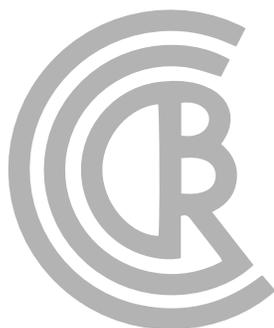


# Education Positions

20  
21



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Beckley- Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce  
Education Committee

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# Student Health and Wellness

Kids Count Data Center, Adverse Childhood Experiences Coalition of West Virginia, the Center for Disease Control, and the US Census Bureau show that West Virginia children are adversely impacted by: poverty (26% of WV's children live below the Federal poverty level), substance abuse (WV leads the nation in opioid deaths), homelessness (37% of WV parents lack secure employment), unstable homes (WV has the highest rate of children who either live with a grandparent/relative or who are in foster care), and domestic abuse (one-third of WV homicides are related to domestic violence). These statistics are at a degree that is unprecedented in the state's history and contribute to WV's ranking of 48th in the nation in overall child well-being.

## Action

The Legislature should continue to support and/or enact legislation that improves the health and well-being of its citizens, including:

Early Literacy, Head Start, Pre-K Instruction, and West Virginia Birth to Three

- Provides early intervention for at-risk children. Many of these programs have never been adequately funded. Classroom instructional support is significantly below where the research-based threshold says it should be; and in 2015, only 14% of 3-year-olds were enrolled in head start.

Communities in School

- Provides staff and resources for an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement leading to improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities.

Trained Nurses

- Work collaboratively with students, families, teachers, and other members of a multidisciplinary team to utilize community resources so that the physical, mental, emotional, and social health needs of students are met.

School Nutrition

- Feeds the 26% of WV's children who live in poverty and who without this valuable program would otherwise go to bed hungry each night.



# Employment First

Persons with disabilities participate in the total workforce in much smaller numbers than those without disabilities (37% vs. 77%), and WV is in last place in the nation with only 26% employed (only 19% of those with cognitive disabilities)—making this most vulnerable population highly dependent on public benefits and forcing them to live a life of poverty. The WV Bureau for Behavioral Health reports that 65% of individuals are currently served in facility-based and non-work settings and that only 18% of funding is going towards integrated employment.

We hold that all citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life. Policies, service delivery practices, and the reimbursement structure for youth and adults with significant disabilities should be a priority. Employees with a disability should be paid directly by employers at the greater of minimum or prevailing wages with commensurate benefits, and they should have the opportunity to interact continuously with co-workers without disabilities, have an opportunity for advancement and job mobility, and be engaged full-time wherever possible.

Alternatives such as non-work day programs can and should continue to be available (as well as other services), but working in the general workforce should be our goal. With the right level and type of support, individuals who were previously considered unemployable can be successful.

Support includes:

- Competent professionals who can guide the individual through the job exploration and search process, negotiate with potential employers, and provide counseling and support after placement (both on and off the job)
- Accommodations and assistive technology
- Assistance with managing the impact of earnings on public benefits
- Assistance with transportation

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, “The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.”

## Action

**The Legislature should support and/or enact the Employment First Bill.**

# Job Skills Training

According to the National Skills Coalition’s analysis of the Bureau of Labor Statistics data, “middle skills” jobs—those that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree—account for 53% of the US labor market, but only 43% of the country’s workers are trained to this middle-skill level.

WV desperately needs these workers, but currently financial aid is not available for them to enroll in non-degree granting short training courses. This means that grants, student loans, and the WV Invests program are not an option for those who are in need of these skills without unnecessarily increasing their workload. Students are forced to somehow come up with the money for their training themselves or to rely on limited funding from Workforce WV, unions, or corporate partnerships. It is a sad fact that while WV employers are struggling to find skilled workers, many potential workers have no way to pay for the training that will give them the job skills that employers are seeking.

## Why Employers Struggle to Fill Open Positions

*% Employers Reporting the Following Reasons*

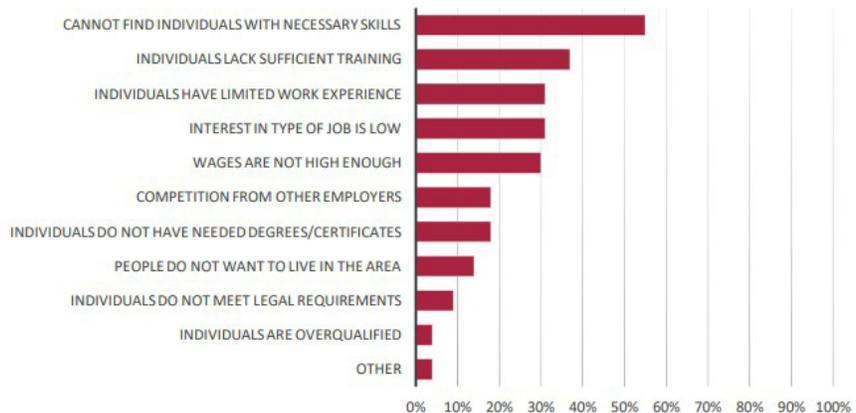


Table 1 WVDE Survey of Employer Skills Needs

## Action

The Legislature should enact legislation that will provide additional grant funding for adult learners to enable them to enroll in non-degree training programs at a Community and Technical College, a four-institution, or a WVDE Career-Technical Education facility in order to achieve the “middle skills” necessary for employment.



