

**COMPLETE**

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## 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?

We need to move away from underfunded and piecemeal policies that are not effectively addressing early learning in Virginia and move towards comprehensive systems that are integrated within the community it serves by partnering with local employers, schools, and families. Investing in early learning now will pay off later. Education should be proactive instead of reactive. Money that is spent in early childhood education will be saved in later years through decreased delinquency and increased productivity and economic competitiveness. We need to ensure preschool and head start teachers are paid adequately to attract and retain high quality professionals. Virginia needs to start improving the efficiency and effectiveness of these early learning programs by integrating and strengthening the programs that we have in place as well as looking ahead at expanding the programs to more children.

## 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?**

Foster children benefit when they are able to return to their families with their safety and developmental needs met. Traditionally the state has focused more on safety than the developmental needs of the children, but both of these issues need to be considered. Supported parenting services are critical to the success of many family reunifications. These services should be tailored to the specific needs of the parents. There are different programs designed to help families dealing with substance abuse, return from incarceration, disabilities, and domestic violence and these programs help to support reunification families. These children are our most vulnerable and if elected I will advocate for appropriate resources for parenting support programs to help these children and their families.

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?**

I believe it is important for our schools to be a place where our children can learn and make childhood mistakes without ending up at the police station. Virginia needs more alternatives to exclusionary discipline, but we also need to do a better job of funding these types of programs. Legislation is only half of the solution, without funding the programs the General Assembly is legislating the problem will still be there. In addition to alternatives for current school discipline, we need to be preventative as well with after school programs, sufficient staffing, and funding to ensure teachers are trained on how to deal with issues before they become a disciplinary problem. We need to address the issue that students with disabilities and African American students are disproportionately affected. As part of a proactive approach it would be beneficial to have more counselors instead of more school resource officers. Incorporating a restorative justice approach to conflicts will help keep them from escalating to law enforcement. A single suspension makes it less likely that a student will graduate from high school, and being referred to the court system makes it even less likely. I support the efforts that have been undertaken so far but I think we need to invest in preventative programs to be proactive about stopping this cycle and keeping kids in the classroom and not the courtroom.

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?**

If these cuts transpire, the General Assembly will need to work across party lines to provide a system that will support the health insurance need for many low-income Virginians. Having healthy families leads to a more productive workforce. These cuts to children's care would occur in tandem with an investment tax cut for the wealthy. In order for the state to make up for what the federal government cuts, the General Assembly would need to raise taxes to recoup some of that money in order to continue to provide medical insurance for poor children. This is why it is so important for the General Assembly to stand up for the needs of children that rely on these types of programs.

## 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?**

Solving the opioid epidemic and its effects on Virginia families requires a multifaceted approach. The General Assembly should work to promote both prevention and treatment programs. Prevention strategies should focus on placing appropriate controls on access to opioids and reducing the opioid addiction risk factors such as chronic poverty and unemployment. Treatment strategies should focus on the understanding that addiction is a family disease with children often needing help with attachment, self-regulation and competency skills. Treatment for children should begin with prenatal care providers screening for addiction and referring addicted mothers to treatment. Hospitals can help new parents connect to appropriate community resources. Services for addicts should include a family outreach component for children. The courts, schools and foster care programs should be prepared to deal with the special needs of these children before this crisis is extended to the next generation. As with other policy solutions, the General Assembly needs to commit funds to assist with the programs it legislates in order to get the maximum benefit.

## 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?**

The Virginia Children's Cabinet initiated a remarkable number of integrative programs since its inception and has been a resource to the Commonwealth. Solving the problem of underperforming schools must include working on the problems facing the community. If elected I welcome the opportunity to review more information on the effectiveness of these programs and hearing its leaders recommendations for future steps that can be implemented in Virginia. Communication between agencies strengthens the programs that serve our children and should be promoted as well as expanded where feasible.

## 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?

I believe some of the most significant barriers include stigma and embarrassment, confidentiality and trust, as well as difficulty identifying symptoms. Each of these can and should be addressed through education on mental health issues. I would support funding for public health experts to design evidence-based educational programs that would address these barriers. Ideally, the educational messages should reach parents as well as children to have the biggest benefit. Increasing youth amenability to mental health treatment only works if that care is then easily accessible. There is important work for the General Assembly to do in this regard, particularly if federal Medicaid dollars are cut and parity for mental health insurance coverage is scrapped.

## 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?

The achievement gap between lower income students and their higher income peers and between white students and students of color is due to the underlying opportunity gap. Better opportunities will lead to better achievement. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that works to provide all students access to challenging and supported opportunities to learn. The General Assembly should support the use of a variety of assessments designed to respond to student needs, support teachers as professionals, help create and maintain a healthy school culture, and sustain equitable and meaningful parent and community engagement. Addressing the opportunity gap through a holistic approach will lead to reducing the achievement gap.