Virginia Is For Learners Lead Innovation Network

Cohort 2.0 Overview and Summary
March 2020 - June 2021

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I. Introduction

In 2015, the Virginia Standards of Learning Innovation Committee, members of whom were appointed by the Governor, recommended to the Virginia General Assembly that the Board of Education develop a new Profile of a Virginia Graduate and adjust the state's diploma requirements to conform with the profile. The 2016 General Assembly subsequently approved House Bill 895 and Senate Bill 336 in furtherance of this goal. In 2018 the Virginia Board of Education released its new Profile of a Virginia Graduate. The Profile emphasized the '5 Cs' of critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and citizenship. The Board of Education also emphasized the development of core skill sets in the early years of high school and established multiple paths toward college and career readiness for students to follow in the later years of high school, including opportunities for internships, externships, and workforce credentialing.

The intent of the new Profile of a Virginia Graduate is to transform learning, teaching, and schooling across the Commonwealth. As Dr. James Lane, Superintendent of Public Instruction noted, "When I think about the best teachers that I had, I remember the teachers who really challenged me to open my mind and think critically about things in ways I never had before. This is the kind of deeper learning that we want all students to experience." Similarly, Virginia Secretary of Education Atif Qarni stated, "Virginia's schools have a duty to prepare students to combat challenges head on, by equipping them with both content knowledge and critical 21st century readiness skills. The Profile of a Virginia Graduate requires that students demonstrate core competencies like critical thinking, collaboration, creative thinking, communication and citizenship."

While the Profile of a Virginia Graduate was designed by the Virginia Board of Education to provide local school communities with a framework of competencies that students should develop as they master the Virginia Standards of Learning and work through division curricula, the Profile did not provide a roadmap for how school divisions should strategically identify, develop, revise, and align local efforts necessary for implementation of the Profile framework. School administrators and classroom educators quickly realized that the new Profile would demand innovative approaches to learning that would impact current school division policies, funding, teaching practices, use of time and school schedules, infrastructure needs, professional learning structures, communication with parents and communities, and numerous other aspects of schooling. The Virginia Department of Education also stressed that the shift to the new Profile framework was not just a high school initiative but rather should impact all PK-12 grade levels.

After multiple conversations and a convening with the Virginia Department of Education and Jobs for the Future staff, a collective of Virginia organizations mobilized together to initiate the Virginia is for Learners Innovation Network (VaLIN), a statewide initiative intended to bring together

school division design teams and foster innovation across the Commonwealth. The objective was to create a network of educators who would work together to find solutions to common challenges and share resources relevant to implementation of the Profile.

The Network was formed through funding and in-kind support from the following partners:

- Edu21C Foundation, a national nonprofit of Ted Dintersmith supporting organizations whose initiatives impact K-12 learning through commitments to help schools provide great life paths to children
- Jobs for the Future/Hewlett Foundation, a national nonprofit focused on broadening educational and economic opportunity who serves as a Hewlett Foundation grant recipient in partnership with the Virginia Department of Education
- Virginia School Consortium for Learning (VaSCL), an educational consortium of over 60 Virginia school divisions that promotes collaboration and high-quality professional learning in order to improve classroom instruction and school leadership practices
- James Madison University, the fiscal agent for the Virginia is for Learners Innovation Network
- Virginia Department of Education, the administrative agency for public school education in Virginia

Together, these entities united around the overarching purpose of fostering changes in Virginia school divisions that result in rigorous, challenging learning opportunities available to all learners regardless of geographic location or demographic. These changes are by design transformational of the school experience for all Virginia children, closing educational and workforce divides and cultivating 'future ready' students, schools, and communities across the Commonwealth.

II. Lead Innovation Teams

Applications for VaLIN Cohort 2 opened in January 2020. School divisions that applied were asked to collectively commit to the following:

- Engage in thoughtful innovation as pioneers for the Commonwealth;
- Model openness to growth within their own team and throughout the cohort;
- Leverage their regional, local, and virtual coaching supports;
- Create and share innovation artifacts and best practices throughout the network and, ultimately, across the Commonwealth; and
- Be present at all planned Institute sessions.