# Broadband Access/Virtual Learning

According to NewAmerica.org, WV is one of the least broadband-connected states. Service as a whole is slower and more expensive compared to plans across the country. It is even more problematic in rural areas. Many rural citizens live in areas not covered by any internet provider. Lack of connectivity narrows opportunities for economic growth and costs WV's citizens in terms of access to employment, healthcare, government services, federal benefits, and education. As we saw from COVID-19 pandemic remote learning has become a reality. Sadly, it has made the education of our citizens just one more victim in the war on the digital divide.

## Action

**The Legislature should support and/or enact legislation that:**

- Makes broadband affordable for low income families by implementing cost-saving or cost-limiting initiatives such as broadband vouchers or tax credits, thus ensuring that economic status is not a limiting factor in access to a quality education.
- Encourages at the federal level significant broadband penetration into unserved and underserved rural areas and that limit “density shopping” by broadband providers.
- Encourages broadband providers to deliver fiber to areas with sufficient population density to cost-effectively serve customers while also offering fixed-base wireless service beyond the fiber footprint to reach unserved populations.
- Ensures meaningful progress is being made toward making broadband universally available to unserved or underserved rural areas, as well as promoting broadband competition, rather than maintaining, supporting or reinforcing the status quo that ignores sparsely populated rural areas.
- Ensures that policymakers have accurate pricing information for broadband plans and comprehensive information on availability and speeds.



# Arts in Education

The arts are fundamental to our humanity. They ennoble and inspire us by fostering creativity, goodness, and beauty. The arts bring us joy, help us express our values, and build bridges between cultures and are a fundamental part of a healthy community—strengthening them socially, educationally, and economically. According to AmericansForTheArts.org, 93 percent of Americans agree that the arts are vital to providing a well-rounded education. They help teach children to communicate effectively with adults and peers, and students engaged in arts learning have higher GPAs, higher standardized test scores, and higher college-going rates as well as lower drop-out rates.

- The spending by arts organizations and their audiences supports 4.6 million jobs and generates \$27.5 billion in government revenue.
- Attendees at nonprofit arts events spend \$31.47 per person, per event, beyond the cost of admission on items such as meals, parking, and babysitters
- Creativity is among the top five applied skills sought by business leaders.
- 4% of all businesses and 2% of all employees are involved in the creation or distribution of the arts
- Cities with art activities have higher civic engagement, more social cohesion, better child welfare, and lower poverty rate,
- Nearly one-half of healthcare institutions deliver arts programming for patients, families, and staff. These healing benefits result in shorter hospital stays, better pain management, and less medication.
- Veterans rank the creative arts therapies in the top four (out of 40) interventions and treatments. The arts promote resilience during pre-deployment, deployment, and reintegration into the community.

This statement has been reviewed and endorsed by more than 53 national organizations, including the NEA: It is imperative that all students have access to an equitable delivery of arts education that includes dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts that supports their educational, social, and emotional well-being, taught by certified professional arts educators in partnership with community arts providers.

## Action

The Legislature should support enact legislation requiring a comprehensive policy be adopted at the state level that requires a plan for arts education with an arts coordinator to oversee, implement and evaluate the plan.



# Civics Education

Americans' participation in civic life is essential to sustaining our democratic form of government. Without it, a government of the people, by the people, and for the people will not last. Of increasing concern to many is the declining levels of positive civic engagement across the country. The Annenberg Public Policy Center says that only 1 in 4 of Americans is able to name the three branches of government, and the Pew Research Center says that only an unnerving 17 percent trust the government in Washington to do the right thing.

In the words of Chief Justice John Roberts, “Civic education, like all education, is a continuing enterprise and conversation. Each generation has an obligation to pass on to the next, not only a fully functioning government responsive to the needs of the people, but the tools to understand and improve it.”

We agree with CivXNow, a bipartisan coalition of over one hundred academic and research institutions, learning providers, and philanthropic organizations, which says that civic education must include a focus on:

- Civic knowledge and skills where students gain an understanding of the processes of government, prevalent political ideologies, civic and constitutional rights, and the history and heritage of these rights.
- Civic values and dispositions where students gain an appreciation for civil discourse, free speech, and engaging with those whose perspectives differ from their own.
- Civic behaviors where students develop the civic agency and confidence to vote, volunteer, attend public meetings, and engage with their communities.

## Action

The Legislature should enact legislation requiring a comprehensive policy be adopted at the state level that requires more classroom time devoted to civics education beginning at the elementary level and continuing through high school and the corresponding teacher professional development and support required to make this a reality.