

McClellan's K-12 Equitable Education & Investment Plan

Summary

1. As the daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter of educators and the mother of two children in public schools, Jenn understands that quality education is the foundation for economic success, healthy communities, and a thriving democracy. During Jenn's over 15 years of service in the General Assembly, her top priority has been fighting for an equitable, high-quality public education system that works for every student. During her tenure in the legislature, she has passed historic legislation to address the disparities facing students of color, students with disabilities, and to end punitive and disproportionate disciplinary practices that force students into the school-to-prison pipeline. In just the past four years alone, Jenn has championed legislation that would lift the out-dated, pre-recession cap on school support personnel and fully fund and implement the [Board of Education's Standards of Quality](#).¹
2. **Equitable Education:** Virginia has fallen short in building and sustaining an equitable education system, failing students, educators, and families in both urban and rural school divisions. Districts often struggle to access resources, prepare, support and fairly pay teachers, implement just disciplinary practices, support students with specific learning needs, all the while continuing to over-criminalize Black and Brown children. Taken together, these significant issues have led to an inequitable K-12 education system for all students. According to the Virginia Department of Education, in 2018, local school districts paid a combined total of \$4.2 billion above their expected budget, money that should have been provided by the state.² This state funding shortfall has a direct correlation to academic achievement gaps, specifically for school districts with higher concentrations of poverty. In order to ensure each student receives a high-quality education, Virginia must fulfill its Constitutional obligation by fully funding and supporting schools based on their specific needs.
3. **Jenn's K-12 Equitable Education & Investment Plan (EEIP) will:**
 - a. Invest approximately \$2.3 billion in new dollars annually into Virginia's K-12 education system.
 - b. Create an Equity Accountability Program to address educational inequities, including a new Director of Inclusion & Diversity under the Secretariat of Education, establish a new School-to-Prison Pipeline Task Force, and require all school districts to set concrete policies to address racism and bias.
 - c. Bring much-needed reform to the Local Composite Index, updating the funding model to accurately calculate the true needs of school divisions.
 - d. Increase teacher salaries to an average of \$65,000 in order to remain nationally competitive and retain the best teachers, and do right by the Commonwealth's educators.
 - e. Fully implement and fund the Board of Education's Standards of Quality.

¹ VPM, [Lawmakers Aren't Fully Funding Supports for At-Risk Students, Say Some Advocates](#) & Virginia Mercury, [Richmond-area senator wants to restore pre-recession school staffing levels](#).

² [2019 Annual Report on the Condition and Needs of Public Schools in Virginia](#), Virginia Board of Education, Presented to the Governor and General Assembly. December 1, 2019. Pg. 4.

- f. Finish the work of lifting the funding cap on school support staff, providing \$350 million to ensure a ratio of no more than 250 students per 1 school social worker, school psychologist, school nurse, licensed behavior analyst, licensed assistant behavior analyst, other licensed health and behavioral positions, assistant principals, and custodial staff.
 - g. Update the profile of a 21st Century Graduate and strengthen assessments to align early childhood education through 12th grade, ensuring that students have the life and work-ready skills and competencies they need to succeed in the 21st century.
 - h. Address long-standing inequities in the special education program.
 - i. Empower local school divisions to determine when to start and end the school year.
 - j. Modernize out-of-date teacher preparation programs and licensure and build and sustain a robust, diverse teacher workforce.
 - k. Create a sustainable and dedicated fund to address school infrastructure issues, while accelerating the deployment of solar power to school districts that are implementing renewable energy programs.
4. This K-12 plan is the second step of Jenn’s 3-part comprehensive Virginia Education plan from birth to employment. She previously released her bold [Universal Child Care & Early Learning Plan](#), aimed at delivering high-quality universal child care to Virginia’s families by 2025 and providing increased access to affordable child care and early learning for more than 500,000 Virginia children. Jenn’s complete education plan is the foundation of rebuilding a thriving Virginia economy after the COVID-19 pandemic that more equitably provides opportunity for generations to come.

