

## **K-12 Education and College Readiness**

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Hampton Roads is a large region that includes many different school districts with each district covering multiple demographics. On average, the students in this region perform as well as or better than their peers across the state and country and their performance is steadily improving.

According to a study published by The Planning Council, overall on-time graduation rates for this region increased 8.9% from 2007-2015, and on-time graduation rates for black students increased 12%. Likewise, the number of high school dropouts per year has dropped 54% in the same time frame.

Virginia Beach Public Schools consistently rank in the top performing school districts in the state for ACT and SAT scores and in 2015 the state-wide average for ACT scores was a full 15 points higher than the national average.

All of this is great news, however that doesn't mean there isn't room for improvement, especially for the underserved populations in our community that don't necessarily have access to all of the extra services that many in this state take for granted.

The state of Virginia is made up of pockets of highly educated, highly skilled workers, primarily concentrated in large metropolitan areas like Hampton Roads, Northern Virginia and Richmond. Because of these large areas, the state averages for measures like college readiness are often skewed. Rural areas, lower population areas, and areas with high poverty rates are performing far below the state average.

In 1995, Virginia launched a broad educational reform that has helped the state see improvements in many areas. As part of this reform, in 2007 the State Board of Education and Department of Education worked together to develop the College and Career Readiness Initiative. The Virginia College and Career Readiness Initiative builds on these revised standards and is designed to:

1. Ensure that college and career ready learning standards in reading, writing, and mathematics are taught in every Virginia high school classroom
2. Strengthen students' preparation for college and the work force before leaving high school.

There is a direct link between educational attainment and earnings potential. In the City of Norfolk, 2.7% of adults with a bachelor's degree or higher were unemployed in 2015. In contrast, 11.8% of adults with only a high school diploma were unemployed and most of them were unqualified for the jobs available to them because of their lack of a college education.

According to the 2012 census, there are 6 areas in Norfolk that have poverty rates >40%. Here, students are less likely to finish high school and adults are less likely to have any post-secondary education. Efforts focused on helping students in these high poverty areas attain their full potential by graduating from high school and enrolling in some form of post-secondary education also helps reduce overall poverty in these areas. For this reason, the City of Norfolk has included a targeted focus on improving the educational performance of students in these areas in the Norfolk Plan to Reduce Poverty.

The number of programs currently in place focusing on improving the education system and college readiness of students throughout the Hampton Roads region is vast and encompasses a wide range of programs. For example, those focused on reducing poverty in inner city areas (like the one included in the Norfolk Plan to Reduce Poverty), to plans focused on providing students with training to help them develop skills needed in the workforce (WHRO American Graduate Program). One thing all of the programs currently in place in Hampton Roads have in common, is a focus on hard skills. However, there is an opportunity to teach students soft-skills and help them hone these skills that are still lacking, not only in Hampton Roads, but across the country.

Many high school graduates are realizing that they are lacking in skills like problem-solving, time management, communication, and collaboration. These soft skills are often developed through involvement in extracurricular activities. However, not all students are able to learn these skills through those programs. These skills have been identified by employers as something that new high school graduates could benefit from developing earlier in life in order to be better employees and have greater potential for continued employment, raises, and promotions.

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