



2024

Virginia Latino Advisory Board

Annual Report

Board Approved: 10/09/24
Last Edited: 10/08/2024

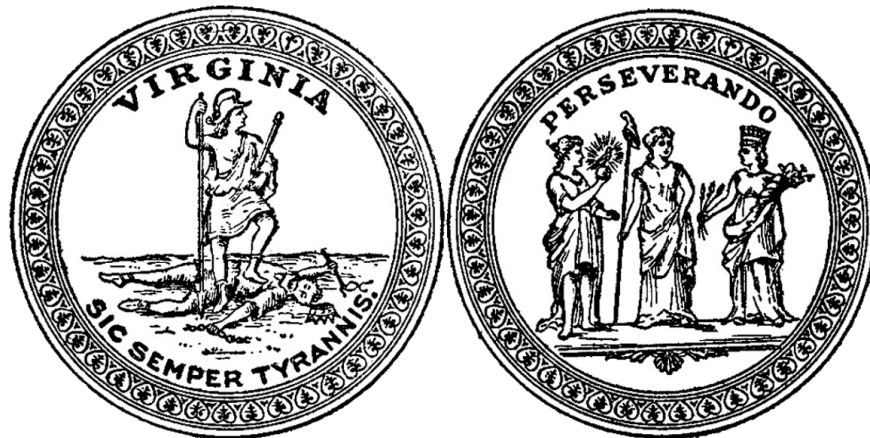


VIRGINIA
LATINO
ADVISORY
BOARD

VIRGINIA LATINO ADVISORY BOARD

2023-2024 Annual Report

October 2024



This report is directed to Governor Glen Youngkin and his administration. It was written and approved by the 20 members of the Virginia Latino Advisory Board.

The document is open to the public and summarizes all the recommendations made by the Board.

Though comprehensive, this report is not an exhaustive list of all issues impacting Latinos in Virginia.

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2024 Virginia Latino Advisory Board Members

Officers

Astrid G3mez
Rev. Jonathan Avendano
Eduardo Gil

of Reston, VA
of Sterling, VA
of Arlington, VA

Madame Chair
Vice Chair
Secretary

Committee Chairs

Roberto Coquis
Leslie Sanchez
Gladys Truong
Santos Munoz

of Falls Church, VA
of Alexandria, VA
of Chesterfield, VA
of Aldie, VA

Health Chair
Business Chair
Housing Chair
Education Chair

Current Members

Jo-Ann Chase
Alexander Guzman
Alberto Calimano
Wendy Clavijo
Juan C Lopez
Saul Hernandez
Jennifer Kelley
Ana Metzger
Emilio Revilla
Jennie Wood
Marcia Donovan
Yenny Gutierrez
Kimberly Kruskamp

of Brambleton, VA
of Richmond, VA
of Manassas, VA
of Vienna, VA
of Springfield, VA
of Washington County, VA
of Moseley, VA
of Midlothian, VA
of Glen Allen, VA
of Goochland, VA
of Fairfax, VA
of Mechanicsville, VA
of Ruckersville, VA

Health
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Education & Career Training
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Education & Career Training

Letter from the Chair

Governor Glenn Youngkin,

I want to extend my gratitude for the opportunity to serve the Commonwealth as the Chair of the Virginia Latino Advisory Board (VLAB.) It is an honor to lead this important commission, which plays a key role in recognizing and advocating for the contributions of Virginia's Latino/Hispanic community. Your leadership and dedication to serve all Virginians, including our growing Latino/Hispanic population, has been instrumental in shaping a brighter future for our Commonwealth.

Since you were hired as Virginia's 74th Governor, we have experienced incredible changes and we have celebrated your numerous achievements that have made Virginia a great place to live, work, and raise a family. Your willingness to work closely with VLAB to define and support the Latino/Hispanic community's strategic direction for the next decade is a testament to your commitment to fostering inclusivity and opportunity for all residents of the Commonwealth.

Latinos/Hispanics in Virginia are committed to family, faith, entrepreneurship, and community. As a vital and growing part of the state's population, their unique experiences and perspectives contribute significantly to Virginia's economic, cultural, and civic success. The Virginia Latino Advisory Board remains steadfast in its mission to inform you and your administration about the issues affecting Latino constituents while advocating for greater access, representation, and opportunities for all.

The primary focus of this year's Annual Report is the recommendation for an evidence-based Latino Economic Impact Study, which will provide critical insights into the economic contributions and challenges faced by the Latino/Hispanic community in Virginia. This study will help guide policies that support equitable economic growth and foster a thriving environment for Latino businesses, workforce participation, and housing opportunities. Each VLAB committee has contributed key recommendations and areas of focus for this study, ensuring that it addresses the most pressing issues facing our community.

We are deeply grateful for your friendship and service in representing the Latino/Hispanic community and the Board looks forward to working alongside you as we advance initiatives that honor the spirit of perseverance and hard work that defines our Commonwealth.

Thank you once again for your service and unwavering commitment to the people of Virginia.

Respectfully,



Astrid Gámez

Madame Chair, Virginia Latino Advisory Board

About the Virginia Latino Advisory Board

The Virginia Latino Advisory Board (VLAB) was established in 2005 to advise the Governor of Virginia on issues of Latino interest so that his administration can best serve the Latino constituents of Virginia. VLAB envisions a Virginia that includes and advances the Latino community by promoting greater opportunities while acknowledging the contributions of the diverse cultural heritage to the Commonwealth. VLAB has the power and duty to:

- Advise the Governor regarding the development of economic, professional, cultural, educational, and governmental links between the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Latino community in Virginia, and Latin America;
- Undertake studies, symposiums, research, and factual reports to gather information to formulate and present recommendations to the Governor relative to issues of concern and importance to the Latino community in the Commonwealth; and,
- Advise the Governor regarding any statutory, regulatory, or other issues of importance to the Latino community in the Commonwealth.

