

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA



Virginia Boys and Men Advisory Commission

DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT



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TWENTY-FIRST DISTRICT

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

HOUSE OF DELEGATES
RICHMOND

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
TRANSPORTATION
APPROPRIATIONS
PUBLIC SAFETY

September 17, 2026

TO: The Honorable Abigail Spanberger, Governor of Virginia
The Honorable Members of the General Assembly of Virginia

Pursuant to the provisions of the Code of Virginia § 30-454 establishing the Virginia Boys and Men Advisory Commission and setting forth its purpose, I have the honor of submitting the Commission's 2026 Annual Report.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh E Thomas", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Joshua E. Thomas
Chair

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Authority of the Virginia Boys and Men Advisory Commission

The Virginia Boys and Men Advisory Commission (the Commission) is an advisory commission established in the legislative branch of state government. The Commission was created during the 2026 Regular Session of the General Assembly pursuant to House Bill 1188, patroned by Delegate Joshua E. Thomas, and Senate Bill 447, patroned by Senator Lamont Bagby.

Under its enabling legislation, the Commission is charged with the powers and duties to evaluate policies, statutory provisions, and state programs affecting boys and men across the Commonwealth. The Commission is authorized to study and address challenges across key areas including education inequity, economic opportunities, disparity in health outcomes, family life, and the impact of social media use. The Commission is required to submit annual reports on its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly. The Commission has a statutory expiration date of July 1, 2029. Staffing, administrative support, and legal counsel for the Commission are provided by the Virginia Division of Legislative Services (DLS).

The Commission consists of 18 members – six members of the House of Delegates, four members of the Senate, and eight non-legislative citizen members appointed by the Governor. Delegates are appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates in accordance with the principles of proportional representation contained in the Rules of the House of Delegates. Senators are appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules.

Members of the Virginia Boys and Men Advisory Commission

House of Delegates Appointees

Delegate Joshua E. Thomas, Chair
Delegate Michael B. Feggans
Delegate Garrett Z. McGuire
Delegate Atoosa R. Reaser
Delegate Andrew Rice
Delegate Michael J. Webert

Senate Appointees

Senator Lamont Bagby, Vice-Chair
Senator Lashrecse D. Aird
Senator Luther Cifers, III
Senator Mamie E. Locke

Gubernatorial Appointees

Eldon Burton
Secretary Carrie H. Chenery
Secretary Marvin B. Figueroa
Secretary Stanley M. Meador
Secretary Jeffery O. Smith

Staff

Troy Hatcher, Legislative Counsel, Division of Legislative Services
Anthony Sargent, Associate Legislative Counsel, Division of Legislative Services
Doug Weimer, Associate Legislative Counsel, Division of Legislative Services
Taisha Harper, Operations Staff Assistant, Division of Legislative Services
Cathy Hooe, Committee Operations Director, House Committee Operations

2026 Executive Summary of Commission Activities

The Commission's inaugural year represents a pivotal moment to establish a foundation in Virginia that seeks to address the challenges facing boys and men, and ensure these efforts are additive rather than competitive. Proposing targeted policy interventions that help young men strengthens the Commonwealth as a whole, yielding outcomes that benefit men and women, boys and girls alike. When fathers are supported and well, families and communities become stronger; when young boys acquire essential literacy skills, they mature into men capable of sustaining meaningful employment and providing for their children; and when men maintain their physical health and social connections, they serve as better partners, parents, and neighbors. Grounded in this collaborative vision, the Commission convened two formal study meetings in Richmond during the 2026 interim to evaluate systemic challenges and construct actionable policy solutions.

At the Commission's initial meeting on July 20, 2026, the Commission established its administrative framework by unanimously adopting a virtual meeting policy pursuant to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act and reviewing its statutory authority under House Bill 1188 and Senate Bill 447. During this meeting, the Commission received testimony on educational performance from the American Institute for Boys and Men, which revealed that under half of Virginia boys arrive at kindergarten ready to read and that fourth-grade boys experienced an unrecovered 13.5-point drop in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scores between 2019 and 2022. Additionally, the Male Educator Network and Policy Institute presented data on severe male educator shortages, highlighting that men represent only 18% to 19% of Virginia's K-12 public school teachers and less than 3% of early childhood educators.

At its second meeting on August 25, 2026, the Commission turned its focus to workforce participation, economic attachment, and career pipelines. Data presented by the American Institute for Boys and Men showed that while overall prime-age male labor force participation stands at 90.8%, disengagement is concentrated among disadvantaged populations, including nearly 24% of prime-age men without a high school diploma and 44% of prime-age men with a disability. Presentations also emphasized that 28% of employed male veterans in Virginia work in federal civil service roles, leaving them vulnerable to federal job contractions, while unemployed justice-impacted individuals face a reincarceration rate 4.5 times higher than those who secure employment. To address these workforce barriers, the Commission evaluated successful state models presented by Virginia Works, the Virginia Community College System, and regional education centers, including Virginia's 15,500 active registered apprentices, the FastForward pay-for-performance program, and regional CTE employer partnerships.

