

INVESTING IN TOMORROW



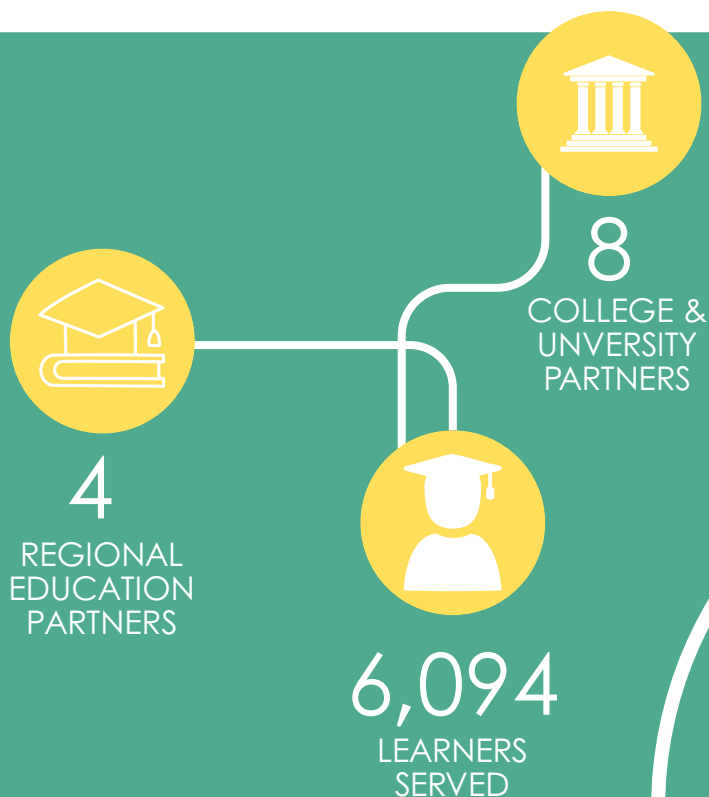
2025-2026 **ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT**

Our **MISSION**

Our mission is to strengthen the regional economy of Southwest Virginia by providing higher education and professional development training of the current and future workforce.

Our **VISION**

We evolve with our region, creating opportunities that transform lives, strengthen communities, and build a future where everyone thrives.





A message from the **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Dear Friends,

This year at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center has been defined by growth, connection, and a shared commitment to what is possible for our region.

Every milestone in this report represents an investment in tomorrow. From the opening of our Regional Simulation Lab, where learners of all ages are gaining hands-on experience that will shape the future of healthcare, to the launch of our apprenticeship program, we are creating opportunities that are practical, accessible, and built to strengthen our workforce for years to come.

We have continued to invest in our campus, strengthen partnerships, and revitalize our Foundation to better support students and the work ahead. Just as importantly, we have invested in our team, building stronger relationships that carry into everything we do.

These investments extend far beyond buildings or programs. They represent a shared belief in the potential of Southwest Virginia and the power of education, workforce development, and collaboration to create lasting impact. Every success highlighted in this report is the result of partners, students, staff, supporters, and community members working together toward a common vision.

I invite you to explore this year's Annual Report and see the impact of these investments firsthand. Thank you for believing in our mission and helping us build a stronger future for our region.

Together, we are A Great Place, Doing Great Things, Because of Great People!™

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Matlock'.

David Matlock

Executive Director / Agency Head

A New Resource FOR HEALTHCARE TRAINING



In March 2026, the Southwest Virginia Regional Simulation Lab for Nursing and Allied Health was officially unveiled, bringing years of planning and partnership to fruition. The lab includes four patient bays, an ambulance simulator, a surgery room, an immersion room, an Anatomage lab, and a medical laboratory science lab, positioning it to support education and workforce development across the region for years to come.

Hands-on Learning in Action

Students are gaining valuable hands-on experience in the Simulation Lab, where immersive, real-world training is enhancing their skills, confidence, and readiness for in-demand healthcare careers. As a regional resource, the lab also creates unique opportunities for interprofessional and interdisciplinary education, allowing learners across healthcare fields to train together and strengthen the teamwork essential to patient care.



“If we can learn to take care of you in here, then we will know how to react when it actually comes time to be in the physical clinical arena or in the OR.”

