

2019 VSBA Legislative Priorities

Funding and Budget

Article VIII of the Virginia Constitution establishes public education as a shared responsibility. School Boards work in partnership with the General Assembly, Virginia Board of Education, and local appropriating bodies to provide education in the Commonwealth. Past changes to state funding for education widened existing gaps between the actual costs of services at the local level and the state's reimbursement for the provision of these services.

- VSBA supports full funding of all mandates and programs passed by the General Assembly. Partial funding or the absence of funding for mandates and programs causes additional burden on local school divisions.
- VSBA supports removing the SOQ Support Position cap.
- VSBA opposes vouchers or tuition tax-credits for non-public schools.

Local Control

- VSBA opposes any legislation which divests local school boards of their constitutional authority to supervise schools and interferes with the day-to-day activities of school boards and superintendents as they perform their constitutional responsibility.
- VSBA supports increased local control of the school calendar, including extended day, extended year and year-round school options without having to request a waiver.

School Safety

Students have a right to and school divisions have a responsibility to ensure a teaching/learning environment that is safe and free of disruption. There are incidents involving weapons, assaults and threats at schools which require interventions in addition to those school personnel are able and authorized to provide.

- The VSBA supports cooperation between state government, local communities, law enforcement agencies, and local school divisions to provide appropriate prevention and intervention programs that are effective in addressing violence, and the precursors to violence, in schools and their communities.
- The VSBA supports teacher preparation program expansions to include course work and practical experience in handling school violence and related issues.
- The VSBA also supports empowering leaders at the local level to make decisions with regard to health services for students, including staffing and funding of school nurses.
- The VSBA urges the General Assembly to:
 - Support local school division efforts to achieve strong, fair and consistent disciplinary expectations and applications to all students;
 - Appropriate sufficient funds to the School Resource Officer Grants Program so that each school board may choose whether to employ

uniformed officers in their schools, as well as sufficient funds for local school boards to use at their discretion in ensuring safe and respectful school environments through effective programs such as peer mediation, conflict resolution, character education, and other proactive initiatives appropriate for individual school communities

- Pass legislation which would afford greater protection to students, school employees, and volunteers who are exposed to bodily fluids which put them at risk of dangerous infectious diseases, and
- Oppose legislation requiring the designation of school personnel to carry concealed weapons in schools.
- The VSBA Supports the authority of local school boards to prohibit guns at all school-related functions/events regardless of setting.

School Modernization

A study of rural Virginia high schools demonstrated that student performance and building condition are correlated. Funding must be provided for new construction and renovations of public schools. State funding is essential to the provision of sufficient, safe, and instructionally appropriate school buildings for all students. The Commonwealth of Virginia must recognize the impending crisis in school construction needs and implement a new strategy to assist localities in funding their school capital needs. The State's objective should be to provide revenue to fund at least 55 percent of localities' school construction needs over the next five years without reducing or modifying other sources of State aid to education.

- The VSBA urges the Virginia General Assembly and the U.S. Congress to provide substantial and sustained funding to finance local school construction, renovation, and debt service costs with disbursements to local school boards.

Teacher Shortages

Effective teachers are essential to providing a high-quality education as required in the Constitution of Virginia. The recruitment and retention of teachers in the face of critical teacher shortages across regions and subject areas is essential to maintaining education quality.

- VSBA supports increased funding for teacher compensation.
- VSBA supports increased funding for the Virginia Teacher Scholarship Loan Program to encourage individuals to enter the teaching profession in shortage areas and to remain in Virginia.
- VSBA supports the allowance of alternative entry routes into the teaching profession to provide localities flexibility in hiring qualified persons who have not formally prepared for teaching careers.
- VSBA supports the provision of individual waivers by the Virginia Board of Education from specific licensure requirements that prohibit local school divisions from retaining otherwise qualified personnel who have demonstrated proficiency in the classroom and are teaching a critical shortage area.
- VSBA supports minority recruitment and promotional practices, including college scholarships for minority students entering the teaching profession.