Findings and Analysis

As noted above, the Commission may study an array of challenges: (i) education inequity, (ii) economic opportunities, (iii) disparity in health outcomes, (iv) family life, and (v) the impact of social media use. Given the expansive scope of these subjects and the compressed timeline of the inaugural interim, the Commission concentrated its 2026 investigation exclusively on educational inequity and economic opportunity. The remaining statutory subject areas (health outcome disparities, family life, and social media usage) are designated for study in 2027.

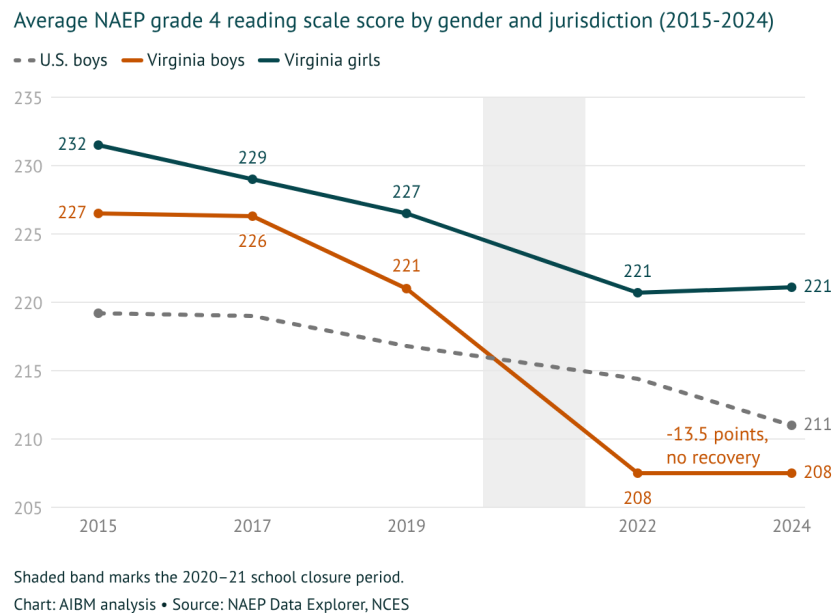
Section I: Educational Attainment, Literacy, and Male Educator Pipeline

Educational performance data presented to the Commission demonstrates that gender disparities emerge early in childhood development and compound progressively through secondary and postsecondary education. Data from the American Institute for Boys and Men reveals an immediate gap at entry into the public education system: in Fall 2024, only 48.0 percent of Virginia boys met overall kindergarten readiness benchmarks, compared to 56.0 percent of girls.¹ This initial gap expands dramatically during elementary instruction. Between 2019 and 2022, fourth-grade boys in Virginia experienced a 13.5-point collapse in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale scores, dropping to an average scale score of 208, while girls scored 221,² see Figure 1.

¹ Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, Fall 2024 Administration; American Institute for Boys and Men (AIBM) analysis.

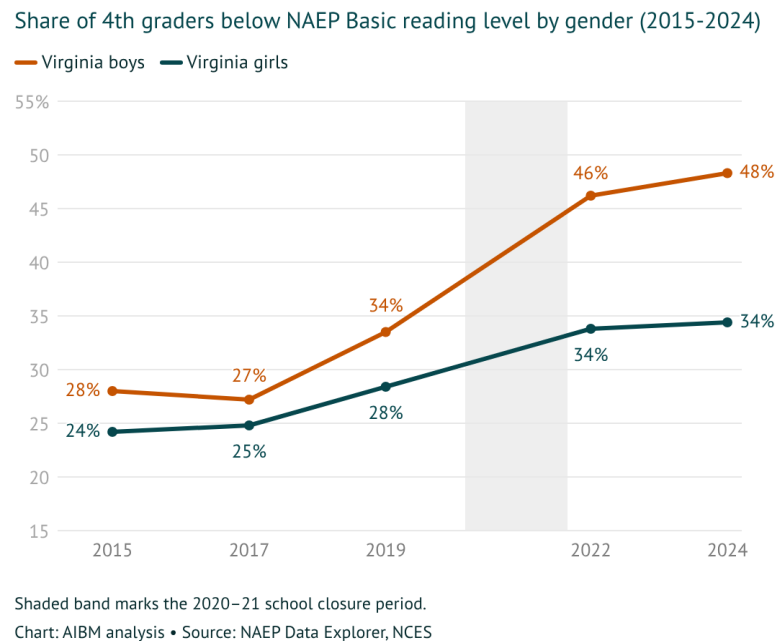
² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Grade 4 Reading Scale Scores, Virginia Public Schools, 2016–2024.

Figure 1



Unlike historical trends where learning loss recovered, scores for fourth-grade boys remained completely stagnant through 2024, leaving 48.0 percent of fourth-grade boys reading below the NAEP Basic level compared to 34.0 percent of girls,³ see Figure 3.

