

July 9, 2025

Dear Nevada Board of Education,

I am writing to formally express my interest in the Nevada's State Superintendent vacancy posted on the Nevada Department of Education website. For the past nine years, I have had the honor of serving in multiple state agency leadership roles including State Superintendent in Virginia and the Chief Academic Officer in Tennessee. In the Virginia superintendent role, I have acted as the chief executive officer of the Department of Education, overseeing all educational programs for students from birth through grade 12 across the Commonwealth. This responsibility has included supporting 1.24 million students in 131 school districts, managing a team of 532 employees, and overseeing an annual budget of \$1.1 billion. In this role, I engaged regularly with a diverse group of stakeholders to ensure their voices were reflected in the agency's work and our efforts aligned with the priorities of state leaders and communities. I collaborated closely with legislative partners, business coalitions, families, educators, local school boards, community organizations, and students. I am deeply committed to the belief that education is the foundation of opportunity. It has the power to open doors—especially for students who might not otherwise have access to the support and resources that strong public schools can provide. I am passionate about ensuring every child has the chance to reach their full potential.

I would be honored to contribute to the ongoing success of the Nevada Department of Education and the State Board of Education. I am eager to collaborate with the Board to improve academic achievement for all Nevada students and provide stronger connections to post-secondary throughout the state as well as ensure increased funding is tied transparently to student outcomes.

As Virginia's State Superintendent, one of my first priorities was listening and learning about what Virginia stakeholders wanted and needed from the department. Stakeholders asked that I focus on transforming the Department of Education into a collaborative, service-oriented organization—one that provides [shoulder-to-shoulder support](#) to school and district leaders, elevates and celebrates educators, and ensures every student has access to a high-quality learning experience each and every day. The agency had traditionally prioritized compliance, reporting, and funding distribution so I reorganized and realigned teams to better serve Virginia's school districts. Protocols and structures were launched to enhance direct support to schools, to foster clear two-way communication pathways with multiple stakeholders, and to allow staff more time to engage with educators, families, and students. When I assembled my senior leadership team, I assigned each leader as a liaison to one of Virginia's superintendent regions, ensuring every superintendent has consistent monthly connection through regional meetings. We also established a modern communications team to deliver on-demand resources, maintain a user-friendly website, produce a weekly newsletter, and lead the #ElevateEducatorsVA and #EverybodyReadsVA campaigns. Additionally, we implemented structured reporting systems, meeting protocols, and Microsoft Teams practices to foster greater coherence and alignment across the agency.

Nevada's State Literacy Plan outlines a comprehensive, three-pronged approach to strengthening early literacy, improve ELA outcomes in grades 3–8, and increase ACT reading performance in high school. I would be honored to lead the implementation of a cohesive PK–12 literacy strategy that ensures students have a continuum of support throughout their educational journey. Over the past two years, I have led the implementation of the [Virginia Literacy Act](#) fostering a networked approach which empowers district leaders in setting a literacy vision, allows school leaders to create environments for success, and provides teachers with the resources, training, and daily coaching needed to transform instruction effectively. In order to build community awareness and support for the science of reading, I have been honored to partner with state and national organizations such as the [Virginia School Board's Association](#) and [NAACP's Literacy advocate Kareem Weaver](#). I also bring my experience in implementing Tennessee Literacy Success Act and my launch of Reading 360, which have resulted in [pre-pandemic literacy results](#) as measured by Tennessee's statewide assessment results. Reading 360 brought teachers, families, non-profit organizations, and teacher-preparation programs together to focus on research-based practices resulting in improved reading outcomes for all Tennessee children. Reading 360 was recognized nationally in the EdPost article, [The Surprising State where Kids are Making a Reading Comeback](#) by Holly Korbey. With demonstrated success of implementing two large-scale, statewide literacy initiatives, I am confident in my ability to further support Nevada's implementation of its' comprehensive approach.

To reduce teacher shortage challenges in Virginia, we implemented a complex three-prong approach to increase pipeline development through innovative teacher recruitment practices and increase retention by elevating the profession and giving teachers a voice with the superintendent. First, we implemented an expansive school tour and #ElevateEducatorsVA to highlight the stories of great educators and honor the profession of teaching as well as strengthen teacher voice through a superintendent teacher advisory council. This council had nine regional members and advised me on how state initiatives were impacting classrooms throughout the state. This advisory council also began to meet with the state board to discuss their opinion on state board policy initiatives. Additionally, I established a partnership with the National Grow Your Own Center to strengthen and scale innovative apprenticeship models across the state which supported our urban schools as well as rural collaboratives to ensure every school had access to alternative licensure models.

Over the past two years, I have supported the Virginia Board of Education in transforming [Virginia's accountability system](#). The State Board and I held [30+ stakeholder meetings](#) and received thousands of written comments providing public feedback to the old accountability system, and stakeholders presented varied recommendations that were the cornerstone for the new framework. In this new framework, school accountability has clear and transparent reporting around three key concepts: mastery of academic knowledge of skills, a clear expectation of growth for every learner, and readiness at each stage of schooling. In elementary school, [the readiness indicator](#) focuses on Virginia's 5Cs -collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creative thinking and citizenship. In middle school, readiness develops personalized learning pathways including advanced learning, career exploration, and self- reflection. Finally, high school readiness emphasizes opportunities in advanced academic

pathways, dual enrollment, industry-recognized credentials and work-based learning. Virginia's new accountability framework was developed collaboratively with stakeholders across the state—a principle I deeply value. Community engagement and stakeholder input are essential to effective leadership in every initiative I undertake—whether in high school redesign, school accountability, literacy implementation, or reducing attendance barriers. I regularly collaborate with business chambers, educators, families, community partners, students, and education associations to ensure policies are informed with diverse perspectives. Additionally, I established a practice of hosting listening sessions across all eight Virginia regions, providing a platform for meaningful dialogue on key initiatives such as the new [accountability work](#), [cell phone-free education](#), or hearing concerns from Virginia's [military families](#). I look forward to applying that same inclusive approach in Nevada, listening closely to stakeholders and using their insights to guide the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for the state's education system.

