

# 2023 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

Update for the Richmond City School Board

Presented By: Matthew Stanley, Director, Advocacy & Outreach

Venue: Richmond City School Board Meeting

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## Reform Virginia's Education Funding Streams & Formulas

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The Commonwealth's education funding streams are in need of equity-based reform.

Current education funding streams in Virginia are antiquated, and punish, rather than invest, in school divisions with high levels of poverty and trauma. Virginia should implement the equity-based recommendations for Virginia's Standards of Quality from the Virginia Board of Education, also known as the School Equity & Staffing Act, that call for the Equity Fund, more counselors and other support staff, and investments in teacher leader and mentor programs.

Reform the Local Composite Index to address concentrated poverty and tax-exempt property.

The formula used to establish the Local Composite Index (LCI) must be updated because it does not recognize the unique circumstances of Richmond and other divisions with high concentrations of poverty and tax-exempt properties. [The most recent update to the LCI](#) for Richmond resulted in an approximate \$10 million decrease in funding for the 2022-23 budget cycle, and we continue to receive comparably less funding every year moving forward.

## Supporting all Levels of English Learners

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### Implement proficiency-based ratios for English Learner Teachers.

[Virginia currently underfunds](#) the support of English Learners (ELs) and a more equitable approach is necessary to ensure they have enough support from EL teachers through proficiency-based student-to-teacher ratios. The current flat ratio of 1 EL teacher per 50 EL students does not recognize the varied needs of EL students and stretches teachers thin.

Data demonstrates the stark achievement gaps for English Learner students, which is compounded by proficiency level and reinforces the need for differentiated instructional support. 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.

The EL teacher ratio should be amended from 20 positions per 1,000 EL students in FY23 (1 per 50) to:

- one position per 25 students for each EL identified at Level One;
- one position per 30 students for each EL identified at Level Two;
- one position per 40 students for each EL identified at Level Three; and
- one position per 50 students for all other EL students.

## Invest in Teachers and Support Staff

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### Eliminate the Support Staff Cap.

[Since 2009, there has been a cap](#) on the number of state-funded support staff positions such as nurses and social workers. These staff are critical in addressing the needs and challenges of our students, especially students and families experiencing chronic absenteeism, violence, and language barriers.

This cap was put in place during the Great Recession as a cost-savings measure and advocacy for eliminating it has been supported by divisions and advocates across the state. From 2011-2021, Richmond lost over \$47 million in state support due to this cap. Full elimination of the support staff cap would cost an additional \$267 million per year.

### Invest in teacher and staff compensation.

[According to the Economic Policy Institute](#), Virginia has one of the least competitive teacher salaries in the country. Despite recent investments in teacher and staff compensation, and the establishment of collective bargaining in RPS, more state support to compensate our staff is necessary.

Virginia, like many other states, is experiencing unprecedented staff shortages. To remain a competitive job sector and reach the current national average for teacher pay, Virginia still needs to increase teacher salaries by about 10%. The General Assembly should continue to make progress towards this goal and ensure that divisions are supported and provided flexibility in their compensation efforts.

## Support Localities in School Construction & Modernization

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### Support localities to address modern learning facilities for all students.

Continued efforts to fund school construction and reform related state policy through legislation, the budget, and the Commission on School Construction & Modernization are critical to ensuring safe and modern learning facilities for our students and staff. There is approximately \$25 billion of documented needs by school divisions across the state. [The Commission's 2022 recommendations](#) should receive due consideration by the General Assembly and Governor.

### Significantly increase school construction grants.

Per the Commission's recommendations (link above), the General Assembly should include additional funding of \$2.5 billion in the appropriation act for the School Construction Grant and Assistance Program (\$500 million for direct grants in School Construction Grant Program; \$2 billion for competitive grants in School Construction Assistance Program).

### Support the rebuilding of Fox Elementary School.

We encourage the General Assembly to support Richmond with additional, one-time funding to offset the cost of rebuilding Fox Elementary School.

## Modify the Classroom Size Reduction Waiver

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Refine the Classroom Reduction Size program waiver to mitigate disproportionate impacts of increasing enrollment.

Due to increasing enrollment and the realities of school size and staffing, RPS has had limited circumstances in which it does not meet the requirements of the K-3 Primary Class Size Reduction program and has lost disproportionate amounts of funding. Richmond is experiencing a growing immigrant population and has more transient residents than suburban and rural divisions.

For example, at one RPS school, a single classroom did not meet the required size and we were forced to accept \$180,000 less funding due to the rigid nature of the CSR program. This is a disproportionate impact for one classroom that was found to be ineligible.

We ask the General Assembly to expand the eligibility for waivers from the program requirements to ensure that we have the necessary funding to continue to support reduced classroom sizes. The amendment would provide divisions some additional flexibility and honor the efforts of divisions to meet the requirements of the CSR program in light of expanding populations at certain schools and the constraints of current teacher shortages.

## Governor's Budget Proposals

The Governor's budget proposals do not include any additional funding for the At-Risk Add-On, school construction, or other reform of education funding streams.

Youngkin Proposal	FY23 (millions)	FY24 (millions)
Update Sales Tax Revenue	\$90.4	\$77.5
Update ADM	\$28.4	\$42.8
Teacher Performance Pay Incentives (\$5,000)	\$0	\$50
Lab School Funding	\$50	\$0
Retention Bonus om 9/1/23 for Instructional & Support Positions (1%)	\$0	\$45.2
Teacher Recruitment Incentives for Hard to Staff Schools	\$0	\$10
Expand Reading Specialists to Grades 4 & 5 (1:550)	\$0	\$16.9
Math Specialists for Grades K-8	\$0	\$7.2

Further details on the state budget is available in [this presentation](#).

## Advocating for RPS Priorities

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### Email, call, and visit legislators!

Visit [www.viriniageneralassembly.gov](http://www.viriniageneralassembly.gov) to find legislator contact information. Sample letters are available on the RPS website at [www.rvaschools.net/advocacy](http://www.rvaschools.net/advocacy).

In-person visits with legislators and their staff can be very impactful. Consider arranging a group visit to meet with meet with members and share your stories about why investing in public education is so critical. Visit [www.viriniageneralassembly.gov](http://www.viriniageneralassembly.gov) for more information on visiting the Pocahontas building and email Matthew Stanley ([mstanley@rvaschools.net](mailto:mstanley@rvaschools.net)) if you need planning assistance.

### Join advocacy partner events!

Follow RPS and state advocacy partners ([VEA](#), [Fund Our Schools](#), [Voices for Virginia's Children](#)) for updates throughout session on advocacy opportunities and events. Be sure to join the Virginia Education Association for the Strong Schools, Strong Communities advocacy rally and lobby day on MLK Day, January 16 ([www.strongschoolsva.org](http://www.strongschoolsva.org)).

### Advocate through media. Tell your story!

Telling your story and advocating through media is an important part of increasing the impact of your advocacy. Consider posting on social media, writing Op-Eds or letters to the editor, or creating your own media to share. These are ways to reach a large audience with your message and increase our collective voice.