

# safe & healthy

## Schools Conference 2026



HEALTH &  
PHYSICAL WELLNESS



SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL  
& ACADEMIC SUPPORT



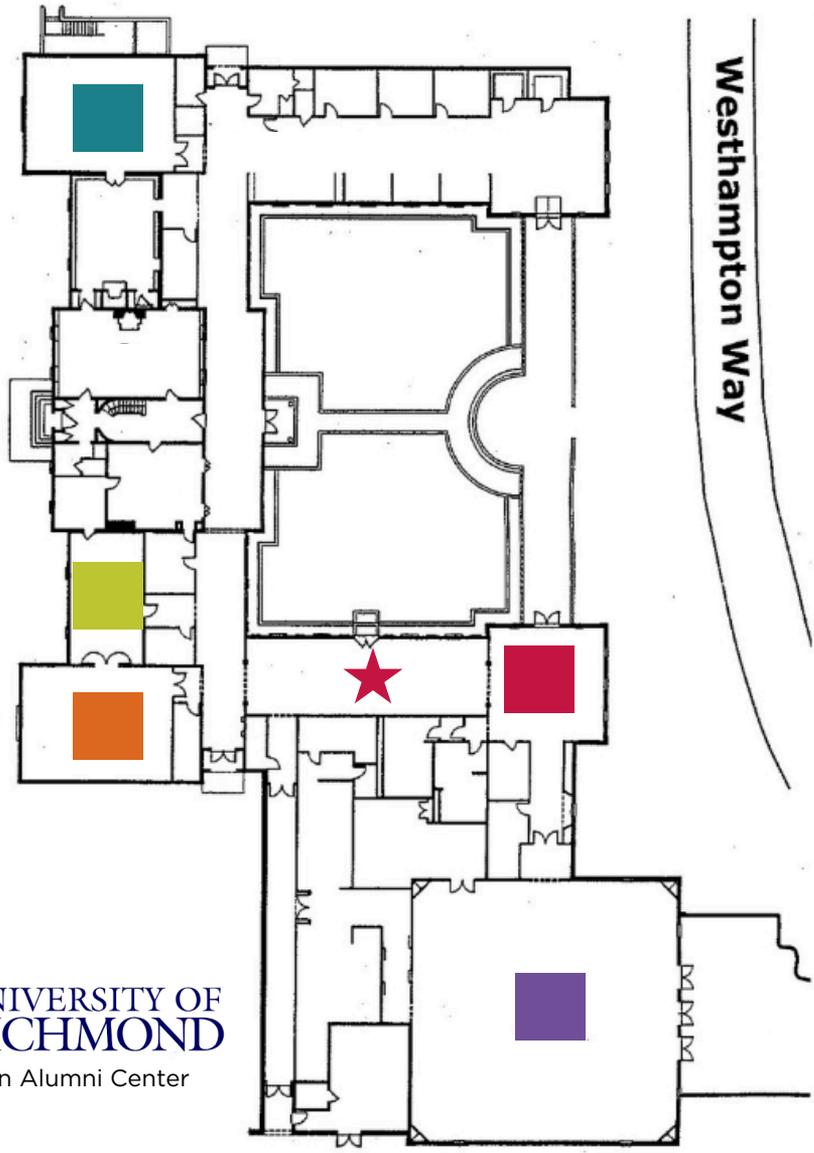
SAFETY  
& SECURITY



**VAIS**

VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2026  
UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND | JEPSON ALUMNI CENTER



 UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND  
Jepson Alumni Center

-  **Ukrop Gallery (Registration)**  
★ Sponsor Hall
-  **Robins Pavilion**
-  **Quigg Conference Room**
-  **Eskandarian Seminar Room**
-  **Rosenbaum Conference Room**



# Welcome to Safe & Healthy Schools 2026

Thank you for taking the time to join us for today's conference. Your commitment to being here – to learning together and supporting one another – speaks volumes about your dedication to creating safe and healthy environments for students. I am particularly thankful for our Think Tank under the leadership of Darcie TeVault in their careful consideration of topics which best address our schools' needs.



The work you do every day as counselors, nurses, teachers, learning support professionals, athletic directors, and safety professionals is vital. You are the ones who hold space for students through their challenges, celebrate their growth, and ensure they have what they need to thrive. That work often goes unseen, but it is deeply valued.

Today is an opportunity to deepen your knowledge, share strategies, and build connections with colleagues who understand the joys and challenges of this work. I hope you leave energized, equipped with new tools, and reminded that you are part of a community that genuinely cares about the well-being of every student – and every member of the school community.

Thank you for all you do. Enjoy the day.

Handwritten signature of Betsy A. Johnson.

**Betsy A. Johnson, M.Ed.**  
**Executive Director**  
Virginia Association of  
Independent Schools

health

counseling

security

# Safe & Healthy Schools Conference Think Tank Team:

**Chris Campbell**  
Richmond Montessori School

**Amrit Daryanni**  
Wakefield School

**Rebecca Ginnetti**  
Congressional School

**Kelly Goodrich**  
Christchurch School

**Natasha Kollaros**  
Episcopal High School

**Cyndi Lyons-Chambers**  
St. Michael's Episcopal School

**Aminata Sackor**  
Al Fatih Academy

**Jentae Scott-Mayo**  
The Steward School

## VAIS Staff

**Betsy A. Johnson, M.Ed.**  
Executive Director

**Lelia G. Grinnan, M.A.**  
Director of Accreditation

**Wendy C. Lawrence, SHRM-CP**  
Director of Finance & Operations

**Darcie L. TeVault, Ed.D**  
Director of Professional Learning

Wi-fi: Visit UR  
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## Find VAIS online:

 [VAIS.org](http://VAIS.org)

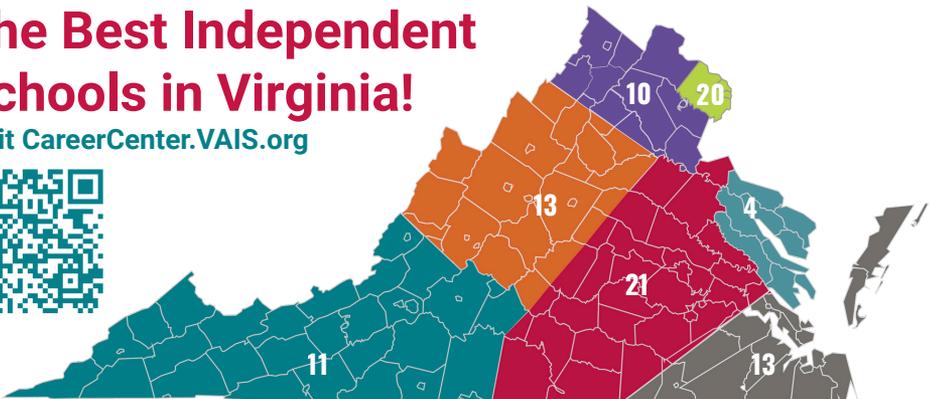
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# CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

health counseling security	9 - 10:15 AM	<b>Keynote</b>   Riding Out the Storm: Managing Emotional Intensity in Neurodivergent Students <i>Dr. Matt Zakreski, Co-Founder, The Neurodiversity Collective</i>
health counseling security	10:35 - 11:30 AM	<b>Concurrent Sessions I</b> <i>Session Descriptions on Pages 6-7</i>
security	11:30 - 4 PM	<b>Deep Dive</b>   Civilian Response and Casualty Care Training <i>Description on Page 7</i>
health counseling	11:45 AM - 12:40 PM	<b>Concurrent Sessions II</b> <i>Session Descriptions on Page 8</i>
health counseling security	12:40 - 2 PM	<b>Roundtable Discussions &amp; Lunch</b> <i>Note: CRCC Training lunch from 12:30 - 1 PM</i>
health counseling	2 - 2:55 PM	<b>Concurrent Sessions III</b> <i>Session Descriptions on Page 9</i>
health counseling	3:05 - 4 PM	<b>Concurrent Sessions IV</b> <i>Session Descriptions on Page 10</i>

# KEYNOTE SPEAKER



## About the Session

Emotions are the cause of many disruptive and problematic behaviors that gifted and twice-exceptional children face. Neurodivergent learners are marked by structural and functional brain differences that may manifest in increased emotionality – making traditional disciplinary approaches ineffective. During this session, Dr. Matt will walk participants through high-intensity “trouble areas” and provide research-based strategies to help manage these feelings and behaviors, turning crisis into connection and student success.

## About “Dr. Matt”

Matthew “Dr. Matt” Zakreski is a high-energy, creative clinical psychologist and professional speaker who utilizes an eclectic approach to meet the specific needs of his neurodivergent clients. A dedicated consultant, professor, and researcher, he serves the Gifted community through his work with organizations like Supporting the Emotional Needs of Gifted, the National Association for Gifted Children, and the New Jersey Association for Gifted Children. Dr. Zakreski has spoken hundreds of times worldwide about supporting neurodivergent youth and is the author of *the Neurodiversity Playbook: How Neurodivergent People Can Crack the Code of Living in a Neurotypical World*.

# CONCURRENT SESSIONS I

10:35-11:30 AM

## You Heard It in Health

*Kyle Mortenson, Educational Consultant & Education Specialist*

**Quigg Conference Room**

Need fresh approaches to teaching consent and healthy relationships? This interactive workshop equips educators with a “Mary Poppins toolkit” of resources for navigating today's complex social landscape. Through hands-on activities and innovative games, explore how to create safe spaces for sensitive conversations while keeping students meaningfully engaged. Participants will experience activities firsthand, collaborate with peers, and leave with at least three classroom-ready resources covering everything from body autonomy to relationship boundaries. Transform your health curriculum with creative strategies that resonate with today's youth and foster authentic learning experiences.

## Supporting Mental Health through Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

*David Naff, Ph.D., Director; Martinique Sealy, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Research Scholar;  
Jared Grigg, Graduate Research Assistant*

**Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium, VCU School of Education**

*Kim Dupre, Ed.D, Co-Director of Project CONNECTS and Systems Coach*

**Virginia Tiered Systems of Support**

**Rosenbaum Conference Room**

How can schools leverage Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and local data to support the mental health needs of their students? The Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium in the VCU School of Education and Virginia Tiered Systems of Support have partnered to develop a system for schools to reflect on and refine their mental health systems to ensure that all students receive the support they need. Participants will learn from peer-reviewed literature about leveraging MTSS for mental health support at multiple tiers and engage with data dashboards to identify opportunities for improving systems and resources at their own schools.

# CONCURRENT SESSIONS I

10:35-11:30 AM

## Venn Knights of the Round Table

*Jim Astrove, Counselor & Chris Campbell, Director of Operations & Facilities*

**Richmond Montessori School**

**Eskandrian Seminar Room**

Risk Management, Safety, Behavioral Threat and Crisis teams all have very separate tasks and responsibilities. They also share a large space at the middle of every school's foundational safety Venn diagram. So how do we best ensure Safety First & Always? Join the conversation!

## DEEP DIVE

11:30 AM-4 PM

**Eskandrian Seminar Room**

## Civilian Response and Casualty Care Training

*Keaghan Plaugher, Critical Incident Preparedness and Response Administrative Specialist, Division of Public Safety Training and the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety, Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services*

This in-person course of Civilian Response and Casualty Care provides a coordinated effort through a "whole community approach" to establish stakeholders and empower citizens to become "Immediate Responders" who do what they can, where they are, with what they have to work with until "First Responders" arrive. This course expands upon the basics of Avoid, Deny, and Defend to respond to an active attack and shows participants how to provide lifesaving medical aid to the injured through the Stop the Bleed® campaign.

# CONCURRENT SESSIONS II

11:45 AM-12:40 PM

## Community Council: Restorative Meets Accountability

*Liz Alford, Assistant Dean of Students, Virginia Episcopal School*  
**Robins Pavilion**

The Community Council is a disciplinary committee made up of at least two Faculty members and two Student Leaders. Although the Community Council is on the VES “disciplinary ladder,” it is viewed as a restorative step to allow students the ability to learn from their mistakes, while also feeling supported by the group assembled. The Community Council’s intention is to function as a preventative measure that aids students in avoiding future disciplinary issues.

## From Insights to Action: Making AI Work for Student and School Well-being

*Todd Feldman, BrainDash™*

*Rob Short, Trinity Episcopal School*  
**Quigg Conference Room**

This session is designed to help schools move from identifying what data matters for student well-being to understanding how schools actually operate today, where student needs stay hidden, and how technology — including AI — can responsibly support earlier, human-led action. Participants will leave with a high-level gap analysis of student support operations, clear boundaries for the use of technology and AI in student well-being, and a practical 30-day go-forward plan.

## Student Gambling Risk: Warning Signs & Early School-Based Intervention

*Carolyn E. Hawley, Ph.D., Professor, Director,  
Virginia Partnership for Gaming & Health at VCU*

*Jared C. Schultz, Ph.D., Professor and Chair, Department of Rehabilitation Counseling,  
Virginia Commonwealth University*  
**Rosenbaum Conference Room**

Gambling among youth is often overlooked, yet it can have meaningful impacts on academic performance, mental health, and social development. This session equips K-12 educators and school professionals with practical tools to recognize early indicators of gambling risk, understand contributing factors, and implement effective prevention and support strategies. Drawing on current research, real-world examples, and state-level resources, participants will gain approaches to promote student well-being and foster safer learning environments.

# CONCURRENT SESSIONS III

2-2:55 PM

## OCD Contamination, Lying, and Suicidal-Intrusive Thought

*Jacklyn Scott, LMHC, Child and Adolescent Therapist, InStride Health*

**Quigg Conference Room**

This presentation will examine three highly misunderstood OCD presentations: contamination fears, reassurance-driven lying, and suicidal-intrusive-thought subtypes. Participants will learn diagnostic hallmarks, how OCD mimics behavioral concerns, and why traditional disciplinary or talk-based approaches can inadvertently reinforce symptoms. The session will equip school professionals with actionable strategies, appropriate response pathways, and evidence-based considerations for supporting students while maintaining safety.

## Encouraging Help-Seeking Behaviors in Boys and Young Men

*Sazshy Kane-West, LPC, Upper School Counselor &*

*Sarah Ambrose, Lower School Counselor, St. Christopher's School*

**Rosenbaum Conference Room**

Leaning on boy-centered research as well as a decade of research by The Center for the Study of Boys at St. Christopher's School, we will expand upon best practices for encouraging help-seeking behaviors in boys and young men. Walk away with strategies to build relationships with boys at your own school. Participants will have the opportunity for a small group discussion to share ideas for supporting boys' help-seeking behaviors, as well as recommendations on strategies to implement.

# KELLEY + CO.

Our gratitude to the team at Richmond-based communications firm Kelley + Co., which designed this very program and supports VAIS and our members through external communications and storytelling. Meet them at [kelleyus.com](http://kelleyus.com).

# CONCURRENT SESSIONS IV

3:05-4 PM

## What's Keeping You Up at Night? Tackling the High-Stakes Challenges of Independent School Nursing

*Dr. Ann Vanichkachorn, Director of Health and Wellness,*

*St. Christopher's School*

**Rosenbaum Conference Room**

This interactive workshop provides a collaborative space for independent school nurses to address the high-stakes challenges that keep them up at night. We hope to explore the complex intersection of pediatric mental health and physical illness, sharing strategies for managing psychosomatic symptoms in the clinic. Participants will also navigate the potential rising trend of vaccine hesitancy and the legal and community health implications of managing non-immunized student populations. Finally, we will dive into "hot topics" like the impact of AI in the delivery of care, the surge in complex allergy management, and maintaining professional boundaries in a 24/7 school environment.

## Healthy Boundaries and Meaningful Relationships

*Jamie Forbes, Founder and Survivor, Learning Courage*

**Quigg Conference Room**

This interactive workshop supports educators in strengthening their relationship-building skills by grounding their practice in self-awareness and healthy boundaries. Explore how your own beliefs, emotional triggers, and caregiving instincts shape the way you connect with students – and how clear, compassionate boundaries create safer, more sustainable relationships. Through discussion, reflection, and practical strategies, learn how to stay connected without becoming overextended, how to recognize early signs of boundary drift, and how to model healthy interpersonal norms for students. Leave with tools that empower you to build trust, respond with clarity and confidence, and foster learning environments where all can thrive.