I. Equitable Education

A. COVID-19 Crisis Impact

School districts across the Commonwealth have struggled to keep up with the ever-changing COVID-19 landscape. Teachers have been at the center of the debate, ranging from concerns about staff safety to children not having adequate access to broadband to take part in their virtual classes. Just last year, due to the pandemic, a temporary cut of \$490 million was made to early childhood education and K-12 funding.³ The Commonwealth Institute predicted that education budget shortfalls will only exacerbate existing inequities, directly impacting students and teachers who already have to “do more with less.”⁴ Even prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, per student spending during the 2019–2020 school year in Virginia was still 8% lower than it was before the 2009 recession.⁵ Not only is Virginia struggling to match pre-recession funding, the Commonwealth’s schools have experienced unprecedented challenges and budget shortfalls in the past year. These will continue to impact students and school divisions long after COVID-19 has passed and will require historic, bold and essential investments to support Virginia’s public education system.

B. The Local Composite Index

In order for the Commonwealth to provide a “system of free public elementary and secondary schools for all children of school age throughout the Commonwealth,” the General Assembly instituted the Standards of Quality (SOQs) in the 1970s. Based on this program, a funding formula was developed called the Local Composite Index (LCI). State and local government jointly share the costs of funding Virginia’s K-12 public education system and the LCI determines a school division’s ability to pay their share of education costs. The formula is calculated by the following three measures: true value of real property (50%); adjusted gross income (40%); and local taxable retail sales (10%).⁶

³ Duncombe, Chris & Stewart, Chad. [Virginia Can Choose Equity for School Funding During Economic Crisis](#). The Commonwealth Institute.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Virginia Department of Education, [Local Composite Index](#).

This outdated formula allows for tax-exempt properties to be considered as part of the true value of real property and bases 50% of the funding formula on this imperfect item alone. The formula also neglects to consider high-need student populations and fixed or rising capital costs, such as school infrastructure. The LCI perpetuates a system of inequity by creating the illusion that certain school districts and localities have access to more funding than they actually do. For localities with high-need student populations, this flawed formula further strains already tight budgets, limiting their ability to increase teacher pay, recruit and retain teachers, hire more staff, support students with specialized needs, and other necessary functions that help to ensure a high-quality education for all.

Jenn has introduced legislation to study and update the LCI, but has been met with opposition.⁷ She has also carried budget amendments to create grants holding schools harmless to help the divisions most impacted by this arcane funding approach.⁸ In order to build an equitable K-12 public schools system in Virginia, it is essential to update the Local Composite Index funding formula.

Virginia's students are too important to wait any longer. Jenn will not wait until day one of the McClellan administration to act. During her transition, she will create a funding reform workgroup that will include education leaders, teachers, parents, and school division representation to analyze and make recommendations for updating Virginia's funding formula. This workgroup will function under the following 3 key goals:

1. Address the unique and individual needs of each school division.
2. Create an education system that prioritizes social justice and equity for students, families, teachers, and school staff.
3. Ensure the funding model provides for a high-quality education for every student regardless of their zip code.

C. Standards of Quality & Support Cap

The Standards of Quality (SOQs) outline the basic needs for public education in Virginia. During re-benchmarking, The Board of Education recommended additional support for high-poverty schools through an Equity Fund; increasing funding for school counselors to ensure at least one counselor for every 250 students; removing the "support cap" and increasing funding for essential school support staff, including social workers, nurses, administrative and custodial staff; and increasing funding for English Language Learner students based on proficiency.⁹

Jenn has consistently championed the removal of the support cap methodology from the budget in the [2021 session](#), [2020 session](#), [2019 Session](#), and [2018 Session](#).

In 2020, Jenn introduced [SB 728](#) to fully fund these recommendations, but the General Assembly did not pass the measure. Again in 2021, Jenn introduced [SB 1257](#), asking the General Assembly to once again invest the requested \$1 billion to fully fund the SOQs and lift the school personnel support cap. SB 1257 was amended and passed to provide 50 million in new funding to create at least three specialized student support positions, including school social workers, school psychologists, school nurses, licensed behavior analysts, licensed assistant behavior analysts, and other licensed health and behavioral positions, per 1,000 students.

As governor, Jenn will build on this success by providing an additional \$350 million to finish the work of lifting the support personnel cap.

⁷ McClellan, Jennifer. [Unfreezing Formula Would Chill Local School Systems](#), Richmond Times-Dispatch, February 2010.

⁸ [2018 Budget Amendment Item 136 #9s](#), Local Composite Index Hold Harmless Grants.

⁹ [Virginia Department of Education](#), Standards of Quality.

D. Equity & Accountability in K-12

New investments will help address the long standing inequities in schools, but money will never be enough to eliminate a century of systemic inequities and racism in Virginia's K-12 public education system. As governor, Jenn will ensure all students receive a high-quality education, including those who have historically faced barriers to success, including: multilingual students, racially marginalized students, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students. The data is clear: the racial achievement gap in public schools will never be closed if the disproportionate discipline gap is not closed first.¹⁰ Building an equitable public education system starts by implementing and requiring critical anti-racism and justice practices and holding the system accountable for dismantling centuries of systemic inequities that serve as barriers for student success.

Jenn will create an Equity Accountability Program that will eliminate the current predictability of student outcomes based on race, gender, zip code, ability, sexual identity, socioeconomic status or languages spoken at home.¹¹ The Equity Accountability Program will be driven by the Virginia Equity 5Cs: Cultural responsiveness of the Educator workforce, implementing Compassion for students and family engagement, reframing Curriculum so it is culturally and socio-economically relevant, Courageous leadership that demands a disruption to this system of inequity, and Continuous reflection.¹²

Currently, more than half of Virginia Schools divisions have moderate or high disproportionate Black student suspensions, with only 5 school divisions data reflecting no disproportionate suspensions of Black students.¹³ Racially disparate school discipline is a driving force for lost instructional time for both Black and Brown students in Virginia. The Commonwealth is ranked among the top 10 in the nation for the disparities between Black student instructional losses.¹⁴ There are still remnants of zero-tolerance policies baked into Virginia law that help fuel systemic racism in the public education system.

Racial and gender diversity in the workforce was a major contributor to U.S. economic growth in the latter half of the 20th century. More than 25 percent of the growth in productivity between 1960 and 2008 was associated with reducing occupational barriers for Black people and women. In 2015, the economy would have been \$2.5 trillion larger had there been no racial gaps in income. If we finally close these persistent educational achievement gaps between Black and Brown children and their White counterparts, we would be changing lives while adding an estimated \$2.3 trillion to the U.S. economy by 2050.¹⁵

In 2018, the Curry School at the University of Virginia reported that 80% of teachers in Virginia were white.¹⁶ Recruiting and retaining a more diverse supply of teachers will positively impact Virginia's students. According to NPR, Black students taught by Black teachers have an increased graduation rate.¹⁷ Jenn will continue supporting and strengthening HBCU teaching programs to supplement the education workforce pipeline and improve diversity. As governor, Jenn will also create a targeted, statewide recruitment program to attract high-achieving minority students to the teaching profession. This program will partner with high-need districts in need of classroom teachers to ensure that after these students become licensed, they will have the training and preparation required to meet the unique needs of the districts they intend to serve.

¹⁰ Losen, Daniel J. & Martinez, Paul. [Lost Opportunities: How Disparate School Discipline Continues to Drive Differences in the Opportunity to Learn](#). October 2020.

¹¹ Navigating EdEquityVA, [Virginia's Road Map to Equity](#), 2020.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Losen, Daniel J. & Martinez, Paul. [Lost Opportunities: How Disparate School Discipline Continues to Drive Differences in the Opportunity to Learn](#). October 2020.

¹⁵ The National Skills Coalition. [The Roadmap For Racial Equity: An Imperative For Workforce Development Advocates](#). Sept. 2019.

¹⁶ Miller, Luke C. Ph.D. [A First Look at Teacher Retention in Virginia](#).

¹⁷ Boisrond, Carl. [If Your Teacher Looks Like You, You May Do Better In School](#). NPR.

Under McClellan's Equity Accountability Program, Jenn will:

1. Establish the Director of Inclusion and Equity position within the Secretariat of Education to ensure a focus on equity and social justice are embedded in all education initiatives.
2. Require and implement effective student discipline policies and laws, curriculum guidelines, and school divisions policies, with a focus on expanding equity.
3. Create new guidelines for teacher preparation programs and provide practical applications for cultural and socio-economic competencies, ensuring teachers are prepared to successfully engage with diverse student populations.
4. Increase accountability for the persistent achievement gaps that are pervasive across Virginia's school divisions.
5. Require all school districts to establish concrete policies to address racism and bias, including continuing education for educators, administrators and others to ensure ongoing cultural and socio-economic competency.
6. Launch a School-to-Prison Pipeline Task Force, a new group which will work under the newly established Equity Accountability Program, charged with:
 - a. Making substantive legislative recommendations that advance equity in student codes of conduct, exclusionary discipline regulations and the use of School Resource Officers.
 - b. Making recommendations that will codify a robust student and family appeal process as it relates to exclusionary discipline.
 - c. Making recommendations that will support the funding and establishment of a statewide "Grow Your Own Program" model, designed to support the diversification of Virginia's educator workforce.

E. Special Education Reform

In 2020, a report from the Virginia Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) found serious deficiencies in how the Virginia Department of Education monitored and responded to special education complaints.¹⁸ In 2018, students without disabilities graduated at a rate of 91% while students with disabilities graduated at the significantly lower rate of 61%.¹⁹ Additionally, only 52% of Black students with disabilities graduated with a standard diploma or better, while students of other races with disabilities graduated with a standard diploma or better at a rate of 65%.²⁰ Ensuring students with disabilities, especially those of color, have equal access to a quality, constitutionally-mandated education is paramount to furthering equity in the public school system.

Further, these graduation rates have resulted in students with disabilities being twice as likely to be unemployed than other students and half as likely to have earned a four-year college degree.²¹ While approximately 20% of students with disabilities have earned an applied studies diploma, an applied studies diploma have little real-world value and are not accepted by community colleges or traditional four-year colleges in Virginia.²²

¹⁸ Masters, Kate. ['Devastating' new report finds major problems with special education in Virginia](#), Virginia Mercury

¹⁹ [K-12 Special Education in Virginia](#). JLARC.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., pg. 43.

²² Ibid.

Currently, schools in Virginia are much more likely to hire special education teachers with a provisional license than hire general education teachers with the same certification. During the 2019–2020 school year, 15% of special education teachers across the state had only a provisional license.²³ This means that 30,000 students with disabilities received their education from a teacher who was not fully licensed.²⁴

That's one of the reasons why, during the 2021 General Assembly Session, Jenn supported legislation to require the Board of Education and the Virginia Department of Education to develop new policies, procedures, and modify existing policies and procedures to improve the crucial administration and oversight of special education in the Commonwealth.²⁵

This bill begins to address longstanding special education teacher shortages, makes Individualized Education Plan (IEP) design consistent across the state, increases the number of school districts that receive state-led quality checks each year in an effort to expose shortcomings and inconsistencies in IEP quality, updates the applied studies diploma to ensure it supports secondary educational and career options, and creates a parent ombudsman that will report directly to the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The implementation of this bold and innovative overhaul will take place over a multi-year period. The McClellan Administration will closely monitor the implementation process and ensure the Equity Accountability Program continues to include input and recommendations to ensure a smooth transition and essential reforms. Understanding that teacher preparation is interconnected, Jenn will also ensure crucial updates to teacher preparation programs and teacher licensure will include the changes addressed in the 2021 legislation.

Additionally, Jenn's effort to lift the support staff cap and put an end to the destructive school-to-prison pipeline will also help address the disproportionate level of expulsions, suspensions, and over-criminalization of Black and Brown students, especially those with disabilities.

F. School Calendar

The current school calendar does not adequately support every student's ability to learn and does not meet the unique needs of the Commonwealth's diverse school divisions. As governor, Jenn will empower localities to determine what is best for their specific situations, providing divisions with the autonomy to determine their own start and end dates for their school years, based on local and regional factors such as agricultural needs, tourism concerns, and weather. This will enable localities to best serve their students' needs. It will make Virginia a leader in the American education system by empowering more divisions to pursue innovative learning options such as year-round schedules, which dramatically reduces summer learning loss. Jenn will also empower individual schools to work with locally elected or appointed school boards to adjust the school week to suit the individual needs of their students and families. This school calendar flexibility will eliminate the "one size fits all" approach that simply does not work for the diverse and growing Commonwealth. Taken together, these proposals will provide school divisions the flexibility they need to work together to create an optimal learning environment in support of their students, families, and educators.

II. Career & Technical Education

A. Career Preparation

Jenn will ensure that the students of today are prepared for the workforce of tomorrow. Her plan will expand access to dual-enrollment programs across the Commonwealth, allowing students in every zip code to earn transferable college level credits while still enrolled in a public high school. Additionally, her plan will provide training, support, and funding for technical education to prepare students who wish to enter the workforce immediately after graduating high school. These dual-enrollment credits could save families thousands of dollars in college course credits while preparing students for their next professional

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ [HB 2299](#), Virginia's Legislative Information System, 2021

step. Jenn's plan will expand on the success of programs like Virginia Teachers for Tomorrow, which allows high school students to gain college credit for interning as a teacher.²⁶

Jenn will also expand Career & Technical Education classes and trade school options to diversify and strengthen Virginia's workforce pipeline. The curriculum for Career & Technical Education programs must be centered on competency-based instruction, credentials and work-based learning, not traditional testing criteria. As governor, Jenn will consult with organizations, businesses, higher education institutions, and others to determine high-growth fields and in-demand skills to better tailor training opportunities to available jobs. Jenn will expand professional development and resources to ensure equitable support for successful implementation of the life ready competencies outlined in the profile of a Virginia Graduate to all students regardless of where the student lives. Providing students with highly sought-after skills and credentials will ensure Virginia has a workforce that is highly adapted to the current job market.

Jenn will work with trade school programs to prepare high school students for the workforce by expanding and creating programs to provide students with hands-on experience in specific fields, and will ensure that these high-quality programs that lead to career opportunities are equitable and available to students across the Commonwealth regardless of where they live.

B. Assessments & Preparing the Modern Graduate

In 2019, Virginia was expected to add upwards of 150,000 new jobs in STEM fields.²⁷ The workforce is shifting from merely focusing on STEM-prepared students to STEM-prepared citizens. Jenn will increase not only the number of required credits, but the number of offered courses in STEM and tying these new requirements to funding programs. Jenn will invest in educating every student in STEM proficiencies, and will not limit its access to students who demonstrate an interest in associated careers. Fully investing in and supporting STEM programs and increasing student exposure and access to these programs from a young age, will populate the STEM pipeline in Virginia by creating a qualified and prepared workforce.

As governor, Jenn will also realign early childhood through 8th grade to reflect the Profile of Graduate. Jenn will require a comprehensive review of the assessments and Standards of Learning to ensure they are culturally inclusive, and assess learning and growth in accordance with the Profile of a Graduate, and reduce the total number and type of required Standards of Learning assessments to the minimum requirements established by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended.

III. Teachers & Education Workforce

A. Teacher Pay

As governor, Jenn will prioritize competitive teacher salary scale that keeps teachers here. During the 2018–2019 school year, Virginia ranked 32nd in average teacher salaries at \$51,994.²⁸ Jenn will increase teacher salaries to an average \$65,000 per year, \$4,300 more than the national average.²⁹ This pay increase will bring more quality, dedicated educators into Virginia's schools and keep them in Virginia by making Virginia the 12th highest paying state for teachers.

B. Teacher Preparatory Programs & Licensure

Teaching is one of the most important careers with power to create lifelong impacts on students' futures. The job of teaching is harder than ever, and the preparatory and licensure system has not been adequately updated to prepare and support the ever increasing challenges a modern day teacher faces. A strong teacher preparation spans throughout a teacher's career from initial college preparation, early mentorship, and continued professional development. Teachers need access to expanded prac-

26 Lucy Sorensen, Jamie Frank, Thomas Gais & Hao Sun. [Virginia is for Teachers? An Analysis of the State's Teacher Demand and Supply](#). Pg. 25.

27 Governor Ralph Northam. [Executive Order, Number Thirty-Six \(2019\), Establishment of the Virginia STEM Education Commission](#).

28 [2019-2020 Teacher Salary Survey Results](#), Virginia Department of Education, Pg. 4.

29 National Center for Education Statistics, [Estimated average annual salary of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by state: 1969-1970 through 2018-19](#).

ticed-based preparation that is informed by local K-12 partnerships and driven by data that helps identify what is working and what needs to be improved.

As governor, Jenn will restructure the Virginia teacher preparatory programs and teacher licensure starting with creating an updated description of what is required of a modern day teacher by aligning teacher preparation programs, teacher licensure and teacher evaluation to the competencies associated with the profile of a Virginia Graduate. Using this data will help identify the profile of a 21st century teacher which will inform the update of the preparation and licensure process to equip, mentor, and develop the skills needed for teachers to succeed.

C. Retention & Debt Forgiveness

Jenn will invest resources to increase teacher retention across the Commonwealth. During the 2016–2017 school year, 11% of teachers left teaching completely while 7% transferred schools.³⁰ This is a higher turnover than the national average which was 8% during the 2016-2017 school year.³¹ Approximately 50% of teachers leave their first placement within four years of being hired.³²

The Richmond Teacher Residency Program (RTR) is a highly competitive program that provides tuition funds and a stipend for student-teachers who complete a year of student teaching in Richmond City Schools and commit to stay in Richmond City Schools for at least three years after graduation.³³ This program supplies Richmond with a supply of highly trained, well prepared teachers who have a desire to stay in Richmond Schools which gives students a sense of stability. This program is especially important considering the current student debt crisis facing the Commonwealth.