VLAB conducts its work through four committees: Business & Workforce, Education and Career Training, Health, and Housing.

The Business and Workforce Committee examines the role of Latinos and Latino-owned businesses in Virginia's economy and suggests policies to increase the economic prosperity of Virginia's Latino community. The Committee works with Latino entrepreneurs, business owners, and leaders across Virginia to promote the Latino community's important role in Virginia's labor force and business community.

The Education and Career Training Committee examines the importance of education and career development in supporting Latino communities across Virginia. By working with early childhood, K-12 systems, higher education, and workforce development agencies in all regions of the Commonwealth, the committee promotes greater educational attainment and equity and stronger pathways to economic opportunity.

The Health Committee examines the health of Latino communities across Virginia and crafts recommendations and policies sensitive to their needs and concerns. By working with health providers and federal, state, and local partners, the committee promotes policies and practices that address the need to increase the number of insured Latinos and encourage health and wellness.

The Housing and Community Development Committee examines the lack of affordable housing and the high level of home evictions within Latino communities in the Commonwealth. The committee works to identify recommendations to increase the supply and availability of affordable housing, prevent and reduce evictions, and improve communication for seeking assistance and support.

The former "Civic Engagement & Social Justice Committee" examined strategies for strengthening relationships between Latino communities and all Virginians. The committee promoted practices central to civic participation, including voting and voter registration, leadership, and service on state boards and commissions. The committee also worked with community partners to improve communication among Latino communities and state government and raised awareness about issues of importance to Latino communities. In 2022, this committee was transitioned to serve as a "work group" to lead collaborative efforts with the four other Constituency Boards in Virginia.

Overview of Latinos in Virginia

Latinos can trace their heritage in Virginia back 500 years, almost an entire century before the first colonists landed in Jamestown in 1607. These pioneers entered the Chesapeake Bay in 1525,¹ leaving a permanent mark of diversity and cultural patrimony in the Commonwealth that continues in 2023. The incredible accomplishments and progress the community has made in industry, the arts, and culture are a combination of the social and intellectual contributions that have bridged centuries of Latino presence in Virginia.

The Latino community of the Commonwealth significantly contributes to modern Virginia's economic and social well-being. Since 2010, the community has witnessed a 32.1% increase, and the 2020 Decennial Census now counts Latinos as 10.6% of the population or more than 908,000 individuals.² We concentrate in Northern Virginia, the Tidewater region, and the Richmond Metropolitan area. *The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis* estimates that by 2030, Latinos will represent 17.2% of Virginia's population, numbering over 1,600,000 residents and accounting for 79% of Virginia's growth.³

Latinos in Virginia are diverse in origin, live in every part of the state, and skew younger than the rest of the population. Salvadoran, Mexican, and Puerto Rican heritage accounts for over half of Latinos in Virginia, with countries in the Caribbean and South and Central America accounting for the remainder. With a median age of 29⁴ and 22% under the age of 18,⁵ Virginia has a large and young Latino population.

The Latino community of Virginia is composed of multiple unique subgroups and represents every point along the spectrum of the immigration experience: some communities are older with numerous decades of accumulated presence, while others are newer. The subgroups “differ in their lifestyles, health beliefs, and health practices.”⁶ Over half (54.2%) are bilingual, and more than a quarter (27.7%) only speak English. An estimated 120,000, or 17.3%, speak Spanish and limited or no English. In addition, Portuguese and indigenous languages of South and Central America are the native languages of a smaller percentage of Virginia's Latinos.⁷

Latino Virginians are a force behind the economy, leading in various fields across the Commonwealth. Yet, while many celebrate the American Dream, various issues must be addressed to make this dream more achievable for all Latinos in the Commonwealth. This report hopes to outline recommendations in the fields of Education, Business, Healthcare, Housing, and more to continue doing what our community does best, which is inscribed on the back of the Virginia State Seal, “Perseverando.”

¹ Peck, D. “Lucas Vásquez de Ayllón's Doomed Colony of San Miguel de Gualdape”, *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol 85. No. 2 pg. 189. Also see <https://www.virginia.org/hispanicsandlatinosinvirginia>

² <https://demographics.coopercenter.org/census2020>

³ Page 7

https://www.vlab.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/vlab/documents/vlab-meetings/LatinoVirginiansSept2018_final.pdf

⁴ <https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/latino-college-completion/virginia>

⁵ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/VA/RHI725219>

⁶ https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/tools/pdf/hispanic_latinos_insight.pdf

⁷ Goren, L. and Mejia, F. Stitches in the Economic Fabric: Latino Virginians and the State Economy. *The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis*. Accessed at

https://www.vlab.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/vlab/documents/vlab-meetings/LatinoVirginiansSept2018_final.pdf

VLAB Member Activities in 2024

In the year since its last Annual Report, VLAB members have engaged in several initiatives, events, and successes in partnership with Governor Youngkin's administration. Collaborative links between the Office of the Governor, his Executive staff, the General Assembly, and VLAB continue to advance solutions for the well-being of all Virginia residents.

VLAB members represent every geographic region in Virginia. They maintain strong ties to their communities and engage in activities that advance Latino cultural, economic, and social issues.