**7**  
MAY

**Momentum MeetUP: Student Life**

10 AM | Virtual and Recorded

## Take Our Exit Survey

Thank you for joining us today to connect, collaborate, and lead. Your insights are essential as we shape future gatherings to support your work. Scan the QR code to share your thoughts.



## Youth Mental Health First Aid Training Interest Form



YMHA is an evidence-based training designed to help adults recognize, understand, and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges in children and adolescents. If you are interested in attending a training in the future, scan the QR code.

Thank you to our sponsors & partners for a successful Safe & Healthy Schools Conference 2026!



EMPOWERING  
**excellence**

**VAIS Annual Conference**

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2026

THE STEWARD SCHOOL

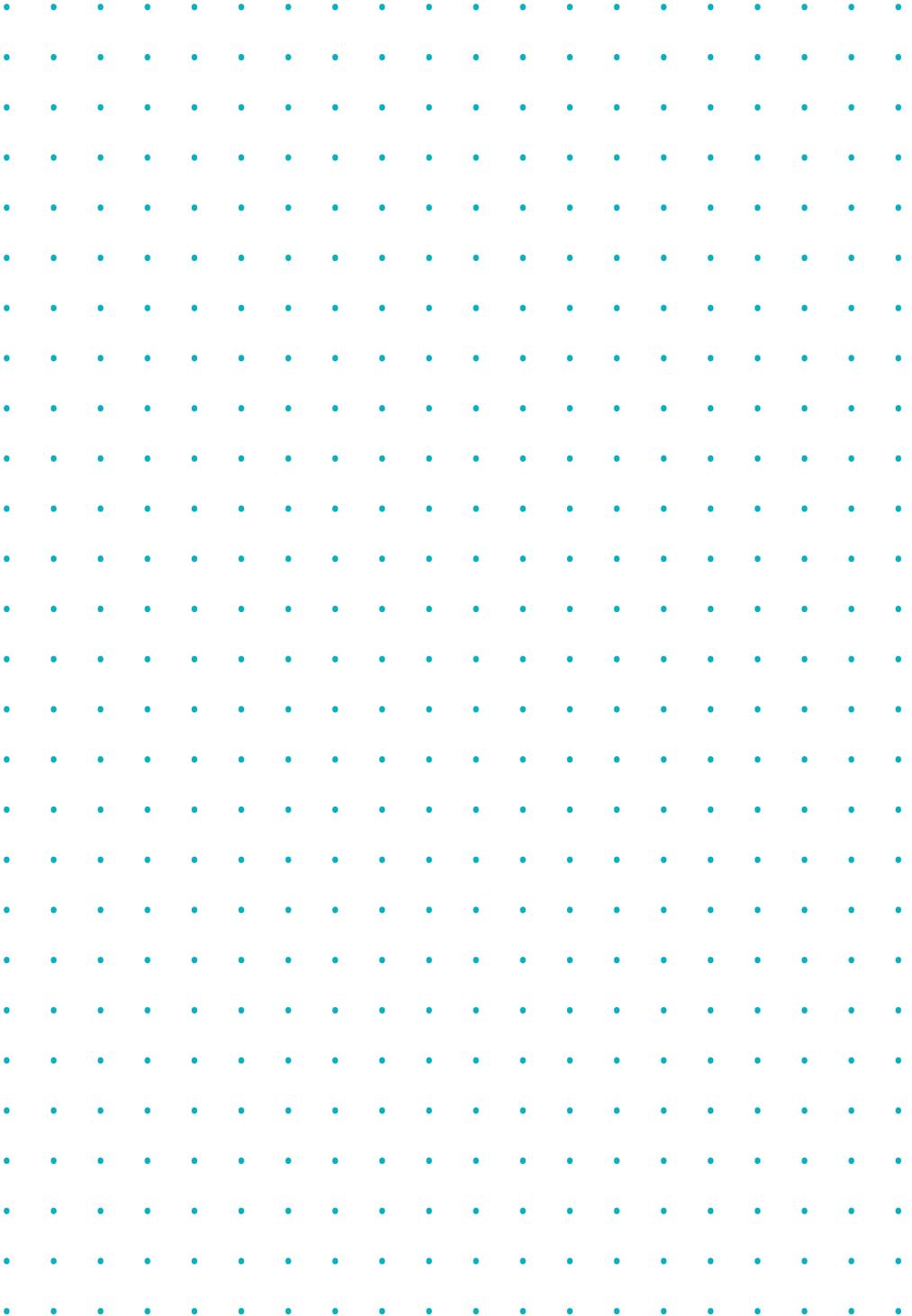
JOIN US FOR A DAY OF CONNECTION, INNOVATION,  
AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH.