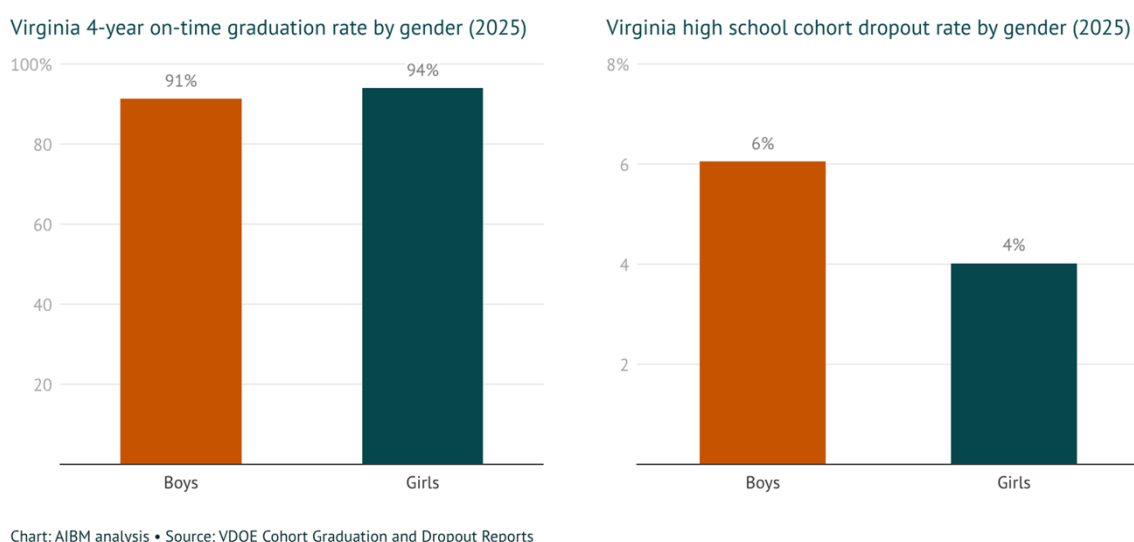
Figure 2



³ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, NAEP Grade 4 Reading Achievement Level Percentages, Virginia Public Schools, 2019–2024.

Notably, this reading decline was uniquely severe to the Commonwealth; nationally, fourth-grade boys experienced only a 2.4-point reduction over the same evaluation period⁴. The reading disparity persists into middle school across all racial and ethnic demographics, as eighth-grade reading assessments highlight male performance gaps of 11 points among White students, 12 points among Asian and Black students, and 16 points among Hispanic students.⁵ Cumulative academic disengagement directly impacts high school completion. While Virginia's four-year on-time graduation rate remains relatively high for both sexes—91.3 percent for boys and 94.0 percent for girls—boys pull away in cohort dropout rates, dropping out at 1.5 times the rate of girls (6.05 percent versus 4.02 percent),⁶ see Figure 3.

Figure 3



Developmental research presented to the Commission indicates that key cognitive self-regulation mechanisms, such as impulse control, mature earlier in adolescent females, whereas school environments often fail to engage male developmental trajectories or account for higher rates of male disengagement,⁷ see Figures 4 and 5.

