

# LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

## 2019-2020 School Year



Virginia  
**PTA**<sup>®</sup>  
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### FUNDING FORMULA & STAFFING

#### **MODERNIZE THE STANDARDS OF QUALITY (STATE STAFFING STANDARDS)**

- School divisions across the Commonwealth exceed the Standards of Quality's minimum staffing guidelines in order to provide a quality public education. Unfortunately, not every local government has a tax base that allows them to exceed the state requirements. As a result, there are widespread disparities in the resources and opportunities available to students.
- The number of economically disadvantaged students has increased by almost 90,000 students since 2009 and English language learners in Virginia schools have increased by over 54,000. Students with special learning needs have also increased exponentially. Support staff positions are vital to the operation of schools and provide essential support to instructional staff.
- School Counselors, currently considered a support position, have expanded job responsibilities as a result of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which has driven the implementation of Profile of a Virginia Graduate and expanded Career Technical Education programming.
- The changing role of technology use and media access in schools has redefined job responsibilities for librarians and technology staff.
- Increased use of on-line or remote learning opportunities has changed staff requirements in some classrooms.
  - ***Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly to modernize the Standards of Quality to reflect actual school division staffing practices and to lift the 2009 Support Position Cap.***
  - ***Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly to revise the Standards of Quality to ensure EVERY school has a full-time principal and a full time librarian or media specialist.***

#### **UNIFIED MENTAL HEALTH TEAM STAFFING**

- Crisis occurs when prevention fails. Mental Health teams are critical to creating a supportive school climate. Of 9,200 Threat Assessments in Virginia schools last year, 50% were threats to self.
- Most students do not receive the mental health services they need due to stigma and lack of access to services and of those who do get help, most do so only in school.

- School Counselor’s role has expanded over the past decade. They collaborate with teachers and other support staff to provide social emotional support, career planning guidance beginning in Kindergarten, and help students develop academic achievement strategies.
- School Psychologists often serve several schools. They collaborate with the School Counselor to formulate individualized intervention plans for students who need comprehensive mental health services.
- School Social Workers address social issues that affect a child’s development and education and create a vital link between schools, home and community services and resources.
- The increase in economically disadvantaged students, English Learners, and students needing more intensive special education services has increased the work load for mental health teams.
  - **Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly to provide students with access to ‘Unified Mental Health Teams’ at nationally recommended ratios.**
    - School Counselor: 1:250                      Virginia: 1:455 (ES) - 1:325 (HS)
    - School Psychologist: 1:500-700        Virginia: No Standard
    - School Social Worker: 1:250    Virginia: No Standard
    - School Nurse: 1 per school    Virginia: 1:600 students

## SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

### BROADBAND

- Access to high speed internet touches almost every aspect of modern life yet there are an estimated 660,000 Virginians who don’t have access to broadband.
- Almost 50% of rural Virginians lack access to high speed internet and 29% don’t have any internet service at all.
- Income directly correlates with access to technology within a household.
- Digital learning and connectivity at school and at home enables students to be prepared for tomorrow’s jobs and levels the playing field for students regardless of their affluence level or geographic location.
  - **Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly to increase funding for the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) or other programs to incentivize internet providers to expand services and provide connection speeds that are greater than 10 megabits (10,000,000 bits) per second with low cost, transparent pricing for consumers.**

## **SCHOOL BUILDING MODERNIZATION**

- Quality of public school buildings and grounds is a health, educational, and environmental **equity issue** for families and communities. **Facilities are not neutral!**
- 60% of Virginia’s schools are more than 40 years old, are deteriorated, do not meet modern standards and lack the digital infrastructure and flexible classroom space to support 21st century learning.
- Localities pay for 80% of school construction costs and many do not have the financial ability to modernize their schools.
  - *Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly and US Congress to provide substantial and sustained investment to support renovation, new construction and debt service costs with a target of funding 55% of local school construction costs over the next 5 years without reducing or modifying other sources of education funding.*
  - *Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education to conduct a statewide analysis of school building quality and renovation needs.*

## **CURRICULUM**

### **WORLD LANGUAGES**

- Studying world languages increases global awareness, cultural understanding and employment opportunities.
- Studying world languages results in higher scores in verbal and math standardized tests, strengthens critical thinking skills, creativity, problem solving capabilities and memory function.
- Ability to speak, read and write in a world language in addition to English is essential to attract business, engage in world trade, participate in scientific research, foster diplomacy, understand cultural nuances and respond to global humanitarian emergencies.
  - *Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education to develop K-16 world language instructional program that supports new language acquisition, retention of heritage languages and develop programs to recruit and retain qualified world language teachers.*