Each applicant school division responded to four prompts intended to assess their readiness for participation in the cohort:

1. What does engaging, deep, challenging learning mean to your team today?
2. Describe your interpretation of engaging, deep, and challenging learning that already exists in your community today.
3. What key strength do you predict your team will bring to the cohort's collective success?
4. What critical need do you anticipate other lead teams and the facilitators can help you address?

In all, 35 school divisions were selected for Cohort 2 (see Table 1), increasing in number from the 31 that had joined as members of Cohort 1. These division teams represent a broad cross-section of Virginia school systems that came from all eight Superintendent's Regions of the Commonwealth. School divisions of all sizes were represented in Cohort 2, ranging from small school systems (0 to 2,000 students) to very large school systems (more than 50,000 students). The average school division percentage of free- and/or reduced-price lunch students in Cohort 2 was 55%, with a range of 23% to 100%.

These 35 school divisions created 30 Lead Innovation Teams, with some of the smaller school divisions partnering together to maximize their networking potential. Each Lead Innovation Team selected 6 team members to represent the division(s). Team members consisted of superintendents and central office administrators, principals, instructional coaches, classroom teachers, parents, higher education faculty, and other school community members.

Table 1. VALIN Cohort Participants

Region	School Division	Student Enrollment	FRL%
1. Central Virginia	Chesterfield County	50k+	38
1. Central Virginia	CodeRVA Regional High School	0-2k	26
1. Central Virginia	Hanover County	10k-20k	23
1. Central Virginia	Henrico County	50k+	45
1. Central Virginia	New Kent County	2k-5k	24
1. Central Virginia	Richmond City	20k-35k	74
2. Tidewater	Chesapeake City	35k-50k	40
2. Tidewater	Essex County	0-2k	84
2. Tidewater	Isle of Wight County	5k-10k	35
2. Tidewater	Norfolk City	20k-35k	73
2. Tidewater	Northampton County	0-2k	79
3. Northern Neck	King & Queen County	0-2k	64
3. Northern Neck	King William County	2k-5k	29
3. Northern Neck	Mathews County	0-2k	46
3. Northern Neck	Stafford County	20k-35k	33
4. Northern Virginia	Fairfax County	50k+	31
4. Northern Virginia	Fauquier County	10k-20k	27
4. Northern Virginia	Shenandoah County	5k-10k	47
5. Valley	Amherst County	2k-5k	55
5. Valley	Campbell County	5k-10k	49
5. Valley	Nelson County	0-2k	52
5. Valley	Staunton City	2k-5k	58
5. Valley	Waynesboro City	2k-5k	62
6. Western Virginia	Botetourt County	2k-5k	27
6. Western Virginia	Montgomery County	5k-10k	37
6. Western Virginia	Pittsylvania County	5k-10k	62
7. Southwest	Bristol City	2k-5k	89
7. Southwest	Lee County	2k-5k	94
7. Southwest	Norton City	0-2k	93
7. Southwest	Radford City	0-2k	45
7. Southwest	Scott County	2k-5k	65
8. Southside	Appomattox County	2k-5k	49
8. Southside	Greensville County	2k-5k	99
8. Southside	Lunenburg County	0-2k	79
8. Southside	Nottoway County	0-2k	91

III. Network Model

Over the course of their VaLIN experience, Lead Innovation Teams were expected to identify (and begin to operationalize) local actions related to deeper learning, expanded equity, and increased learner engagement strategies foundational to the Commonwealth's Profile of a Virginia Graduate outcomes. Although the implementation team helps facilitate the network's activities, the VaLIN work is necessarily collaborative and driven by local school division needs.

Foundational Engagement Strategy

- **Pre-Planning -** Members of the VDOE, VaSCL, and ALP facilitation team (including pertinent experts) assemble to develop / refine the project plan, resources and logistics for each cohort.
- **Kick-Off Regional, Local, and Virtual Seminars -** Regional cohorts convene for one (1) full-day visioning event. In alliance with their assigned coach, the cohort will participate in one of three District-based planning sessions as well as up to three virtual seminars.
- **Mid-Point Regional, Local, and Virtual Seminars -** Cohorts convene for one full-day planning event in their regional hubs. Additionally, they participate in one of three District-based planning sessions as well as up to three virtual seminars.
- **Culminating Regional, Local, and Virtual Seminars -** Cohorts convene for one final full-day planning event in their regional hubs. Additionally, they participate in one of three District-based planning sessions as well as up to three virtual seminars.

Process Improvements from Cohort 1 to Cohort 2

- **Clarified Intended Outcomes -** The design team focused outcomes on district development of story-driven, resource-rich artifacts to be curated into a thematically aligned collection of Innovation Pathways.
- **Provided Pre-Launch Coaching -** ALP coaches connected with teams throughout February 2020 to unpack their district's applications and level-set around expectations for engagement within the Network.
- **Led Design Using Innovation Framework -** Team-based design was anchored by a research-based Innovation Framework authored by the ALP team and informed by Cohort I implementation.
- **Leveraged Virtual Engagement -** The crisis that unfolded less than two weeks after 2020 launch led to opportunities to learn together virtually, including a Spring twitter chat (#VaLINchat), Summer Virtual Pathways, and the launch of 'birds of a feather' micro-networks throughout the fall and winter.
- **Ensured Leadership Involvement -** VaLIN Steering Committee members provided direct support of district leadership and the team's appointed lead to ensure consistent communication and engagement.

2020-2021 Implementation Timeline

Phase 1 Understanding the Challenge Mar - May 2020	**Phase 2** Designing Solutions June - Aug 2020	**Phase 3** Taking Action Sept - Dec 2020	**Phase 4** Amplifying Successes Jan - Mar 2021
Teams identified opportunities to promote deeper learning, active engagement, and equity within their communities. Response to the pandemic resulted in rapid expansion of most urgent solutions.	Teams expanded plans to advance 'small steps to big change' that bring the Profile to life in their districts. Virtual pathways aligned to shared areas of focus united members of Cohorts I and II in collaborative learning.	Teams implemented, tested, and refined innovation designs in their district. Members engaged in cycles of action and reflection within cross-district 'sandbox' teams that encouraged ongoing iteration and alignment of practice.	Teams applied lessons learned from their design solutions into scale-up plans that expanded the impact of their innovations. Efforts culminated in actionable and contextualized paths to activate the Profile.

Phase 1: Understanding the Challenge (March-April 2020)

On March 2, 2020, over 180 Virginia education leaders began their journey as the cohort convened in Chesterfield. Led by author and producer Ted Dintersmith, High Tech High GSE Creative Director Kaleb Rashad, and Virginia State Superintendent James Lane, teams unpacked a vision for and identified opportunities surrounding the urgency for purposeful learning.

The second session of the 2-day launch saw teams continuing their design in regional groups facilitated by coaches from Advanced Learning Partnerships. By day's end, each team had generated personalized plans for realizing the Profile of a Virginia Graduate via change catalysts aligned to the Innovation Playlist.

No fewer than ten days later, all K-12 schools in Virginia were mandated to close to in-person learning in response to the continued spread of novel coronavirus, or COVID-19. The echoes of this shift permeate throughout each and every team's engagement as a member of VaLIN Cohort 2, with the pandemic response becoming a catalyst for change in its own right.

Throughout the spring, school teams partnered with their ALP Innovation Coaches for support with their most urgent needs, utilizing the weekly #VaLINchat on twitter throughout the spring as a means of staying connected to each other and the goals of the cohort.

Phase 2: Designing Solutions (May-July 2020)

In accordance with local, state, and national guidelines, the VaLIN Steering Team collaborated to reconceptualize the Summer Institute previously planned for July 23.

This calendar frames the myriad virtual learning experiences offered throughout June and July in support of Innovation Team efforts to activate the Profile of a Virginia Graduate through project focus on equity, deeper learning, and active engagement. These opportunities address focus areas essential to innovation and are relevant to educators planning equitable, engaging deeper learning experiences by design, no matter the learning location.

This Summer Learning Series (lovingly described at the time as Virtual VaLIN) set the stage for the 'Birds of a Feather' opportunities that would follow in Fall 2020, culminating in a network-wide virtual experience that offered each team the opportunity to share their design's current state as they learned from each other's process.

