

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

2019-2020



FUNDING FORMULA & STAFFING

MODERNIZE THE STANDARDS OF QUALITY (STATE STAFFING STANDARDS)

- Students who are economically disadvantaged, English learners, and students who need more intensive special education support have increased exponentially in the past 10 years.
- The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Virginia's implementation of Profile of a Virginia Graduate and expanded Career Technical Education has increased the role of school counselors.
- Changing role of technology and media has redefined job responsibilities.
- Increased use of on-line or remote learning opportunities has changed staff requirements in some classrooms.
- Support staff positions are vital to the operation of schools and provide vital support to instructional staff.
 - ***Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly to modernize the Standards of Quality to reflect actual school division staffing practices and to lift the 2009 Support Position Cap.***

UNIFIED MENTAL HEALTH TEAMS

- Crisis occurs when prevention fails. Mental Health teams are critical to creating a supportive school climate. Of 9,200 Threat Assessments in Virginia schools last year, 50% were threats to self.
- 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.
- School Counselors role has increased with the implementation of ESSA's Profile of a Virginia Graduate, which increases career pathway preparation work beginning in Elementary School.
- Increase in economically disadvantaged students, English Learners, and students needing more intensive special education services has increased the work load for mental health teams.
 - ***Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly to provide students with access to 'Unified Mental Health Teams' at nationally recommended ratios.***
 - School Counselor: 1:250 Virginia: 1:455 (ES) - 1:325 (HS)

- School Psychologist: 1:500-700 Virginia: No Standard
- School Social Worker: 1:250 Virginia: No Standard
- School Nurse: 1 per school Virginia: 1:600 students

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

BROADBAND

- Access to high speed internet touches almost every aspect of modern life yet there are an estimated 660,000 Virginians who don't have access to broadband.
- Almost 50% of rural Virginians lack access to high speed internet and 29% don't have any internet service at all.
- Income directly correlates with access to technology within a household.
- Digital learning and connectivity at school and at home enables students to be prepared for tomorrow's jobs and levels the playing field for students regardless of their affluence level or geographic location.
 - *Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly to increase funding for the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) or other programs to incentivize internet providers to expand services and provide connection speeds that are greater than 10 megabits (10,000,000 bits) per second with low cost, transparent pricing for consumers.*

SCHOOL BUILDING MODERNIZATION

- Quality of public school buildings and grounds is a health, educational, and environmental **equity issue** for families and communities. **Facilities are not neutral!**
- 60% of Virginia's schools are more than 40 years old, are deteriorated, do not meet modern standards and lack the digital infrastructure and flexible classroom space to support 21st century learning.
- Localities pay for 80% of school construction costs and many do not have the financial ability to modernize their schools.
 - *Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly and US Congress to provide substantial and sustained investment to support renovation, new construction and debt service costs with a target of funding 55% of local school construction costs over the next 5 years without reducing or modifying other sources of education funding.*
 - *Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education to conduct a statewide analysis of school building quality and renovation needs.*

CURRICULUM

WORLD LANGUAGES

- Studying world languages increases global awareness, cultural understanding and employment opportunities.
- Studying world languages results in higher scores in verbal and math standardized tests, strengthens critical thinking skills, creativity, problem solving capabilities and memory function.
- Ability to speak, read and write in a world language in addition to English is essential to attract business, engage in world trade, participate in scientific research, foster diplomacy, understand cultural nuances and respond to global humanitarian emergencies.
 - *Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education to develop K-16 world language instructional program that supports new language acquisition as well as heritage languages and supports programs to retain qualified world language teachers.*

SAFETY

SCHOOL SAFETY & THREAT ASSESSMENTS

- Physical and mental health safety of students and staff is essential.
 - *Virginia PTA supports funding physical building improvements to provide secure entry identification processes and regular school building safety audits by safety specialists.*
 - *Virginia PTA supports communication to parents at the start of the school year regarding threat assessment protocols, emergency preparation drills and crisis response procedures and re-unification protocols for their school building*
 - *Virginia PTA supports training for all school-based employees on youth mental health including early intervention, prevention and return to learn practices.*
 - *Virginia PTA Memorandums of Understanding with local law enforcement, training programs for School Resource Officers and funding SRO grant programs so that each community may choose whether to employ uniformed officers in their schools.*

