

# PREPARING STUDENTS & EDUCATORS

FOR THE  
FUTURE



Commonwealth  
Learning  
Partnership



## INTRODUCTION: THE COMMONWEALTH LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

Virginia has engaged in efforts to modernize its education system for several years. Central to these efforts has been the creation, adoption and promotion of the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate*, a major milestone for both educators and students across the Commonwealth. This updated framework for high school graduation provided the foundation for school districts to offer students a deeper, more personalized learning experience that develops the skills and competencies necessary for success beyond the classroom.

After development and adoption of the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate*, the Virginia Department of Education launched *Virginia is for Learners* in partnership with local school divisions and other education stakeholders. This initiative committed to ensuring every Virginia student graduates with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive after high school. Efforts during this initiative led to a realization among stakeholders that, in order to actualize this goal, additional resources and support should be provided to educators and education leaders.

This recognition subsequently guided efforts by several nonprofit organizations and schools of education to align the professional expectations and resources of educators and education leaders with the revised expectations for Virginia graduates. The results have facilitated a unique array of nested thought pieces, frameworks for professional learning programs, and new resources for Virginia's educator workforce.

In the midst of these efforts, the organizations came to another realization: while separately their work was beneficial for Virginia's education community, together their work could align in ways that ensure educators and education leaders have the support and upskilling opportunities they need to do their jobs in a rapidly changing environment. This idea led to the creation of the Commonwealth Learning Partnership, a network of Virginia nonprofit organizations and schools of education aiming to take the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* from vision to practice by providing the professionals with a repository of teaching resources, career enhancement programs and professional learning materials and training opportunities.

## PURPOSE: FOUR NESTED VIRGINIA EDUCATION PROFILES

This paper serves as the Partnership's foundational thought piece, showcasing several of the materials Partnership members co-designed to enrich and modernize the professional learning (pre-service and in-service) of Virginia's educator workforce. The document provides a brief history and summary of the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* and subsequently outlines three companion professional profiles:

- *Profile of a Virginia Classroom*
- *Profile of a Virginia Educator*
- *Profile of a Virginia Education Leader*

The second portion of this document discusses the connections between the four profiles and how these influence and improve the success of Virginia students. It is through this work that the Commonwealth Learning Partnership aspires to illustrate how investment in the educator workforce and their upskilling and ongoing professional development is essential for securing a richer, more successful outcome for the next generation of working professionals.

Finally, an appendix included at the end of this paper provides the reader with visual representations of the materials Partnership members co-designed, as well as a graphic depicting Virginia's five competencies that now accompany content knowledge requirements, referred to as "The Five C's."

## SUMMARY: PROFILE OF A VIRGINIA GRADUATE

In 2016, Virginia enacted House Bill 895/Senate Bill 336, which called on the Virginia Board of Education to work in consultation with education stakeholders to develop a *Profile of a Virginia Graduate*, identifying the knowledge, skills and experiences necessary to ensure success after high school. From this work, the Board of Education concluded that the Virginia high school graduates must be able to:

- Achieve and apply appropriate academic and technical knowledge (content knowledge);
- Demonstrate productive workplace skills, qualities, and behaviors (workplace skills);
- Build connections and value interactions with others as a responsible and responsive citizen (community engagement and civic responsibility); and
- Align knowledge, skills and personal interests with career opportunities (career exploration).<sup>1</sup>

Through each component, the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* promotes deeper learning and career pathways by recognizing students must be equipped with both content knowledge and skills to succeed in postsecondary learning and work. This profile lays the foundation for local graduation requirements and endorses student-centered learning by accommodating diversity in student interests through opportunities for apprenticeships, internships and other credentialing programs.

“The Five C’s,” the competencies or skillsets that inform the profile, also assists schools in preparing students for future employability and lifelong learning. These competencies are defined as: Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Communication, Collaboration and Citizenship Skills. Many local school districts have customized “The Five Cs” to meet community contexts and employer demands.

## SUMMARY: PROFILE OF A VIRGINIA CLASSROOM

The *Profile of a Virginia Classroom* considers the components of a learning setting that enable all students to graduate having had the experiences and developed the content and competency mastery articulated by the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate*. Led by the Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (VASCD), this profile developed through discussions and co-design work around the Commonwealth with educators and education organizations. It provides educators with resources and prompts to guide creation of a productive and deep learning environment for students that prepares them for the future.