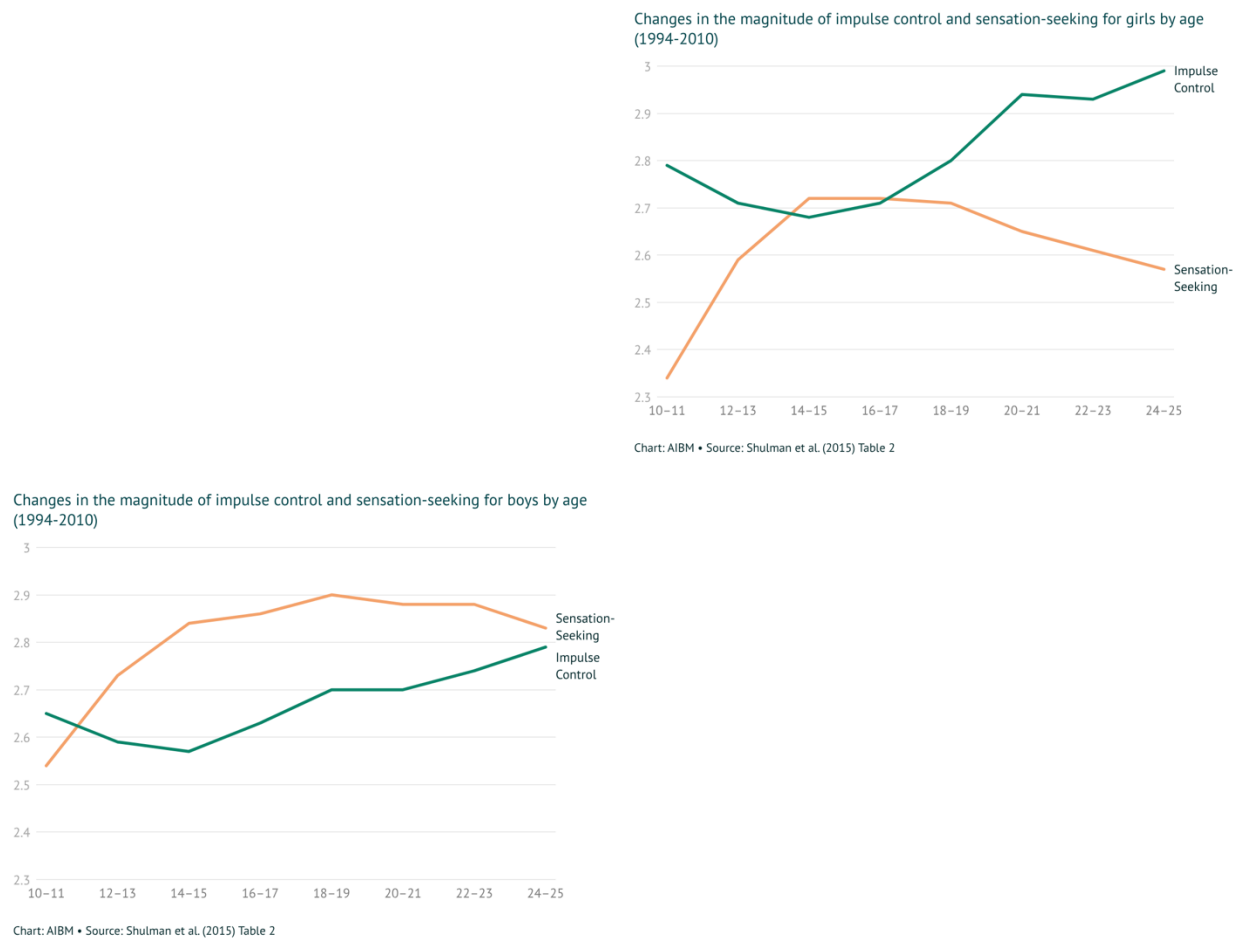
⁴ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, NAEP Grade 4 Reading Scale Scores, U.S. Public Schools National Comparison, 2019–2022.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, NAEP Grade 8 Reading Scale Scores by Race and Gender, Virginia Public Schools, 2024.

⁶ Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), Cohort High School Graduation and Dropout Report, Class of 2025.

⁷ Elizabeth P. Shulman et al., "Sex Differences in the Developmental Trajectories of Impulse Control and Sensation-Seeking from Early Adolescence to Early Adulthood," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 44 (2015); cited by AIBM.

Figure 4 and Figure 5



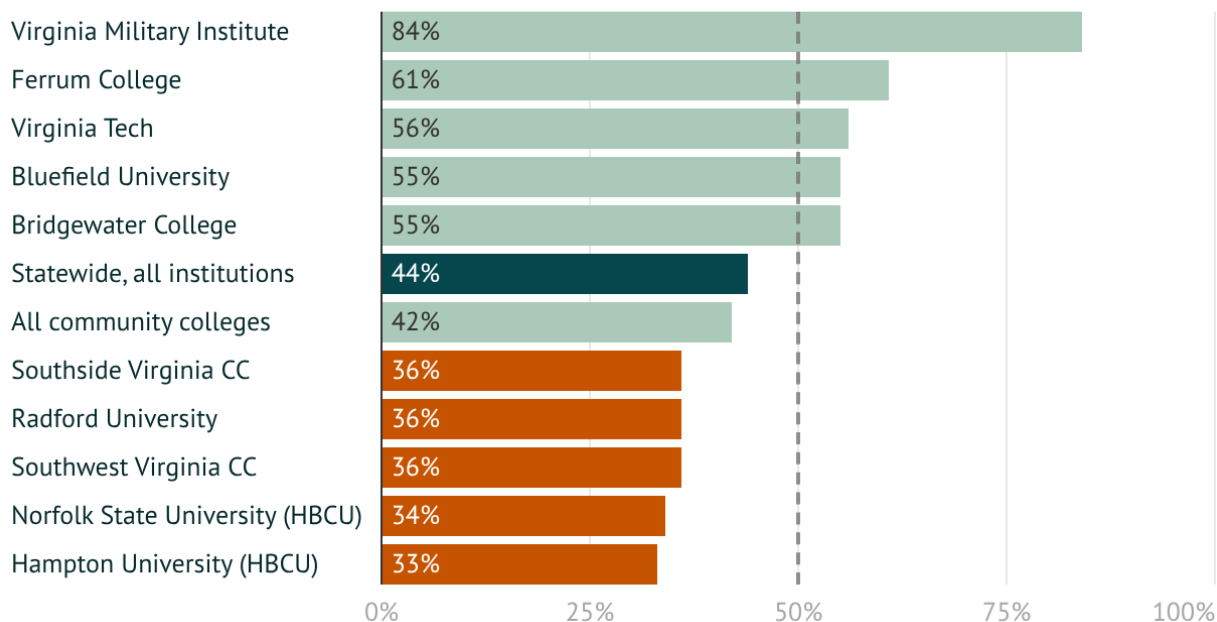
These secondary school dynamics severely restrict the male postsecondary pipeline. Men represent 37.0 percent of young Virginians aged 18 to 24 enrolled in higher education, compared to 47.0 percent of women, creating a 10-point enrollment gap that has widened over the past decade.⁸ Statewide, men account for 44.0 percent of undergraduate headcount across all public and private higher education institutions,⁹ see Figure 6.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS) Higher Education Enrollment Series, Ages 18–24, Virginia, 2015–2023.