VLAB's highlights from 2023-2024 include:

- October 18, 2023 - 2023 Energy Freedom Summit, Tyson Corner
- Nov. 30, 2023 - Protecting Kids Online, Cornerstone Chapel
- October 21, 2023 - Providence Falls Community Festival, Vienna
- October 22, 2023 - Latino Festival, Loudoun County
- December 7, 2023 - Coffee with the Loudoun Parent Liaisons, Sterling, VA
- January 11, 2024 - Legislative Day, Richmond, VA
- January 23, 2024 - Fentanyl Crisis with AG Jason Miyares Office, Dumfries, VA
- February 20, 2024 - One Pill Can Kill, Winchester, VA
- February 15, 2024 - Meeting Immigration Forum, Centerville, VA
- February 18, 2024 - VAAB Town Hall, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA
- February 27, 2024 - Corporate Bylaws Clinic in support of small businesses (co-sponsored by Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, McGuire Woods and Capital One), Goochland, VA
- March 30, 2024 - Domestic Abuse Workshop, Consulate of El Salvador, Woodbridge, VA
- April 17, 2024 - Town Hall AG Miyares, Iglesia Mana del Cielo, Sterling, VA
- April 19, 2024 - Annual Northern Virginia Public Health Conference, Woodbridge, VA
- May 5, 2024 - Latino Festival, Loudoun County, VA
- May 16, 2024 - Protecting America - Briefing with Virginia's AG J. Miyares, Online
- May 23, 2024 - Inauguration Sully Community Center Clinic, Herndon, VA
- May 26, 2024 - Astrid Gamez Facilitated the workshop What are the challenges raising children in two different cultures, El Salvador Consulate, Woodbridge, VA
- June 1, 2024 - President Nayib Bukele Inauguration, San Salvador, El Salvador
- June 8, 2024 - Una Hora de Oración Praying Stop Child Abuse, Bell Tower, Richmond, VA
- June 18, 2024 - Loudoun County Fentanyl Awareness with AG Miyares, Auburn, VA
- June 22, 2024 - Father's Day Celebration, Consulado de El Salvador, Woodbridge, VA
- June 27, 2024 - Film "El Suspiro del Silencio," Embassy of El Salvador, Washington, DC
- July 31, 2024 - Art Exposition at the Embassy of El Salvador, Washington, DC
- August 11, 2024 - Celebration of the 199 Anniversary of Bolivian Independence Day, Washington, DC
- September 7, 2024 - Hispanic Festival, Arlington, VA
- September 12, 2024 - Round Table with Latino Leaders and AG Miyares, Fairfax, VA
- September 20, 2024 - Culpeper Fiesta Latina, Culpepper, VA
- September 22, 2024 - Festival Latino, Fredericksburg, VA
- September 24, 2024 - Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration at the Virginia Governor Mansion, Richmond, VA
- September 26, 2024 - Hispanic Heritage Month Breakfast meeting with Senator Tim Kaine and Mark Warner.

VLAB Listening Sessions in 2024

The Virginia Latino Advisory Board is constantly looking for ways to hear directly from the Latino community it represents across the commonwealth. Three community listening sessions were held, during which VLAB members could hear firsthand about issues and concerns facing the Latino constituency.

The Listening Sessions were often hosted in partnerships with regional or state-wide Latino-service organizations and held in public spaces, like churches that donated the use of their space. These events are an opportunity to shed light on issues of representation and access to resources and information.

They were strategically scheduled the night before the full board meetings to ensure maximum attendance from board members. Three listening sessions were held, one in Sterling and two in Richmond. The full notes are attached as appendices to the end of this report.

04/04/2024 - Iglesia Mana del Cielo, Sterling
06/06/2024 - Mitra Tabernaculo de Restauración, Richmond
08/08/2024 - Philippine Cultural Center of VA, Virginia Beach CANCELED
10/03/2024 - Better Business Bureau, Glen Allen

VLAB Board Meeting Dates in 2024

The Latino Advisory Board has met the following dates since its last report

02/02/2024 - Zoom Meet
04/05/2024 - George Mason University, Fairfax
06/07/2024 - Patrick Henry Building, Richmond
08/09/2024 - Zoom
10/04/2024 - Patrick Henry Building, Richmond

VLAB GUEST SPEAKERS, 2024

February 2nd, 2024

- Patti Hidalgo-Menders, Community Liaison Officer, AG Office
- The Honorable Winsome Sears, Virginia Lt. Governor

April 5, 2024

- Supervisor Andres Jimenez, Mason District Board of Supervisors
- Mariel del Castillo, Admission Counselor, Admission Office George Mason University

June 7, 2024

- Bryan Horn, Director, VA Department Housing & Community Development
- Rachael Schaefer, CEO, Opportunity Scholars

August 9, 2024

- Luis Davila Pernas, Director, Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration (PRFAA)
- The Honorable Michael Berlucchi, City Council, Virginia Beach

Recommended Action

Business and Workforce

Recommendation #1 - Latino Economic Impact Study for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Introduction

The VLAB Business Committee recognizes the importance of conducting a comprehensive Latino Economic Impact Study for the Commonwealth of Virginia to better understand the contributions and challenges faced by the Latino community. This study will provide critical insights to help shape policies that promote equitable economic growth, support small business development, and enhance talent pipelines for high-demand industries.

To ensure the study captures vital aspects of Latino economic participation, we submit the following recommendations, specifically focusing on small business growth and talent development. This study should be conducted in partnership with related stakeholders in the Latino community.

1. Include Data and Trends on Latino-Owned Small Businesses

The Commonwealth of Virginia Latino Economic Impact Study should provide a thorough analysis of Latino-owned small businesses in the state, including:

- **Business Formation Rates:** Identify the rate Latino entrepreneurs start new businesses compared to other demographics.
- **Sectors of Participation:** Highlight the primary industries where Latino-owned businesses are concentrated, such as retail, construction, food service, and professional services.
- **Revenue Growth and Sustainability:** Examine revenue trends and factors contributing to business longevity or failure, including market access and financial sustainability.

Rationale: By understanding the current landscape of Latino entrepreneurship, we can design policies and initiatives to support business expansion and sustainability, providing critical resources for this growing demographic.