-Ethan Davis
VCU Nurse Anesthesia student

Read the full article:



Simulation Lab IMPACT

BY THE NUMBERS:

From March 2026 - June 2026

1,124 STUDENTS UTILIZED THE LAB

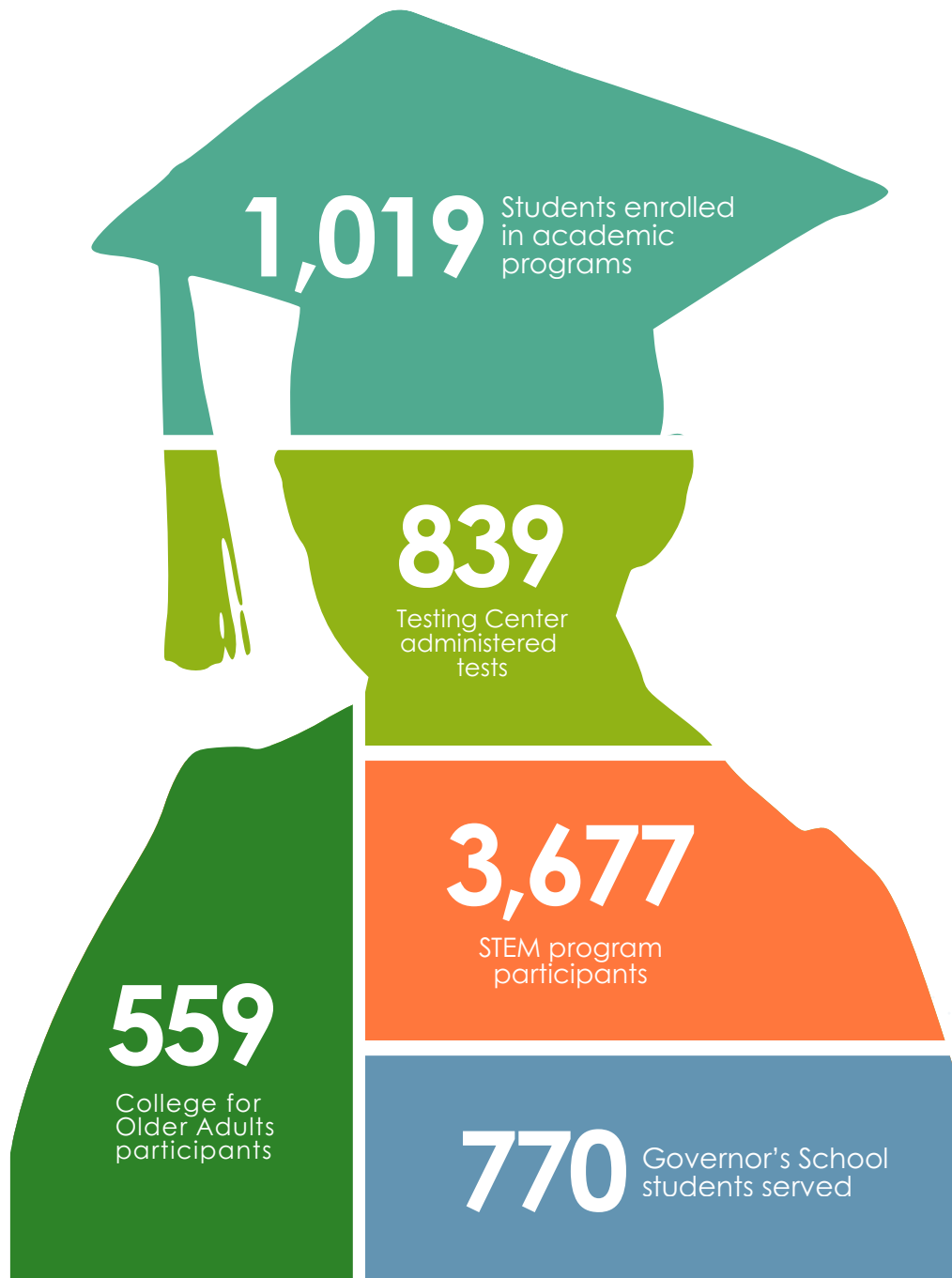
13+ PARTNERS AND ORGANIZATIONS

195 LAB HOURS

Learn more about how our
Simulation Lab is advancing
training in our region:



Student **PROFILE**



From early learners...

Through our K-5 STEM Academy and educational outreach in local elementary and middle schools, we're introducing young learners to hands-on, engaging experiences that spark curiosity and build a strong foundation for future learning.



**91 STUDENT
OUTREACH
EVENTS**

to lifelong learners

Through the College for Older Adults, lifelong learners aged 50+ continue to engage, explore new interests, and stay connected with enriching educational experiences designed for our community.