My unwavering belief that every child can succeed—with the support of a high-quality teacher, a strong school system, and an engaged community—has prepared me to lead the Nevada Department of Education. I look forward to working in close partnership with the State Board of Education to ensure that every Nevada child is empowered to achieve their lifelong goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Coons', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lisa Coons, Ed.D.

# Lisa Coons



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**State Superintendent of Public Instruction** | Virginia Department of Education | (March 2023-March 2025)

- Served as the chief executive officer for the Virginia Department of Education leading all birth to grade 12 programming, overseeing 534 staff, 131 school districts, and managing \$11.9 billion dollar budget to support 1.2 million students in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- Systematically raised instructional expectations in every classroom through the revision and increased rigor in statewide History Standards (April 2023), Mathematics Standards (August 2023), and English Language Arts Standards (March 2024).
- Redesigned the statewide assessment system to ensure comprehensive standards are taught and measured as well as redesigned performance reports to be clear and usable for students, families, and teachers.
- Restructured and implemented a comprehensive school accountability system that clearly communicates student mastery, student growth, and student post-secondary readiness. Launched a clear accountability dashboard ([Road to Readiness Hub](#)) that provides transparency to stakeholders on school performance as well as support strategies and resources for districts to utilize in improvement planning.
- Optimized the Office of School Quality and the Department of Teaching and Learning to provide cohesive transformative supports for schools based on the specific needs identified through the new accountability system.
- Introduced \$418 million dollar “ALL In VA” (attendance, literacy, and learning recovery tutoring program) allowing 1900 schools to tailor student supports grounded in an evidence-based framework supporting post-pandemic recovery.
- Initiated a \$10 million pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship grant program in partnership with Virginia Works, using a “grow your own” model to strengthen the teacher and principal pipeline. Achieved a 0.5% reduction in statewide teacher vacancies within the first year, with projections indicating a 1.5% reduction by Year 3—on track to lower the vacancy rate below the 1.5% statewide average.
- Successfully reorganized state budget following the sunset of \$32.5 billion in ESSER funds and secured approval for federal late liquidation plan maintaining state staffing and CARES Act programming for schools.
- Designed and implemented a statewide attendance reduction strategy to include establishing the Governor’s Advisory Task Force, flexible attendance hours for average daily attendance, and an Attendance Action Kit providing schools with customizable solutions directly leading to 1,276,522 fewer absent days and 3.2% reduction in chronic absenteeism within the first year.

### **Chief Academic Officer | Tennessee Department of Education | (June 2019–March 2023)**

- Served as the chief academic officer for the State of Tennessee, leading all birth to grade 12 academic programming including K-12 teaching and learning in literacy/English language arts, mathematics, science, and fine arts; early childhood education; voluntary PreK; Head Start; learning recovery and Response to Intervention.
- Led and mentored an executive team of assistant commissioners, senior directors, and an office of 60+ staff members.
- Spearheaded cross-agency academic initiatives across ten divisions—including educator preparation, teacher/leader evaluation, and Career and Technical Education—to ensure aligned programming and seamless transitions for students entering the workforce.
- Launched a comprehensive \$120 million Reading 360 Initiative that trained over 18,000 educators, supported 100+ district high-quality literacy programs, re-designed teacher preparation programs, and provided 50,000 families with home literacy materials resulting in the highest Grade 3-8 2022 ELA statewide outcomes since 2012 despite intermittent pandemic school closures.
- Introduced a statewide family literacy engagement initiative, including PBS programming, free literacy nights, and distribution of no-cost decodable books to 20,000 families.
- Coordinated statewide implementation of a \$68 million legislative initiative requiring all school districts to deliver full-day academic programming for at-risk and vulnerable students to support learning loss recovery and remediation.
- Cultivated a statewide strategy that secured Tennessee’s place as a national leader in the adoption and implementation of high-quality instructional materials resulting in over 97% of districts adopting English language arts materials considered high-quality.
- Implemented a \$170 million TN ALL Corps tutoring program for 155,000 at-risk students in grades 1-8 providing research based high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring to ensure accelerated learning growth and higher student achievement gains in mathematics and English Language Arts.
- Designed and directly supported two statewide community partnership grants with multiple United Ways, Urban League, and other nonprofit organizations to create a networked tutoring program serving an additional 40,000 at-risk students providing additional tutoring capacity for large urban districts.
- Restructured fiscal monitoring of district VPK budgets to increase timely expenditures by 20%, and, in turn, allowing the state to re-allocate unspent funds adding 33 classrooms statewide.
- Orchestrated a strategic research partnership with University of Tennessee establishing an independent Tennessee Reading Research Center to evaluate existing statewide reading initiatives to determine the most impactful strategies and to ensure sustainability in the implementation of effective reading instruction improvements.



