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News Release

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2026 VSBA Excellence in Workforce Readiness Award Winners Announced *Winners Recognized at the VSBA Conference on Education*

Charlottesville, VA – The Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) has announced three first place winners for the 2026 VSBA Excellence in Workforce Readiness Awards. These winning divisions were honored earlier today at the 2026 VSBA Conference on Education, held in Virginia Beach.

Established in 2018 by the VSBA Task Force on Workforce Readiness, the awards program highlights exemplary initiatives in Virginia's public schools that focus on preparing the state's future workforce.

This year's first-place award recipients are:

Student Population Below 5,000 Students

Salem City Public Schools, *Forge the Future*

The Forge the Future Summer Manufacturing Inclusion Camp is Virginia's first program of its kind, immersing students in real-world manufacturing careers while building critical workforce readiness skills. Over a 4-week program, students engage in classroom instruction on workplace safety and readiness, followed by hands-on, on-site training at local manufacturing facilities.

Student Population Between 5,001 – 10,000 Students

Manassas City Public Schools, *Career and Conversations*

The Career and Conversations program prepares students to be workforce ready by combining career exploration, professional skill development, and direct engagement with business and industry professionals. Students develop workplace readiness skills such as communication, networking, professionalism, and career planning through structured interactions with employers and continued workforce readiness experiences throughout the school year.

Student Population Above 10,001 Students

Henrico County Public Schools, *Hands-On Learning, Real-World Impact: Students Build a School*

At its core, this project exemplifies what true workforce readiness looks like. Students are not just learning about construction trades; they are actively practicing them in an authentic environment. They work with industry-grade tools, follow building codes, meet professional standards, and collaborate across multiple trades. This level of immersion accelerates skill development and prepares students to transition seamlessly into employment, apprenticeships, or further training.

About the Virginia School Boards Association

The Virginia School Boards Association, a voluntary, nonpartisan organization of Virginia school boards, promotes excellence in public education through advocacy, training, and services. The Association offers conferences, information, training, and counseling designed to meet the needs of the Commonwealth's educational leaders.

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