

Virginia PTA

Child Advocates of the Year

2024-2025



Jessica Blandy

Individual Child Advocate of the Year (Blue Ridge Region, Roanoke City Council of PTA/PTSAs)

Over the past two years, Jessica Blandy created a tidal wave of support for funding Roanoke City Public Schools in the face of proposed and actual budget cuts from the City of Roanoke. She worked together with the school division to understand and become educated on the facts and then garnered support from PTAs across Roanoke City Council PTA, PTA members, and the community at large. Jessica's ability to connect with people of all backgrounds and truly listen has increased attendance at Council PTA meetings and empowered parents and staff to speak up and advocate for fully funding Roanoke City Public Schools. Jessica sees advocacy and engagement as a 24/7/365 effort, and she keeps a finger on the pulse of many issues affecting the Roanoke region. She doesn't simply provide high-level summaries to her members of relevant issues, but instead provides detailed information, which increases credibility when members speak out with the facts. Jessica's leadership of the Roanoke City Council PTA and efforts to mobilize and engage families has created a true momentum of advocacy in Roanoke and is a testament to the power of the PTA.



Maureen McNulty

Individual Child Advocate of the Year (Northern Region, Alexandria City Council of PTA/PTSAs)

Maureen McNulty has been a champion advocate for the Alexandria City Public Schools budget process for the last several years. Not only has she personally advocated to the school board and city council meetings, but she also developed a campaign to educate the community on the budget process and how they could get involved. Maureen's approach to advocacy always incorporates the power of sharing information and resources through community engagement events and through a strong social media campaign. In a tremendously diverse community, Maureen has broken down cultural barriers by holding meetings in Spanish at local community centers because she understands that every family wants their children to thrive in good public schools. Maureen ensured that the budget process didn't just sit in board room discussions. She took key budget points from a complicated process and created an easily digestible social media campaign with actionable items, and she designed toolkits for local PTAs to share key messaging and talking points. Maureen's advocacy efforts have created a culture of advocacy in Alexandria and been a model for PTA leaders across Alexandria.



Hardy Elementary School PTA

Local PTA Child Advocate of the Year (Tidewater Region, Isle of Wight County)

Hardy Elementary School PTA has been working hard to tackle a wide variety of issues of importance to their school community. They successfully pushed to replace school buses that exceeded their lifespan, securing funding for five new school buses this year, with an additional purchases planned over the next two years. They also advocated for increasing bus driver salaries to reduce bus route splitting and ensure consistent, safe transportation for all students. Hardy Elementary PTA actively advocated for funding the Isle of Wight School Board budget, a 3% staff pay increase, infrastructure improvements, and updated equipment for Career Technical Education classes. Using social media, letters to the editor in the local paper, and frequent school board meeting appearances has resulted in real, tangible improvements for their students. Hardy Elementary PTA's open communication and focus on educating their community about local, state, and federal issues that impact their students exemplifies a commitment to engaging and empowering families to take action for all children.

Virginia PTA

Child Advocates of the Year Legislative

2024-2025



Senator Ghazala Hashmi

Virginia State Senator, 15th District

Senator Ghazala Hashmi represents parts of Chesterfield County and Richmond City in the Virginia State Senate. She also serves as the Chair of the Senate Education and Health Committee. As a former college educator, Senator Hashmi has championed issues of importance to Virginia schools such as additional funding for English language learners, and increased access to mental health resources. In particular, Senator Hashmi has been a champion for fully funding public schools and implementing changes proposed by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission. Her focus on securing funding to update outdated funding formulas would correct the state's chronic underfunding of public education and ensure that students have the resources they need to be successful. Her leadership has been instrumental in lifting the final provisions of the recession era support cap that has limited funding for a generation of Virginia's students.



Delegate Sam Rasoul

Virginia State Delegate, 38th District

Representing the City of Roanoke in the Virginia House of Delegates, Sam Rasoul also serves as the Chair of the House Education Committee. Delegate Rasoul is a champion for public education and has supported many issues of importance to Virginia students including social-emotional learning, expanding farm to school programs, piloting community schools, improving career and technical training, and access to mental health resources. During the 2025 General Assembly Session, Delegate Rasoul led the effort on the House side to finally remove the staff support cap and implement all of the short term policy recommendations made by the Joint Legislative Audit Review Committee. These long-overdue policy changes focus on improving staffing and resources for our students, including specifically implementing a new supplemental add-on for special education students.



Delegate Shelly Simonds

Virginia State Delegate, 70th District

Delegate Simonds represents the Newport News area in the Virginia House of Delegates. In her role as the Chair of the House Education K-12 sub-committee, Delegate Simonds has been a constant advocate for schools, families and educators. Having been a teacher in Newport News public schools, Delegate Simonds has been outspoken in the areas of teacher pay and training, additional funding resources for special education and english language learner students, and the unique needs of students in military families. Delegate Simonds advocacy over the past two sessions has brought focus to lifting the decade old cap that restricts funding for essential support staff. This session she championed legislation to improve student math outcomes by increasing funding for math specialists and expanding teacher access to math micro-credentialing programs.