**Executive Officer, District Priority Schools | Metro Nashville Public Schools | (August 2017-June 2019)**

- Created an effective leadership division that supported 23 priority schools, replacing a smaller legacy system, and bolstering student attendance by an average of 15% and academic growth by 20% on NWEA MAP benchmark data.
- Directed a team of principal supervisors, student support coordinators, and literacy and math specialists; successfully executed a \$5.6M budget, providing operational support to 25 schools, 11,000 students, and over 850 staff members.
- Cultivated partnerships with John Hopkins University (Attendance Works), TNTP, Vanderbilt University, and Lipscomb University to re-vision the MNPS priority schools strategic plan focusing on building community partner schools, implementing rigorous literacy and math curricula, designing intensive teacher and leader supports, and creating a robust wrap around social and emotional support system for students.
- Formulated road map for the successful exit of five schools from statewide priority status by increasing student attendance by 20% and significantly increasing academic success of students in all five schools.
- Served as an advisory member to the Nashville Mayor's Kitchen Cabinet for Priority Schools to engage multiple community entities in Nashville to build a coherent and comprehensive vision for school improvement for turn around schools.
- Established community partner relationships with city council members, Communities in Schools, Nashville Public Education Foundation, United Way, and Pencil Foundation to create school-specific strategies to fully engage families in their children's learning experiences.

**Executive Director of Instructional Leadership | Tennessee Department of Education | (October 2014-August 2016)**

- Oversaw visioning, content sequencing, and module development for quarterly statewide leadership courses designed to provide systematic instructional professional development for over 2100 superintendents, assistant superintendents, and principals.
- Customized and executed leadership coaching series for urban school districts to tailor instructional leadership development models impacting leadership supports for over 300 school leaders in Tennessee.
- Orchestrated 2015 statewide leadership conference including developing learning sessions and managing operations and \$2M budget; event served over 2300 attendees with an 89% highly satisfied customer rating.
- Re-structured monthly regional professional learning series for district instructional supervisors to use a collaborative problem-solving model. As a result, designed and implemented a statewide improvement science model that facilitated the analysis of literacy practices in 70% of districts.

**Middle School Supervisor | Sumner County Schools | (July 2013-September 2014)**

- Led instructional programming for 13 diverse county-wide middle school programs and served as co-chair for Countywide Student Intervention Implementation Committee.
- Facilitated the implementation of RTI<sup>2</sup> programming including budgeting, ordering, and managing the delivery of RTI<sup>2</sup> intervention materials to all district middle schools.
- Coached principals in curriculum planning, revising master schedules to ensure consistent intervention time, and designed cohesive intervention curriculum in math and reading.
- Facilitated countywide Professional Learning Communities for principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, librarians, and guidance counselors in building coherent instructional and student support practices within their school.

**Director of Academics | LEAD Public Schools | (April 2012-July 2013)**

- Designed, oversaw, and provided direct support for instructional leadership staff, instructional coaches, special education staff, English as a Second Language services, teacher development, instructional technology oversight, and special education programs.
- Oversaw staff, \$500K budget, and training for academics to ensure effective and efficient operations of new initiatives with growing schools that served students with dynamic needs.
- Created and implemented cohesive instructional model for middle and high schools resulting in an application of state academic standards as well as designed rigorous college preparation and remediation time for students with large academic barriers and gaps.
- Retooled teacher evaluation system to include weekly walk-through observations and teacher coaching that resulted in a clear continuum of teacher development around statewide teacher evaluation indicators.
- Designed and executed yearlong professional development calendar, network assessment calendar, weekly professional development, and two-week induction programming to provide clear continuum and fidelity to the academic vision.

**Assistant Superintendent | Ross Local Schools, Ohio | (August 2009-April 2012)**

- Designed and executed strategic planning and budgeting for the “Race to Top” Grant including ordering, invoicing, monthly board updates, and state-mandated reporting.
- Oversaw the district budget of \$2M in competitive grants, federal grants programs, and student support dollars and provided school board with monthly budget reports.
- Served as the human resources representative for all contract negotiations, staff discipline, staff recognition, and staff terminations.
- Supervised K-12 instructional programming including gifted, English as Second Language, technology, and library media services and provided monthly board reports on academic progress and achievement.

## **Educational and Certifications**

Broad Fellowship: School of Management, Yale University (Fellowship for Education Leadership, June 2022-March 2023)

Doctor of Education Degree: David Lipscomb University (Learning Organizations and Strategic Change, Dec 2016). Dissertation title: The Impact of the EDI Framework and Inquiry-based Learning Strategies on Student Achievement in Middle School; Advisor: Dr. Jeanne Fain

Education Specialist Degree: David Lipscomb University (Collaborative Professional Learning, Dec 2014). Project Title: Improving Literacy for all Adolescents; Advisor: Dr. Tammy Shutt

Instructional Coaching Certificate: David Lipscomb University (July 2014)

Superintendent License: University of Cincinnati/Wright State University (Aug 2011)

Principal License: University of Cincinnati/Wright State University (Aug 2006)

Administrative Specialist License: Curriculum & Instruction Wright State University (Aug 2003)

Master of Arts Degree: Wright State University (Educational Technology, June 2003)  
Concentrations: Educational Technology, Educational Leadership

Bachelor of Science Degree: Wright State University (Secondary Education, June 1998)



## **Presentations and Publications**

*Multiple state level presentations, discussions, and listening sessions in regional/state meetings, business councils, board meetings, legislative committees, and serving in the role of Virginia State Superintendent of Public Instruction are not individually listed.*

Coons, Lisa (April 2025). Hunt Institute Illinois Legislative Retreat: Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction.

Coons, Lisa (April 2025). Hunt Institute Ohio Legislative Retreat: High-Quality Math Instruction.

Coons, Lisa (January 2025). Hunt Institute Oklahoma Legislative Retreat: Cell Phone-Free Education.

Coons, Lisa (November 2024). Chronic Absenteeism on the Rise: What the Research Says, What Policy Members are Doing About It. Excel in Ed National Summit on Education.

Coons, Lisa (November 2024). Cell Phone Free Policy: Discussion on Emerging Issues. Council of Chief State School Officers.

Coons, Lisa (October 2024). Hunt Institute Virginia Legislative Retreat: Virginia's Accountability Reform Efforts.

