



CAPITOL ISSUES February 27, 2026

2026 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

By David Ellena, Ed.D., VASSP Director of Government Relations

The 2026 General Assembly session is rapidly approaching its conclusion. The Assembly is scheduled to adjourn, *sin die*, on March 14. Both chambers are working quickly to address bills from the opposite chamber. Today we will focus on bills that VASSP has voiced concerns about during the session. We will look at where those bills are currently.

House Bills

[HB38](#)-Requires each teacher and other relevant personnel, as determined by the applicable school board, employed on a full-time basis to complete mental health awareness training that addresses the needs of youth populations that are at a high risk of experiencing mental health challenges and disorders in accordance with evidence-based best practices developed by the American Psychological Association. This bill would require mental health awareness training for full time employees as determined by the school board at least once.

[HB182](#)-Requires the Board of Education, in establishing high school graduation requirements, to permit any student to substitute the African American History course or the Advanced Placement African American Studies course for the World History I course or the World Geography course for the purpose of satisfying the history and social studies credit requirements. There is a companion bill in the Senate ([SB427](#)). The bill does not require this course to be offered, simply stating that if it is available it can be substituted for another course. It has passed both houses and has been sent to the Governor.

[HB201](#)-Requires each local school board to develop and implement a policy to require the annual notification of the parent of each student enrolled in the local school division, to be sent by email and, if applicable, SMS text message within 30 calendar days succeeding the first day of each school year. There is a companion bill in the Senate ([SB109](#)). There are several things that must be included in this communication. Those guidelines should come from the school board. It has passed both houses and has been sent to the Governor.

[HB298](#)-Prohibits any public elementary or secondary school student from being suspended, expelled, or excluded from attendance at school unless the school first considers at least one evidence-based restorative disciplinary practice, as defined in the bill, except in the case of certain serious enumerated firearm or drug offenses or aggravating circumstances, as defined in the bill. This bill has been altered from its first draft. It now includes the word “consider” instead of “implement”, which is a huge change. The Senate has offered a substitute which will now return to the House for approval.

[HB333](#)-Permits a school board to provide a program of instruction on or relating to the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the United States Capitol to public school students only in accordance with the requirements of the bill. The bill allows schools to include instruction on the events of January 6, 2022, provided they meet the requirements set forth in the bill. It has passed the Senate.

[HB355](#)-Requires, no later than September 1, 2027, the Board of Education, in consultation with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and any other stakeholder that the Board deems appropriate, to (i) develop, identify, or procure and make available to each school board at no cost an evidence-based tool or evidence-based tools for the mental health screening of each public school student in grades six through 12 and (ii) develop, adopt, distribute to each school board, and post publicly and conspicuously on its website guidance and model procedures for annual mental health screenings for each such student, with certain content enumerated in the bill. The bill requires, beginning with the 2028-2029 school year, each school board to ensure that each student in grades six through 12 in the local school division is screened at least annually using such screening tool, unless the student's parents opt the student out of such screening. The Senate offered a substitute, which will be returned to the House for approval.

[HB461](#)-Establishes a maximum age range of three years for children with disabilities in grades kindergarten through six in non-general educational settings and prohibits any student with a disability in grades kindergarten through six from being placed in any educational setting in which the maximum age range exceeds three years unless the student's individualized education program (IEP) team determines that an exception is appropriate and justifies such exception in the student's IEP. There was a substitute offered by the subcommittee.

[HB1301](#)-Establishes several provisions relating to student diabetes medical care and management in public elementary and secondary schools in the Commonwealth, including requiring division-wide plans in each school division. This bill incorporates [HB 624](#) and contains a reenactment clause. There is a companion bill in the Senate ([SB122](#)). The Senate offered a substitute which is headed back to the House.

Senate Bills

[SB19](#)-Policies relating to instructional material that contains sexually explicit content; applicability; construction. Amends current law requiring the Department of Education to develop model policies and each school board to adopt policies consistent with the Department's model policies for ensuring parental notification of any instructional material that includes sexually explicit content by (i) defining "instructional material" as any material, regardless of its format, assigned and provided to a student by a public school teacher directly for the completion of an assignment or curricular objective and clarifying that "instructional material" does not include any book or audiovisual material available in a public school library unless specifically required or assigned by a public school teacher directly for completion of an assignment or curricular objective and (ii) providing that nothing in the applicable law or any model policy or amendments thereto adopted by the Department or any policy or amendments thereto adopted by a school board pursuant to the applicable law shall be (a) construed to permit the censoring of books in any public elementary or secondary school or (b) utilized as a rationale or basis for the removal of books from any public elementary or secondary school. It has passed both chambers and is headed to the Governor.

[SB63](#)-Requires the Board of Education to permit any student who is simultaneously pursuing an advanced studies diploma and an International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma to complete certain courses or sequences of courses required for an IB diploma, as approved by the Board, including substitutes for the Virginia and U.S. history and government courses and for the economics and personal finance credit requirement. This bill has passed both chambers.

[SB108](#)-Amends the requirements for the student cell phone and smart device possession and use policies that each school board is required to develop and each public elementary and secondary school is required to implement pursuant to applicable law to require such policies to, except as provided in applicable law, prohibit student cell phone and smart device possession and use on school property from bell to bell. The House Subcommittee has offered a substitute for this bill. It will head back to the Senate for approval.

Please try to find some time and peruse the bills listed. You will find the complete list of House bills and their status [HERE](#). The complete list of Senate bills is [HERE](#). Visit [Virginia's Legislative Information System](#) to read the history of any bill or resolution, all amendments, and the text of the legislation. In reviewing these bills, please do not hesitate to share with me your thoughts or ask any questions about the proposed legislation. I can be contacted at dellena@vassp.org.
Thank you!