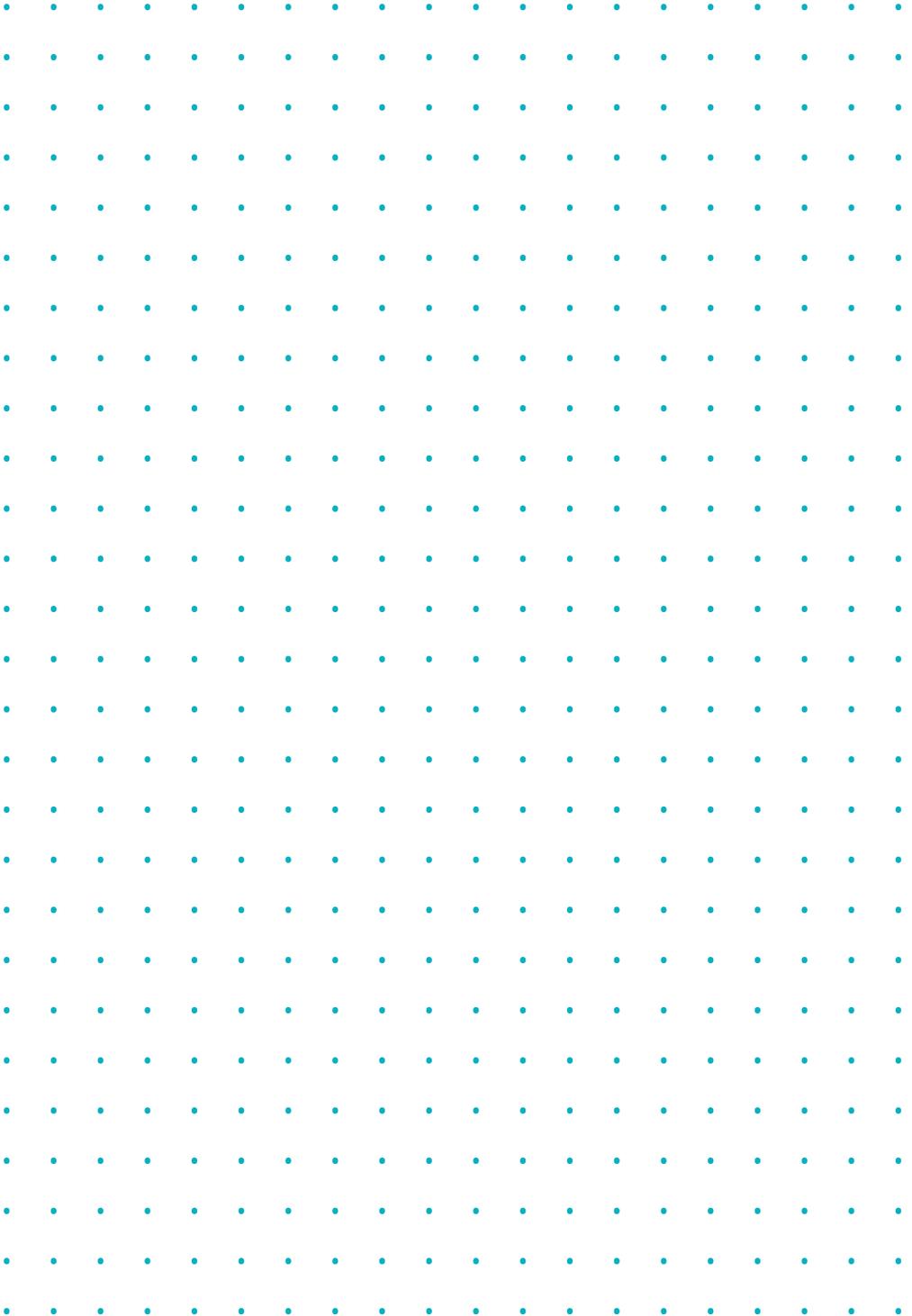
SCAN TO SUBMIT YOUR  
CONCURRENT SESSION PROPOSALS

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION OPENS  
JULY 1.