⁹ State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) Total Headcount Enrollment by Sex, Fall 2025; AIBM analysis.

Figure 6

Male share of undergraduate headcount (Fall 2025)



Excludes single-sex institutions and colleges originally founded as women's colleges.

Chart: AIBM analysis • Source: State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV)

However, this disparity concentrates most heavily at institutions serving first-generation and economically disadvantaged students. Male undergraduate headcount drops to 36.0 percent at Southside Virginia Community College and Southwest Virginia Community College, 34.0 percent at Norfolk State University, and 33.0 percent at Hampton University.¹⁰ Consequently, among young adults aged 25 to 34 in Virginia, only 39.0 percent of men hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 48.0 percent of women.¹¹

Simultaneously, the pipeline for male educators into Virginia classrooms has collapsed. Men currently account for only 18.0 to 19.0 percent of the Commonwealth's K-12 public school teaching workforce, down from 33.0 percent nationally in the 1980s.¹² The shortfall is most pronounced in early childhood education, where men constitute less than 3.0 percent of early childhood educators statewide and approximately 7.0 percent in public elementary contexts.¹³ The higher education pipeline offers little immediate relief: in 2024, men received only 16.0 to

¹⁰ SCHEV Institutional Headcount Reports, Fall 2025 Headcount by Gender.

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimates, Educational Attainment for Population Ages 25–34, Virginia, 2023.

¹² VDOE Staffing Reports, 2024; AIBM and Male Educator Network (MEN) Policy Institute analysis.

¹³ VDOE Early Childhood Staffing Survey, 2024; MEN Policy Institute.

17.0 percent of bachelor's degrees in education awarded by Virginia colleges and universities, down from 39.0 percent in 2003.¹⁴

Research presented by the Male Educator Network and Policy Institute underscores that while female educators remain foundational and highly effective in teaching male students, expanding male representation in the classroom yields distinct, complementary benefits. In conjunction with additional programs, increasing male educators produces higher student mentorship identification, reduced middle school reading gender gaps, and a 43.0 percent reduction in Black male high school dropout rates when guided by targeted instructional models.¹⁵

Section II: Male Workforce Participation, Economic Mobility, and Career Pathways

Analysis of Virginia's labor market presented by the American Institute for Boys and Men, Virginia Works, the Virginia Community College System, and New Horizons Regional Education Center reveals that while topline employment metrics appear strong, substantial disconnections exist across specific male demographics and geographic regions. Overall prime-age male (ages 25 to 54) labor force participation stands at 90.8 percent and employment at 88.0 percent.¹⁶ However, between July 2025 and June 2026, Virginia experienced a net loss of 16,600 nonfarm jobs—the third largest absolute job decline among all states—driven largely by a reduction of 17,000 direct federal positions.¹⁷ see Figure 13. Male military veterans are disproportionately exposed to these federal contractions, as 28.0 percent of employed male veterans in Virginia work in federal civilian positions, compared to just 7.0 percent of non-veteran men,¹⁸ see Figure 7.

¹⁴ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Completions Component, Education Degrees by Sex, Virginia Institutions, 2003–2024.

¹⁵ University of Chicago & NORC Male Educator Motivation Study (2025); cited by MEN Policy Institute.

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), Civilian Noninstitutional Population Ages 25–54, Virginia.

¹⁷ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Current Employment Statistics (CES), Monthly Nonfarm Employment Estimates, Virginia Statewide, July 2025–June 2026.

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS 1-Year PUMS, Employed Males Ages 18–64 by Veteran Status and Sector, Virginia.

Figure 7

Share of employed Virginia men ages 18–64 by sector and veteran status (2024)

Federal**Private****State + local****Self-employed / other**

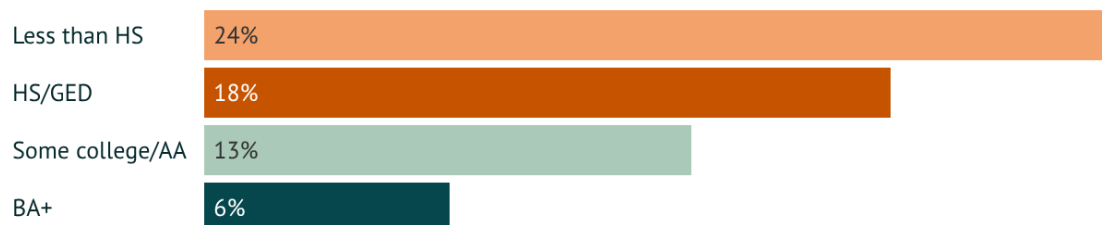
Excludes armed forces and those living in institutional group quarters.