Coons, Lisa (October 2024). Accelerating the Passage of Research into Policy: Challenges and Opportunities. National Academy of Education Annual Policy Forum.

Coons, Lisa (July 2024). It is Time to Set Goals for Cutting Chronic Absenteeism. American Enterprise Institute.

Coons, Lisa (October 2024). Inspiring Educational Change: Superintendent Lisa Coons' Journey and Vision for Virginia Schools. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e55mCR2h9RE>

Coons, Lisa (January 2024). Perspectives on Registered Apprenticeships in Teaching. NASDTEC Convening on Registered Apprenticeship in Teaching.

Coons, Lisa (November 2023). Grow Your Own Pathways from Teacher to the Superintendency for Women. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQsn47BnKRU>

Coons, Lisa (August 2022). Unique Learning Needs State Board Rules Updates. TN State Board of Education.

Coons, Lisa (July 2022). Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement: Funding Unique Learners. TN State Board of Education.

Coons, Lisa (July 2022). Featured in "5 Insights on Getting the 'Science of Reading' Into Classrooms." <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/5-insights-on-getting-the-science-of-reading-into-classrooms/2022/07>

Coons, Lisa (June 15, 2022). Featured in "Cheatham County Schools chosen to pilot changes in online learning program." <https://www.cheathamcountyexchange.com/news/cheatham-county->

[schools-chosen-to-pilot-changes-in-online-learning-program/article\\_4ad7b49e-eacf-11ec-bd05-1b3814941bc0.html](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/documents/2020-22-TDOE-Accelerating-TN-Report.pdf)

Coons, Lisa (April 2022). 2021-22 Statewide Testing Outcomes. TN State Board of Education.

Coons, Lisa (April 2022). Creating Coherent and Systematic Partnerships between TDOE and Education Preparation Providers. Council of Chief State School Officers.

Coons, Lisa (April 2022). Featured in “County Schools Lauded for Reading.” [https://www.news-herald.net/news/county-schools-lauded-for-reading/article\\_b12ddf27-938d-597f-ad5c-8013c125c2bd.html](https://www.news-herald.net/news/county-schools-lauded-for-reading/article_b12ddf27-938d-597f-ad5c-8013c125c2bd.html)

Coons, Lisa (March 4, 2022). Featured in “Tennessee Department of Education visits Harold McCormick Elementary as part of ‘Reading 360’ campaign.” <https://www.elizabethton.com/2022/03/04/tennessee-department-of-education-visits-harold-mccormick-elementary-as-part-of-reading-360-campaign/>

Coons, Lisa (March 2022). Featured in “The Urban League of Greater Chattanooga Fights Illiteracy.” <https://nul.org/news/urban-league-greater-chattanooga-fights-illiteracy>

Coons, Lisa (February 2022). Featured in: “Beyond ‘Maus’: How Tennessee’s schools are changing for the better.” <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/beyond-maus-how-tennessees-schools-are-changing-better>

Coons, Lisa (February 2022). Featured in “23,171 Knox County Parents Will Receive Texts to Help Children Learn at Home.” <https://governorsfoundation.org/23171-knox-county-parents-will-receive-texts-to-help-children-learn-at-home/>

Coons, Lisa (February 2022). Reading 360: An Overview. Excel in Ed.

Coons, Lisa (January 2022). Accelerating Learning through High Dosage Tutoring. What Works Summit. <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/documents/2020-22-TDOE-Accelerating-TN-Report.pdf>

Coons, Lisa (October 2021). 2021 Statewide Academic Performance Results. TN State Board of Education.

Coons, Lisa (September 2021). TN All Corps: How Superintendents Can Leverage State Dollars for Learning Acceleration. Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents State Conference.

Coons, Lisa (September 2021). Reading 360: How to Support Systemwide Literacy Change in Your District. Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents State Conference.

Coons, Lisa (April 2021). “What Can States Do to Improve Reading Instruction?” EdTrust Podcast. <https://edtrust.org/the-equity-line/what-can-states-do-to-improve-reading-instruction/>

Coons, Lisa (September 2020). How to Leverage Best for All Central Resources during School Closures. Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents State Virtual Conference.

Coons, Lisa (January 2020). Featured in “National Literacy Campaign to Visit Three Tennessee Districts to Observe Model Curriculum Implementation.” StandardsWork.

<https://knowledgematterscampaign.org/national-literacy-campaign-visit-three-tennessee-districts-observe-model-curriculum-implementation/>

- Coons, Lisa (September 2019). Improving Instruction: Start with High Quality Instructional Materials. Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents State Conference.
- Coons, Lisa (September 2018). "Dr. Joseph Cautions Against Quick Fixes for Under Performing Metro Schools." <https://tntribune.com/dr-joseph-cautions-against-quick-fixes-for-under-performing-metro-schools/>
- Coons, Lisa (2016). The Impact of the EDI Framework and Inquiry-based Learning Strategies on Student Achievement in Middle School.
- Coons, Lisa. (2016). Tennessee Department of Education 2016 statewide integrated leadership course Spring: Elementary and secondary literacy strategies.
- Coons, Lisa. (2015). Tennessee Department of Education 2015 statewide integrated leadership course Winter: Elementary and Secondary. TDOE.
- Coons, Lisa (2015). Tennessee Department of Education 2015 statewide integrated leadership course Fall: Elementary and Secondary. TDOE.

## Nevada Strategic Vision and Plan Overview

Despite recent increases in education funding and the implementation of a pupil-centered funding plan, Nevada ranks 45th in student success and continues to perform in the bottom fifth of states nationally. Every Nevada student deserves high-quality instruction every day in schools that offer strong support systems and clear college and career pathways. To fully realize the potential of recent investments, Nevada needs to reset its future-focused goals in collaboration with the State Board of Education, the Governor, and community stakeholders to create measurable and transparent outcome expectations. **The preliminary five areas of focus** below should be developed into quantifiable goals through inclusive listening sessions with students, families, educators, higher education leaders, business representatives, and community members—ensuring that our priorities are measurable and aligned to support success for all Nevadans.

