

Recommendations of K-12 Priorities in House Budget

Collective recommendations
and a Call to Action for House
Appropriations Committee
for K-12 budget investments
in 2022.



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PURPOSE



We write this memorandum on behalf of Fund Our Schools (the largest P-12 education advocacy coalition in the state representing parents, students, educators, school staff, community advocates, research and other community organizations), the Coalition of Small and Rural Schools of Virginia (representing 80 school divisions), and other signatory organizations to share our collective recommendations for K-12 budget investments in the 2022 proposed House budget.

We thank you for your work to continually respond to the ever-evolving education landscape and new challenges posed by severe staffing shortages and disruptions from the pandemic. Our recommendations for K-12 investments in this memorandum are grounded in evidence-based approaches that have been shown through rigorous studies to improve student outcomes and well-being. Our recommendations are also informed by stakeholders who work, learn, and collaborate in schools. Based on experiences from other states and divisions, we know school staffing shortages, lost learning time, and trauma can be mitigated if lawmakers take quick and strategic action. We believe that actions to provide immediate relief this year, coupled with policies to modernize schools and build our workforce over the long term, can abate some of the most harmful impacts from the pandemic and set Virginia on a track to lead the nation in education outcomes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James J. Fedderman".

Dr. James J. Fedderman
President, Virginia Education Association

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Behavioral Health of Students

Investing in school-based social services is critical to address significant health and other environmental factors that can affect a student's education and ability to succeed in school. [A large share of students have experienced new forms of trauma](#) during the pandemic, and schools will need additional ongoing resources to identify and address behavioral health support for years to come. Budget amendment [486 #17s](#) (Dunnavant) to provide \$75 million in state American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to the VDOE to support divisions in implementing mental health screenings offers an immediate tool for a comprehensive assessment of student behavioral health needs this year. Similarly, amendment [311 #5s](#) (McClellan) and [311 #3h](#) (Price) for \$10 million for a school-based mental health integration pilot program presents a promising option for scaling state technical assistance to divisions to contract with community-based mental health services for students. We also support amendment [33 #2s](#) (McClellan) for the Behavioral Health Commission to conduct a study on ways to maximize school-based mental health services.

Perhaps one of the most comprehensive and promising approaches to providing students with consistent wrap-around support services on an ongoing basis, while also leveraging available federal resources, is the proposed \$10 million pilot project for state support of community school models. Many other states have invested in community school models over the past decade because of consistent research showing improved [student outcomes](#) and [teacher retention](#). [Several states](#) this past year leveraged their ARPA funding to kickstart these programs across divisions ([the U.S. Department of Education has put out an extensive guide for using ARPA resources for community school models](#)).

While follow-up will be needed by lawmakers next year to create sustainable solutions for ongoing behavioral health support for students emerging out of the pandemic, the

budget proposals listed in this section offer critical initial steps to take stock of student behavioral health needs, trial promising programs, and study how to best leverage existing state and federal resources in school settings.

