



## SMALL COMMUNITY SCHOOLS & AGING SCHOOL BUILDING MAINTENANCE

### SUMMARY:

Numerous studies over the past three decades cite the academic benefits of small schools and small learning environments as being equally as important as class size. However, due to local operating budget shortfalls there is a continued trend to decrease spending on small school staffing and building maintenance as well as consolidate or close the older, smaller schools to achieve perceived operating economies of scale.

Many small schools threatened with deterioration or closure are community-centered schools, which define and anchor that residential community, thereby providing not only an educational environment that has close ties to family but also ensures the vitality of the community.

Legislation and policy should provide a dedicated source of state funding for maintenance and renovation of aging school buildings and enact flexible smart growth polices that are anchored in the community to define new school building construction rather than relying on minimum school site size and acreage requirements. Additionally State Staffing Standards of Quality should support the basic full time support staffing needed for a school of any size such as a principal, librarian, technology staff, medical staff, recordkeeping staff and custodial staff.

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**WHEREAS**, students attending smaller community-centered schools have close relationships and a greater sense of belonging to the community which results in higher academic success, higher attendance rates, higher graduation rates, and an increased likelihood to take advanced level courses and participate in extra-curricular activities; and

**WHEREAS**, smaller schools have been found to be more successful at developing the more personal and informal relationships between school staff, students, and parents which lead to better student engagement and social behavior, teacher satisfaction and collaboration, and parent involvement; and

**WHEREAS**, Small community-centered schools across the country are faced with closure or a deterioration of facilities due to a lack of state funding for maintenance; the establishment of large minimum school site sizes and minimum acreage requirements per student (including parking and athletic fields); and the belief that smaller schools may be more expensive to operate (despite their positive impact on academic success); and

**WHEREAS**, Despite recommended changes by the Virginia Department of Education, small community-centered schools face vital staff shortages due to a combination of staffing limits set in Virginia's Standards of Quality and local funding shortages.

## THEREFORE, BE IT

**RESOLVED**, that the Virginia PTA recognizes the important role that a school plays within a thriving community and discourages closure or consolidation of schools or districts without consent and support of the residents and surrounding community, and be it further

**RESOLVED**, that the Virginia PTA recognizes that school size is as important to student academic success as classroom size; and does not support minimum school sizes for schools or districts but rather a flexible smart growth approach that requires community involvement in the early planning stages for new schools and requires costing for new schools to include initial full cost accounting (land acquisition, transportation, infrastructure, utilities, construction), the school lifecycle cost (maintenance, operations), as well as a comparison of the cost of renovating or expanding an existing community-centered school; and be it further

**RESOLVED**, that the Virginia PTA and its constituent associations seek and support development of a competitive state funded grant program or a dedicated maintenance funding source to provide for the regular repair and maintenance or upgrade of aging school buildings; and be it further

**RESOLVED**, that the Virginia PTA supports efforts to revise the Standard of Quality limits to provide vital support services for small community schools to include; full time principals, full time art teachers, full time music teachers, full time librarians, full time technology teachers or other media specialists, a full time school nurse or other medically trained personnel, full time custodians and a full time bookkeeper or attendance secretary.

January 2018, approved by General Membership