ESSA REPORTING TRANSPARENCY

- Good communication is rooted in strong data policies and practices
- Student data provides teachers with a complete picture of strengths and weaknesses of student performance and empowers families so that they can support learning and home and make informed decisions about schools and programs.
- School data can help identify needs and broader student population trends to make informed decisions about professional development
 - **Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education to consider the following enhancements to the ESSA Virginia school report cards:**
 - Translation into multiple languages
 - Mental Health Threat Assessments conducted
 - Use of restraint and seclusion
 - Use of trauma informed care and Muti-Tiered Systems of Support
 - Ethnic diversity of teachers
 - Languages spoken by teachers
 - Teacher completion of cultural sensitivity training
 - Identification of parent groups (PTA/PTO/Booster)
 - Project Based Learning school wide projects
 - **Virginia PTA urges School Divisions to require Principals to annually email the school report card to parents with a note regarding their findings and the school's plans for sustaining or improving findings.**

CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE)

- The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Virginia's resulting implementation of Profile of a Virginia Graduate and new school accreditation standards expands focus on Career Technical Education ensuring that graduates have the knowledge, skills, attributes and experiences identified by employers and educators as critical for success in the workforce.
- CTE programs prepare students for high wage, high skill, high demand careers in existing and emerging industries while meeting the Commonwealth's need for well-trained and industry-certified technical workers.
- Not every student's successful career path is a 4 year college. Career and technical education (CTE) programs in Virginia public schools serve more than 640,000 students in one or more CTE courses in grades 6-12.

- Agriculture and forestry comprise the largest industry in the Commonwealth, contributing \$91 billion to the economy and supporting more than 442,000 jobs.
 - *Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education, educators, school counselors, career development professionals and administrators to promote career technical education and workforce development programs in a positive light as a respected career path.*
 - *Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education to recognize February as Career Technical Education Month.*
 - *Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education ensure Agriculture and Forestry is represented on the Advisory Committee for Career Technical Education and that curriculum supports rural workforce development and innovation.*

ADVANCING EQUITY & DIVERSITY

- Celebrating the diversity of views, experiences, cultural heritages and traditions, skills and abilities, values and preferences that make up our communities is at the core of our work. PTA Officers are actively engaged, daily, in the ground work within each school building of fostering an inclusive and diverse school climate.
- It is important to acknowledge and advance work with community partners to address structural inequities that are rooted in our nation's social, political, economic, and educational structures.
 - *Virginia PTA urges the Board of Education to include one full time Chief Equity Officer per school Division as part of the State Standards of Quality. This person would support implementation of culturally responsive practices across the school division which may include monitoring completion of cultural competence professional development, reviewing lesson plans and curriculum, assessing cultural necessities, decreasing discipline disproportionality and closing opportunity gaps.*
 - *Virginia PTA urges Board of Education to require educators, support staff and administrative staff to participate in ongoing, mandatory training and professional development programs that seek to recognize student strengths and skills and reinforce appreciation for cultural differences for the purpose of reducing unconscious bias.*

- **Virginia PTA urges the Virginia Board of Education and local School Boards to review history text books and curriculum at every grade level, but in particular the fourth grade Virginia history 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.**

ABOUT VIRGINIA PTA

The Virginia PTA's twenty-one districts support 240,000 members at local PTAs in 1,025 schools across the Commonwealth. Hands-on, local support for PTAs in schools across the Commonwealth combined with robust training resources and a national advocacy platform, sets the PTA apart as the leader in supporting local school parent groups. Local PTAs play a crucial role in building strong partnerships between parents and administrators and creating a vibrant community of engaged parents which contributes to the educational success, health, and well-being of our children and communities. We speak with one voice for every child - not only in our local schools, but also in State Legislatures, the US Congress and in our State and National Departments of Education.