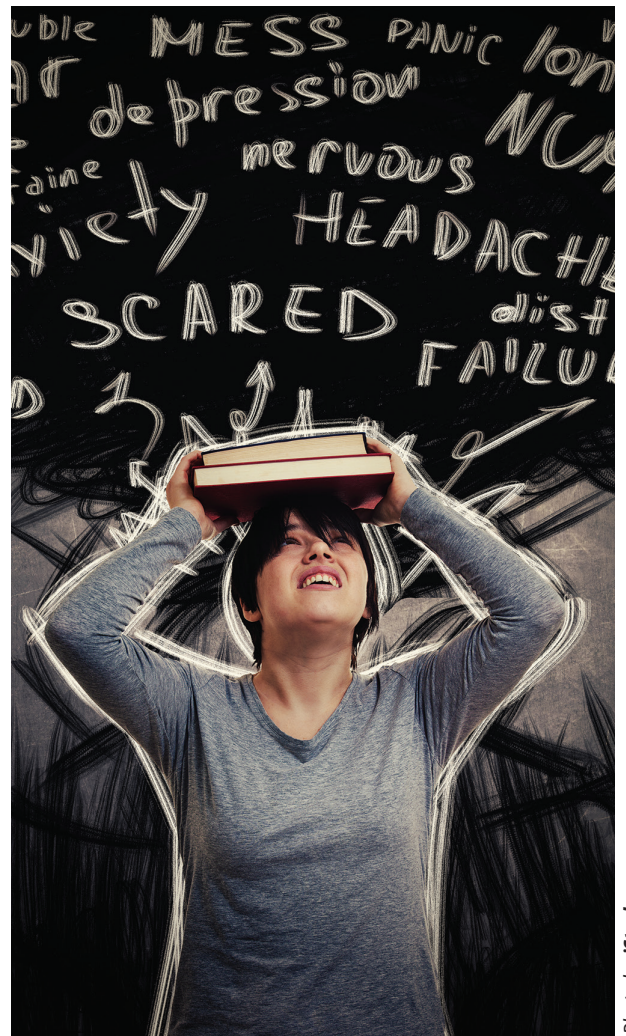


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RECOMMENDATIONS Continued

Evidence-Based Investments to Improve Student Outcomes and Stabilize Schools

Two of the largest challenges identified by education stakeholders are the severe staffing shortage and the significant learning loss that has occurred over the pandemic, particularly for students who face more barriers to instruction. Improving the adequacy of our pay for school employees, funding the revised Standards of Quality (SOQs), and lifting the state cap on support staff are three high impact and research-supported methods to improve student outcomes.

Premium Pay for School Staff

A two-pronged approach is needed to shore up the staffing crisis in the short term and address deeper pipeline issues for the future. In the short term, we support amendment [479.20 #1s](#) (Hashmi) to issue \$51 million in ARPA funding to school divisions to provide premium pay increases to attract and retain key staff positions. This Caboose budget amendment would fast-track payments to divisions and allow them to provide bonus pay of up to \$13 per hour for the purpose of attracting and retaining necessary school-

based positions (this use of providing State Fiscal Recovery Fund ARPA funding for premium pay to school staff was [recently recommended by the U.S. Departments of Treasury and Education](#)). We are already seeing [other states and localities](#) use their federal funds for this purpose, including to increase wages of critical staff positions like substitute teachers and bus drivers. With the absence of so many essential school staff, [teachers consistently give up their lunch and breaks](#) to cover classes, and even [high-level administrators have to fill in](#) to cover food service and empty classrooms. This contributes to a finding from a large [January 2022 survey of educators that 90% are experiencing professional burnout](#). With staffing shortages progressively worsening throughout the school year, we recommend lawmakers pass this emergency funding, and consider increasing the amount proposed, to immediately address this issue in the short term.



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RECOMMENDATIONS Continued

Evidence-Based Investments to Improve Student Outcomes and Stabilize Schools

Adequate teacher and staff salaries

In the long term, Virginia must raise the salaries of educators and school staff, improve school conditions by hiring adequate support staff, invest in safe learning environments, and build back the [severely depleted pipeline](#) of individuals enrolling in programs to become teachers. Countless studies have concluded that [teacher quality is the single most important variable affecting student outcomes](#), and according to the Economic Policy Institute, [Virginia's teacher pay is the least competitive](#) in the country when comparing teacher wages to those of similarly-educated workers in other professions. When factoring in that other states are also increasing their teacher salaries and [investing substantially in Grow Your Own programs and teacher residency programs](#) to retain the dwindling supply of educators, Virginia is not in a strong position to compete. On our current track, we should expect our staffing crises to

get worse, not better, over the medium to long term. Accordingly, we support the 10.25% pay increase for educators and school staff in the proposed budget, and view this as the minimum needed to get us within sight of the national average teacher salary.