**Focus One: K-12 Literacy Improvement** Nevada currently ranks [among the lowest](#) in the nation for ELA and literacy performance and continues to experience declines in reading achievement, particularly in fourth and eighth grades. However, across the country, effective models grounded in the science of reading have demonstrated success. Building on these [national models](#), networks, and state-level expertise, the department will dedicate the next three years to a comprehensive effort to improve literacy outcomes across elementary, middle, and high schools by establishing strong implementation practices aligned to the current [Nevada State Literacy Plan](#). Collaborative implementation must engage early childhood providers, school districts, higher education institutions, families, and community partners to ensure the delivery of high-quality literacy instruction. Efforts will center on strengthening core instruction, accelerating academic recovery, and advancing students' reading and writing proficiency.

**Focus Two: K-12 Math Improvement** Similarly, Nevada has consistently underperformed on [national indicators](#) of mathematics achievement. Strong math proficiency not only is the foundation for many careers, but mathematics is critical to developing effective problem solving and critical thinkers. To address these persistent challenges, we will launch “[All Kids are Math Kids](#)” campaign to elevate the importance of math fluency and problem-solving skills across the state. Leveraging the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) [strategic math toolkit](#), we will collaboratively design and implement a comprehensive statewide mathematics initiative—modeled after the [Nevada State Literacy Plan](#) design. This initiative will be guided by a Math Advisory Council, composed of educators, higher education faculty, business and community leaders, and families, to ensure the program is equitable, evidence-based, and aligned with student needs.

**Focus Three: Increase student daily attendance to ensure all students have access to school-based resources and strong daily instruction** Currently, Nevada's chronic absenteeism rate of [34.9%](#) ([national average 23.5%](#)) shows that 1 in three students miss more than 18 days of school every year. We know that when students attend school regularly, they have access to strong daily instruction, nutritional resources, mental health, and other wrap around supports. By strengthening collaborative partnerships like [Go to Grow](#), the [Stronger Connections and Capacity Building](#) grant, and using [Virginia's Attendance Task Force](#) model, we can collectively address the root causes of high chronic absenteeism rates in Nevada.

**Focus Four: Strengthen personalized learning and build PK-20 Workforce Development Continuum** Nevada has started critical work around [Portrait of a Nevada Learner](#) and [Nevada Future of Learning Network](#) to personalize learning experiences and better engage Nevada students. Personalized learning can also be used to leverage students career goals and tap into state workforce development strategies. In support of the Governor's [Office of Workforce Innovation](#), the state department should seek to expand and scale opportunities in middle school and high school career that ensure students have both academic proficiency and workforce credentials by utilizing [strong state models](#), processes to expand [state credentials of value](#), and building collaborative programs to [create credentials of value](#) for high-demand pathways.

**Focus Five: Alignment of Resources and Support** Nevada has completed critical school funding reform and created the Pupil Centered Funding Plan. Now the Board and the Department must ensure that these funds show academic performance improvements by aligning Nevada's school accountability with the pupil-centered funding plan allowing for transparent communications on how funding is impacting student performance. We will lead statewide engagement sessions and design a reformed accountability system that transparently shows how statewide investments are impacting student performance.

## References

Kirsten Baesler

State Superintendent, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

Email: [REDACTED]

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Dr. Latonya McDade

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Dr. Marcey Sorensen

Superintendent, LaJoya Independent School District, TX

Former Deputy Superintendent, Virginia Department of Education

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Dr. Jeremy Raley

Goochland County Commissioner

Former Chief of Staff, Virginia Department of Education

Email: [REDACTED]

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Dr. Doug Straley

2024 Virginia Superintendent of the Year

Louisa County Superintendent

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

**Kirsten Baesler**  
State Superintendent

**Dr. Donna Fishbeck**  
Chief of Staff

**Laurie Matzke**  
Assistant Superintendent



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February 17, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

It is my pleasure to offer my highest recommendation for Dr. Lisa Coons, a proven and dynamic leader in education whose experience, strategic vision, and deep commitment to student success make her an exceptional candidate for state-level leadership. I have had the privilege of working alongside Lisa in my role as State Superintendent of North Dakota and as Past President of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), where I have seen firsthand her ability to lead with purpose, navigate complex policy environments, and drive transformative change in education.

Lisa is a leader among state leaders. As State Superintendent of Public Instruction for Virginia, she has set a high bar for state education agencies nationwide. In this role, she has demonstrated the ability to oversee complex educational systems, successfully managing an \$11.9 billion budget and leading a statewide team of over 500 professionals. Under her leadership, Virginia has implemented rigorous academic standards, redesigned its statewide assessment system, and launched transformative initiatives in literacy, career readiness, and student engagement. Her “ALL In” initiative—focused on attendance, literacy, and learning recovery—has directly impacted thousands of students, leading to measurable gains in academic achievement and school engagement and her work to advance personalized learning and competency-based education has had significant impact.

Before leading Virginia’s education system, Lisa was Chief Academic Officer for Tennessee, where she spearheaded one of the most comprehensive literacy reform efforts in the country through *Reading 360*. She is data-driven, student-centered, and relentless in her pursuit of excellence, always seeking to align education policy with real outcomes for students.

One of Lisa’s greatest strengths is her ability to build coalitions and unify diverse stakeholders around a shared vision for education. Whether navigating legislative processes, working with governors and state boards, or engaging local educators and families, she leads with clarity, collaboration, and conviction. She understands the complexities of state governance and has a proven track record of translating policy into practice, ensuring that students and educators see the benefits of state-level initiatives in their classrooms.