Chart: AIBM analysis • Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS 1-year PUMS

Educational attainment represents the primary structural dividing line in male labor force participation and earning power. Among prime-age Virginia men without a high school diploma, 23.8 percent are not working, compared to 17.9 percent of high school graduates, 12.7 percent of those with some college, and only 6.4 percent of bachelor's degree holders,¹⁹ see Figure 8.

Figure 8

Share of Virginia men ages 25–54 not working (2024)



Counts of men not working: less than HS 30K; HS/GED 71K; some college/AA 47K; BA+ 46K. Excludes armed forces and those living in institutional group quarters.

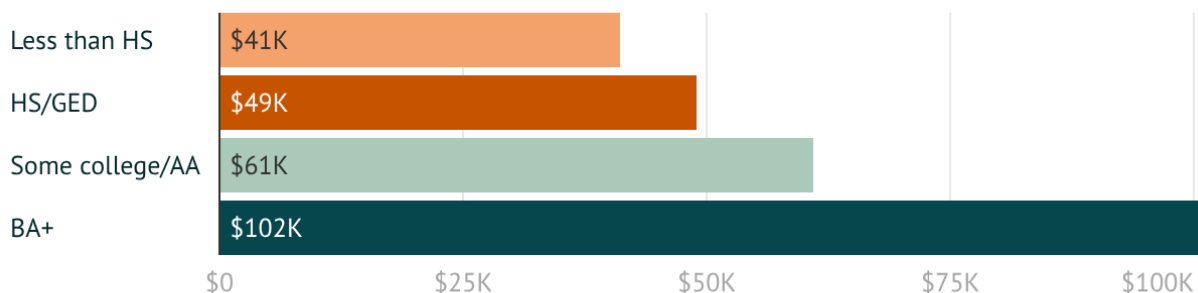
Chart: AIBM analysis • Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS 1-year PUMS

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS 1-Year PUMS, Non-Working Status among Prime-Age Men by Educational Attainment, Virginia.

Annual wage data mirrors this divide: employed prime-age men with less than a high school education earn a median annual wage of \$41,000, compared to \$49,000 for high school graduates, \$61,000 for associate degree holders, and \$102,000 for college graduates,²⁰ see Figure 9.

Figure 9

Median annual wages, employed Virginia men ages 25–54 (2024)



Positive wage income only, in 2024 dollars (ADJINC-adjusted). Excludes armed forces and those living in institutional group quarters.

Chart: AIBM analysis • Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS 1-year PUMS

Severe labor market disconnections affect individuals with disabilities, youth, and justice-impacted populations. Among prime-age men with a disability, 44.0 percent (approximately 73,000 individuals) are not employed, representing more than one-third of all non-working prime-age men in the Commonwealth.²¹ Furthermore, 9.0 percent of young Virginia males aged 16 to 24 (totaling 42,000 individuals) are disconnected from both employment and education.²² Geographically, prime-age male labor force participation drops below 84.0 percent in Southwest and Southside Virginia, reaching lows of 78.2 percent in the LENOWISCO and Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commissions.²³ For justice-impacted Virginians released from state correctional facilities in FY2021, 59.0 percent achieved covered state wages within three years, but only 15.0 percent maintained steady employment across more than 77 percent of quarters,²⁴ see Figure 10.

²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS 1-Year PUMS, Inflation-Adjusted Earnings for Employed Prime-Age Males, Virginia.

²¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS 1-Year PUMS, Employment Status by Disability Status, Men Ages 25–54, Virginia.

²² U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS 1-Year PUMS, Disconnected Youth (NEET) Population Ages 16–24, Virginia.

²³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS 1-Year PUMS, Labor Force Participation by Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA), Virginia.

²⁴ Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC), FY2021 State-Responsible Release Cohort Covered Wage Analysis (June 2026).