2. Assess Latino Workforce Participation and Talent Development Needs

The study should evaluate Latino workforce participation in key high-demand fields identified by the **State Technical Talent Development Scholarship Program**, such as healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, and skilled trades. Specifically, it should:

- **Analyze Workforce Gaps:** Assess the current workforce gaps in these high-demand sectors, with a focus on the representation and participation of Latino workers.
- **Barriers to Entry and Advancement:** Identify obstacles that Latino individuals face when pursuing careers in these industries, including educational attainment, skills gaps, and systemic discrimination.
- **Alignment with Training Programs:** Recommend strategies to align the **State Talent Development Scholarship Program** and other workforce development resources to serve the Latino community's needs better, ensuring greater participation and success in these fields.

Rationale: Ensuring Latino workers fully integrate into Virginia's high-demand industries will contribute to a more robust and inclusive economy while addressing the state's critical workforce shortages.

3. Develop Public-Private Partnerships to Foster Latino Entrepreneurship and Workforce Training

The study should explore opportunities for creating strategic public-private partnerships to support Latino small business growth and workforce development. Key partnership areas include:

- **Internships and Apprenticeships:** Collaborate with businesses to create internship and apprenticeship programs that offer practical experience and pathways to employment for Latino students and workers.

- **Business Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship opportunities for Latino entrepreneurs to guide navigating the complexities of starting and growing a business, including accessing capital and expanding markets.

- **Collaborations with Educational Institutions:** Strengthen connections between Latino-owned businesses, major employers, and educational institutions to ensure students and workers have the skills to succeed in high-demand fields.

Rationale: Public-private partnerships are essential to creating a sustainable Latino business growth and workforce development ecosystem. These collaborations will help bridge the skills gap, facilitate entrepreneurship, and ensure Latino workers are prepared to meet industry demands.

4. Tailor Marketing and Outreach Strategies to the Latino Community

The study should assess the effectiveness of current outreach and marketing strategies aimed at promoting small business resources and talent development programs to the Latino community. Specific recommendations include:

- **Culturally Sensitive Marketing:** Ensure that outreach campaigns are culturally relevant and conducted in both English and Spanish, utilizing Latino-focused media, community organizations, and local Latino chambers of commerce.

- **Targeted Campaigns:** Focus marketing efforts on Latino youth, small business owners, and workers in high-demand fields, emphasizing the benefits of participating in programs like the **State Talent Development Scholarship Program** and available business support services.

Rationale: Tailored outreach strategies are necessary to maximize the Latino community's participation and engagement and ensure that they fully benefit from the state's business and workforce development resources.

5. Address Systemic Barriers to Latino Business and Workforce Success

Finally, the study should examine systemic barriers that hinder the success of Latino entrepreneurs and workers. Including at a minimum:

- **Access to Capital:** Investigate Virginia Latino business owners' difficulties in obtaining loans or investment capital and propose policies to improve access to financial resources.

- **Socioeconomic factors:** Explore the impact of systemic barriers such as education, healthcare, food insecurity, limited English proficiency, and crime.

- **Discrimination and Bias:** Explore any systemic discrimination that limits opportunities for Latino workers and entrepreneurs and recommend ways to foster a more inclusive business environment.

- **Lack of Professional Networks:** Assess the role of professional networks in career and business advancement and recommend initiatives to create mentorship and networking opportunities specifically for Latino entrepreneurs and workers.

Rationale: Removing systemic barriers is critical for ensuring equal opportunities and fostering a thriving Latino business and labor force in Virginia.

Conclusion

The VLAB Business Committee believes incorporating these recommendations into the Latino Economic Impact Study will provide a comprehensive view of the economic contributions and challenges facing the Latino community in the Commonwealth of Virginia. By focusing on small business growth, talent development, and public-private partnerships, the study can help shape policies that promote sustained economic inclusion and prosperity for Latino workers and entrepreneurs.

Recommendation #2 - State Technical Talent Development Scholarship Program

The State Talent Development Scholarship Program is a strategic initiative to address critical workforce shortages in high-demand fields through comprehensive scholarship support. This program aims to enhance the state's economic growth and competitiveness by investing in the education and training of residents committed to pursuing careers in sectors vital to the state's development.

Program Overview: The State Talent Development Scholarship Program provides full-ride scholarships to eligible students enrolling in high-demand fields such as healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, and skilled trades. The initiative seeks to create a robust pipeline of qualified professionals to meet the growing needs of the state's industries.

Eligibility Criteria: Applicants must meet state residency requirements, possess a high school diploma or equivalent (e.g., G.E.D.), and demonstrate a commitment to work in high-need industries post-graduation. The selection process may evaluate academic performance, demonstrated interest or dedication to the targeted field, and potential contributions to the state's workforce.

Scholarship Details: The program covers full tuition and provides additional financial support for books, fees, and living expenses. Recipients must maintain satisfactory academic progress to retain the scholarship. The scholarship duration aligns with the length of the chosen educational program, ensuring comprehensive support throughout the student's academic journey.

Obligations and Commitments: Scholarship recipients must work within the state and in their field of study for a specified period after graduation. Failure to fulfill this commitment may result in repayment obligations. Ongoing academic performance and regular progress updates are necessary to maintain eligibility.

Partner Institutions and Employers: The program collaborates with accredited colleges, universities, and technical schools, offering students a range of educational options. Partnerships with local businesses and industries provide internship and apprenticeship opportunities, facilitating practical experience and employment pathways.

Program Administration: A designated state agency or board oversees the program, ensuring effective management and coordination. The program is funded through state allocations and private sector contributions, creating a sustainable financial model. Regular evaluation and reporting ensure transparency and continuous improvement based on key performance indicators and stakeholder feedback.

