

NO MORE NON-CENTS! FUND OUR SCHOOLS

Sample Form Letters

Contact Your Legislators to Advocate for Public Education!

Visit the RPS Advocacy website for our Advocacy Toolkit and more resources

www.rvaschools.net/advocacy

It's time to advocate with the Virginia General Assembly to fund our schools! The House and Senate will be considering many important bills and negotiating the state budget in the coming weeks. Your voice is needed to encourage legislators to make equitable and meaningful education funding reform a priority!

Sample Form Letters

Sample form letters on several RPS legislative priorities are found on the following pages. You can send them directly to legislators after adding the legislators' name or you can add a personalized message with your own views or specific requests. While both are effective, letters with a personalized message including more about yourself and why these issues are important to you, is always the most impactful.

Contact Information for Legislators

- Find your Delegate and Senator and their contact information [here](#).
- Additional contact info for all legislators is found by clicking their names [here](#).
- Important legislators to contact include those on the following committees:
 - [House Appropriations Committee](#)
 - [Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee](#)

Don't Forget Phone Calls!

Call their Capitol offices and provide a quick position statement for their secretary or legislative assistant to write down for the legislator. Sample calls:

- "Hello, my name is _____ and I'm calling to ask Senator _____ to advocate for the Equity Fund proposed by the Virginia Board of Education."
- "Hi, my name is _____ and I'm a constituent of Delegate _____. I'm calling to ask Delegate _____ to vote for the Equity Fund to provide more support to our schools that need the most help."

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COVID Impacts - Local Composite Index and Enrollment/ADM Loss

Local and state budgets have been severely impacted by COVID-19. It is critical that our state government continue to support school divisions. How did COVID-19 impact you, your student, or your community? Consider customizing this letter by sharing your personal story.

Example - Local Composite Index

SUBJECT: Support Local Composite Index Hold Harmless for School Divisions

Dear Delegate/Senator LAST NAME,

As a student/parent/teacher/etc. (in/of) Richmond Public Schools, I am deeply concerned about potential funding decreases because of the Local Composite Index (LCI) formula. School divisions are still recovering from the impacts of COVID-19. Now, Richmond Public Schools will be playing catch up again because of the broken LCI formula that is causing RPS to lose about \$7 million in state education funding next year.

Please support Budget Amendment Item 137 #4s from Senator McClellan to hold the school divisions most impacted by COVID harmless from LCI changes. In Richmond, hold harmless funding would help the division mitigate the impact of the LCI change and possibly help prevent layoffs and help pay for proposed teacher compensation increases. This funding is critical to helping our division continue to meet the needs of our students and adequately compensate our staff.

It is imperative that we continue to invest in our students, schools, and families. More than ever we look to you, our representatives, for support in these unprecedented times.

Sincerely,

John Doe
Address
Richmond, Virginia 232##

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Example - COVID Impacts & Enrollment Loss

SUBJECT: Support Education Funding During COVID-19

Dear Delegate/Senator LAST NAME,

As a student/parent/teacher/etc. (in/of) Richmond Public Schools, I am deeply concerned about the potential education funding decreases as school divisions continue to recover from the impacts of COVID-19. The pandemic has significantly changed our everyday lives and severely impacted our students' learning.

I am writing to you in hope that you will support Budget Amendment Item 137 #3s from Senator Hashmi to maintain funding provisions pre-COVID enrollment and attendance decline and ensure that our students, staff, and families continue to have their needs met.

It is imperative that we continue to invest in our students, staff, and families. More than ever we look to you, our representatives, for support in these unprecedented times.

Sincerely,

John Doe
Address
Richmond, Virginia 232##

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EL Teacher Ratios

Another significant priority is implementation of a new, more equitable approach to English Learner student to teacher ratios. The current flat ratio of 1 teacher to 50 students does not adequately serve their needs. The Board of Education recommended changing the ratios to a proficiency-based scale, where less English proficient students would have a ratio of 1:25 and more proficient students would have ratios ranging from 25-50 students per teacher. This policy would equitably distribute EL teachers to the EL students who need the most support.

Example - English Learner Teacher Ratios

SUBJECT: English Learner Teacher Funding

Dear Delegate/Senator LAST NAME,

My name is _____ and I am a *student/parent/teacher/etc.* in Richmond Public Schools. I would like to express my support for SB156 (Hashmi) which provides support to our English Learner (EL) students by amending the staffing requirements for EL teachers.

Currently, more than 1 in 8 Virginia students are current EL or former EL students and Virginia ranks 6th worst in the nation for EL graduation rates, and 3rd worst on the 8th grade National Assessment for Educational Progress test.

Currently, there is only one teacher per 50 EL students. We can do better. Amending the staffing requirements to be based on student proficiency level, instead of a flat ratio, would more equitably support the needs of our EL students across the Commonwealth. EL students in Virginia have faced unique challenges during the pandemic and have had the most significant drop in state achievement scores of any student groups measured for state reading, math, and science tests.

This proficiency-based proposal in SB156 was recommended to you by the Virginia Board of Education. The VA BOE identified how to address equity and I hope you can see why it is a necessity in a system where many young people do not have the same starting line. I am looking forward to seeing a more inclusive learning environment which celebrates diversity, and the changing demographics of Virginia. Please encourage your colleagues to advance and fund this proposal.

Sincerely,

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Equity Based Funding

The biggest legislative priority for RPS is to continue investing in equity based funding so that school divisions that have high concentrations of poverty, like Richmond, receive more funding to support their high-need students.

One proposal under consideration is the Equity Fund. This new fund would combine existing state funds for the At-Risk Add-On program with another pool of funds called Prevention, Intervention, and Remediation funds. The Virginia Board of Education proposed creating this fund and investing additional funding in the state budget. School divisions would be required to spend these funds in schools with the greatest concentrations of poverty. This new fund would begin to modernize our education funding formulas by recognizing that each child and school within a division do not have the same level of needs, and state funding should equitably reflect that reality.

This issue will ultimately be decided by the [House Appropriations Committee](#) and [Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee](#) as they craft the state budget. While you should always contact your own legislators to express your views on legislation you can also contact all the members of those money committees.

Example - Equity-Based Funding

SUBJECT: Support the Equity Fund - HB1135 & SB490

Dear Delegate/Senator LAST NAME,

My name is _____ and I am a *student/parent/teacher/etc.* in Richmond Public Schools. I am writing to seek your support in establishing the Equity Fund. This proposal and the advancement of equity-based funding models is critical to the success of students from disadvantaged communities, both rural and urban. There has always been a lack of equitable funding, but now COVID-19 has deepened the disparities between high-poverty and wealthier communities. Now is the time to invest in our students and create the Equity Fund and advance other equity-based funding for our schools. Please encourage your colleagues on _____ Committee to advance and fund HB1135 and SB490.

Sincerely,

Name & Address

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Example - Equity-Based Funding

SUBJECT: Support the Equity Fund - HB1135 & SB490

Dear Delegate/Senator LAST NAME,

My name is _____ and I am a student/parent/teacher/etc. in Richmond Public Schools. As the General Assembly advances education legislation and decides on how to fund our schools I ask you to create the Equity Fund proposed by the Board of Education. Current funding formulas do not account for poverty and the socioeconomic status of our students. Research shows that Virginia's high-poverty school divisions are spending \$6,600 less than what is needed to meet the national average on standardized tests. Investing in our students is critical to fix this financial gap and give our school divisions the tools they need to help our students be successful. It is time for Virginia to make equity-based funding a reality. Please encourage your colleagues to advance and fund HB1135 and SB490.

Sincerely,

Name & Address