



JLARC PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

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.

- **Eliminate Support Cap:** Support staff balance teacher workload, provide services that impact academic success and ensure a safe learning environment. The cap on funding Support Staff (24:1,000) reduces overall basic aid which limits school division flexibility to meet instructional and operational needs.
- **Fix inaccurate low-income At-Risk Add-On and include in SOQ:** The current At-Risk Add-On formula uses historic meal applications that only identify 39% of free-lunch eligible (at-risk) students. Using the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) identifies 53% of Virginia's at-risk students and reflects current division-wide use of the school meal Community Eligibility Program (CEP).
- **Create Add-On for Special Education & English Learner Students:** Specialized instructional and support services help higher-need students succeed academically. Funding should reflect the division level enrollment of high-need students.
- **Use staffing ratios that reflect actual practice and compensation:** Piecemeal changes based on available revenue have not kept up with prevailing staffing practices. School divisions employed 51% more staff (in FY21) than the SOQs.
 - 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.

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

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.

- **Statewide Individualized Education Program (IEP) System:** Develop statewide IEP to create consistency and transparency in IEP writing, implementation, and monitoring.
- **Professional Development/Certification:** Teachers/IEP teams need targeted training in SPED instruction, co-teaching, IEPs, applied studies diploma, and transition planning.
- **Funding Formula:** Workload analysis or student-need SOQ add-on staff funding is needed to improve SPED identification, instruction quality, and staff retention.
- **Special Education Data:** Publicly provide disaggregated staffing data based on disability.

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.

- **Staffing:** Fund 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)
- **Community Partners, Tele-Mental Health & Innovation:** Support flexible funding programs that enable to schools to partner with community-based mental health providers and expand access to tele-mental health services, Crisis Receiving Centers, and Recovery High Schools.
- **Medicaid Rate Study:** 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.

- **Education:** 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.
- **Staffing:** Support school staffing requirements for substance abuse counselors.
- **Naloxone:** Support naloxone in schools and staff/ bus driver training on overdose recognition/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.

SOCIAL MEDIA & STUDENT DATA

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, and effectively communicate with parents.
- **Performance Reporting:** Support improved communication to students and parents regarding assessment results, academic goals and how to support learning at home.
- **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
- **State-wide Student Information System:** Support development of a federated system that provides access to high-quality, real-time data to analyze enrollment, staffing, and student performance patterns.

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.

- **Access:** Support funding/programs that expand access to pre-school for at-risk 3–4 year old children.
- **Affordability:** Support programs and funding that improves and expands childcare affordability.
- **Reporting:** 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.
- **High -Quality:** Support evidenced-based, integrated, and comprehensive early childhood curriculum.
- **Retention:** 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 high-quality school library is essential to supporting instruction and academic achievement.

- **Reading Specialists:** 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.
- **Library Funding:** Support funding for school/classroom libraries to maintain up-to-date book collections.
- **Librarian Staffing:** Support a full-time librarian per school and media specialists based on enrollment.
- **Collection Access:** Support access to library collections, inclusion of parents and educators on book selection/challenge committees, and supplemental instructional material selection and review committees.
- **Family Engagement Literacy Programs:** Support programs that raise awareness of evidence-based literacy instruction, intervention, and assessment practices, and which expand 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/reduced-price meals and many face food insecurity in the evening and on weekends.

- **Free Meals:** Support continuation of the free school meal program for all students.
- **Fresh, High-Quality Scratch-Cooked:** 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, and meals that meet all student dietary needs.
- **Local Produce & School Gardens:** Expand programs that enable schools to procure and serve more locally grown food and support programs that provide hands-on learning in school gardens.
- **Wellness Committees:** Support inclusion of students, parents, and school staff on school meal and wellness committees.

SCHOOL BUILDING QUALITY

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.

- Provide all counties and cities with the ability to impose a local sales and use tax up to one percent to fund the construction or renovation of schools if such levy is approved in a voter referendum.
- 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.

Virginia PTA is the oldest and largest non-partisan, child advocacy volunteer association in Virginia with more than 130,000 members who are committed to building family to school partnerships and advocating for the academic success, health and well-being of all children. As the leader in supporting local school parent groups, Virginia PTA strengthens Virginia's schools and communities by providing non-profit technical support, leadership training, family engagement toolkits, student recognition, advocacy tools and parent education resources for approximately 900 school communities across Virginia.