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There will be a session dedicated to the actions of the General Assembly and the effects on school administrators during the School Law Clinic at the 98th Annual Virginia Middle and High School Principals Conference & Exposition at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel in Williamsburg, June 22- 25, 2026.



To register for the annual conference click [HERE](#).

The 2026 session of the General Assembly has been underway since January 14 with both the House and Senate controlled by Democrats. With a Democrat governor, Virginia essentially now has one part rule.

Below is a report I recently shared with the VASSP Board of Directors. President Melanie Patterson and CEO Randy Barrack suggested that this information be shared with our entire membership. It includes minutes of our Virginia Public Education Coalition (VPEC), State Board of Education Updates – October through December – and my General Assembly Report.

Please try to find some time and peruse the bills listed. Tuesday, February 17th is the last day for bills to be acted upon in their chambers of origin, other than the budget bills. Bills must “cross over” to the opposite chamber by Wednesday, February 18. In reviewing these bills, please do not hesitate to share with me your thoughts or ask any questions about the proposed legislation. I can be contacted at dellena@vassp.org.

VIRGINIA PUBLIC EDUCATION COALITION Notes

- Minutes
 - [November](#)

- [December](#)
- [January](#)
- [VPEC Legislative Priorities](#)

Board of Education Updates

- **October**
 - [Update on School Supports](#)
 - [Licensure Recommendations](#)
- **November**
 - [Universal Screenings for Gifted and Advanced Studies](#)
 - [Perkins Plan Updates and Next Steps](#)
 - [Overview of Supports for Students with Disabilities](#)
 - [VLA Intervention Instructional Program Guides](#)
- **December**
 - [Teachers Salaries and Vacancies](#)
 - [SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND SUPPORT FRAMEWORK RESULTS](#)
 - [Student and Schools Support Overview](#)
 - [Accreditation Report and Next Steps](#)

GENERAL ASSEMBLY UPDATE

Budget Updates

- [HB30](#)
- [HB30 Education](#)
- [SB30](#)
- [SB30 Education](#)
- [U.S. Senate Fundraising: End of 2025](#)
- [U.S. House Fundraising: End of 2025](#)
- [VPAP](#)

Bills Update

- All [House Bills](#)
- All [Senate Bills](#)
- Key Bills to Watch
 - House
 - [HB333](#)-Teaching of January 6 events
 - [HB359](#)-Funding private school attendance
 - [HB31](#)-Mental health training for staff
 - [HB38](#)-IB courses and diplomas
 - [HB138](#)-Requires a Career Coach at each high school
 - [HB182](#)-Substitutes for US History and Government
 - [HB201](#)-Notification of prescription drugs and firearms, safe storage
 - [HB236](#)-Library materials review processes. Prohibits censorship, requires a process to review and reclassify materials.

- [HB298](#)-Requires at least one evidence-based restorative disciplinary practice, as defined in the bill, except in the case of certain serious enumerated firearm or drug offenses or aggravating circumstances.
- [HB355](#)-Requires mental health screening once a year for grades 6-12.
- [HB362](#)-Requires that printed textbooks are the primary instructional source.
- [HB410](#)-SAT tests required during the school day. Participation in SAT DAY program.
- [HB428](#)-Deals with diplomas for students with disabilities. High school people?
- [HB461](#)-Requires no more than a 3 year age range in noneducation settings, through grade 6.
- [HB462](#)-Adds health care instruction to middle and high school economics education and financial literacy instruction.
- [HB473](#)-special education dispute resolution system; administration, organization, oversight, and training; regional special education ombudsman established.
- [HB532](#)-inform at least one parent of a minor student enrolled in such school if such minor requests that any such employee participate while at school in the social affirmation of such minor student's gender incongruence or the transition of such minor student to a sex or gender different from the minor's biological sex, approval of one parent to implement plan.
- Senate
 - [SB19](#)-Defines "instructional material".
 - [SB63](#)-IB and Advanced diploma standards. High school people?
 - [SB108](#)-Prohibits cell phone possession bell to bell.
 - [SB109](#)-safe storage of drugs and firearms.
 - [SB122](#)-Diabetes management. Allows students to self-administer.
 - [SB147](#)-Alternative pathways to standard diplomas.
 - [SB200](#)-Standards of Learning assessments and related assessment methods; development, administration, scoring, and release.
 - [SB234](#)-school principal to request a meeting to discuss parental responsibilities with the parent of any student who violates a school board policy or student code of conduct by engaging in bullying and such student's record evidences a pattern of repeated violations involving engaging in bullying or the principal determines that the severity of the incident requires further invention.
 - [SB264](#)-indicate whether a child has a disability that affects social skills development and whether the child is vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing.
 - [SB265](#)-Makes it a Class 1 misdemeanor to commit an act of aggravated bullying or aggravated cyberbullying, as defined in the

bill, against any student enrolled in any elementary or secondary school or institution of higher education.

- [SB427](#)-African History/Studies substitute.
- [SB491](#)-Discrimination based on immigration status.
- [SB561](#)-Bathroom availability based on biological sex. Places responsibility on the Principal. Reeves.
- [SB563](#)-Opting out of lessons and materials. Sturtevant.
- [SB603](#)-Student life counseling. Permissive. Sturtevant.

	<p style="text-align: center;">Click Here</p> <p style="text-align: center;">A popular website to track legislation in the Commonwealth</p>
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