## **SAFETY**

### **SCHOOL SAFETY & THREAT ASSESSMENTS**

- Physical and mental health safety of students and staff is essential.
  - *Virginia PTA supports funding physical building improvements to provide secure entry identification and regular school building safety audits by safety specialists.*
  - *Virginia PTA supports communication to parents at the start of the school year regarding threat assessment protocols, emergency preparation drills, crisis response procedures and re-unification protocols for their school building*
  - *Virginia PTA supports training for all school-based employees on youth mental health including early intervention, prevention and return to learn practices.*
  - *Virginia PTA supports Memorandums of Understanding with local law enforcement agencies, training programs for School Resource Officers and funding for SRO grant programs that enable communities to choose whether to employ uniformed officers in their schools.*

## **SCHOOL QUALITY PROFILES (REPORT CARDS)**

- Good communication is rooted in strong data policies and practices. School Quality profiles are an important tool families can use to understand if their school is meeting the academic and social emotional needs of their students.
- Data in school quality profiles can help school districts make informed decisions about staffing, professional development and student academic growth.
  - **Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education to enhance Virginia's School Quality Profiles to include important data about teacher diversity, mental health programs, inclusivity and school climate:**

#### **DIVERSITY IMPROVEMENTS:**

- Translation into multiple languages
- Ethnic diversity of teachers
- Languages spoken by teachers
- Staff completion of cultural sensitivity training

#### **MENTAL HEALTH IMPROVEMENTS:**

- Mental Health Threat Assessments conducted
- Use of restraint and seclusion
- Practices related to using trauma informed care and/or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

## SCHOOL CLIMATE IMPROVEMENTS

- Identification of parent groups (PTA/PTO/Band Boosters, etc.)
- Project Based Learning connected to the community
- Annual Principals notification to parents announcing new data is published with required personal reflection on school performance and plans in place to sustain positive growth or remediate areas of weakness.

## CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE)

- Not every student's successful career path is a 4 year college. Career Technical Education (CTE) programs in Virginia public schools serve more than 640,000 students in one or more CTE courses in grades 6-12.
- CTE programs prepare students for high wage, high skill, high demand careers in existing and emerging industries while meeting the Commonwealth's need for well-trained and industry-certified technical workers.
- The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Virginia's resulting implementation of Profile of a Virginia Graduate and new school accreditation standards expanded the focus of CTE and works to ensure graduates have the knowledge, skills, attributes and experiences identified by employers and educators as critical for success in the workforce.
- Agriculture and forestry comprise the largest industry in the Commonwealth, contributing \$91 billion to the economy and supporting more than 442,000 jobs.
  - ***Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education, educators, school counselors, career development professionals and administrators to promote career technical education and workforce development programs in a positive light as a respected career path.***
  - ***Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education to recognize February as Career Technical Education Month.***
  - ***Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education ensure Agriculture and Forestry is represented on the Advisory Committee for Career Technical Education and that curriculum supports rural workforce development and innovation.***

## ADVANCING EQUITY & DIVERSITY

- Celebrating the diversity of views, experiences, cultural heritages and traditions, skills and abilities, values and preferences that make up our communities is at the core of our work. PTA Officers are actively engaged, daily, in the ground work within each school building of fostering an inclusive and diverse school climate.

- It is important to acknowledge and advance work with community partners to address structural inequities that are rooted in our nation’s social, political, economic, and educational structures.
  - **Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education to include one full time Chief Equity Officer per school Division as part of the State Standards of Quality.** *This person would support implementation of culturally responsive practices across the school division which may include monitoring completion of cultural competency professional development, reviewing lesson plans and curriculum, assessing cultural necessities, decreasing discipline disproportionality and closing opportunity gaps.*
  - **Virginia PTA urges Board of Education to require educators, support staff and administrative staff to participate in ongoing, mandatory training and professional development programs that seek to recognize student strengths and skills and reinforce appreciation for cultural differences for the purpose of reducing unconscious bias.**
  - **Virginia PTA urges the Virginia Board of Education and local School Boards to review history text books and curriculum at every grade level, but in particular the fourth grade Virginia history curriculum, to eliminate language, behavior or retelling of events that is stereotypical, demeaning, exclusionary, or judgmental and instead embrace cultural contexts with appreciation and celebration of cultures and their contributions to our society.**

## **ABOUT VIRGINIA PTA**

*The Virginia PTA’s twenty-one districts support 240,000 members at local PTAs in 1,025 schools across the Commonwealth. Hands-on, local support for PTAs in schools across the Commonwealth combined with robust training resources and a national advocacy platform, sets the PTA apart as the leader in supporting local school parent groups. Local PTAs play a crucial role in building strong partnerships between parents and administrators and creating a vibrant community of engaged parents which contributes to the educational success, health, and well-being of our children and communities. We speak with one voice for every child - not only in our local schools, but also in State Legislatures, the US Congress and in our State and National Departments of Education.*