Expanding Opportunity **THROUGH APPRENTICESHIP**



The Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center launched a new Registered Apprenticeship program with support from grant funding to expand workforce opportunities across the region. Through this initiative, the Higher Education Center was able to hire a dedicated Apprenticeship Coordinator to help employers develop and manage apprenticeship programs while connecting individuals to paid, hands-on training and classroom instruction. The program also supports outreach, technical instruction, and employer incentives to build sustainable pathways to industry-recognized credentials and in-demand careers.

Brayden's **SUCCESS STORY**

When Brayden enrolled in the autobody program at the Washington County Career & Technical Education Center, he discovered a passion that would shape his future. Through the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center's Registered Apprenticeship Program, he is building on his classroom instruction with hands-on experience at Pioneer Chevrolet, where he is developing the skills and knowledge needed for a successful career in the automotive industry.



"I think the training that I'm getting here will help me in the long run. I'd like to open my own shop one day, help people that way."

-Brayden Ferguson



Scan the QR code to learn how Registered Apprenticeship is creating opportunities for students and helping employers develop their workforce:



BY THE NUMBERS:

23 REGISTERED APPRENTICES

9 EMPLOYER SPONSORS

8 EMPLOYMENT SECTORS



Revitalizing Our **FOUNDATION**

Investing in Student Success

The Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center Foundation received a \$280,000 grant through the Appalachian Regional Commission's READY Grants to Grow Initiative, matched by \$120,000 from the SWVA Higher Ed Center, to strengthen its capacity and expand its impact. With this grant, the Foundation was able to hire a Director of Development to begin the important work of expanding scholarship and tuition assistance opportunities for students. The initiative also supports strategic planning, governance, and board development to ensure long-term support for the Center's mission.



Leadership to Grow our Impact

Larry Foster was named Director of Development for the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center Foundation, bringing more than a decade of fundraising experience in higher education and nonprofit organizations. In this role, he is leading efforts to strengthen the Foundation's presence, build relationships with donors and partners, and expand scholarship opportunities for students across the region.



BY THE NUMBERS:

\$191K AVAILABLE FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

\$1.16M OPERATING BUDGET

\$6.4M FOUNDATION ASSETS

A Day At **DOLLYWOOD**

In June, our team headed to Dollywood for a fun-filled staff retreat, enjoying a day of laughter, connection, and time together outside the office.



Growing our Team

As the Higher Education Center continues to grow, we welcomed new staff across several departments to support increasing programs, partnerships, and opportunities. We also welcomed a full-time Assistant Coordinator of Meetings and Events to meet growing event needs. In addition, we brought our security team in-house as full-time employees, strengthening our commitment to a safe, welcoming environment for everyone we serve.



Jenny Nichols
Registered Apprenticeship
Coordinator



Russell Walls
Maintenance Technician



Aaron Norris
Information Security Officer



Kat Stephens
Healthcare Simulation Specialist



Megan Counts
Event Support Technician

A VOICE FOR OUR REGION

Throughout the year, we were honored to welcome state leaders to the Higher Education Center, creating opportunities to showcase our impact and advocate for the educational and workforce needs of Southwest Virginia.



First Lady of Virginia Visits SWVA Higher Ed Center

Virginia First Lady Suzanne Youngkin visited the SWVA Higher Ed Center in October 2025, where she spoke with students in the HEALS program and spent time learning about their educational experiences. During her visit, she also toured several of the Center's labs, highlighting the innovative, hands-on training opportunities available on campus.

Secretary of Education Tours New Lab Spaces

Virginia Secretary of Education Jeffery Smith visited the Higher Education Center as part of a statewide tour, where he engaged with students and experienced the Simulation Lab in action. During his visit, he stopped for a look at the lab's birthing manikin in action.



Attorney General Stops by for Listening Session

Virginia Attorney General Jay Jones visited the Higher Education Center for a listening session with regional partners and served as keynote speaker at the VACP Law Enforcement Symposium, leading discussions on public safety and collaboration.



Building Tomorrow's Innovators Through Robotics

The Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center continues to support hands-on STEM learning by hosting the region's FIRST LEGO League tournament and sponsoring local teams. This year, two teams from Hillsville Elementary School advanced to the international stage after ranking among the top five teams in Virginia out of more than 190 teams statewide. Their achievement reflects the strength of robotics education in our region and the impact of opportunities that foster innovation, teamwork, and problem solving at an early age.



STEM In Motion

The SWVA Higher Ed Center hosted the KidWind Southwestern Virginia Regional Tournament and sponsored teams across the region, supporting hands-on learning in wind energy and engineering. This year, several local teams advanced to the state competition, showcasing strong skills in design, teamwork, and problem solving.