Funding the Revised Standards of Quality

While inadequate pay is the primary reason educators have reported leaving the profession during the pandemic – [64% of respondents to a recent large teacher survey said that “pay wasn’t sufficient to merit the risk or stress”](#) – other issues around adequate support, staffing, environmental conditions, and autonomy also have strong effects on retaining high quality instructors. We have a clear evidence-based roadmap developed by the Virginia Board of Education (VBOE) over the past decades to revise our SOQs and provide Virginia students with a high-quality education, regardless of their zip code. All of the recommendations, from investing in principals, reading specialists, English learner instructor ratios by language ability, and additional support to our highest poverty divisions through the At-Risk Add-On are highly effective with strong returns on investment for improving student outcomes. Amendments [137 #5h](#) (Bourne) and [137 #14s](#) (McClellan) would fully fund the revised SOQs as prescribed by the VBOE and cost \$462 million over the budget cycle. Fully funding the SOQs has been a long-time priority of virtually every education advocacy organization in the state because the recommendations are seen as indisputably effective and high yield for improving student outcomes. We understand that in past years we have made progress to invest in pieces of the revised SOQs, but with our record surplus this year, we ask lawmakers on this committee to finally close the loop and fund this thoroughly discussed and vetted set of funding priorities for our students.



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RECOMMENDATIONS Continued

Evidence-Based Investments to Improve Student Outcomes and Stabilize Schools

Lifting the Support Cap

In conjunction with the revised SOQs recommendation, the VBOE once again recommended lifting the support cap put in place in the wake of the Great Recession. The support cap was initially premised as a temporary cost-saving measure, but has remained for more than a decade and today the consequences have pushed schools to the breaking point in the form of bus driver, food service, custodial, and other critical support staff shortages. 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. In addition, 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 state helps pay for less than 40% of support staff in Virginia's public schools. This means many local governments must fund the majority of these positions on their own and not all communities have sufficient resources to make these investments. Lifting the support cap, as amendments [137 #9s](#), [137 #15s](#), [137 #6h](#), [137 #12h](#), and [137 #21h](#) all propose, would free up local division revenue used currently to fully fund many of these positions, and in turn allow reinvestments to meet state matches for teacher and staff salary increases.



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RECOMMENDATIONS Continued

Mitigating Our School Infrastructure Backlog

With the zeroing out of most state support for school infrastructure over the past decade, Virginia school divisions have an increasingly large backlog of needed upgrades according to our state agencies – nearly \$25 billion at this point – and are in desperate need of new funding sources to modernize. We have clear evidence from many longitudinal studies that modern school infrastructure has a direct [impact on student outcomes, the health of students and staff, and improves teacher retention](#). That is why the \$500 million in one-time school construction grants and \$166 million in freed up Literary Fund loan funding in the proposed budget represent such a welcome step by education advocates across the state. Yet, we know that this funding alone will not be sufficient to address our backlog, and that left to local divisions, entire swaths of the state will not be able to raise sufficient funds to modernize their schools. In addition, with the House Finance Subcommittee voting

down efforts to allow localities to put a 1% sales and use tax to a referendum to pay for school construction, the onus has shifted to the state for solutions, now that localities' hands remain tied. We call on your committee to consider the slew of budget amendments and recommendations made by the Commission on School Construction and Modernization to go further than the proposed budget and show a good faith effort to meaningfully address our school infrastructure crisis. In the short term, additional ARPA funding could be used for this purpose under the flexibility provided through the Revenue Loss Provision. In the medium to long term, we ask that lawmakers on this committee [follow the lead of all our surrounding states](#) and offer ongoing direct aid for school infrastructure.



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RECOMMENDATIONS Continued

Literacy and Reading Intervention

The \$63 million in the proposed budget to expand the Early Reading Intervention program to include 4th and 5th grade, in addition to amendments [137 #16h](#) (Coyner) and [137 #13s](#) (Lucas) to fund the Virginia Literacy Act (\$37 million) are both high-impact investments that would transform our students' literacy and comprehension across all subjects. With the Virginia Literacy Act, we suggest one change to broaden the evidence-based literacy instruction definition

to allow for a continuation of reading curriculums that are employed and currently working in divisions, but might not meet this strict criteria. There is a [large body of research that confirms early reading and literacy interventions](#) yield long term benefits for student academic outcomes in secondary and tertiary education.



