance and focus as we implement our action plans and measure the outcomes. Further, we will access the Center for technical assistance, data analytics, and professional development related to other current and future student success initiatives. Current completion-focused initiatives include coaching and intrusive advising, the electronic early alert system, the Virginia Education Wizard, and faculty discipline peer group activities. Future strategies include structured pathways and college readiness and onboarding. Launching a Student Success Center in our state will maximize the impact in our institutions and statewide of these efforts.

The process used to develop the Complete 2021 strategic plan resulted in a common framework, aligning and prioritizing completion strategies and initiatives. A Student Success Center in Virginia will help ensure effective dissemination and adoption of positive practices and lessons learned across institutions. As each biennium of the six-year plan approaches, the Center will provide an identifiable venue for further development or revision of this strategic vision and policy agenda for community college student success that will continue to engage leadership and frontline personnel across our colleges.

A major role for a Student Success Center is to develop a set of common policy and legislative priorities that will advance the completion agenda for all of the students we serve. We will work
with our colleagues from the other institutions in the state, alongside the Student Success Center, to identify, refine, and promote key policy priorities. Through our institution’s stakeholder network and through our partner organizations, we will inform and engage other voices in this agenda-setting effort, including our local K-12 and workforce and economic development groups.

We understand that effective Student Success Centers have expectations of the colleges they represent. Student outcomes data, collected and organized for use in institutional and statewide conversations about improvement, play an essential role in determining and scaling what is working for our students. The recently created decision support tool, QUINN, described in the proposal narrative, provides the ideal vehicle for sharing our student outcomes data with the Student Success Center and we support the sharing of our data with other institutions in our state.

Virginia’s Community Colleges have made a commitment to improving student outcomes and increasing student completion rates. Having a strong, sustainable Student Success Center will provide critical infrastructure to help our institutions work together strategically to accelerate institutional and student progress on the completion agenda.

We look forward to advancing a statewide student success and completion agenda and are committed to joint activity to accelerate the scaling of student success innovations, benefitting from the focus and guidance to be provided by the Student Success Center.

Sincerely,

Blue Ridge Community College
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. John Downey
Authorized Signer Title: President
Signature: 

Dabney S. Lancaster Community College
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. John Rainone
Authorized Signer Title: President
Signature: 

Eastern Shore Community College
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Linda Thomas-Glover
Authorized Signer Title: President
Signature: 

Central Virginia Community College
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. John Capps
Authorized Signer Title: President
Signature: 

Danville Community College
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Bruce Scism
Authorized Signer Title: President
Signature: 

Germanna Community College
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. David Sam
Authorized Signer Title: President
Signature: 

J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Genene LeRosen  
Authorized Signer Title: Executive Vice President

Signature: [Signature]

Lord Fairfax Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Cheryl Thompson-Stacy  
Authorized Signer Title: President

Signature: [Signature]

New River Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Jack Lewis  
Authorized Signer Title: President

Signature: [Signature]

Patrick Henry Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Angeline Godwin  
Authorized Signer Title: President

Signature: [Signature]

Piedmont Virginia Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Frank Friedman  
Authorized Signer Title: President

Signature: [Signature]

Southside Virginia Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Alfred Roberts  
Authorized Signer Title: President

Signature: [Signature]

Thomas Nelson Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. John Dever  
Authorized Signer Title: President

Signature: [Signature]

John Tyler Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Edward Raspiller  
Authorized Signer Title: President

Signature: [Signature]

Mountain Empire Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Scott Hamilton  
Authorized Signer Title: President

Signature: [Signature]

Northern Virginia Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Robert Ralls  
Authorized Signer Title: President

Signature: [Signature]

Paul D. Camp Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Will Aiken  
Authorized Signer Title: Interim President

Signature: [Signature]

Rappahannock Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Elizabeth Crowther  
Authorized Signer Title: President

Signature: [Signature]

Southwest Virginia Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. J. Mark Estepp  
Authorized Signer Title: President

Signature: [Signature]

Tidewater Community College  
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Edna Baehre-Kolovani  
Authorized Signer Title: President

Signature: [Signature]
Virginia Highlands Community College
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Gene Couch
Authorized Signer Title: President
Signature: [signature]

Virginia Western Community College
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Robert Sandel
Authorized Signer Title: President
Signature: [signature]

Wytheville Community College
Authorized Signer Name: Dr. Dean Sprinkle
Authorized Signer Title: President
Signature: [signature]
Commonwealth of Virginia
Office of the Governor

October 9, 2015

Chris Baldwin
Senior Director
Jobs for the Future
88 Broad Street; 8th Floor
Boston, MA 02110

Dear JFF Student Success Center Network,

I am pleased that the Virginia Community College System Office (VCCS) is participating in the competition for start-up funding to join the Student Success Center Network. I support their proposed use of the Governor’s Career Pathways Work Group as an external advisory panel to provide strategic direction and input on the Center’s priorities. The Work Group falls under my direction as the Governor’s Chief Workforce Advisor and is chaired by one of my staff, Elizabeth Creamer.

Virginia’s Career Pathways Work Group is dedicated to meeting state and regional economic development and business needs. To do this, cross-program, cross-agency leaders who comprise the work group are collaborating to expand state and regional sector strategies and career pathways, and, in line with Governor McAuliffe’s benchmarks, nearly 500,000 in demand workforce credentials by 2030, and more than 50,000 by the end of the Governor’s term of office. 24 different education and workforce development programs—serving Virginians from middle school through middle age—are represented on the Work Group. In addition to the Governor’s Office and VCCS, contributing agencies include: the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), Virginia Employment Commission, Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP), and a number of other agencies serving veterans, low-income adults, and other Virginians with barriers to continued education and employment.

The VCCS proposal to participate in JFF’s Student Success Center Network is well aligned with the mission and principles of the Governor’s goals for Workforce Development, and with the specific activities of Virginia’s Career Pathways Work Group. The Commerce and Trade Secretariat and our Career Pathways Team stand ready to assist the VCCS and other partners in ensuring the success of this proposal.

Sincerely,

Maurice A. Jones

Maurice A. Jones
October 9, 2015

Mr. Chris Baldwin
Senior Director
Jobs for the Future
88 Broad Street; 8th Floor
Boston, MA 02110

Dear JFF Student Success Center Network,

I am pleased to write in support of the Virginia Community College System’s application for funding to create a Student Success Center in Virginia. This center will be a great addition to the important work that VCCS is already doing.

As Virginia’s Secretary of Education, it is my goal to increase completion rates and ensure more equity in higher education, especially at colleges and universities that work to support our underserved populations. Governor McAuliffe is adamant that we cannot establish the new Virginia economy without a world-class education system. The VCCS will play a crucial role going forward, forming the backbone for many individuals and families eager to gain the skills and training necessary to be successful contributors to the 21st century workforce.

The Student Success Center will be a critical player in the Commonwealth’s economic and academic future by providing guidance and focus as VCCS implements its Complete 2021 agenda. Colleges will access the Center for technical assistance, data analytics, and professional development related to a variety of student success initiatives, including coaching and intrusive advising, the electronic early alert system, the Virginia Education Wizard, and faculty discipline peer group activities.

Launching a Student Success Center in our state will maximize the impact on our institutions and will support the Administration’s completion agenda, a goal shared by all public higher education institutions in Virginia.

I commend the VCCS for developing a student centered plan to increase completion rates at each of the 23 community colleges, and I look forward to seeing the progress on the new Student Success Center and Complete 2021 goal. I know this will be a national example of completion, equity, and success.

Sincerely,

Anne Holton
October 9, 2015

Chris Baldwin
Senior Director
Jobs for the Future
88 Broad Street; 8th Floor
Boston, MA 02110

Dear JFF Student Success Center Network,

I am pleased to write this letter in support of the Virginia Community College System’s application for funding to create a Student Success Center in our state. This commitment to student success will be an addition to all the great work the VCCS is currently doing.

As Director of State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), it is my ultimate goal to increase completion rates, especially at colleges and universities who work to educate our underserved populations. Last year, SCHEV created a new strategic plan that put students at the center. The goals of this plan are to provide affordable access for all; optimize student success for work and life; drive change and improvement through innovation and investment; and advance economic and cultural prosperity of the Commonwealth and its regions. The VCCS has done great work in developing a strategic plan to meet these goals. This Student Success Center will help strengthen the great work already done and propel the system forward to meet SCHEV’s goals.

I understand that the role of the Student Success Center will be to provide continued guidance and focus as they implement their Complete 2021 agenda. Further, colleges will access the Center for technical assistance, data analytics, and professional development related to other current and future student success initiatives. Current completion-focused initiatives include coaching and intrusive advising, the electronic early alert system, the Virginia Education Wizard, and faculty discipline peer group activities. Future strategies include structured pathways and college readiness and onboarding. Launching a Student Success Center in our state will maximize the impact in our institutions while moving the needle towards completion. All these actions will support SCHEV’s completion agenda shared amongst all the public higher education institutions in Virginia.

I commend the VCCS for developing a student centered plan to increase completion rates at each of the 23 community colleges. I look forward to seeing their progress on the new Student Success Center and Complete 2021 goal. I know they will be a national example for completion and success.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Peter Blake

Advancing Virginia Through Higher Education
October 9, 2015

Chris Baldwin
Senior Director
Jobs for the Future
88 Broad Street; 8th Floor
Boston, MA 02110

Dear JFF Student Success Center Network,

As Chair of the Board of Directors of the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education, I am pleased to report that the Foundation board has approved fundraising for the Student Success Center as one of eight evidence-based initiatives included in Fund 2021.

Virginia's Community Colleges are committed to achieving the ambitious goal of Complete 2021: Tripling the number of credentials earned by community college students. That goal can only be met if the 23 colleges work together, under the leadership of the VCCS System Office, to substantially transform current policies and practices. Rigorous national research studies have identified numerous strategies that are proven to increase completion. The VCCS Academic Services and Research and Workforce Development Services divisions have prioritized the implementation of these eight strategies during the first two years of the six-year strategic plan.

Fund 2021 will raise resources for these innovations. Grant proposals have been submitted and future proposals are planned; the VFCCE through its annual fund plans to secure unrestricted gifts to be applied to the Fund 2021 area in greatest need. Our board campaign is under way and our goal is 100% participation from our members.

We look forward to supporting the Student Success Center. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of the grant application from Virginia’s Community Colleges.

Sincerely,

Gerald L. Baliles
Chairman