Teams from North Cross School, Virginia Middle School, Albert Harris Elementary School, Patrick Henry Elementary School, Lebanon Middle School, and Northwood Middle School advanced to the state competition in April.

Celebrating the HEALS Inaugural Graduating Class

The HEALS program celebrated its first graduating class, marking an exciting milestone for the healthcare preparation program. These students are moving on to top colleges and universities across the country, carrying with them the experiences they gained at the SWVA Higher Ed Center.

Learn more about where the HEALS Class of '26 is headed next:



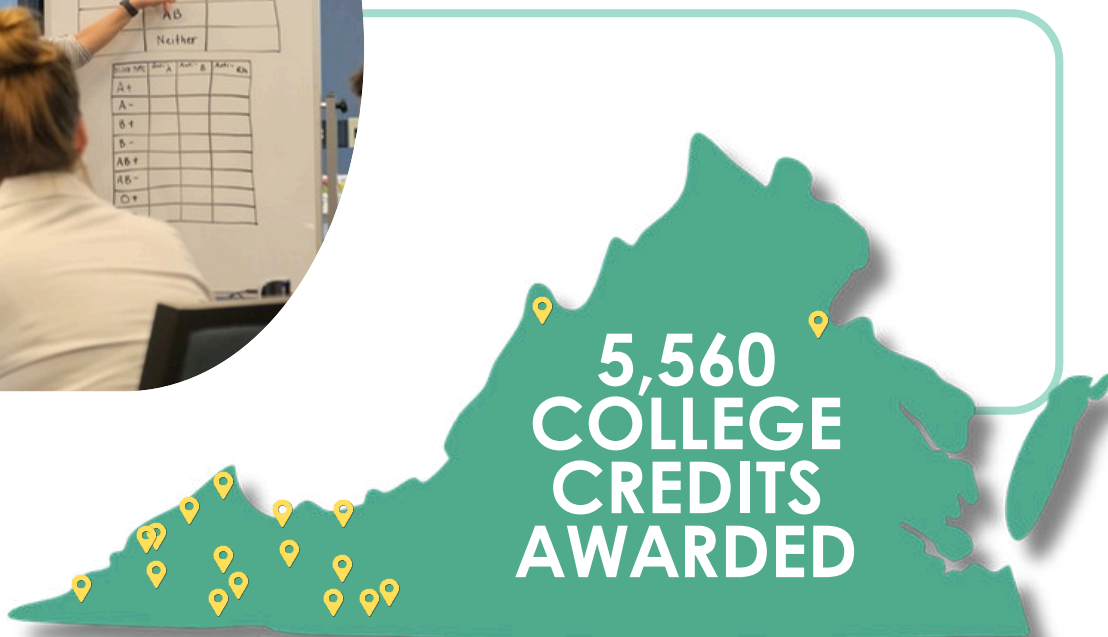
**"THESE EXPERIENCES
HAVE HELPED SHAPE
WHO I AM AND
PREPARED ME FOR
WHAT'S NEXT."**

Kate Cochran
Abingdon High Class of '26

Expanding the Governor's School



The A. Linwood Holton Governor's School has grown by 528 students in the last ten years, reaching more students and expanding dual enrollment opportunities across the region.



Conference Services **BY THE NUMBERS**



3,786

Event bookings



79,000

Event attendees



231

Organizations
served



\$250K

Conference
revenues



4.98/5

Average
rating



A Great Place, **MADE EVEN BETTER**

This year, we continued to enhance our campus with thoughtful upgrades that improve both functionality and experience. Improvements included the installation of energy-efficient LED lighting throughout the building, completion of a multi-phase window replacement project, the addition of a timeline wall highlighting the Higher Education Center's history, and ongoing landscape enhancements.



The timeline wall outside of the Rachel Fowlkes Auditorium highlights key milestones in the Higher Ed Center's history, celebrating the vision, partnerships, and progress that have shaped our impact across Southwest Virginia.

OUR ECONOMIC IMPACT

The Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center generates nearly \$30 million in annual economic activity while supporting jobs, businesses, and workforce development across Southwest Virginia.