Phase 3: Taking Action (August 2020 - February 2021)

Throughout August and September, teams continued to collaborate with their Innovation Coach in support of transitioning their innovative ideas into innovative action. The desire to unite around shared themes of practice contributed to the design of the October 7th virtual convening, during which team members joined one of six Birds of a Feather sessions to further expand their network in their chosen arena.

These virtual Birds of a Feather connections launched a winter learning series of their own, building on the areas of focus from the summer's learning by activating micro-networks / action teams that were thematically aligned to shared goals. These micro-networks / action teams were invited to work together around design, implementation, and reflection in support of one another's approaches to innovation.

Phase 4: Amplifying Successes (March 2021 - July 2021)

Spring 2021 found each team on a continuum of phases of implementation of their innovation, which could essentially be categorized into three different states. Teams were either a) on the precipice of implementation, b) in the midst of initial implementation, or c) engaged in one or more iteration cycles of their innovation.

As a means of inviting the Network to reinforce each other's efforts, the March convening event invited teams to serve as panelists to share both the process and outcomes of their approach with other interested peers. *Voices of VaLIN* podcasts served as an analogous approach within an asynchronous format. These sessions were intended to catalyze each team's

movement in adherence with the VaLIN Network's mantra: *Small Steps. Big Change. Deeper Learning, Together.*

Throughout the spring, teams channeled their efforts toward realizing their implementation goals and [capturing the story of those innovations](#) in a variety of formats. [This website](#) serves as the 'culminating artifact' of Cohort 2's journey, organizing these stories of innovation around their shared catalysts of change such that future cohorts can learn from these innovations in support of their own local efforts.

Anticipated Improvements for Cohort 3.0

Through the Profile of a Virginia Graduate and the aligned 5 Cs, VaLIN is redefining innovation and networking within, between, and among districts. VaLIN's personalized coaching model has introduced and continues to reinforce progressive, aligned professional learning outcomes. In this way, Virginia is modeling for adults what it seeks for its children.

- **Activate Agile Networks -** Work closely with VDOE to leverage swarm / hive networks to support sustainable professional learning needs.
- **Apply Lessons Learned from Pandemic Response -** Model the scaled implementation of progressive professional collaboration & innovation.
- **Leverage Cohort I and II Work Products -** Utilize the culminating product from 2020-2021 implementation as an accelerator that helps districts identify entry points.
- **Codify Innovation Framework -** Systematize the Innovation Framework as a road map toward activating change. This Framework can serve as visible milestones for districts building scaled capacity around the Profile of a Virginia Graduate and the aligned 5 Cs.
- **Empower Equitable Readiness for Collective Impact** - The launch of Cohort 3.0 represents actualization of a 'tipping point' to leverage next-generation support from VDOE and organizations like the Commonwealth Learning Partnership.

The pandemic offers a multi-generational chance to reimagine and scale learning models that authentically empower deeper learning, equity, and active engagement. Applying this year's innovation in the 2021-22 cohort will produce a tipping point toward sustainable regional outcomes.

IV. Innovation Team Project Artifacts

All told, 24 of the 35 school divisions that joined VALIN Cohort 2 in March 2020 completed a full year of project development and implementation actions through June 2021. Given the volatile nature of the 2020-21 school year, eleven of the school divisions dropped out of the cohort due to change in leadership or competing priorities that were unanticipated when their applications were submitted.

The following collection of artifacts offers a brief overview of each team's focus for their innovation projects, organized around the Edu21C Innovation Playlist change catalyst most aligned to each division team's efforts. Associated hyperlinks provide access to case studies, presentations, videos, podcasts, and other mixed media artifacts that offer additional depth of context around the team's project.

Change Catalyst 1: Mobilize The Learning Community

Mobilize By Defining Shared Vision

King and Queen, King William, and Mathews - [Operationalizing the 5Cs](#)
The goal of this multi-district team's efforts: to guide division-level and school-level leaders to unpack and operationalize the 5 C's. Leaders can then better support classroom teachers in navigating and implementing authentic, deeper learning opportunities at all levels in their work to support students as they grow in their acquisition of life-ready skills.

Stafford County - [SCPS Portrait of a Graduate](#)
Over the course of participation in VaLIN 2.0, the Stafford team focused on beginning to outline what the SCPS-specific profile of a graduate / learner / educator would look like. The following illustrates those skills and qualities and that teachers and leaders will both model and teach to students so that each of these personal statements will be true by the time a student graduates. They incorporate the 5Cs of the Portrait of a Graduate as well as those adopted by Stafford in its original adoption of the C5W continuum.

