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Collector: Web Link 1 (Web Link)
Started: Friday, July 14, 2017 8:30:18 PM
Last Modified: Friday, July 14, 2017 8:43:16 PM
Time Spent: 00:12:58
IP Address: 71.62.109.230

Page 2: Contact Information

Q1

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Page 3: Question 1: Early Learning

Q2

Virginia is known to have a ‘non-system’ of early learning where programs operate under different departments and sets of rules. What would you do to better link programs and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Virginia’s early learning programs?

Stakeholders across the spectrum, from educators, to parents, to business owners, have all advocated for quality Early Learning opportunities because they are aware of the importance of these programs in the development of life-long learners. Because of the importance of the early learning experience, we need to assure that these opportunities are consistent and meet quality learning levels across the Commonwealth. That being said, it is important that we develop assessments that are authentic measurements of real learning, and not a measurement of standardization, and preparation. Because of the importance of Early Learning opportunities, we must develop a concise system of oversight to assure the development, and safety, of each individual child. In cases where multiple agencies need to be involved to meet individual learners’ needs we must cut bureaucracy and duplication, and increase systems of communication to ensure that these needs are met in a clear and efficient way. Many education theorists promote the idea of holistic education, a number of schools even practice some form of a holistic approach to learning, as a state we need to bring that understanding of educating the whole child to our statewide system. Our current SOL laden system attempts to measure learning equality, instead we need to develop a system that provides an equitable learning experience for every student. As a state legislator, I will work with stakeholders and experts across agencies to develop a system that works best in achieving that goal, either through centralization, a taskforce, or some other method.

Page 4: Question 2: Foster Care

Q3

Most children entering foster care are returned to their families. In most cases, these families do not receive additional support and services from the child welfare system, which can lead to poor health and education outcomes for children. How do you think the Commonwealth can better support children once they are returned to their families?

Under the current system, foster care, and many other services, act as a place-marker, instead of addressing, and correcting the problem. Families move in and out of “the system” trapped in an inescapable bubble of despair. Lack of support is not only detrimental to the life of the family and the individual, but the economy and the future of Virginia as well. If we spend the time and money to correct the issue--to provide educational and support systems for these families—that are prescriptive rather than punitive, we can provide a pathway out of this cycle, and an opportunity for success. I realize that this is no easy task to achieve considering our current rank in the nation as a provider of social services, but we must begin to meet our current challenges to avoid future pitfalls. One of my early, teaching experience was at an alternative school in San Antonio, Texas. The school was developed in the 19th Century to educate the children of freed slaves. As the needs of the community changed, the role of the school had changed. Although still run by nuns, it was now part of the San Antonio ISD. The school was an alternative school for students who for one reason or another couldn’t make it in their “home” school. Some had gotten in trouble with gangs, some were pregnant teens, or teenage mothers, but for all this was now their permanent school. The school provided things like classes in parenting skills, an on-campus nursery, and even occasionally had people visit from the Department of Health in Austin to address safe sex and condom use. The point being that we need to adapt our approach to meet the current and future challenges.

Page 5: Question 3: School to Prison Pipeline

Q4

The US Department of Education data analyzed by the Center for Public Integrity shows that Virginia schools, in a single year, referred students to law enforcement agencies at three times the national rate. Numerous studies show that these school discipline policies increase the chances of these students becoming involved with the adult criminal justice system. If elected, how would you address these issues?

The school-to-prison pipeline issue is a growing issue across Virginia, and the country. Currently, in Virginia there are those who want to militarize our schools in the name of protecting our students. In recent years we have seen an increase in school safety officers, members of local police and sheriff's departments who are assigned to our schools. While the intention of the presence of these officers was to protect students and teachers from issues arising outside the school, and potential criminal activity that might arise on campus. These officers become called upon, more and more to deal with issues of classroom discipline. The problem here is two-fold. First, it is detrimental to the perception of authority of the teacher as a classroom leader. Secondly, misbehavior become elevated from a school issue to a criminal issue. The class clown has now entered into "the system" and leading to the increased potential of the individual's future involvement in the adult criminal justice system. While I don't think that we are point where we can call for the dismantling of the School Safety Officer program, or perhaps even call for statewide mandates on where SROs should be used, I do think we should develop a state-wide training system and criteria for the proper use of police on campus, for the benefit of all administrators, teachers, and SROs.

Page 6: Question 4: Health Insurance

Q5

Virginia's Children's Health Insurance Program (known as FAMIS in Virginia) and Medicaid provide low-income children with health insurance that their families would otherwise be unable to afford. If the federal government cuts payments to the states for Medicaid and/or FAMIS, how would you support the health needs of low-income children?