I have the utmost confidence that Lisa will bring the same passion, expertise, and unwavering commitment to student success that she has demonstrated throughout her career. Any state seeking a strong, visionary leader for its education system would be fortunate to have Lisa at the helm.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you would like further insights into Lisa’s leadership and the impact she has made across multiple states.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Baesler  
State Superintendent

ND Center for Distance  
Education  
Fargo, ND  
(701) 298-4830

ND School for the Deaf /  
RCDHH  
Devils Lake, ND  
(701) 665-4400

ND State Library  
Bismarck, ND  
(701) 328-2492

ND Vision Services /  
School for the Blind  
Grand Forks, ND  
(701) 795-2700



April 16, 2025

To Whom it May Concern,

It is with immense pleasure that I offer this letter of recommendation on behalf of Dr. Lisa Coons. Dr. Coons served as the Chief Executive Officer for the Virginia Department of Education during my tenure as Superintendent of Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS). Under her leadership, I have found Dr. Coons to be a highly qualified, skilled, and passionate educational leader. She has demonstrated visionary leadership and models professionalism and dignity while upholding the foundations of mutual respect for all stakeholders. She very quickly forged trusting relationships with all 131 school districts and created an environment of shared accountability for advancing student achievement.

Dr. Coons has amassed an impressive body of work implementing a broad repertoire of educational programming to meet the needs of diverse student populations. At a time when literacy achievement was of grave concern in the state, Dr. Coons ensured every school division implemented a comprehensive literacy plan undergirded by the Science of Reading and invested in resources and support. She pioneered the 'All In' tutoring program which emphasized attendance, literacy, and learning recovery supporting all school divisions in the Commonwealth. As a beneficiary of the 'All In' tutoring program, PWCS experienced notable student achievement gains in literacy.

Additionally, at a time when school divisions were struggling with alarming chronic absenteeism rates post-pandemic, Dr. Coons designed and implemented a comprehensive statewide attendance strategy, which included an Attendance Action Kit with customizable solutions to support school divisions. While the state experienced a 3.2% overall reduction in chronic absenteeism within the first year, as a school division, PWCS experienced an impressive 5.5% decrease which was a direct result of the strategic support and resources provided by Dr. Coons. As a superintendent, I came to rely on and deeply appreciate Dr. Coons' strategic thinking, collaboration, and sense of urgency for sustainable school improvement.

Dr. Coons is dedicated to recruiting and retaining quality teachers and principals. She created strategic partnerships and launched a pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship grants program using a "grow your own" model. This forward-thinking initiative, the first in Virginia, benefited PWCS as an early grant recipient. The initiatives and priorities Dr. Coons has executed throughout the Commonwealth have not only been impactful but have also garnered the respect and praise from school superintendents throughout the state.

Dr. Coons is dedicated to the pursuit of continuous improvement in every aspect of her work. She brought much needed stability to the Virginia Department of Education during a time of distressing instability and uncertainty. From the adoption of high-quality instructional materials to implementation of a new accountability framework, Dr. Coons facilitated the change management

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LATANYA D. MCDADE, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

P.O. Box 389, Manassas, VA 20108 • [www.pwcs.edu](http://www.pwcs.edu) • 703-791-8712

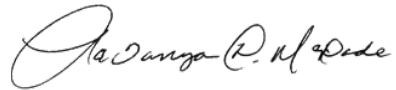


process in collaboration with school division leaders, families, and communities valuing our voice to effectuate positive change.

As a lifelong learner, Dr. Coons is devoted to staying current with best-in-class research in education, consistently seeking to expand her knowledge and enhance her capabilities. This commitment is evident through her active involvement in numerous state and national committees, forums, publications, and educational media platforms. Her proactive approach ensures that she remains at the forefront of educational advancements, enabling her to implement innovative strategies and drive meaningful progress.

Dr. Lisa Coons is a dynamic, hardworking, and passionate educational leader who is unwavering in her commitment to fostering student growth and readiness for postsecondary success. She is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for all students through a steadfast pursuit of excellence in education. Dr. Coons leads with integrity and excellence, viewing these principles as moral imperatives. Her progressive vision, ability to drive meaningful change, and genuine dedication to improving educational outcomes for every learner make her an exemplary candidate for the most challenging educational leadership roles. If you have any questions, or need additional information, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] or via email: [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "LaTanya D. McDade".

LaTanya D. McDade, Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
Prince William County Public Schools

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**The Hunt Institute**  
**4000 Centergreen Way**  
**Suite 301**  
**Cary NC, 27513**

I am honored to write this letter of recommendation for Dr. Lisa Coons who has served with distinction as the state superintendent for the Commonwealth of Virginia for the past 3 years. Lisa is an exceptional leader whose dedication to student success, strategic vision, and ability to navigate complex political landscapes have left a lasting impact on education in our state.

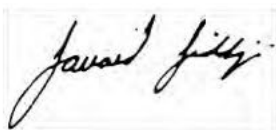
A tireless advocate for literacy, Dr. Coons has led transformative efforts to ensure that all students regardless of background have access to high-quality reading instruction. Under her leadership, literacy initiatives have been both research-driven and results-oriented, leading to measurable improvements in student outcomes. Her commitment to evidence-based practices has empowered educators and strengthened literacy foundations across the state.

Additionally she has demonstrated outstanding strategic leadership, guiding education policy through challenging and often politically charged environments. Her ability to bring diverse stakeholders together whether policymakers, educators, parents, or community leaders has been instrumental in advancing initiatives that put students first. Her steady leadership in the face of adversity has been a model of integrity, pragmatism, and unwavering dedication to what is best for kids.