As of January 2021, the average American owed \$32,731 in student loans³⁴ In Virginia alone borrowers owe on average \$29,887 each.³⁵ 56% of Virginia residents are in debt due to student loans.³⁶ Making college more affordable and incentivizing and creating more programs like the RTR program will make obtaining an education degree more attainable while also incentivizing teachers to work in high needs school divisions.

Jenn will increase funding for the expansion of the Richmond Teacher Residency (RTR) program and work to set-up teacher residency programs in other areas across the Commonwealth.

D. Professional Development & Mentorship

Increasing teacher retention requires a renewed commitment to mentorship to help new teachers hone their skills. Currently, mentorship programs are required for the first year of a teacher’s probationary period.³⁷ However, most teachers who end up leaving teaching do so within the first five years.³⁸ As governor, Jenn will help address high teacher turnover rates by extending mentoring programs to five years for first time teachers. Jenn will maximize the program’s effectiveness by working with the Board of Education to evaluate and redesign the use of time and school schedules to increase opportunities for professional learning communities, peer coaching, and collaboration.

30 Miller, Luke C. Ph.D. [A First Look at Teacher Retention in Virginia](#).

31 Lucy Sorensen, Jamie Frank, Thomas Gais & Hao Sun. [Virginia is for Teachers? An Analysis of the State’s Teacher Demand and Supply](#), Pg. 8.

32 Miller, Luke C. Ph.D. [A First Look at Teacher Retention in Virginia](#).

33 McNeill, Brian. [Teacher Tales: Participants in the School of Education’s Richmond Teacher Residency program share lessons they’ve learned in city school classrooms](#). VCU News.

34 Song, Justin. [Average Student Loan Debt in America: 2019 Facts & Figures](#).

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 [Va. Code Ann. § 22.1-303](#).

38 Miller, Luke C. Ph.D. [A First Look at Teacher Retention in Virginia](#), Pg. 31.

IV. School Infrastructure

A. School Buildings

As governor, Jenn will focus effort on capital projects such as school construction, while also advancing clean and efficient energy usage. From 2008 to 2017 capital spending on schools in Virginia fell by 33%.³⁹ Schools are facing mold and insect infestation,⁴⁰ leaking ceilings,⁴¹ falling ceiling tiles,⁴² and even broken bathroom stall doors.⁴³ More than 60% of school buildings in the Commonwealth are over 40 years old.⁴⁴

As governor, Jenn will build upon her work in creating the School Construction and Modernization Commission in 2020. The Commission's goal is to provide guidance and resources to local school divisions related to school construction and modernization and making funding recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor. As governor, she will ensure the Commission recommendations are implemented and funded for creating a dedicated and sustainable fund to provide localities with financial support and resources to build, renovate, and modernize Virginia schools. This plan will ensure that every school that needs renovation and modernization will receive the funding it needs. After school construction needs have been identified, supplies will be purchased in bulk to keep costs down.

As the Commonwealth moves to 100 percent clean energy by 2050, new and renovated classrooms and school buildings will need to be transitioned towards renewable energy sources. Currently 89 schools embrace solar power, generating more than 20 megawatts of energy.⁴⁵ Jenn will ensure that the historic reinvestment in school structures will expand the use of renewable energy in schools throughout the Commonwealth. By accelerating the deployment of solar across school districts Jenn will have 442 new solar schools producing 150 megawatts by 2025. This will make Virginia a national leader in solar in schools.

B. Broadband

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed major flaws in Virginia's broadband infrastructure. In a time when reliable internet is required for students to learn and teachers to teach, it is imperative that everyone has reliable internet access. Broadband is often not available in rural and high poverty areas. Students in every zip code deserve to be on level footing when it comes to accessing their school materials.

Recent Virginia investments in broadband have totaled more than \$29.6 million to expand broadband access.⁴⁶ As governor, Jenn will ensure the long term issues of broadband access are addressed by creating a path for broadband infrastructure. She will prioritize greater investments in the current Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) to provide grants to build broadband infrastructure. Currently there are twice as many grant applications through VATI than there are funds available.⁴⁷ She will also coordinate and expand affordability programs for broadband, deploy innovative procurement strategies, and improve broadband coverage maps.