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REVENUE AND FUNDING NEW INVESTMENTS

We are under no illusion, despite our historic budget surplus, that finding the funding necessary to meet these recommendations will be easy. The state has many needs coming out of the pandemic, yet it's clear when you ask the public, [there is great concern for the challenges faced by our public schools and students](#). When it comes down to weighing large tax cuts against finally funding our revised SOQs, lifting the support cap, making a meaningful dent in our school infrastructure backlog, investing in student mental health services, and giving our educators a much needed raise, we ask that you weigh the pros and cons judiciously. Tax cuts are generally seen as an economic tool to stimulate the economy, increase inflation when it's below target, and improve job opportunities. One might argue, in the moment, that there is not nearly as strong a need for those outcomes compared to addressing the current challenges schools face. While both political parties have indicated a desire to get our educator pay up to the national average, fully fund our SOQs, lift the support cap, and modernize our school infrastructure, these are relatively large investments that would generally not be options without targeted revenue raising or a massive budget surplus. With that consideration, we ask if you could conceive of a more advantageous scenario in the future when we might invest in these priorities in lieu of a tax cut? We realize tax cuts will always be on the table when there is a budget surplus, but in a time when the multiplier effect of a tax cut is so severely diminished, elasticity of consumer spending is tight, inflation is high, and [more than two thirds of the Virginia public is willing to pay more](#) in taxes for education funding, investing in our long-time education priorities makes prudent economic and social sense.

If you feel committed to supporting a tax cut for some Virginia families this session, we encourage you to expand the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), as submitted in the proposed budget. Longitudinal research clearly shows a strong correlation between receiving an EITC and improvements to [student health](#) and [education outcomes](#). Low-income families receiving the credit also would be more likely

to spend it on [needed household expenditures](#), thus [providing a larger economic benefit than tax cuts targeted towards higher income Virginia families](#) who would be more likely to save the money. There's no doubt that other tax cut options, like the one on groceries, could also benefit low-income families, but this tax currently funds critical state and local education expenditures, and removing it would lead to painful cuts down the road. Waiting until we have results later this year from the [JLARC study on our tax code](#), which will provide recommendations on progressive revenue reform options, seems prudent at this time so we do not inadvertently cause school funding shortfalls in the near future.



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CONCLUSION

We have an unprecedented opportunity in our recovery from the pandemic to use significant state and federal resources to invest in long term, transformational solutions that reimagine and rebuild schools to help all Virginia students thrive. In economic terms, if pandemic-related learning loss is not rigorously addressed, Virginia is likely to lose billions of dollars in GDP over the coming decades from decreased productivity (the [OECD](#), [World Bank](#), [McKinsey](#), and [Brookings](#) all have estimates on GDP loss). Intervening immediately to stem this loss is critical for student well-being and protecting Virginia's long term economic interests. Accordingly, we urge you to invest in short term mitigation measures such as robust mental health screening and pilot programs, premium pay to attract and retain school staff this year, increasing salaries by 5% annually over the next two years, fully funding the revised SOQs and lifting the support cap, an upfront investment in school infrastructure improvements, and reading intervention programs. We also encourage you to consider the other budget amendments listed below in the Appendix that would improve student well-being and respond to immediate challenges posed by the pandemic.

Thank you.

American Federation of Teachers, Virginia
Coalition of Small and Rural Schools of Virginia
Communities in Schools
Edu-Futuro
EMGAGE
Legal Aid Justice Center
New Virginia Majority
Norfolk Federation of Teachers
Richmond Region League of United Latin American Citizens
Council
RISE for Youth
Side by Side
The Commonwealth Institute
Virginia Association of School Superintendents

Virginia Education Association
Virginia Educators United
Virginia Excels
Virginia Organization of Delta Kappa Gamma
Virginia Organizing
Virginia PTA
Virginia Retired Teachers Association
Virginia School Counselor Association
VOICES for Virginia's Children

