

2021 PRIORITIES



Virginia
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PRESERVE & RESTORE EDUCATION FUNDING

COVID-19 has exposed long standing inequities in state education funding that are a direct result of a historic over-reliance on local real estate taxes to fund education. A strong education program enables Virginia's current and future economy to thrive. It's imperative that state education funding be preserved in order to provide school divisions with stability as they work to provide safe in-person instruction and robust distance learning.

- Protect education funding from fluctuations in sales tax revenue.
- Delay the student enrollment adjustment until March 2022.
- Maximize opportunities to utilize CARES and other federal funding sources.
- Restore education funding that was un-allotted at the start of the pandemic.

SCHOOL EQUITY & STAFFING

Virginia ranks 41st in the nation for per pupil state spending and 33rd for early childhood education. Over the past decade the number of economically disadvantaged students, English language learners and students with disabilities has increased. While the Virginia Board of Education has recommended targeted improvements to address the teacher shortage, ensure schools are equitably staffed and support our most at-risk students, those recommendations have not been funded by the General Assembly.

- Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly to adopt a plan to fund the Board of Education's Standards of Quality recommendations to reflect actual staffing practices and fund the state's share of ***essential staff for every school***.
 - Full time principal for every elementary school
 - Full time librarian and technology teacher for every school
- Address inequities faced by our most vulnerable student populations by fully funding the At-Risk Add-On and Equity Fund.
- Lift the 2009 recession-era Support Position Cap & flexibility waivers
- Provide state funding for mandated staffing and training requirements

INTERNET ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY

Fourteen percent of K-12 students in Virginia don't have broadband access at home and 12% of Virginia's K-12 students don't have a computer at home. To support distance learning and close the digital divide, it's imperative that every Virginian, regardless of their affluence level or geographic location, have access to affordable broadband.

- Support an increased budget for Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI).
- Provide each student and teacher with a laptop or device that supports instruction.
- Identify and map gaps in broadband coverage to target improving accessibility.
- Implement affordability programs that streamline utilization of federal funds to help connect low-income families to the high speed broadband.

COVID-19 SAFETY & LEARNING

SCHOOL NURSES: Virginia PTA supports a multi-factor health assessment staffing approach that not only meets the chronic and acute health needs of students, but also identifies social determinants of health to determine effective school nurse workloads. Virginia PTA supports one registered school nurse per school and trained para-professional school health aides working under a registered school nurse to meet the full health needs of a school.

LEARNING & FLEXIBLE FUNDING: Virginia PTA supports funding, resources and programs that allow local school boards the flexibility to implement plans that address COVID-19's impact on student learning.

EXPAND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for ages 15-34 and half of all lifetime mental illnesses are identified by age 14. Most students do not receive the mental health services they need due to stigma and lack of access to services and of those who do get help, most do so only in school.

- Virginia PTA supports funding Unified Mental Health teams at nationally recommended ratios of (1:250) for school counselors; (1:500-700) for psychologists; and (1:250) for social workers.
- Virginia PTA supports the implementation of social emotional curriculum standards and a trauma informed care approach.

TEACHER DIVERSITY TRANSPARANCY

Research shows that academic achievement increases when teachers reflect the same race, gender, cultural or linguistic background as their students. To focus on equity and closing the achievement gap, teacher diversity data should be publicly available on the School Quality Profiles.

- Virginia PTA supports transparent data practices and reporting teacher diversity data including race and languages spoken on the School Quality Profiles.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Education received during the first five years of a child's life is important to a child's long-term educational success. According to the Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program, almost half of Virginia children enter kindergarten without the basic skills they need to succeed in school.

- Virginia PTA supports expanding Virginia's Preschool Initiative and Mixed Delivery Grants in both public and private settings and maximizing the accessibility and affordability of early childhood programs.
- Virginia PTA supports a uniform measurement and an oversight, regulatory and improvement system that helps families make informed choices, provides feedback to teachers, and is indicative of positive child outcomes.

ADVANCE EQUITY & CULTURAL COMPETENCY

Celebrating the diversity of views, experiences, cultural heritages, traditions, skills, abilities, values and preferences has always been at the core of PTA's work and should be reflected in school policies.

- Enhance the Standards of Quality to include one full-time Chief Equity Officer per school division.
- Support programs that increase the diversity of teachers.
- Support required cultural sensitivity professional development for all school staff.
- Support a review history text books and curriculum to eliminate language, behavior or retelling of events that is stereotypical, demeaning, exclusionary, or judgmental and instead embrace cultural contexts with appreciation and celebration of cultures and their contributions to our society.

FOOD SECURITY & SCHOOL NUTRITION

Proper nutrition is imperative to the health, development and academic achievement of children. Prior to the onset of the current public health crisis, approximately 850,000 Virginians were food insecure, including 250,000 children. An estimated 445,000 additional Virginians are experiencing food insecurity because of COVID-19.

- Maintain access to free school meals through the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Support adoption of the Community Eligibility Program for eligible divisions and measures that reduce the stigma of receiving free or reduced-price meals and alleviate the burden of school meal debt.
- Expand access to grants, incentives and staffing programs that increase locally grown food served in school cafeterias, expand rural work-force education and provide hands-on learning in school gardens.
- Support strong school meal nutrition standards and discontinuing the sale of competitive foods as a part of the school meal program.

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE & CLEAN ENERGY

Quality of school buildings is a health, educational, and environmental equity issue for families and communities and should be a component of dedicated infrastructure spending. Implementing new solar and electric energy technologies can reduce and stabilize energy costs and fossil fuel pollution, thus creating a healthier environment for students while concurrently supporting STEAM learning.

- Building Modernization: Support dedicated funding for renovation, new construction and debt service costs as well as a statewide analysis of school building quality and renovation needs.
- Electric School Buses: Support funding, grants and incentive programs that enable school districts to purchase electric school buses and install charging stations and electric transportation infrastructure.
- Solar Panels for Schools: Increase access to clean energy solutions by removing net metering limits and barriers that limit school district's use of Power Purchase Agreements.

SCHOOL SAFETY

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

- Fund physical building improvements to provide secure entry identification and regular safety audits.
- Provide parent communication at the start of the school year regarding threat assessment protocols, emergency preparation drills, crisis response procedures and re-unification protocols.
- Support clearly defined Memorandums of Understanding with local law enforcement agencies, training programs for School Resource Officers and funding for SRO grant programs that support local control.
- Emergency preparedness for individuals with limited English proficiency, disabilities, or other special needs

WORLD LANGUAGES

Studying world languages results in higher scores in verbal and math standardized tests, strengthens critical thinking skills, creativity, problem solving capabilities and memory function. Additionally, it increases cultural awareness and is essential to attract business, engage in world trade, participate in scientific research, foster diplomacy and respond to global humanitarian emergencies.

- Virginia PTA urges the development of K-16 world language instructional program that supports new language acquisition, retention of heritage languages and programs to recruit and retain qualified world language teachers.