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For Immediate Release

## Virginia PTA Partners with Fund Our Schools Coalition; Advocates for 2022 Policy Priorities, Kids & Families at Capitol Day in Richmond

On Monday, the Virginia PTA participated in a joint [press conference](#) headed by Fund Our Schools Virginia to push for critical staffing, infrastructure, and literacy funding to abate some of the pandemic's most harmful impacts and set Virginia on a track to lead the nation in education outcomes. The press conference comes on the heels of the Virginia PTA's annual Capitol Day, where its leaders and members met with legislators to address current challenges facing students, families, and schools, and to advocate for top 2022 policies at the Virginia General Assembly (GA) session.

Each year, regardless of administration, the Virginia PTA advocates at the GA for funding and policy issues related to schools' challenges and opportunities; they then provides local PTAs and their volunteers throughout the Commonwealth with parent-focused information, tools, and grant opportunities to empower parents and turn legislative priorities into tangible benefits for families, teachers, and schools.

Building on advocacy successes in 2021 that saw a historic investment in broadband, expansion of the free meals program, improvements in the counselor- and support staff-to-student ratios, and infrastructure funding that allowed for the safe return to schools, the Virginia PTA's 2022 advocacy platform includes several [legislative priorities](#), including the following highlights:

- Staffing Shortages and School Quality Funding
- Comprehensive, Statewide Approach to Literacy and Reading
- Dedicated Funding for Building Modernizations
- Prioritization of Early Childhood Education and Childcare
- Investment in Student Health and Wellness

At the Monday press conference, Virginia PTA President-Elect Jenna Alexander addressed several of these priorities, noting the connection between adequate funding and outcomes for kids, and how PTAs step in to fill the gaps: "Parent volunteers have spent the past two years creating new ways to connect our communities and build the strong relationships ... that not only help students succeed, but help them thrive.... We see the lack of support staff in our schools and organize parents to volunteer in classrooms. We see students struggling with math or reading skills and we set-up after school enrichment programs..., and we host STEM night to connect students to new career possibilities."

Current Virginia PTA President Pamela Croom underscored the important role parent volunteers play, as well as the critical need to fund 2022 priorities: "Our public schools are the heartbeat of local communities across Virginia, and as volunteers in our schools, we observe challenges first-hand. When we talk about evidence-based approaches to improving student outcomes, one of the first things that comes to mind is *parent involvement*. Research shows that when parents and schools work together, students succeed." But, she noted, "at the same time, there has been a persistent lack of funding for these evidence-based practices. With Virginia's record surplus this year, we are asking the General Assembly to fully fund our schools."

Fund Our Schools Virginia is the largest P-12 education advocacy coalition in the Commonwealth, representing parents, students, educators, school staff, community advocates, research and other community organizations.

### **About the Virginia PTA**

The [Virginia PTA](#) is a nonpartisan statewide child advocacy association focused on strengthening schools and communities by empowering parents to be engaged in their child's education and advocating for policies and resources that benefit all children across the Commonwealth. A student-centered, locally connected nonprofit, the Virginia PTA supports PTA volunteers, collaborates with families and schools, and then amplifies and advocates for their needs, interests, and concerns at the state level.

The Virginia PTA works to make every child's potential a reality by improving education experiences and resources; strengthening family-school partnerships; supporting the network of local PTAs throughout the Commonwealth; providing support to PTA Councils who advocate with their local school board and work with local school divisions; and helping volunteers with training, best practices, toolkits, and grants that support local PTAs and their communities.

For media inquiries, please contact Pamela Croom at [pamela.croom@vapta.org](mailto:pamela.croom@vapta.org) or Jenna Alexander at [pres-elect@vapta.org](mailto:pres-elect@vapta.org).

## **Additional Background Information**

### **Staffing Shortages and School Quality Funding**

Virginia PTA believes the General Assembly must lift the Support Cap for staffing that leaves vulnerable schools short of critical support staff—essential to keep schools running safely, balance teacher workload, and provide critical, equalizing student services. Virginia PTA is urging the General Assembly to fund schools based on needed support staff rather than using an arbitrary, 2009-recession era formula.

### **Comprehensive, Statewide Approach to Literacy and Reading**

Firmly committed to the belief that reading is foundational to student academic success, the VA PTA is advocating for passage of the Literacy Act as part of a comprehensive, statewide approach to literacy. The Literacy Act would support science-based reading research, evidence-based instruction, increased numbers of reading specialists, student intervention plans, and resources for families.

### **Dedicated Funding for Building Modernizations**

Virginia PTA is pushing for dedicated funding for school building modernizations throughout the Commonwealth. Investments in schools' aging and outdated buildings helps to mitigate health and safety risks, create equitable education opportunities, improve student and staff retention, decrease overhead costs, and positively affect property values.

In 2021, VAPTA successfully advocated for targeted funds to replace HVAC systems, underscoring the critical connection between restoring education funding and safely reopening schools. They advocated for establishing the new Commission on School Construction and Modernization—setting the stage for larger-scale infrastructure improvements in 2022.

### **Prioritization of Early Childhood Education and Childcare**

Virginia PTA continues to advocate for early education and high-quality, affordable childcare, including funding and programs that expand access to pre-school for at-risk 3- and 4-year-old children as well as improve and expand childcare affordability for all families.

Having pushed for the prioritization of early childhood education since its inception, the PTA celebrated recent successes including the 2021 General Assembly session approval of \$48 million in enhancements to the Virginia Preschool Initiative and an expansion of the Virginia Child Care Subsidy Program, which provides financial assistance for quality childcare to families of four earning up to \$89k and the more-than doubling of investments in public pre-K since 2018.

### **Investment in Student Health & Wellness**

To support recovery from the pandemic and the mental health of students, Virginia PTA is advocating for increased investment in school nurses and unified mental health teams. The VA PTA lobbied for years—and in 2020 secured funding to increase the ratio of [school counselors](#) to students and in 2021 secured \$50M to fund a new [standard](#) of

three specialized student support personnel per 1,000 students to include school counselors, school nurses, social workers, psychologists, and other licensed health and behavioral positions.

Now, in 2022, they are advocating for school counselors and unified mental health teams to be funded at nationally recommended ratios.

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