APPENDIX

List of Recommended Budget Amendments for HB30/SB30

Admendent #	Patron	Description
137 #16h	Coyner	Direct Aid - Virginia Literacy Act - HB 319
137 #11h	Hudson	Direct Aid - Hold Literary Fund Harmless from Elimination of Interest on Fines and Fees - HB 620
129 #9h	Coyner	VDOE - Virginia Literacy Act - HB 319
129 #10h	Davis	VDOE - STEM-C Standards of Learning - HB 221
135 #9h	Simonds	VDOE - School Construction Fund - HB 254
129 #2h	Simonds	VDOE - Review STEM+C Occupational Categories - HB 217
131 #2h	VanValkenburg	VDOE - Performance-Based Biology Assessment - HB 585
132 #2h	Simonds	VDOE - School Division Maintenance Reserve Tool - HB 252
132 #1h	Guzman	VDOE - School Bus Driver Study - HJ 84
134 #1h	Delaney	VDOE - Reading Coursework in Educator Prep Programs - HB 419
134 #3h	Hudson	VDOE - Speech Language Pathologists - HB 547
134 #4h	Convirs-Fowler	VDOE - Cultural Competency Training on AAPI Student Bullying- HB 371
135 #3h	Guzman	VDOE - Digital Citizenship, Internet Safety, and Media Literacy Advisory Council - HB 1026
137 #20h	O'Quinn	Direct Aid - School Construction Matching Grant Fund - HB 563
311 #3h	Price	School-based Mental Health Integration Pilot
128 #2h	Byron	SOE - Attendance Recovery
370 #4h	Hudson	HB 600: Continuation of Overpayment Forgiveness
137 #5h	Bourne	Direct Aid - 2021 Standards of Quality - HB 1135
137 #6h	Bourne	Direct Aid - Eliminate Support Cap
137 #12h	Kory	Direct Aid - Eliminate Support Cap
137 #21h	Reid	Direct Aid - Eliminate Support Cap
137 #13s	Lucas	Direct Aid - Virginia Literacy Act (SB 616)
137 #5s	Hashmi	Direct Aid - Proficiency-Based English Learner Teacher Ratios (SB 156)
137 #3s	Hashmi	Direct Aid - ADM Hold Harmless
311 #5s	McClellan	School-Based Mental Health Integration Pilot
129 #17s	Stanley	DOE - Public Schools Trades Incentive Fund (SB 628)
129 #4s	Lucas	DOE - Virginia Literacy Act (SB 616)
129 #15s	Hashmi	DOE - Virginia Fund to Support Teachers
139 #1s	Bell	VSDB - Salaries and Benefits
129 #13s	Hashmi	DOE - STEM+C Standards of Learning (SB 239)
135 #2s	McPike	DOE - School Building Data Collection (SB 238)
364 #1s	Boysko	SB 447: Salary History Inquiries
33 #2s	McClellan	School-Based Mental Health Task Force
486 #21s	Dunnivant	ARPA - COVID-19 Test to Stay in School

APPENDIX Continued

List of Recommended Budget Amendments for HB30/SB30 •

Admendent #	Patron	Description
486 #14s	Marsden	ARPA - STEM Learning Loss Mitigation
137 #1s	Ruff	Direct Aid - School Construction Grants Program
137 #9s	Barker	Direct Aid - Support Position Cap
137 #15s	McClellan	Direct Aid - Support Position Cap
137 #14s	McClellan	Direct Aid - SOQ Revisions (SB 490)
486 #17s	Dunnavant	ARPA - Mental Health Screenings

List of Recommended Caboose Budget Amendments for HB29/SB29 •

Admendent #	Patron	Description
149 #1s	Bell	VSDB - IT Infrastructure
479.20 #1s	Hashmi	APRA - Teacher Premium Pay Increase

For technical questions on the recommendations, numbers, research, and budget amendments, please contact Government Relations team members at the Virginia Education Association: **Shane Riddle** (sriddle@veanea.org) and **Chad Stewart** (cstewart@veanea.org).

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