Mobilize By Activating the Vision

Chesterfield County - From Design to Impact ([Case Study](#) and [Voices of VALIN Podcast](#))
As part of Chesterfield's innovation journey, they identified the need to set the stage for innovation to take place. In their strategic plan, Chesterfield promises to "ignite passion through authentic and captivating experiences." The way to advance this ignition is through their Infinite Learner 6 Cs. By focusing their innovation on revamping their School Improvement and Innovation Process, they are creating the conditions for innovation to take root and thrive.

Richmond City - RPS DREAMS [Innovation Framework](#) and [Sample Innovations](#)
RPS's innovation journey began with their efforts to create STEM Academies within two of their middle schools. It quickly became apparent to them that this work was having an impact on their learners and RPS needed a way to replicate it within existing bandwidth. Leveraging the Innovation Framework as a model, RPS designed their own DREAMS Innovation Process, which is now being leveraged to scale innovation across the division.

Change Catalyst 2: Student Driven Learning

Reimagining Student Learning Experiences

Amherst County - Project-Based Learning ([Presentation](#) and [Voices of VALIN Podcast](#))
Via this presentation with the innovation team alongside the podcast episode with Superintendent Dr. Rob Arnold, Amherst County shares the story from moments of a year of innovation. This past summer, their partnership with WSET enabled student production teams to develop and manage a televised series of engaging lessons aligned to universal themes. Later in the year, a focus on PBL led to development of a website that showcases selected student artifacts from each of the division's schools for public viewing.

New Kent County - [Summer of MORE (Meaningful Opportunities for Real World Engagement)](#)
New Kent County is leveraging a 5Es approach to build commitment as they reinvent the summer learning experience to reactivate the joy for learning. The Summer of MORE (Meaningful Opportunities for Real World Engagement) is a multifaceted experience for both learners and teachers, with thematic units that activate the 5Cs and PLC structures that foster risk-taking and leadership opportunities.

Empowering Educators to Unleash Student Potential

Chesapeake City - Empowering Educators ([Voices of VALIN Podcast](#))
During a review of their efforts from the 2020-21 school year, Chesapeake City's innovation team brought to light a theme of empowering educators to provide a greater level of real-life application to student learning experiences. In this Voices of VaLIN podcast episode, Dr. Sheli Porter discusses some of the realizations gleaned from their leadership efforts.

Nelson County - Pathways for Professional Learning ([Voices of VALIN Podcast](#))
The Nelson team worked collaboratively to reimagine approaches to professional learning via empowering our educators in Lead Innovation Teams. The initiative included a rebranding of our division-wide focus within pathways of learning, ensuring relevant learning experiences that will engage students and help them develop a passion for learning. The goal of these Lead Innovation Teams is to transform student learning from abstract to a meaningful learning experience.

Norfolk City - Establishing a Community of Practice for Concurrent Instruction [Case Study](#)
Norfolk Public Schools, like so many, \shifted their innovation during the year to meet both present and future learning. The innovation is focused on the return to school that provides an optimal experience for all learners whether in person and virtual but also is shaping instruction to be more aligned to best practice around engagement and empowerment of students.

Staunton City - SCS University [Case Study](#), [Presentation](#), and [Video Overview](#)
Continuous learning is an embedded process in any innovation! Staunton City Schools developed and upscaled SCS University, a collaborative peer-to-peer training that allows for personalized learning around an identified focus and need. This same concept could be applied across divisions and across innovative practices.

Aligning Systems to Support Student Agency

Hanover County - Electives Pathway Exploration [Case Study](#)
Despite the changes students were to experience in the fall of 2020, the Hanover team was able to fold the thinking of multiple elective choices within a new middle school schedule. The team created a new component in the schedule called Academic Curriculum Enrichment Block (ACE). Eventually, ACE attempted to realize what the team had initially set out to do in March 2020: to give students a chance to explore multiple elective choices.