Marketing and Outreach: The program employs diverse promotion strategies, including high school visits, career fairs, and online campaigns, to attract potential applicants. Engaging with industry partners and educational institutions ensures broad support and awareness, while community involvement fosters a collective commitment to the program's success.

Education & Career Training

1. **Implementation of Executive Order 33** will provide a cell phone-free environment promoting the health and safety for K-12 students; however, the effectiveness of this policy can be augmented with recent technological advances the VLAB Education Committee researched and discovered.
2. **Social Emotional Learning (SEL)** programs like Second Step could be in violation of Governor Youngkin's Executive Order 1 and the trend is that schools are expanding these kinds of initiatives.
3. **Parent Liaison, Family Liaison, Parent Resource office** initiatives in the Virginia School System help new Americans (naturalized or first generation) and foreign nationals with legal or illegal status overcome cultural barriers to effectively place children at the appropriate grade level (advance or held back) in schools based on their capacity to handle material in a new language.

Recommendations and Narrative

1. Implementation of Executive Order 33 will provide a cell phone-free environment promoting the health and safety for K-12 students; however, the effectiveness of this policy can be augmented with recent technological advances the VLAB Education Committee researched and discovered.

On 9 September 2024 the VLAB Education Committee had a conversation with the developers of a new software called *SHIFT*. They presented data that the committee believes can attain the goals and objectives of Executive Order 33 in an effective, frictionless, and fiscally responsible way. The developers of this new software were open to issue a License of Use to the Commonwealth of Virginia for free as a proof-of-concept with two or three schools. The committee believes a study can be conducted in two or three schools monitored by one of the Colleges or Universities in the Commonwealth of Virginia. For example, two schools of similar size in population and demographics can be used with one monitored

as a control group and the other with *SHIFT* in full use. If this study provides favorable results, Virginia can consider expanding the use of a solution like *SHIFT* as a data-driven decision.

Background

Due to the unavoidable nature of modern technology, we must employ tools such that technology does not impede the human person from rising to their fullest potential.

Around 2008, we began to see a marked rise in perceived anxiety and self-loathing in our nation's youth. In fact, the rise was so sharp, that in statistics it's known as a "hockey stick graph", because the graph resembles the shape of a hockey stick lying on its side: flat for a while, followed by a sharp angle increase.

Children spend an average of 4.8 hours a day on social media, on their iPhones. Recent studies indicate that spending more than three hours a day on social media doubles the risk of poor mental health for adolescents. Most alarming is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data from 2019-2021, reporting that the rate of suicide has increased 167% since 2010 for girls and 91% since 2010 for boys. In the same timeframe, boys and girls experienced a spike in depression of 161% and 145%, respectively. In addition to the worsening state of youth mental health in the past decade, the state of academic achievement also suffered, as measured by the precipitous drop in the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) scores beginning in 2012.

All the while, flip phones are making a massive comeback, with "searches for flip phones...surging, up 15,369% over the past year among Gen Z and younger Millennials" as these younger generations are crushed under the weight of social media, incessant connectivity and availability, and endless information saturation.

Findings

In 2023, the University of Michigan performed a study entitled '*Constant Companion*', wherein they collected data on the use and burden of the smartphone in the lives of 203 students ages 11-17. This study analyzed the use of phones both during and outside of school.

The findings were as one would expect: students used their phones throughout the school day and long into the night and received hundreds of notifications during the school day. The research also revealed that social media, video games, Netflix, and pornography were consumed regularly during the school day. Additionally, students reported that all attempts at administrative regulation of phone use during the school day were half hearted and rarely successful. Several of the key findings are below:

- The smartphone is a constant companion, both providing background buzz and encouraging regular pickups over the more than four hours of teen smartphone use on an average day.
- Phone use during school hours is nearly universal but varies widely, reflecting a patchwork of different school policies. Youth advisors reported that schools have a wide variety of policies, and variable enforcement within those policies, which students may or may not follow.
- Notifications are plentiful, with half of our participants receiving 237 or more per day. These interruptions are both delightful and distracting, leading many young users to feel the need to manage what they get notified of, and when.
- TikTok was one of the most popular and longest-duration apps used in the sample of 11- to 17-year-olds whose phones we tracked. TikTok was used by 50% of the participants, for a median of 1 hour and 52 minutes per day
- Over half of teens used their phones overnight on school nights, primarily for social media, gaming, or YouTube.

At present, the available solutions to the school day distractions of the smartphone are gravely insufficient. Mere discipline - as evidenced by the *Constant Companion* research - is incapable of surmounting the addictive nature and ubiquity of the smartphone. Additionally, cell phone pouches or lockers prevent students from contacting parents or police in cases of emergency. Many individuals

have speculated that physical barriers to the cell phone is an untenable and potentially dangerous solution and cite the recent school shooting in Georgia as a case study on the imperfection of the cell phone pouch.

Additionally, available solutions such as Brick or Opal - two screen time management applications - suffer from an Achilles heel: *the apps can be deleted by the user*. Whenever a user no longer wants to be restricted from using certain applications such as social media during set hours of the day, they can simply delete the restriction app from their phone.

The available services do not separate the lock and the key, which is to say they may apply the desired limitations to the device, but they also give the ability to remove the limitations to the person who owns the device.

Potential Proof-of-Concept and Study Option for Virginia

Executive Order 33 is in pursuit of a solution which removes the distracting nature of cellphones during instructional periods and yet which still permits “parents to communicate with children for typical reasons, such as forgotten items and changes in pick-up times, as well as protocols for students with medical needs to access their devices and for emergency communication.”

SHIFT offers a potential solution to mitigate some of the problems already mentioned in this report via a software that is installed onto smartphones which confines the device into just the essential functions: calendar, notes, reminders, clock, wallet, weather, photos, camera, phone calls, and messages.