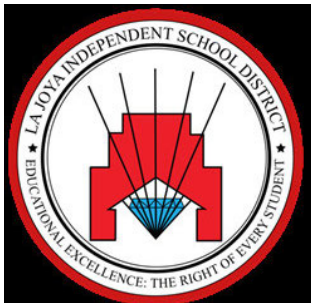
Above all, Lisa embodies a kids-first approach in every decision. Whether advocating for equitable funding, championing teacher support, or ensuring high standards for all students, she never loses sight of the fundamental mission: giving every child the opportunity to succeed. This guiding principle has made her not only an effective leader but also an inspiring one.

Therefore, it is without reservation, and with the utmost pride that I endorse Dr. Lisa Coons. Please contact me personally at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] you have further needs or concerns.

Sincerely,



**President & CEO | The Hunt Institute**  
**Former Virginia Secretary of Education**



## **La Joya Independent School District**

### **Superintendent of Schools**

200 West Expressway 83

La Joya, Texas 78560

Telephone (956) 323-2006

### **School Board**

*Julian Alvarez III, President*

*Anita Chavez, Vice-President*

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*Dr. Rosalva Hernandez, Member*

*Dr. Carlos Margo, Member*

*Jessica Ochoa, Member*

April 6, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

It is an absolute privilege to write this letter of recommendation for Dr. Lisa Coons as she pursues the position of Nevada State Superintendent. Having worked directly under Dr. Coons' leadership, I witnessed firsthand her unwavering commitment to educational excellence, instructional leadership, transformational management practices, and a clear dedication to children. She is a leader with the rare ability to balance visionary strategy, commitment to service, and a relentless drive for improved student outcomes.

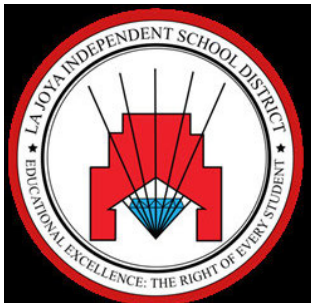
I had the pleasure of serving as her Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning at the Virginia Department of Education and while she was serving as the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Virginia Department of Education, Dr. Coons lead one of the most complex education systems in the country, overseeing 131 districts, a \$11.9 billion budget, and serving over 1.2 million students. Under her leadership, Virginia implemented impactful reforms—from rewriting and raising academic standards and redesigning statewide assessments to launching groundbreaking initiatives like the “ALL In” attendance, literacy, and tutoring recovery programs to address academic achievement gaps left behind after the pandemic, she empowered over 1,900 schools to address this level of learning loss through evidence-based solutions and in a way that best met the context of their communities. She worked skillfully with the 131 Division Superintendents, the Governor’s Office, State Legislators, and the State Board of Education to ensure that with each initiative, children and evidence-based practices were at the core of her leadership.

In addition to her work in the Academics Division of the VDOE, I watched her restructure school accountability systems, launch a \$68M parent microgrant program, and introduce pre-apprenticeship models for educator pipelines that drew national attention. She flawlessly engaged communities all over the state around the shifts needed in the accountability system, and deeply engage educators, parents, community members, and stakeholders from all sides of the Commonwealth. These initiatives were not only innovative but also responsive to student, teacher, and community needs. Dr. Coons doesn’t just lead with policy—she leads with clarity, confidence, and purpose.

Prior to her role in Virginia, she served as Chief Academic Officer for the Tennessee Department of Education, where she spearheaded the \$120 million Reading 360 Initiative, redefined early literacy instruction, and led Tennessee to its highest statewide ELA outcomes in a decade. Whether navigating complex funding transitions, launching large-scale tutoring programs, or building partnerships with higher ed and nonprofits, Dr. Coons always maintains her focus on access for all students and works to ensure that all students attain measurable student growth. The literacy growth in Tennessee is largely due to her work and she can replicate this as she knows literacy and evidence-based practices and will work tirelessly to

**Dr. Marcey Sorensen, Superintendent of Schools**

*Educational Excellence: The Right of Every Student*



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*Dr. Carlos Margo, Member*

*Jessica Ochoa, Member*

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ensure that educators have the tools and resources they need to impact all students, as teaching and learning is at the heart of all of her decisions.

What sets Dr. Coons apart is her deep understanding of the challenges educators face at every level. She has served in district leadership roles, most notably as Executive Officer for Priority Schools in Metro Nashville, where she led a turnaround effort that improved student attendance by 20% and guided multiple schools out of state priority status. She builds systems that are sustainable, evidence-based, and results-oriented—while never losing sight of the individuals those systems are designed to serve.

Dr. Coons leads with courage, clarity, and conviction. She is deeply respected not only for her intelligence and strategic thinking but also for her authenticity, care of children, and ability to bring people together around a shared vision. She has led at the State level, not only as a State Superintendent, but as a Chief Academic Officer. She has worked at the District level, leading challenging work and getting the impact that District's want for their communities.

I recommend Dr. Lisa Coons without reservation for any superintendent position. She is one of the most effective, inspiring, and mission-driven leaders I have had the honor to work with, and any school district or State would be fortunate to benefit from her extraordinary leadership.

Sincerely,

Superintendent

La Joya Independent School District

**Dr. Marcey Sorensen, Superintendent of Schools**

*Educational Excellence: The Right of Every Student*

2212 Parkers Hill Drive  
Maidens, VA 23102

February 25, 2025

For nearly two years, I have had the pleasure to serve the Commonwealth of Virginia alongside Dr. Lisa Coons as her Chief of Staff. During this time, I have been witness to her strong and exceptional skills as she spearheaded nation-leading work that will have a lasting benefit for public school students in Virginia.