FOR EVERY

\$1

STATE GENERAL
FUND INVESTED



\$8

IN ECONOMIC
ACTIVITY GENERATED

\$29.7M

ANNUAL ECONOMIC IMPACT



FOR EVERY

1

JOB AT THE
CENTER



1.03

ADDITIONAL JOBS
SUPPORTED



148

TOTAL REGIONAL
JOBS SUPPORTED



\$4M

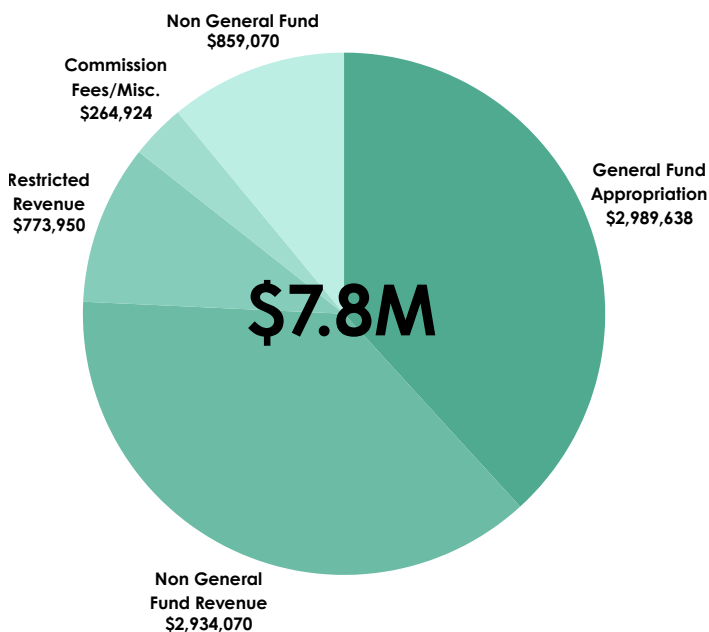
LOCAL TAX
REVENUE GENERATED

These figures exclude graduates' spending and wages upon graduation from the Center's academic partner programs and only reflect the operations of the Center along with our tenants.

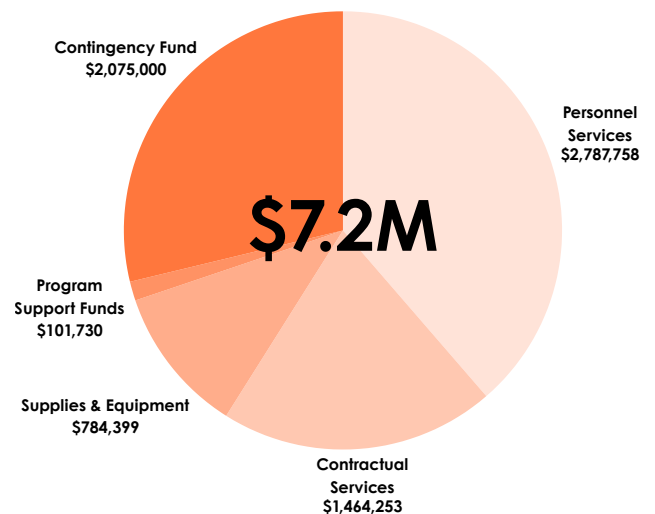
Analysis compiled by BRIDGE using IMPLAN software with data sourced from Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center.

FINANCIALS

Revenues



Expenditures



HEC in the News

Throughout the year, the Higher Education Center was highlighted in both regional and national media outlets, spotlighting our new programs and continued impact throughout the region.

Watch the Blue Ridge PBS feature here:



Our Board of Trustees

The Higher Education Center's Board of Trustees continues to provide steady leadership and guidance, helping shape our direction and strengthen our impact across the region.

Legislative Members

Senator T. Travis Hackworth, Chair
5th District

Senator Todd E. Pillion, Vice Chair
6th District

Delegate Betsy B. Carr
78th District

Delegate Briana D. Sewell
25th District

Delegate Jason S. Ballard
42nd District

Delegate Sam Rasoul
38th District

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April Hamby Crabtree
Dr. Keith Perrigan
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University of Virginia

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University

Donna Stanley Education
Member, Virginia
Community College
System

This list reflects the Board of Trustees members for the 2025–2026 fiscal year. To view the Center's current Board members, please visit swcenter.edu.

Stronger Together THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

Our Partners



Funding Partners

We are grateful to our funders whose generous support helped make the Simulation Lab possible, advancing hands-on training opportunities for learners across the region.

Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission
 Wellspring Foundation of Southwest Virginia
 Appalachian Regional Commission
 Southwest Virginia Healthcare Excellence Academy Lab School
 Ballad Health
 Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center Foundation
 The United Company Foundation
 Food City
 A. Linwood Holton Governor's School





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ABOUT US:

