2026 PRIORITIES

Virginia PTA
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*The **Virginia PTA** is the oldest and largest nonpartisan child advocacy volunteer association in the Commonwealth, 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, the Virginia PTA strengthens Virginia's schools and communities by providing nonprofit technical support, leadership training, family engagement toolkits, student recognition, advocacy tools, and parent education resources for approximately 900 school communities across Virginia.*

FULLY FUND THE ACTUAL COST OF EDUCATION

The Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly to uphold their constitutional duty to fund free, high-quality education for all children in the Commonwealth. Virginia's outdated funding formula fails to account for the true costs of educating our students and vastly underestimates the necessary investments in our teachers and staff. Virginia's overreliance on local governments to fund education has fueled inequities across the Commonwealth, led to a shortage of highly qualified teachers, and contributed to significant achievement gaps. Federal funding cuts and freezes have further aggravated this problem and highlighted the need for full funding of our schools at the state level.

- **Adequate Resources for High-Need Students**
  - Codify add-on funding secured in the 2025 legislative session.
  - Increase add-on funding to accurately reflect the true cost of educating high-needs students.
  - Fund resources that reflect the division-level enrollment of high-needs students.
- **Increased Teacher and Staff Pay**
  - Support best-in-class compensation practices for teachers and staff that accurately reflect their education and training needs.
  - Calculate salaries using division averages instead of linear-weighted averages.
- **Sufficient Numbers of Faculty and Staff**
  - Adopt staffing ratios based on actual school division practices.
  - Account for small divisions' inability to achieve economies of scale and large divisions' greater need for administrative staff.
- **Fully Funded Public Schools**
  - Support increasing revenue and revenue streams to fully fund the Commonwealth's obligation.
  - Increase funding to compensate for lower levels of funding from federal and local governments.

FOOD SECURITY AND SCHOOL NUTRITION

Proper nutrition is essential for 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. Federal funding of school meal programs has been inadequate, necessitating greater support from the Commonwealth.

- **Universal Free Meals**
  - Support universal free meals for all children.
  - Enhance programs that support food security outside of school hours.
- **Fresh, High-Quality Food**
  - Provide infrastructure funding to modernize equipment in school cafeterias.
  - Offer training programs that expand access to meals that are cooked from scratch using whole, fresh, and minimally processed ingredients, and that meet all student dietary needs.
- **Local Produce and School Gardens**
  - Expand initiatives that enable schools to procure and serve more locally grown food.
  - Support programs that provide hands-on learning in school gardens.
- **Wellness Committees**
  - Include students, parents, and school staff in school meal and wellness committees.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENTS

The new VDOE Accountability and Performance Framework creates unnecessary new fifth- and eighth-grade performance task testing not tied to SOL curriculum. It evaluates middle schools based on high school coursework and includes ELL test results prior to English proficiency. VDOE staffing is inadequate to provide substantive academic improvement to schools designated as “Off-Track” or “Needs Intensive Support.”

- **Targeted Funding for Schools Performing Below Standard**
  - Extend additional funding, staff, and resources to students and schools identified as not meeting expected targets for growth or mastery.
- **Reduced Testing**
  - Support a high-quality assessment system that measures growth, informs future instruction, and eliminates high-stakes testing and tests not tied to current SOL curriculum.
- **High-Quality Instructional Materials**
  - Support the development and exchange of high-quality instructional resources for teachers across schools and divisions.
- **Adequate Implementation Timelines**
  - Provide realistic timelines for teacher professional development and rollout of new standards.
- **Better Performance Reporting**
  - Support timely student assessment results and school quality profiles in commonly spoken languages for students and families.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

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 perpetuate an achievement gap for students with disabilities.

- **Adequate Special Education Funding**
  - Increase funding for staffing and staff compensation, SPED identification, instruction quality, and staff retention.
- **Targeted Professional Development and Certification**
  - Train teachers/IEF teams in SPED instruction, co-teaching, IEPs, applied studies diplomas, and transition planning.
- **Greater Access to Special Education Data**
  - Make disaggregated staffing data based on disability publicly available.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND SAFETY

Students and educators have a right to attend schools that are safe and conducive to learning and achievement.

- **Safety and Violence Prevention Resources**
  - Support funding and research to implement evidence-based strategies, physical improvements, and mental health resources to reduce bullying, school violence, shootings, and substance abuse.
- **Transparency and Parental Input on Safety Policies**
  - Ensure that school districts seek parental input when developing best practices related to threats of school violence.
  - Require that agreed-upon policies be made public and accessible to families and community members.
- **Quick and Informative Safety Alerts**
  - Mandate that school administrators swiftly and transparently communicate to families during and following threats and also extend resources to aid in age-appropriate follow-up with their students.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND STUDENT DATA

The prevalence of student laptops, cellphones, social media use, and digital learning and research in K-12 classrooms raises concerns about youth data privacy, online safety, and mental health. Parents and students should have the ability to easily monitor and control their data, privacy, and security settings.

- **Safekeeping Student Data**
  - Prohibit the sale of student data or its use to target advertising at students and families.
  - Support professional development for educators and administrators regarding handling student data.
  - Provide families with accessible and easy-to-read privacy policies as well as information on data lifecycle management (including the destruction of stale data) and data breaches.

- **Online Protection of Youth**
  - Support raising the age for parental consent from 13 to 16.
  - Expand protections for children online to include mobile apps.
  - Allow students and parents to delete youth content.

MATH AND LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Reading and math proficiency are foundational to academic success. Evidence-based practices for instruction, intervention, and assessments and high-quality teachers, curriculum, and materials set up students for success in these areas.

- **Math Specialists and Micro credentialing**
  - Support funding for math specialists and coaches as well as math micro credentialing programs to improve math instruction and achievement.
- **Math Access and Pathways**
  - Improve identification of students and expand counseling resources to communicate math pathways.
- **Reading Specialists and Literacy Coaches**
  - Hire more reading specialists for grades 6 through 8 (at a 1:550 ratio), literacy coaches, and support staff based on the numbers of students identified as not proficient on growth and SOL assessments.

MENTAL HEALTH

Virginia ranks 48th nationally in providing access to mental healthcare 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, which helps explain why 60 percent of youth with major depression do not receive treatment in the Commonwealth.

- **Improved Mental Health 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 support staff.
- **Innovative Models for Mental Healthcare**
  - Support flexible funding programs that enable schools to partner with community-based mental health providers.
  - Expand access to telemental health services, crisis receiving centers, and recovery high schools.

CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Career Technical Education (CTE) 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.

- **Promoting CTE Pathways**
  - Fund registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs as well as market-driven compensation for CTE instructors.
  - Expand career education pathways and programs that celebrate and encourage participation in CTE programs.