In less than two years under Dr. Coons has led the Virginia Department of Education in the development of best in class, rigorous standards in English/Language Arts and a modernized accountability system (School Performance and Support Framework). Her expertise in instruction was critical to the state's implementation of plans to reduce learning loss through the use of high quality, high dosage tutoring. These efforts resulted in improved student achievement after a few short months of implementation.

Additionally, Dr. Coons led Virginia's efforts to collaborate with educators, families, and leaders from across the Commonwealth to reduce chronic absenteeism. As a result, Virginia experienced a 16% reduction in chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism decreased from 19.3% in 2022-2023 to 16.1% in 2023-2024. All K-12 students had 1,276,522 fewer absent days which led to an additional 8,935,654 hours of instruction for Virginia students. She also led the state's efforts to support school divisions in developing cell-phone free policies by providing toolkits and resources to localities for use in their communities.

Lisa's talents extend far beyond the borders of Virginia as her expertise as an instructional leader has been recognized by many of her colleagues in state agencies and organizations across the country. Her ability to develop an instructional vision and create the conditions through support, resources, training, and guidance with the practitioners responsible for implementation is unmatched. She believes in building relationships and working shoulder to shoulder with superintendents, principals, and other key practitioners to ensure that instructional change is sustainable and long lasting.

The challenges of leading a large state agency are many. With the multiple internal and external influences that impact a leader in public education in 2025, Lisa always maintains her focus on the students she serves. This non-negotiable belief is at the core of our agency's work and is modeled by her on a daily basis.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to serve our Commonwealth with Lisa. She has taught me countless lessons and has helped me develop my skills and abilities into a stronger leader through the multiple leadership experiences and opportunities she has provided for me. Any organization would be lucky to have Dr. Lisa Coons on their team. Please feel free to contact me at any time if you need additional information.

Yours In Service,



Jeremy J. Raley, Ed.D.  
Chief of Staff  
Virginia Department of Education



GREGORY V. STRICKLAND, Chair, *Patrick Henry District*

BILLY A. SEAY, *Louisa District*

STEPHEN C. HARRIS, *Cuckoo District*

DEBORAH A. HOFFMAN, *Green Springs District*



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BERNIE D. HILL, *Jackson District*

LLOYD R. RUNNETT, SR., *Mineral District*

J. DOUGLAS STRALEY II, *Division Superintendent*

## Louisa County Public Schools

February 26, 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

I am privileged to offer my highest recommendation for Dr. Lisa Coons, the State Superintendent for Public Instruction for the Commonwealth of Virginia. As the superintendent of Louisa County Public Schools, I have had the opportunity to closely observe Dr. Coons' leadership and the profound impact she has made in her role at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). Dr. Coons is an exceptionally intelligent leader with an outstanding ability to analyze complex problems and develop effective solutions. Dr. Coons is a skilled communicator, an incredible relationship builder, and a deeply passionate advocate for public education. Her ability to connect with diverse stakeholders and lead with purpose has been transformative for the educational landscape in Virginia.

When Dr. Coons assumed her role as State Superintendent two years ago, the state of education in Virginia was in a time of significant turmoil. There was a clear disconnect between school divisions and the VDOE, and a noticeable lack of communication, vision, and strategic direction. The need for strong, unifying leadership was critical, and Dr. Coons stepped into this role with a clear commitment to rebuilding trust, fostering collaboration, and setting a new course for public education in Virginia. Her approach has been one of transparency and decisive action, making it possible for school divisions to reconnect with the VDOE and move forward with a shared vision for the future.

One of Dr. Coons' most remarkable strengths is her ability to solve complex challenges through innovative thinking. Under her leadership, the state has made significant strides in addressing chronic absenteeism, an issue that affects student achievement and long-term success. Through the introduction of new strategies and processes, Dr. Coons has helped implement creative solutions that are having a measurable impact across the Commonwealth. Her data-driven, collaborative approach has demonstrated her ability to lead with both empathy and a focus on results, ensuring that students are given the support they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond.

Dr. Coons' leadership has also been crucial in reshaping Virginia's accountability system. She spearheaded the development of a new accountability model that is both rigorous and supportive, ensuring that schools are held to high standards while also receiving the resources and guidance they need to improve. This new model is a testament to her forward-thinking approach and her commitment to educational excellence. Additionally, Dr. Coons has brought much-needed attention to workforce development, helping to align educational outcomes with the needs of the modern economy. By focusing on preparing students for the future workforce, she has ensured that Virginia's

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J. DOUGLAS STRALEY II, *Division Superintendent*

## Louisa County Public Schools

education system is not only meeting the needs of today's students but also preparing them for success in an ever-evolving world.

Under Dr. Coons' guidance, Virginia has also made significant progress in literacy education. She led the successful implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act, a transformative initiative that is improving literacy instruction across the state. This achievement is part of a larger effort to increase reading and math scores throughout Virginia, an initiative that Dr. Coons has passionately led with a focus on ensuring all students have the foundational skills necessary to thrive. Her commitment to educational equity and her ability to lead large-scale initiatives have had a lasting impact on student achievement across the state.

In conclusion, Dr. Lisa Coons is an exceptional leader whose vision, intelligence, and dedication have had a profound impact on the education system in Virginia. Her leadership has transformed the VDOE into an organization that is responsive, collaborative, and results-driven, setting Virginia's schools on a strong path toward success. Through her efforts to address absenteeism, overhaul accountability systems, prioritize workforce development, and improve literacy and math outcomes, Dr. Coons has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the success of every student in the Commonwealth. I give Dr. Coons my highest recommendation, confident that her continued leadership will only elevate any organization fortunate enough to work with her. The Commonwealth of Virginia is a better place to work, live, and raise a family because of the great work of Dr. Lisa Coons.

Sincerely

**J. Douglas Straley II**

Division Superintendent, Louisa County Public Schools