The *Profile of a Virginia Classroom* displays several characteristics that contribute to valuable student learning and instruction:

- A learning setting (e.g., classroom) should ensure subject matter is relevant in and outside of the classroom in order to create deeper learning opportunities for students and facilitate real-world connections.
- The learning setting should be collaboration-friendly and supportive of student interaction while also ensuring that lessons meet student needs.
- This environment should also promote the student’s productive struggle to grasp important concepts and provide opportunities to explore different solutions.
- Lessons should incorporate purposeful checkpoints and assessments to gauge progress, along with student feedback, as a valuable method to ensure productivity.

No classroom would be complete without ensuring a socially considerate and equitable learning environment. The *Profile of a Virginia Classroom* lists safety as the first factor for creating a supportive classroom experience and also pays attention to additional factors such as inclusivity and cultural responsiveness. The learning environment must also facilitate confidence and skill-building among students in order to support their overall progress.

## **SUMMARY: PROFILE OF A VIRGINIA EDUCATOR**

The *Profile of a Virginia Educator* seeks to describe the content knowledge, skills, dispositions and experiences that educators need to be able to put the Profile of a Virginia Classroom and Graduate into effect. This work began with a series of focus groups across the Commonwealth. In 2018, EdPolicy*Forward*: The Center for Education Policy at George Mason University launched this effort with statewide discussions with educators and education leaders. Throughout this process, EdPolicy*Forward* recorded responses from participants and processed their answers to develop an actionable framework. In the spring of 2019, the profile underwent consideration by several groups of teachers, administrators and teacher preparation faculty.

The *Profile of a Virginia Educator* acknowledges the important role educators play in preparing a student for life after high school. Educators should be familiar with a variety of pedagogical approaches as well as an awareness of how students learn and grow. Methods to ensure content knowledge remains applicable to real world experiences is also an important concept for educators to grasp. The profile also underscores the importance of approaching work with an equity lens, understanding diversity among students and being culturally-responsive and sensitive to these differences.

Equally important is the profile's acknowledgment of experiences and support to which educators should have access in order to ensure sufficient preparation. Opportunities for mentoring, peer counsel, and communities of learning contribute to lifelong professional learning and ensure an educator's skills and content knowledge are continually refreshed.

## **SUMMARY: PROFILE OF A VIRGINIA EDUCATION LEADER**

The *Profile of a Virginia Education Leader* outlines the professional knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary for education leaders to operationalize the Profiles of a Virginia Graduate, Educator and Education Leader. This includes supporting the continuous learning and professional development of educators and cultivating productive and preparatory learning experiences for students. Facilitated through the efforts of William & Mary's School-University Resource Network (SURN), this profile underwent multiple levels of design, review and discussion by Virginia educators, superintendents, other school leaders, higher education faculty members and relevant community stakeholders. Its multifaceted review process ensured that the finished piece reflected feedback from all levels of the education field.

The *Profile of a Virginia Education Leader* underscores that education leaders must operate through an equity-focused framework to ensure optimal learning for educators, students, families and communities. A leader facilitates equity throughout the learning environment by engaging and empowering educators to mentor students and model positive behaviors. An education leader must be adept at articulating and establishing a positive vision, set of values and culture to facilitate student growth.

Through an understanding of research-based models for continuous school improvement, a leader should facilitate individual and collective responsibility by encouraging and managing partnerships across the learning community. An innovative spirit is critical to long-term success, as a leader must uphold thought diversity and create opportunities for buy-in from educators, students, and families. A leader also engages in active listening and explores opportunities for collaboration. At the heart of these efforts is a leader's inclination to practice humility, transparency, and emotional intelligence.

## THE NESTED NATURE OF THE PROFILES: CONSIDERING THE TIES THAT BIND

“The Five C’s” is the connective tissue that binds the four profiles, all of which work together to support deeper learning and meaningful, preparatory education opportunities for students. This section separately analyzes the commonalities of the profiles through the lens of these five concepts and illustrates how the classroom, educator and education leader profiles are interdependent actors that work together to actualize the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate*.

### **Critical Thinking**

Critical Thinking skills can flourish in a classroom that provides opportunities for student-led analysis and problem solving. The classroom should allow students to explore solutions through a productive struggle, rather than enclosing them in a rigid, answer-focused framework. It should also facilitate connections between content knowledge and real-world circumstances to create relevancy and buy-in for the student.