While “shifted”, the user cannot access any other apps or functions. No social media, app store, internet browser, Netflix, email, pornography, gaming applications, online shopping, or YouTube.

This software is effective *only within the school building itself* via a technique known as “geofencing”. As the student walks into the school building, their mobile phone automatically “shifts”, now restricted to only the essential functions. As they leave the premises, their phone unshifts back to normal.

SHIFT takes about 3 minutes to install onto the student’s phone and **cannot be removed by the student until a date determined by the school or parents (i.e., the end of the school year or graduation day)**. Unlike the available applications which can be deleted by the student whenever it is convenient for them to do so, *SHIFT* cannot be removed from a student’s phone unless it is physically plugged into an administrative computer.

Thus, the school building can always be a haven for uninterrupted learning, free from the burden of distractions and psychological abuses mediated through the smartphone. Outside of the school building, the student is free to use their phone as they normally would, because *SHIFT* does not affect the user experience of the phone unless they are within the geofence. However, because *SHIFT* relieves eight hours of the psychological burden and habituation of smartphone use, the mental health and habits of students will be improved in the peripheral hours they spend not in school.

Conclusion

The mental health of today’s youth is meaningfully dependent on their relationship with the indispensable smartphone, with the data explicitly demonstrating that wellbeing decreases as smartphone use increases. Over two-thirds of 11- to 17-year-olds said they “sometimes” or “often” find it difficult to stop using technology, use technology to escape from sorrow or get relief from negative feelings, and miss sleep due to being on their phone or the internet late at night. The quality of education is also causally affected by how much a student uses their smartphone during school, with more time spent on the phone decreasing education quality.

The state-wide implementation of *SHIFT* could afford Virginian students liberation from the mental health burden that is smartphone usage during school, create an educational environment that would catapult Virginia into first place in education in the nation, and positively affect the habits and relationship that Virginia’s youth have with social media and their smartphones.

Proposed Action

- Contact the developers of the software directly to receive a formal presentation of the free capability and gain more insight of the viability for Virginia
- Explore options to implement a pilot program between a few schools in tandem with a study monitored by a local Virginia College or University for a data-driven decision with respect to *SHIFT*'s effectiveness in creating a better environment for the health and safety for K-12 students IAW Executive Order 33

2. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs like Second Step could be in violation of Governor Youngkin's Executive Order 1 and the trend is that schools are expanding these kinds of initiatives.

Parents and school employees have provided anecdotal information that Virginia school systems could be purchasing contracts with SEL programs such as [Second Step](#) that either teach or include supplemental materials that could be violating Governor Youngkin's [Executive Order 1](#). For example, parents in Loudoun County communicated their frustration with material that is initially presented to build emotional well-being, respect and responsibility or anti-bullying/anti-suicide programs, but often act as a way for schools to smuggle topics to which parents would otherwise object — such as discussions on race, gender, oppression, abortion, religious beliefs, and many others. Parents believe that the process does not give them the opportunity to adequately review content or opt their children out of SEL. This information should be further investigated by the Virginia Education Department.

Background

Executive Order 1 states the following: “For the purposes of this Executive order “inherently divisive concepts” means advancing any ideas in violation of Title IV and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, including, but not limited to of the following concepts (i) one race, skin color, ethnicity, sex, or faith is inherently superior to another race, skin color, ethnicity, sex, or faith; (ii) an individual, by virtue of his or her race, skin color, ethnicity, sex or faith, is racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or subconsciously, (iii) an individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of his or her race, skin color, ethnicity, sex or faith, (iv) members of one race, ethnicity, sex or faith cannot and should not attempt to treat others as individuals without respect to race, sex or faith, (v) an individual's moral character is inherently determined by his or her race, skin color, ethnicity, sex, or faith, (vi) an individual, by virtue of his or her race, skin color, ethnicity, sex, or faith, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race, ethnicity, sex or faith, (vii) meritocracy or traits, such as a hard work ethic, are racist or sexist or were created by a particular race to oppress another race.”

Findings

Some of the material in the Second Step program seems to be sourced by websites such as Learning for Justice. This website is supported by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and claims to be a resource to cultivate and nurture dialogue, learning, reflection and action from those closest to and harmed most by injustices in the South. However, according to an article by Brenda Hafera, Assistant Director and Senior Policy Analyst, Simon Center and published by the Heritage Foundation on 23 March 2023, SPLC is suspected to be involved in two lawsuits related to its implementation of an “anti-racist” curriculum in the Albemarle County school district in Virginia.

An example of the resources that SPLC provides is a lesson on privilege, oppression, and intersectionality (all tenets of Critical Race Theory) in which students discuss and apply concepts from a film called 'Bibi.'

This report cannot provide conclusive evidence that teachers are using these resources, however a former Loudoun County Public School (LCPS) Board member stated they do not discourage teachers from using them. Since teachers have access and can use any of the related resources attached to Second Step, the main concern of parents is the lack of transparency in the content and not being able to opt out of these lessons if they are taking place as a matter of LCPS policy. LCPS Policy 5040, section

A.3 seems to imply or is interpreted in a way that categorizes social emotional learning as not a part of counseling, and therefore, parents cannot opt out.

Conclusion

The Virginia Department of Education has the capacity to gather more data and assess the information presented in this document. If school systems in Virginia are purchasing curriculum such as Second Step, it should be transparent to parents. If the material or resources for teachers violate the Governor's executive order it should be discouraged or be informed to parents so they could make the decision to opt out of the instruction altogether. There are similar situations taking place in other states. For example in Pennsylvania, America First Legal recently announced in November 2023 a settlement agreement in a lawsuit filed earlier that year against the West Shore School District over failure to allow parents to opt their children out of SEL curricula in the district. In that case it was determined that parents have the right to excuse their children from specific instruction that conflicts with their religious beliefs. Despite state law, the West Shore School District denied these parents their lawful right to opt their children out of these teachings, which were aimed at indoctrinating children. Parents, not public-school administrators, should be ultimately responsible for the upbringing of their children, including their moral formation.