Figure 10

Virginia state-responsible release cohort; three years after release (FY2021)

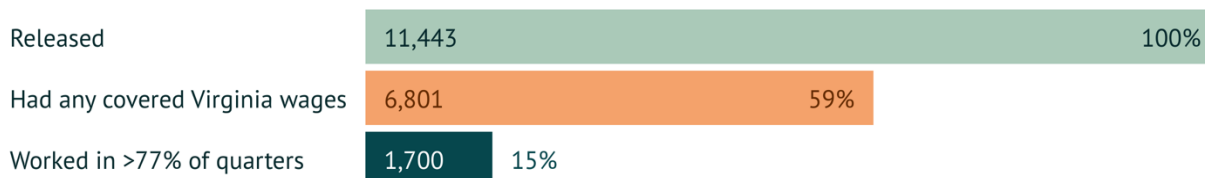


Chart: AIBM • Source: Virginia DOC FY2021 release cohort (June 2026)

Crucially, state correctional data confirms that unemployed releasees experience a 4.5 times higher reincarceration rate than those who obtain steady employment.²⁵ To address these workforce challenges, state agencies and regional partnerships have demonstrated effective high-retention program models. The Virginia Community College System's FastForward credentialing program—a pay-for-performance model capping state investment at \$4,000 per credential—serves a population that is 65.0 percent male with an average age of 35, yielding a 95.0 percent completion rate and an average annual wage increase exceeding \$15,000.²⁶ Statewide, Virginia supports over 15,500 active registered apprentices, 84.0 percent of whom are male.²⁷ While registered apprenticeships are heavily male-dominated in traditional trade sectors such as construction (96.0 percent male) and manufacturing (85.0 percent male), men represent only 23.0 percent of apprentices in healthcare and social assistance,²⁸ see Figure 11.

²⁵ VADOC FY2021 Release Cohort Recidivism Study, Recidivism Rates by Employment Status Three Years Post-Release.

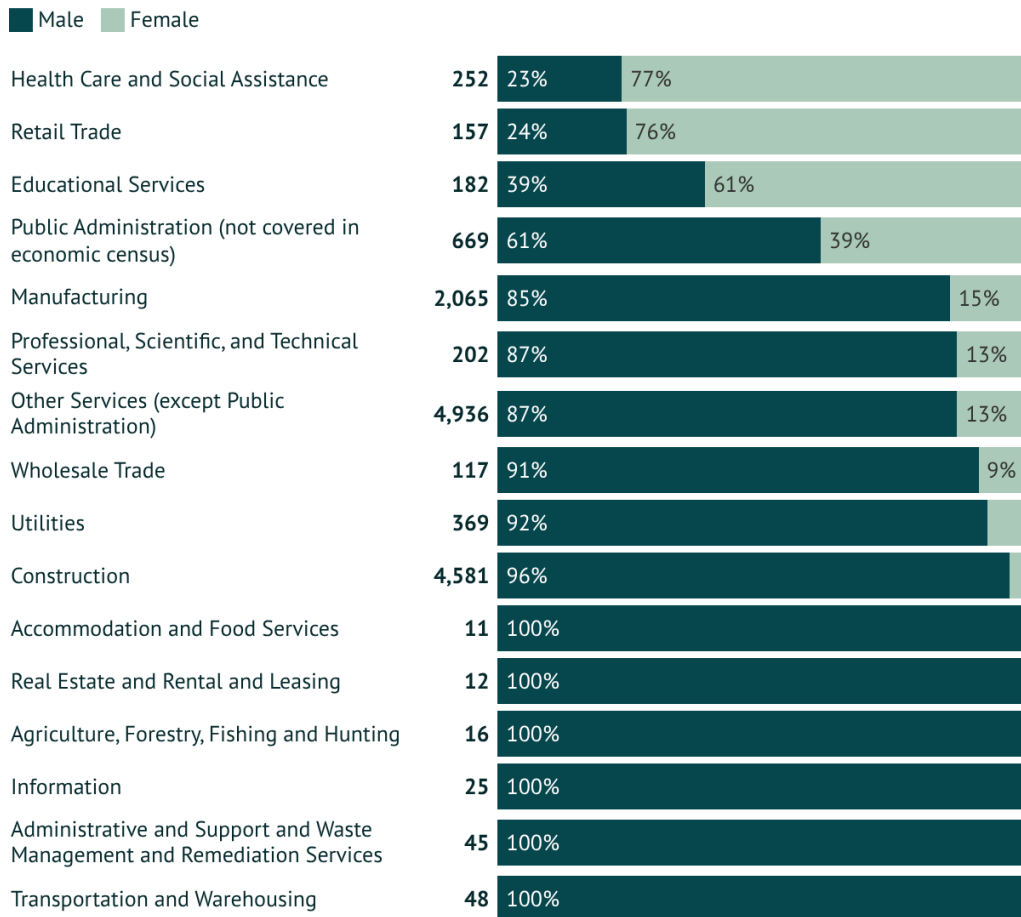
²⁶ Virginia Community College System (VCCS) FastForward Administrative Data and Virginia Employment Commission Wage Records (as of July 1, 2025).

²⁷ Virginia Board of Workforce Development (Virginia Works) Registered Apprenticeship Administrative Data, 2026.

²⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, Registered Apprenticeship Partners Information Data System (RAPIDS), Virginia FY2025 Industry Demographics.

Figure 11

Gender composition of Virginia apprentice industries (FY2025)



Other Services mainly includes electricians, pipe fitters, cosmetologists, and estheticians.