Henrico County - [Journey Toward Life Ready Framework](#)
Henrico's story centers how the pandemic super-charged their advance towards a deeper learning focused Teaching and Learning Framework through rapid prototyping, testing, failure, and survival. The key innovation is the Practitioner's Guide for Design and Delivery that was designed to support teachers in our virtual OR in-person environment. Essentially, this resource is the guide to HCPS best practices expectations for Life Ready instruction.

Radford City - [Reimagining School Scheduling](#)
The driving question of Radford City's Innovation Team: *Can we create a schedule that allows teachers to collaborate, plan, and prepare for the integration of problem/project based learning?* Review the slide deck that chronicles the team's journey in order to understand their path as well as to access resources associated with their implementation.

Change Catalyst 3: Real World Challenges

Classroom / School-Based Innovation

Montgomery County - MCPS Tech Internship [Video](#)
The MCPS Tech Internship program offers students a real-world learning experience that prepares them for future endeavors in the field of cyber security. The team is leveraging the Profile of a VA Classroom to map out connections between cybersecurity students and content

experts, identify what personalized learning looks like in these classrooms, and develop assessments that connect students to the real world while focusing on equity for non-traditional cybersecurity students.

Shenandoah County - Bringing SCALE to Life [Video](#)
The Shenandoah VaLIN team worked this year to continue to bring SCALE (Shenandoah County Advanced Learning Environments) to life. The initiative's goal is to support expansion of career and work-based experiences through continued collaboration with local community agencies, business partners, and higher education institutions.

Waynesboro City - Students Solving Community Challenges [Presentation](#)
The Waynesboro City team focused its efforts on a pair of initiatives (Waynesboro High School's *Students Solving Community Challenges* program and Kate Collins Middle School's *Waynesboro Educational Farm*) that both incorporated opportunities for real world learning and community engagement within the context of the student experience.

District-Wide Expansion and Alignment

Bristol City - Bearcat Bridge ([Presentation](#) and [Voices of VALIN Podcast](#))
Bristol City is collaborating with the local Chamber to establish a program that prepares and recognizes high school students who demonstrate career and workforce readiness skills. Students are mentored, participate in an advisory period where they create and maintain a digital portfolio, have access to work-based learning opportunities and a spring Job Fair. Successful students receive the Chamber's Seal of Excellence on their diploma.

Nottoway County - E3: Expose, Explore, Experience ([Case Study](#) and [Voices of VALIN Podcast](#))
The Nottoway team's Innovation Focus is best summed up as E3 -- Expose, Explore, Experience. Their goal is to expose, reveal, and introduce careers and opportunities to elementary students as they develop curiosity and interests. As students progress through middle school, they explore career pathways, begin to make choices and identify job preferences. E3, at the high school level, involves an active living model where students investigate and become immersed in career and real-life learning experiences.

Change Catalyst 4: Authentic Assessments

Classroom / School-Based Innovation

Greensville County - Launching Performance Tasks [Presentation](#) and [Voices of VALIN Podcast](#)
Greensville County is a Year 1 Innovation Team from Cohort II, with an initial innovation goal to increase project-based tasks and student-centered learning in the classroom. We will present our story of excitement in the beginning, how we stuck with our goals throughout, hardships,

successes and how we changed our innovation to work for our school district during the Pandemic.

District-Wide Alignment

Fairfax County - Transforming Student-Led Assessment [Video](#)
How has Fairfax County Public Schools attempted to adapt instructional practices to shift with changing times? Experience the journey of trailblazing schools that are shifting instruction to provide experiences where students learn, develop, and showcase their growth in "Portrait of a Graduate" skills through student-led Presentations of Learning. See the journey from initial concept, planning, teacher shifts, roadblocks, and adjustments that will allow these practices and assessment strategies to be the norm for all students, and how partnership with a state cohort will help propel the initiative.

Change Catalyst 5: Caring and Connected Communities

Supporting Communities of Learners

CodeRVA Regional High School - [Promoting Student Agency via 9GA](#)
CodeRVA's design builds on next-generation high school models across the nation that rethink the use of time and space, leverage technology to personalize and accelerate learning, and redesign curriculum to align with competency-based progressions. CodeRVA's team identified the need to create a formal Ninth Grade Academy (9GA) to facilitate the transition not only to high school, but to CodeRVA's unique learning environment.