In order to design this environment, educators must be knowledgeable about how students learn as well as how to design learning experiences that can foster multilateral connections. Educators must also exercise flexibility in their use of pedagogies, bearing in mind the diverse needs and skills of students. To accomplish these objectives, an educator must have access to career-long learning opportunities that ensure their skills and content knowledge are routinely refreshed and reevaluated. Such opportunities could include activities like peer evaluation exercises, professional learning resources, and mentorship programs. These experiences would ensure educators are aware of new information and research or updated methods to cultivate student growth.

Facilitating these opportunities for educators requires engagement from education leaders. Leaders have the responsibility to create and support organizational structures that advance educator and student growth. Leaders must actively listen to the school community and communicate directly with educators, students, family and the larger community. Above all, leaders must articulate a vision that prioritizes continuing growth for everyone.

### **Collaboration**

The education community can cultivate student collaboration by facilitating opportunities within the classroom and workplace for students to work interdependently and learn in group settings. The learning setting should promote inclusivity among students as well as balance educator-led instruction with student-led exercises.

Educators can create this classroom experience by practicing flexibility in their curriculum and teaching designs. They must be able to coordinate content knowledge requirements with opportunities for students to develop critical skills. Student-led exercises and support initiatives can enable students to work productively together. Educators should also have access to professional learning resources and programs, both within and outside of the school system, which can enhance these efforts.

Education leaders in turn should value and promote diverse thinking and creativity among educators, which encourages them to design authentic and collaborative learning environments for students. Leaders should also model innovation and creativity in their own efforts to manage school resources and education objectives.

### **Communication**

Communication skills can flourish in a classroom that feels safe and supportive to students and provides opportunities for to engage in written and oral expression of ideas. The classroom should allow for assignments that relate to real-

world circumstances, such as public speaking. To ensure the success of these exercises, the classroom should promote diversity, equity and inclusion. Students should also have ample opportunities to express their thoughts in a positive and productive way to fellow students and educators.

To create this experience, educators must be active listeners that elevates student voice. Educators should understand how students learn, grow and develop while also employing different pedagogies to cultivate communication skills. Educators should also serve as a model and mentor to students in order to improve their skillsets.

Education leaders must ensure educators receive sufficient opportunities and resources in order to learn and model communication skills for students. Leaders can model appropriate communication techniques by articulating their vision and expectations for student success to educators, students, families and the community.

### ***Creative Thinking***

Students can foster creative thinking skills in a classroom that provides them the freedom to brainstorm and contemplate solutions in a judgment-free environment. Learning settings should provide worthwhile learning experiences that promote the productive struggle of comprehending concepts and encourage students to consider a variety of possibilities when searching for the correct answer.

Educators can facilitate this classroom experience by modeling creative thinking for students and designing courses in ways that provide students increased autonomy and opportunities for self-expression. To do this, educators should have a variety of methods in their toolkit, which can be replenished through resources and opportunities that inspire and shape their own creative thinking skills.

Education leaders have the responsibility of creating conditions that encourage and promote creative thinking. They can also cultivate creativity among educators by exemplifying innovation in their own efforts to ensure a positive learning environment. Leaders should routinely communicate with educators to evaluate their flexibility in teaching methods as well as interact with students to gain their input.

### ***Citizenship***

Cultivating citizenship skills within students requires a classroom setting that is culturally responsive to student diversity and acknowledges real-world issues and local community contexts. The classroom should provide opportunities for service-oriented learning and tasks that address issues relevant to modern society and that enable students to engage in the community as their classroom.

However, this classroom experience cannot be actualized unless educators understand how to respond to cultural diversity among students and exercise sensitivity and responsiveness to these differences. To accomplish this, educators should have ample opportunities for classroom observation and access to professional learning resources that enhance their personal reflection, knowledge and skillsets.

Education leaders can draw upon their knowledge base of methods for school improvement to implement frameworks that support citizenship among students. Education leaders should communicate directly with educators and remain active in their efforts to inspire students to become more service- and community-oriented.