It is apparent that Affordable Healthcare is an essential part of keeping children healthy, in-school, and learning. Affordable healthcare not only is essential to the future of the individual, but the future of the Commonwealth. We need to assure that our young people have appropriate and quality healthcare. If the federal government cuts funding for CHIPs, FAMIS, and Medicaid, the state legislature will have to take on the responsibility for assuring access to an adequate system of Healthcare for all Virginians. I am well aware most Republican members of the House, including the current chair of the Health, Welfare, and Institutions committee, have been adamantly opposed to expanding Medicaid, to the tune of nearly seven billion in Virginia tax dollars given to other states. This not only costs our economy through a decline in productivity, but costs each of us in increased insurance and tax rates as emergency rooms are strained to provide treatment. Perhaps a viable alternative for school age children would be to provide a more holistic approach. To allow school nurses to provide higher levels of treatment for students, or to have Physicians Assistants or other professionals in schools to provide treatment. While this is obviously not the best answer to fixing the current issues we face in providing Affordable Healthcare to all Virginians, or all Americans, it may have to do until the majority of our legislators begin to see the value of a healthy and productive citizenry.

Page 7: Question 5: Opioid Epidemic

Q6

Substance abuse by parents affects both the parents and their children. Brain research shows that positive attachment between a parent and child in the first few years of life is critical to the child's healthy brain development. Substance abuse can significantly impact those early bonds between parents and children. If elected, what policy solutions would you promote to address the needs of the whole family?

My approach to addressing parental opioid abuse and its affect on their children would be largely the same as with the foster care question above. We need to take a prescriptive rather than punitive approach to dealing with opioid abusers. We need to get parents who are victims of opioid abuse to seek treatment without fear of retribution. We need to get addicts to seek treatment early, before their addiction becomes the total focus of their life. If we can get folks into a treatment program early enough the damage to the child's development and the nurturing bond between the parent and child will be minimal. Of course, we will not be able to reach every victim of the opioid epidemic early in the cycle of addition, but wherever we reach them we must provide them with a full range of tools to address their addiction, their responsibilities as a parent, and the issues that brought them to addiction. To encourage the addicts to seek treatment we must have laws in place similar to the rules that allow someone to report an opioid overdose without fear of criminal charges. It is cheaper for the community, and better for all concerned to cure someone's addiction, than it is to incarcerate them.

Page 8: Question 6: Cross-Systems

Q7

A child can interact with many systems (schools, health and mental health, courts, etc.) as they grow up. A Virginia Children's Cabinet has been established to facilitate cross-agency collaborations at the highest levels of state government. If elected, how would you facilitate this type of cross-agency collaboration for children?

While my knowledge of the Virginia Children's Cabinet initiative, is somewhat limited. I do believe that Cross-Systems Collaboration is important to ensure student success. Again, most learning theorists in the 21st century emphasize the importance of a more holistic approach to learning. While I realize it is a relatively new initiative, I believe the Virginia Children's Cabinet is limited in depth and scope. If we feel the program has shown sufficient success we should expand it, if not we should replace it. In either case, we need a program that addresses a wider range of issues facing learners, and effects a larger number of schools across the Commonwealth. The dangers I see in the VCC initiative are the development of a one size fits all model, and the possibility of an inaccurate method of measurement of success. At a time when the average student in school today will change careers 3-5 times throughout their lifetime we need to be teaching critical thinking skills that will make students successful lifelong learners. No matter what we do we must make sure we assess student learning in an authentic and real way. To assure life-long learning we must move away from "teaching to the test."

Page 9: Question 7: Mental Health

Q8

In 2016, Virginia ranked 49th in the nation for the rate of youth with major depression who did not receive any mental health treatment. There are many barriers to quality mental health treatment for children, including: type of insurance, place of residence, lack of access and stigma. What do you view as the most significant barrier to effective mental health care for children and adolescents in Virginia, and how would you propose addressing this barrier?

The largest barrier to addressing effective mental healthcare for children and adolescents is two -fold. First, there is the lack of trained counselors to address student issues on school campuses, and second is an underlying fear of potential litigation, real or perceived, by parents of the students they are attempting to help. The general assembly needs to work to provide trained mental health professionals within every school systems, and continue to build systems of cross-collaboration. We might also pass legislation to provide protections to school staff who are acting in good faith, within their areas of responsibility.

Page 10: Question 8: Education

Q9

The achievement gap between lower income students and their higher income peers and between white students and students of color has been a persistent problem in Virginia that has recently worsened. How would you address the achievement gap in Pre-K to 12 education?

To close the achievement gap the General Assembly must adequately and fully fund the state portion of our Public School budget in a consistent and transparent way. We must also raise the standards of quality learning to a level above the bear minimum. This would allow equity in learning in our public schools across the Commonwealth, from the poorest school in the Southwest to the newest school in Alexandria. Again, we must assess this learning in an authentic way to assure that we are measuring the student's ability to learn, and not the student's ability to successfully test.