



FUND HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION

Virginia's schools receive less K-12 funding than the 50-state average, the South-Atlantic regional average, and three bordering states (KY, MD, WV). Virginia's Standards of Quality funding formula underestimates staffing needed to serve Virginia's students, uses recession-era caps to limit funding, and fails to adequately account for the higher costs of educating students at-risk due to poverty, special education or English learner needs. Virginia's over-reliance on local governments to fund a high-quality education has fueled a shortage of fully licensed teachers and contributed to achievement gaps.

The General Assembly should implement the near-term recommendations made by Virginia's Joint Legislative Audit & Review Commission to reflect actual school division staffing.

- **Eliminate Support Cap and Recession Era caps:** Support staff balance teacher workload and provide services that impact academic success. The Support Cap effectively reduces overall Basic Aid which impacts support, instruction, and all other division operations.
- **Simplify staffing ratios to reflect actual practice and compensation:** Piecemeal changes based on available revenue has not kept up with prevailing practice for school staffing. In FY21, school divisions employed 51% more staff than calculated by the SOQ formula.
 - Adopt staffing ratios based on actual school division practices
 - Calculate salaries using division average instead of linear-weighted avg.
 - Account for small divisions inability to achieve economies of scale.
 - Implement student-based Special Education & English Learner funding.
- **Revise low-income funding formula and include At-Risk Add-On in SOQ:** Update calculation to reflect the school meal Community Eligibility Program by using the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) measure which identifies 53% of Virginia's students at-risk rather than relying on a historical record of free-lunch meal applications that only identifies 39% of free-lunch eligible/at-risk students.

SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING

State special education funding uses more than 60 staffing ratios and student weights depending on student disability and time in the classroom, yet there is limited data collected or publicly provided on the numbers of teachers, aides, and students (by diagnosed disability) in self-contained classrooms. Underfunding, understaffing and lack of adequate professional development perpetuates an achievement gap for students with disabilities

- **Professional Development/Certification:** Teachers and IEP member teams should have professional development or certification in special education instruction and co-teaching; management of individualized education programs; applies studies diploma, transition planning; and handling complaints
- **Funding Formula:** Staffing levels should be determined by a workload analysis or student-need SOQ formula to improve identification, instruction quality, and staff retention.
- **Special Education Data:** Publicly provide disaggregated staffing data based on disability.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

More than 1 in 8 Virginia students are current English Language (EL) or former EL students. English Language students faced unique challenges during the pandemic and had the most significant drop in state achievement scores of any student groups measured for state reading, math, and science tests.

- Implement student-based funding or implement a scaled staffing ratio that takes into account the different proficiency level of students and the instructional staff required to support EL students.
- Increase funding for school division translators and resources to increase communication with parents.

MENTAL HEALTH

Virginia ranks 48th nationally in providing access to mental health care for youth, and suicide is the second leading cause of death for 10-24 year olds. Ninety-one percent of Virginians live in an area with a shortage of mental health professionals resulting in 60% of Virginia's youth with major depression not receiving treatment.

- Support funding Unified Mental Health teams at nationally recommended ratios of (1:250) for school counselors; (1:500) for psychologists; and (1:250) for social workers and/or support staff at (4:1,000)
- Support flexible funding to facilitate schools partnering with community-based mental health providers.
- Expand access to tele-mental health services, Crisis Receiving Centers and Recovery High Schools.
- Support a Medicaid rate study to include school-based mental health services and technical assistance to school divisions to bill Medicaid for school-based services

SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION

Virginia is ranked by the CDC as one of nine states with a significant increase in drug overdoses for all ages. A lethal dose of fentanyl is small enough to fit on the tip of a pencil and cannot be identified in other drugs by sight, smell, or taste which can lead to accidental overdose.

- Support youth evidence-based comprehensive substance use education, prevention and early intervention programs as well as education on how to identify and respond to an overdose.
- Support school staffing requirements for substance abuse counselors.
- Support naloxone supplies in schools and staff/ bus driver training on overdose recognition and response.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE

School violence and disciplinary problems have escalated in the last several years. Students and educators have a right to attend schools that are safe and conducive to learning and achievement.

- Support funding and research to implement evidence-based strategies, physical improvements, and increased mental health resources to reduce bullying, school violence, shootings, and substance abuse.