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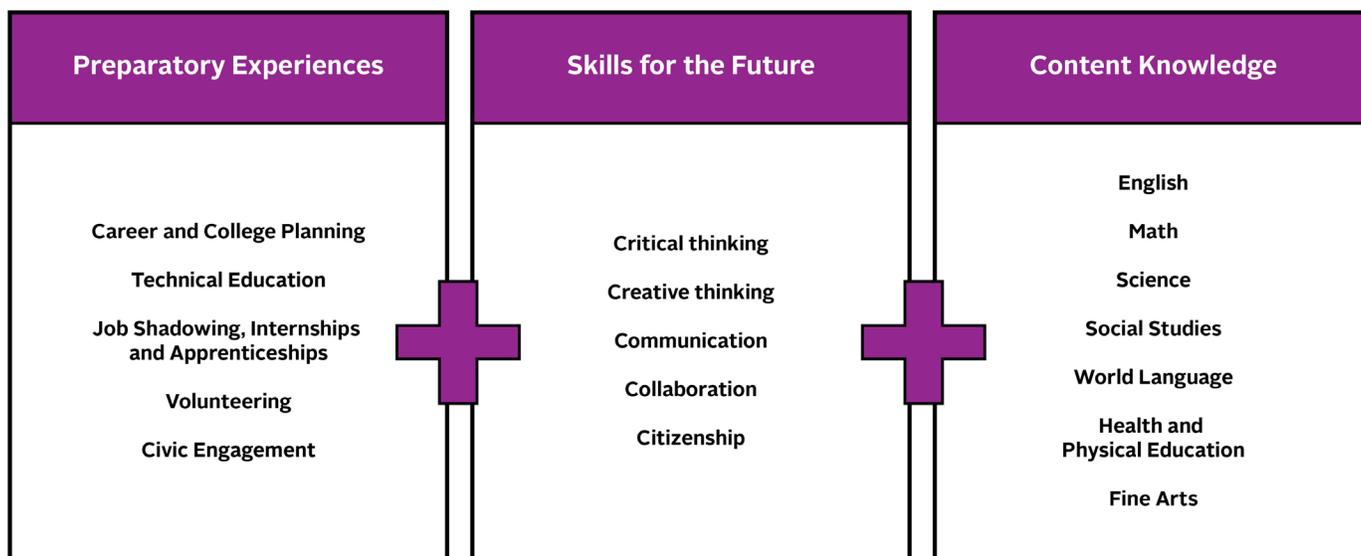
## **CONCLUSION: THE COMMONWEALTH LEARNING PARTNERSHIP**

When analyzing these profiles, one thing is clear: educators and education leaders are the foundation for student success. From classroom design to community buy-in, these actors are absolutely necessary for ensuring students graduate prepared for the future and ready to contribute positively to their community and the modern economy. To advance their efforts and facilitate long-lasting growth of students, we must invest in Virginia's education workforce.

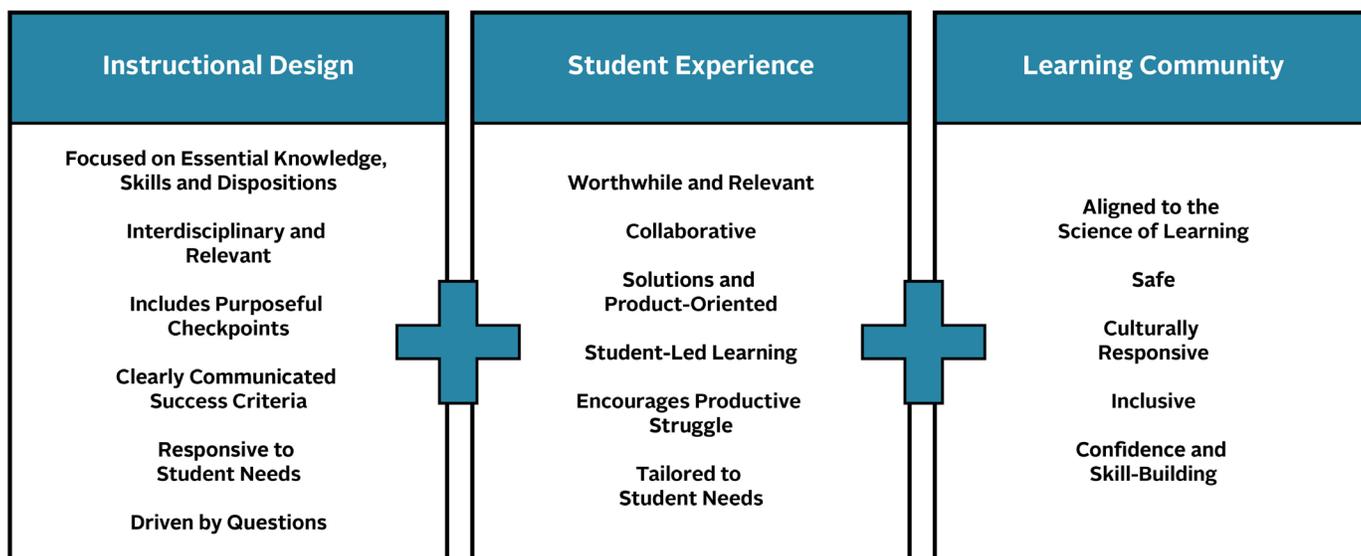
The Commonwealth Learning Partnership was established to champion that cause: we believe that to take the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* from vision to practice, Virginia education stakeholders and policy officials must invest in the initial training and ongoing professional learning of educators and education leaders. We support the notion that all who work or learn in Virginia schools deserve the supports and upskilling opportunities needed to thrive. Furthermore, our Partnership is committed to working toward solutions that provide equity and opportunity to everyone.