# Notes

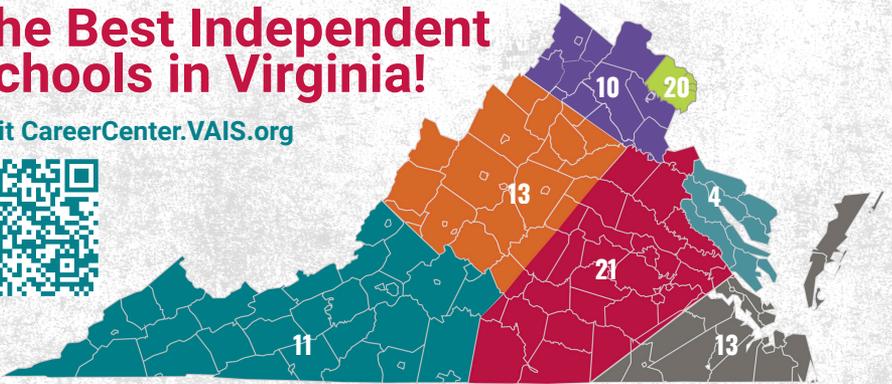


# Notes



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## NORTHWEST

Foxcroft School  
 Fredericksburg Academy  
 Highland School  
 The Hill School

Loudoun Country Day School  
 Middleburg Montessori School  
 Powhatan School

Randolph-Macon Academy  
 Saint James' Episcopal School  
 Wakefield School

## SOUTHWEST

Boys Home of Virginia  
 Chatham Hall  
 Community High School of Arts & Academics

Hargrave Military Academy  
 James River Day School  
 New Covenant Schools  
 New Vistas School

North Cross School  
 Oak Hill Academy  
 Sullins Academy  
 Virginia Episcopal School

## VALLEY

Blue Ridge School  
 The Covenant School  
 Eastern Mennonite School  
 Field School of Charlottesville  
 Fishburne Military School

Fork Union Military Academy  
 Fuqua School  
 Grymes Memorial School  
 Miller School of Albemarle

Mountaintop Montessori School  
 Stuart Hall School  
 Tandem Friends School  
 Woodberry Forest School

## NORTHERN

Al Fatih Academy  
 Alexandria Country Day School  
 Browne Academy  
 Burgundy Farm Country Day School  
 Commonwealth Academy  
 Congressional School  
 Episcopal High School

Flint Hill School  
 Gesher Jewish Day School  
 Grace Episcopal School  
 Green Hedges School  
 The Langley School  
 Linton Hall School  
 The Madeira School

Montessori School of Northern Virginia  
 Pinecrest School  
 The Potomac School  
 St. Stephen's and St. Agnes School  
 Trinity Academy Meadow View  
 Westminster School

## RIVER

Aylett Country Day School  
 Chesapeake Academy  
 Christchurch School  
 Ware Academy

## RICHMOND

Anna Julia Cooper School  
 Benedictine Schools of Richmond  
 Brunswick Academy  
 Collegiate School  
 Good Shepherd Episcopal School  
 Millwood School  
 The New Community School

Northstar Academy  
 Orchard House Middle School  
 Richmond Montessori School  
 Rise Academy  
 Riverside School  
 Rudlin Torah Academy  
 Sabot School

Seven Hills School  
 St. Andrew's School  
 St. Catherine's School  
 St. Christopher's School  
 St. Michael's Episcopal School  
 The Steward School  
 Trinity Episcopal School

## HAMPTON ROADS

Broadwater Academy  
 Cape Charles Christian School  
 Chesapeake Bay Academy  
 Christopher Academy  
 Hampton Roads Academy

Nansemond-Suffolk Academy  
 Norfolk Academy  
 Norfolk Christian Schools  
 Norfolk Collegiate School

Southampton Academy  
 Strelitz International Academy  
 Virginia Beach Friends School  
 The Williams School