

Eliminate the State's Cap on School Support Staff

Ensure Productive, Safe Learning Environments for All

The Support Cap Contributes to our Staffing Crisis

Support staff are essential in meeting the academic, social, and emotional learning needs of students in and out of the classroom, and they maintain school safety, keep school facilities functional, aid teachers, and promote healthy learning environments. Adequately staffing these positions leads to better academic and life outcomes for students and helps build a system of public education that works for all. Yet since the 2008-2009 school year, there has been a profound drop-off in state investment for support staff positions. This is because in 2009, during the Great Recession, lawmakers added language to the budget creating a “cap” on support staff funding, cutting hundreds of millions in state funding for support staff. Between 2009 and 2020, support staff in Virginia schools declined by 1,660 positions while student enrollment increased by more than 62,000 students. The number of support staff that the state recognizes and provides funding to support has fallen even faster, dropping by 13,870 positions over that same period.

Solution

Support a budget amendment to strike the language in the Appropriation Act that established the support positions cap and fund school support staff based on how many positions schools need. School districts across the commonwealth have reported support staff shortages in recent years and the pandemic has pushed schools to a breaking point. Lifting the support cap will help to alleviate the challenges that schools face and provide students with the resources necessary for a quality education.

Why Funding the SOQs Matters

- The state now helps pay for less than 40% of support staff in Virginia's public schools, down from 61% in 2009. This means many local governments have to fund the majority of these positions on their own and not all communities have sufficient resources to make these investments.
- Per student support staffing (excluding positions exempt from the cap) declined at four times the rate for school divisions with the most students of color (as a share) compared to school divisions with the fewest since the 2008-2009 school year.

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- Support positions are vital for addressing and improving challenges that are particularly faced by students from low-income families and students of color such as chronic absenteeism, high rates of suspensions and expulsions, and overall school climate.
- The cap is not based on sound policy. A 2004 JLARC review found that the state's prior method of funding support staff was "neither inadequate nor excessive." The report noted that Virginia's per-pupil expenditures for non-instructional services were below the national average and similar to the average for the southern region.