This will result in a reliable, affordable, and speedy broadband which will provide more stable distance learning and better prepare students for entering the 21st century workforce.

39 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. [K-12 Funding Cuts Include Capital Spending to Build and Renovate Schools](#), The Virginian-Pilot.

40 Gregory, Sara. [Norfolk schools say they need \\$124 million for repairs. This year's request: \\$16 million](#), The Virginian-Pilot.

41 Gregory, Sara. [Building conditions deteriorate in cash-strapped school districts](#), The Roanoke Times.

42 Reid, Zachary. [Overhauling Richmond school facilities now a \\$670 million question](#), Richmond Times-Dispatch.

43 Mattingly, Justin. [Kamras announces 'bathroom blitz' initiative for Richmond Schools](#), Richmond Times-Dispatch.

44 The Editorial Board. [Time to Address State's Aging School Buildings](#), The News & Advance.

45 McGowan, Elizabeth. [Virginia jumps to head of the class on school solar installations, report shows](#), Energy News Network.

46 Office of the Governor. [Governor Northam Announces More Than \\$29.6 Million to Expand Broadband Access](#).

47 Flynn, Meagan. [Teleworking in a Parking lot. School on flash drive. The coronavirus prompts new urgency for rural internet access](#), The Washington Post.

C. Real Food in Schools

Subsidized school lunch provided thousands of children with safe, nutritious meals each school day. Prior to the pandemic, more than 122.5 million lunches, 35 million breakfasts, and 1.3 million snacks were served each school year by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE).⁴⁸ However, much of it is cheap industrial food which adds “hundreds, if not thousands, of chemicals to the human body” due to the way it is treated and processed.⁴⁹ These foods often contain unhealthy ingredients or unhealthy amounts of ingredients, such as salt.⁵⁰ Poor diet leads to diet-related illnesses which would have otherwise been prevented. For example, diabetes was the seventh leading cause of death in Virginia in 2015.⁵¹ However, many cases of diabetes in Virginia are preventable through a healthy lifestyle and eating habits — habits which form in Virginia’s schools.⁵²

The solution is to curtail the outsourcing of children's food to companies which do not care about their health. As governor, Jenn will connect farmers to schools throughout the Commonwealth to provide fresh, local ingredients to school kitchens. If each household in Virginia spent \$10 per week on locally grown foods, Virginia would see \$1.65 billion of direct economic impact.⁵³ If VDOE’s food budget were directed toward local fresh, healthy and whole foods, the economic impact would be even larger. The long-term benefits would, on their own, be well worth the transition. Many diet-related illnesses would be prevented.

To provide children with local, healthy food, schools must partner with and support Virginia’s farmers to ensure there is adequate economic incentive. Jenn will incentivize VDOE to partner with the Department of Agriculture to ensure farmers of all sizes are able to fairly enter this new market. Virginia must partner with school’s cafeteria workers to ensure that they receive the proper training as they transition to fresh food. Finally, Virginia must support schools in building their own community gardens to ensure that children know where their food comes from and are directly involved in the food they eat every day.

V. The Path to Equitable Education

As the daughter, granddaughter, and great granddaughter of educators, Jenn understands that an equitable education is key to healthy communities, a robust economy and thriving democracy. Jenn’s mother was the first member of her family to go beyond the 8th grade. Her mother was able to finish school and then eventually on to college, which was her ticket to economic opportunity for her and her future family. Growing up, Jenn’s parents often said that her inheritance was a high-quality education. Every student deserves that inheritance. Right now there is inequity across Virginia and that inequity even exists in the same classroom. COVID-19 has exacerbated what was already not right. For far too long, Virginia schools have been underfunded and Virginia's teachers have been undervalued. Under Jenn’s leadership, education will be a top priority and her \$2.3 billion new investment and plan to create equitable accountability will ensure every child in the Commonwealth has access to high-quality education, regardless of who they are or where they live.

48 [Virginia Department of Education](#).

49 Gaddis, Jennifer. *The Labor of Lunch: Why We Need Real Food and Real Jobs in American Public Schools*, 2019, Pg. 97.

50 Center For Science in the Public Interest, [The Forgotten Killer](#).

51 Virginia Department of Health, [Diabetes Burden in Virginia](#), 2018, Pg. 4.

52 *Ibid.*, Pg. 6.

53 E. Bendfeldt, et al., [Virginia Farm to Table](#), 2011, Pg. 4.