3. Parent Liaison, Family Liaison, Parent Resource office initiatives in the Virginia School System help new Americans (naturalized or first generation) and foreign nationals with legal or illegal status overcome cultural barriers to effectively place children at the appropriate grade level (advance or held back) in schools based on their capacity to handle material in a new language.

These initiatives seem to be active in some school districts but not in others and the level of effectiveness varies depending on the places that the program is active. In some locations liaisons or school counselors cover all students, but limited resources or the way these initiatives are implemented or prioritized are different depending on the school district. Liaisons focus on the special needs of foreign families (even those with American-born children) and often schools hire Liaisons on a part-time basis without benefits. As a result, there are inconsistencies with the level of effectiveness due to high turnover, inexperience and qualifications placing uncertainty in the quality of education of the future work force in Virginia. The Department of Education can facilitate the sharing of best practices and lessons learned of these initiatives with uniformity across the State and explore options to exchange or make resources available if possible.

Background

The number of students in Virginia with English as Secondary Language (ESL) increased 77% (100K to 177K) from 2008 to 2024. A more detailed breakdown below:

- 8% of total student population in 2008 (last 15 years)
- 15% in 2024 (today)
- 21% in 2039 (+15 years) if linear trends continue

Findings

The main goal of parent liaisons is to find ways to graduate students and facilitate their integration into society and American culture. The main approach to accomplish this task is as follow:

- Improve grades and performance of foreign students and American-born children of foreign parents
- Improve graduation rates
- Increase matriculation at universities and colleges
- Increase attendance at trade schools and apprenticeships
- Familiarization of American social standards and citizenship

Parent liaisons have observed that parents often don't understand basic American educational

concepts such as the A-F grading system. As a result, families have a need for additional orientation and personal attention from liaisons on key aspects of the traditional American way of life. They often lack the cultural understanding to advocate for their children or teach them to advocate for themselves. Often, foreign born parents don't understand documentation about school rights and responsibilities. Many of them are unaware of their rights as parents and the process to appeal school system decisions that may affect the wellbeing of their children or feel threatened with possible retaliation from authorities if they say something about their children.

Additionally, liaisons have observed that many students are placed in classes below their academic capabilities due to language barriers during placement testing. Liaisons are also the first line of defense/alerting for students in danger of human trafficking, gang influence on pre-teens/teens, serious/dangerous family situations that require intervention, mental health issues among other situations.

Conclusion

Based on the current growing trends in ESL family needs, parent liaisons will play a key role in the shaping of future citizens in Virginia. As a result, a special consideration in future resources should be discussed and allocated to meet this need. The potential level of influence and outreach liaisons can attain cannot be underestimated. Additionally, helping all Virginia school districts understand the cultural differences and special needs of foreign families, and develop programs to build a bridge to integration and assimilation in the American culture and social norms based on personal interactions may be beneficial for the State in the future. The Department of Education and local School Boards should consider the development and recruitment of a cadre of full-time liaisons with training, certifications, salaries and benefits in anticipation of the growing need for these professionals to help assimilate the children of new citizens, residents (legal or illegal) in society and American culture.

Health

Mental Health Services and education programs focused to Latinos has been a challenge across our country, but we know that Virginia is focused on providing (and improving) such service to the Latino Community of Virginia.

Latino citizens are concerned about the lack of Mental Health Services that could treat patients with Bipolar and Borderline Personality Disorders (BPD) specifically Veterans and their dependents. Veterans have put their lives on the line and deserve Mental Health Services, but specifically in Northern Virginia, and we are confident this goes for the rest of Virginia, there are a limited number of providers choosing to focus on patients with other types of Mental Health conditions that are easier to manage.

Additionally, providers often don't accept the normal military healthcare called Tricare and become out-of-network providers. Based on anecdotal evidence, providers find the military healthcare system difficult to use or that Tricare doesn't provide enough coverage for their patients.

This places a growing part of the population at a disadvantage for such critical care. Patients left untreated for Bipolar or BPD could become a risk of injury to themselves or others.

One of our **recommendations is to bring this issue to the attention of the Virginia Veterans Administration and elected officials at the Federal level to advocate for reforms to the military Tricare program and make it easier for providers to use and accept patients.**

We have also found that Latinos in our state are not familiar with National 988 phone number which is an "entry point to Virginia's Crisis services for Virginians who are experiencing mental health distress," which includes threats of suicide. For this reason, and consistent with First Lady Youngkin's Fentanyl

Awareness and Narcan awareness events, we **recommend that awareness/education events such as these be increased in the Latino communities, which in addition to the First Lady's in person events, media campaigns should also be conducted.**

And finally, we **recommend that the Governor's Office and Administration promote the results of VA SB707, Public middle schools and high schools; career and technical education organizations permitted.**

We believe that the establishment of career and technical education student organizations at the high school level will assist in Latino students throughout Virginia in getting a head start and/or getting additional career insight from an early age to assist them in making the best career decisions from an early age.

One of the stories that led to introducing bill VA SB707 was that of a High School student, Liam Gandi who was stopped from creating a HOSA-Future Health Professionals chapter in his high school. Now with SB707 passed, Liam and his schoolmates will be able to establish a HOSA chapter in their school and get a head start in gearing their education (i.e. College and Medical School) towards a successful medical practitioner in the future.

Like Liam and his schoolmates, we believe that if Latinos have the opportunity and guidance to learn from professionals in such professions such as health, they will be more inclined to pursue careers in these fields. In addition, we hope that parents and local professionals will volunteer their times to high school clubs that are created with SB707, to assist our future professionals in getting a head start on their careers.