Chart: AIBM analysis • Source: U.S. DOL Apprentices by State Dashboard

This imbalance exists despite long-term projections indicating Virginia will face a shortfall of 8,020 registered nurse full-time equivalents by 2038.²⁹ Finally, regional career technical education models, such as the Good Life Solution program operated by New Horizons Regional Education Center and Newport News Shipbuilding, achieve an 86.0 percent first-year employee retention rate by engaging students prior to senior year and embedding industry mentorship directly into high school curricula.³⁰

²⁹ U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, Nurse Workforce Projections 2024–2038.

³⁰ New Horizons Regional Education Center & Newport News Shipbuilding / HII Good Life Solution Program Administrative Outcomes, 2017–2026 Cohorts.

Commission Recommendations

The Commission submits the following legislative, budgetary, and regulatory proposals to address educational gaps and workforce disconnections facing boys and men across the Commonwealth:

Legislative Recommendations

1. Virginia Literacy Act Amendments: Amend the Code of Virginia to mandate that student reading performance data collected under the Virginia Literacy Act (VLA) be disaggregated by sex at the school, division, and state levels. Establish explicit gender-specific progress targets tracked in VLA reporting to raise boys' reading levels by a set date. Require the state to identify schools and divisions where boys' reading outcomes have improved or declined and document the instructional and student-support practices associated with those trends.
2. Workforce Outcome Metric Modernization: Amend statutory reporting requirements for state workforce programs to require that outcome reporting separate employment from bundled placement measures. Require that long-term employment retention be tracked beyond the second quarter after exit.
3. CTE Dual-Enrollment Expansion: Amend the Code of Virginia to expand dual enrollment high school-community college programs to include explicit career pathways into education, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing starting in the ninth grade.

Budgetary Recommendations

1. Virginia Literacy Act Best Practices Grant Program: Appropriate state general funds to establish a competitive grant program for local school divisions to pilot and scale the high-impact instructional and student-support practices identified through the disaggregated Virginia Literacy Act data and division evaluations.
2. Male Educator Recruitment Grants: Appropriate state general funds to establish a grant program for local school divisions to directly market teacher apprenticeship and teacher residency programs to men.
3. Campus Male Educator Networks: Appropriate funds to establish a grant program for higher education institutions to create male educator campus networks and cohort support models.

4. Expansion of VCCS Workforce Credentialing: Appropriate funding to expand VCCS FastForward credentialing and G3 last-dollar financial assistance to support middle-skill training for high-demand trades and healthcare fields.
5. Correctional Re-entry Workforce Support: Appropriate funds to maintain and expand Virginia Works' Opportunity Advocates program to connect justice-impacted Virginians on probation and parole with careers before and after release across all probation districts.
6. Regional CTE Infrastructure: Allocate state funding to sustain facilities, equipment, and student experiences for regional CTE centers operating across division boundaries.

Regulatory Recommendations

1. Annual Male Educator Pipeline Tracking: Request the Governor require the Department of Education to publish an annual male educator report using existing data to track men across all preparation and alternative licensure routes. This data must be disaggregated by sex, race, ethnicity, preparation route, endorsement area, and provider.
2. Military Veteran Teacher Tracking: Request the Governor require every school district to report the number of military veterans employed as teachers, disaggregated by gender, military branch, and subject.
3. Healthcare Apprenticeship Expansion: Direct the Virginia Board of Workforce Development and VCCS to build male pathways into health care occupations and expand paid clinical training and work-based learning to address nursing and healthcare support shortages, including leveraging federal funding streams from The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), which was signed into law in 2018.
4. Vocational Assessment Data Analysis: Direct the Department of Education to request and publish the results of Student Vocation Assessments given to 14-year-olds disaggregated by career and gender to gauge early interest in teaching and other fields.

Acknowledgements

The Commission wishes to thank the following for their assistance with this report:

The American Institute of Boys and Men

Richard V. Reeves, President

Alanna Williams, Vice President

Patrick Bourke, Senior Policy Fellow

The Male Educator Network and Policy Institute

Curtis Valentine, President

Movember Institute of Men's Health

Tim Gnanesan, Country Director, USA

Brian Heilman, Global Lead, Masculinities Research

Mike Smithers, Director of Philanthropy and Strategic Initiatives

New Horizons Regional Education Center

Dr. Marsha Cale, Chief Executive Officer

Newport News Shipbuilding

Gary Artybridge, Manager of Corporate Citizenship & K-12 Educational Partnerships

Virginia Board of Workforce Development

Anthony Reedy, Executive Director

Virginia Community College Systems

Randall Stamper, Associate Vice Chancellor

Appendices

Classroom to Careers: A Longstanding Partnership; An Evolving Model

Men at Work in Virginia: The Employment Picture

Setting the Stage: An Overview of Educational Challenges and Opportunities Facing Boys in Virginia

Virginia's Community Colleges: Career Education and Workforce Training Programs

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