STUDENT DATA PRIVACY & SECURITY

Student laptops, digital learning in K-12 classrooms, on-line research sources, and prevalent cell phone and social media use raises new concerns about youth data privacy, on-line safety, and youth mental health. Parents and students should have ability to easily monitor and control their data, privacy, and security settings.

- Support parental notice & consent before provider collects youth personally identifiable information.
- Support prohibiting the sale of student data, and/or its use to target advertising to students/families.
- Support raising the age for parental consent from 13 to 16 and expanding protections for children on-line to include mobile applications and ability for students and parents to delete youth content.

- Support professional development for educators and administrators on handling student data.
- Support clear, accessible, easy to read privacy policies provided to families & students as well as information on data lifecycle management including destruction of stale data and data breaches.

ASSESSMENTS & REPORTING

Accountability systems that provide multiple measures of student growth and achievement provide valuable information to students, families, teachers, and school leaders to guide new instruction.

- **Reduce Testing:** Support a strategic assessment system that eliminates unnecessary testing.
- **Measure Growth:** Support high-quality comprehensive assessment systems that measure student growth and enable teachers to align instruction to improve student learning.
- **Professional Development:** Support professional development that helps teachers guide instruction and support evidenced-based interventions for identified students, as well as communicate with parents.
- **Reporting:** Support improved communication to students and parents regarding how to leverage growth assessments; strategies to support learning at home; school-wide assessment results and academic goals.
- **School Quality Profiles:** Should be available in commonly spoken world languages and provide literacy measures, school climate data, mental health data, threat assessment data, and staffing for at risk students

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & CHILDCARE

Education received during the first five years of a child's life is important to a child's long-term academic success. Reliable, high-quality, affordable child-care also enables families to work and earn an income.

- Support funding and programs that expand access to pre-school for at-risk three- and four-year old children.
- Support programs and funding that improves and expands childcare affordability.
- Support reporting on measures of quality for childcare that enables families to make informed choices, provides feedback to teachers, and is indicative of positive child outcomes.
- Support evidenced-based, integrated, and comprehensive curriculum for early childhood education.
- Support programs and funding for ongoing training and retention of early childcare teachers.

LITERACY INSTRUCTION & ACCESS

Reading is foundational to student academic success. Scientifically-based reading research and evidence-based practices for instruction, intervention, and assessments are essential to reading success and future academic achievement. A school library is essential in supporting each school's instructional program and supports academic achievement.

- Support increase in reading specialists for grades 4-8 (1:550), literacy coaches, and support staffing based on students identified as not proficient on PALS and SOL assessments.
- Support funding for school/classroom libraries to maintain of up-to-date library collections
- Support full time librarian for every school and media specialists based on enrollment
- Support access to library collections, inclusion of parents and educators on book selection and challenge committees and supplemental instructional material selection and review committees.
- Support family engagement programs that raise awareness of evidence-based literacy instruction, intervention and assessment practices and grant programs that increase access to books starting at birth.

FOOD SECURITY & SCHOOL NUTRITION

Proper nutrition is imperative to the health, development, and academic achievement of children. More than 590,000 students rely on free or reduced-price meals and many also face food insecurity in the evening and on weekends.

- Support continuation of the free school meal program for all students.
- Support infrastructure funding to modernize equipment in school cafeterias and provide training programs that expand access to meals that are scratch-cooked using whole, fresh, and/or minimally processed ingredients.
- Expand access to grants, incentives, and staffing that enables schools to procure and serve more locally grown food and provide hands-on learning in school gardens.
- Support high-quality, high-nutrition school meals and discontinuing competitive food sales at mealtimes.
- Support daily school meal offerings that are inclusive of dietary, religious, or cultural meal options.
- Support inclusion of students, parents, and school staff on school meal and wellness committees.

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE & BROADBAND

Building quality and access to the internet impacts student success. More than half of Virginia's school buildings are over 50 years old. 22% are not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. 40% are at or above capacity. 5% lack sufficient broadband. Dedicated state funding is needed meet modern health & safety standards.

- Dedicated funding and Standards of Quality are needed for school building renovation and new school construction in order to meet modern health, safety, instructional, and technology standards.

CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Career Technical Education programs prepare students for high wage, high skill, and high demand careers in existing and emerging industries, while meeting the Commonwealth's need for well-trained and industry-certified technical workers.

- Support funding CTE programs, including registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs, expansion of career education pathways, and market-driven compensation for CTE instructors.
- Support communication and programs that celebrate and encourage participation in CTE programs.