To combine our focus on Mental Health awareness and education, VLAB will host a soccer tournament in Northern Virginia which will Promote Youth Healthy living and focus on Mental Health - supporting the "Right Help, Right Now" behavioral health transformation plan and the "One Pill can Kill" campaign. Our goal is to further educate the Latino community on the First Lady's anti-fentanyl campaign.

Housing and Community Development

Hispanics are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States with over 65 million people, making up 19.5 percent of the US population in 2023. Hispanics are also one of the youngest ethnic groups with the average median age of 30 in 2020. The median age for Latinos in Virginia is 29 years old.

Hispanic homeownership is on the rise. In a study done by the Urban institute, it is projected that between 2020 and 2040, there will be 6.9 million net new homeowner households. Out of the 6.9 million, 4.8 will be Hispanic. That is 70 percent of new homeowners by 2040. In 2023, the Hispanic homeownership rate was at 50 percent.

The Hispanic population in Virginia has grown to 11.2 percent. With an overall population of 8.7 million people, that is approximately 975,000 Hispanics living in Virginia.

According to the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals, Virginia has the 3rd highest rate of college-educated Latinos (30%), 3rd highest Latino Median Household Income (\$84,525), 3rd highest Latino Labor Force Participation rate (75%) and Virginia is number one in Labor Force Participation rate for Latinas (67.9%).

While this is good news for Hispanic homeownership, barriers still persist. What are some of the barriers to Hispanic homeownership?

High interest rates are affecting everyone who wants to buy a house. Tight inventory is also preventing people from buying a house. With tight inventory comes higher prices because more people are competing for the same house.

Some specific obstacles to Hispanic homeownership include down payment requirements, bad debt to credit ratios, being self-employed at higher rates and do not have sufficient credit histories, and language barriers. Because of this, Hispanics, more than any other group, are more likely to use risky financing to buy a home.

Why should the Commonwealth help Hispanic homebuyers? Between 2012 and 2022, the Hispanic population was responsible for more than half of the US population growth. A study by the Urban Institute has shown that the Hispanic population is the only racial group that will experience an increase in homeownership rate between 2020 to 2040.

According to the National Association of Realtors, seventy-five percent of younger Millennial buyers (aged 25-33) were first time home buyers. The median age for Hispanics living in Virginia is 29. They are at the age when they will start buying homes.

There are several strategies to help boost Hispanic homeownership.

1. Outreach – Help more Hispanics navigate the different programs that Virginia offers by translating the programs into Spanish. The programs that are offered by the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Virginia Housing Development Authority are not in Spanish so Hispanics do not know what programs are out there.

More marketing outreach to the Hispanic community would help them know what programs are available. Offer homeownership classes by Virginia Housing in Spanish will also help.

Have classes on how to qualify for a mortgage, the importance of having a credit history and building a strong credit profile by lowering the debt-to-income ratio.

1. Task a university to draft a report of the state of Hispanic homebuyers. The report should have the characteristics of the homebuyer, giving the reader a profile of a Hispanic Virginia homebuyer, including age, household, income, where the down payment money comes from, which age group is buying, where they are buying, the age of the homes that are being bought, education level, etc. This should also be broken down into whether they are first time homebuyers or not and where they are buying, if it is in the suburbs, the city, in rural or urban areas and how far away they are living from their jobs.
2. Attendance of the VA Governor's Housing Conference is put on every year. This year, it is held in Virginia Beach, VA. Registration Fee is \$499 and Exhibitor Fee is \$500. We will need a small budget to register and attend the Conference to meet organizations, companies and government agencies that assist with housing or in the business of building housing. It will give the same organizations and government agencies the chance to get to know us as well.

Conclusion

The Virginia Latino Advisory Board wishes to thank Governor Youngkin, the Office of the Governor, his Cabinet, the Deputy Secretaries, and all administration staff working on behalf of Latinos in the Commonwealth to make this 2023-2024 Annual Report possible. We also thank the Office of Attorney General Jason Miyares for their partnership and support on many of our initiatives. The recommendations of this report reflect the insight, dedication, and commitment of many hard-working public servants who partnered with VLAB to examine the most urgent health, social, education, economic, and cultural issues affecting Latinos in Virginia. The work of the board throughout the entire year would not have been possible without their support, collaboration, and thoughtfulness.

We thank and recognize Emma Williams Jensen, Special Assistant for the Office of Diversity, Opportunity, & Inclusion Michael Perez, Christian Martinez, Director of Housing & Community Development Byran Horn, and Justin Bell for all their help in ensuring VLAB achieves its mission. VLAB also wishes to thank the many organizations, Latino/Hispanic leaders, community advocates, and elected officials who participated in crafting this Annual Report and the board's work throughout the year. These individuals and groups participated in VLAB meetings and shared the conversation that drives solutions. We want to also thank all the organizations and partners that have used their facilities for our meetings like Iglesia Mana del Cielo, George Mason University, Better Business Bureau for example.

VLAB looks forward to continuing this joint effort to implement stronger Latino worker protections, help entrepreneurs innovate and grow their businesses, improve public school student outcomes, welcome new immigrants and undocumented individuals to Virginia, keep families safe in their homes from eviction, and continue to expand access to affordable health care. These recommendations are respectfully submitted in the spirit of virtue, liberty, steadfastness, and renewal.

Appendices of 2024 Annual Report

Additional documents referenced in the report are listed below and attached to the end of this report.

Appendix A - Meeting Agendas & Minutes

Appendix B - Listening Session Notes

Appendix C - Statements

All documents are already publicly available either on Virginia's Commonwealth Calendar (commonwealth.calendar.gov) or on the Virginia Latino Advisory Board's website (vlab.virginia.gov).