# APPENDIX

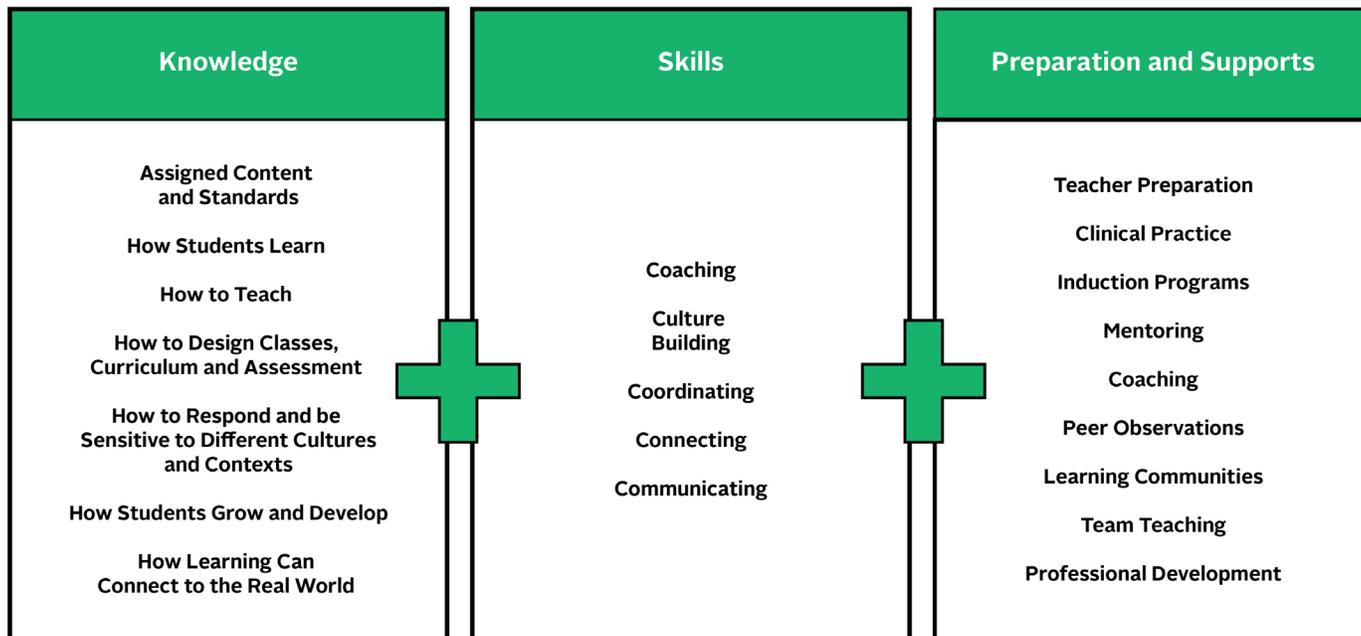
## Profile of a Virginia Graduate



## Profile of a Virginia Classroom



## Profile of a Virginia Educator



## Profile of a Virginia Education Leader

