

Alliance for Virginia's Students

Priorities for Investing in Virginia's Students and Public Schools

The state made significant and ongoing cuts to public schools during the recession that put students at risk of not learning what is required to succeed academically, as well as economically. The cuts created large inequities and an over-reliance on local funding to pay for schools. This document shares the priorities of the Alliance for Virginia's Students to fix the state's inadequate support for its students and preK-12 public schools. We need real changes that provide sustained funding so that our children, and our children's children, can have the best opportunity for a bright future. Failure to do so jeopardizes the future of Virginia's schools, workforce, and economy.

The Alliance is a broad-based coalition of educational and municipal organizations and over 7,000 individual members across the state committed to encouraging all Virginians to demand high quality educational opportunity for every child.

We urge candidates to prioritize the following items:

Improvements to Virginia's Standards of Quality (SOQ)

Virginia's Board of Education has handed Virginia a blueprint for restoring support for public education. Last November, they unanimously approved common-sense recommendations for lawmakers to undo some of the harmful cuts made during the recession and to ensure Virginia schools have adequate staffing for critical positions such as principals, assistant principals, school counselors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, and other support staff. If the recommendations had been implemented, the state would have largely restored its support for K-12 schools back to pre-recession levels.

Increase Targeted Investments to High-Poverty Schools

The General Assembly has found that "poor children are more at risk of educational failure than children from more affluent homes." Meanwhile, high-poverty school divisions suffered deeper budget cuts than other divisions during the recession and Virginia lags other states in its targeted support to assist students from low-income families. Boosting support for Virginia's At-Risk Add-On, which provides school divisions additional money to help instruct low-income students, would put us more in line with other states and begin to bridge the divide in Virginia between the educational opportunities available to kids, and address the General Assembly's concern.

Support Virginia's Teachers

The importance of teacher quality cannot be over-emphasized. High-quality teachers are critical for classroom success, but Virginia ranks 46th out of 50 states and DC in competitiveness of teacher salaries, and schools are struggling to attract and retain teachers. Virginia needs to increase teacher compensation to competitive levels so we can recruit and retain the best in the profession.

Strengthen the Virginia Preschool Initiative

Funding for the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) has not been adjusted for inflation since 2008. VPI has a strong track record of preparing students for success in school. To ensure that we continue to get these results, Virginia needs to build on recent progress and increase state per pupil support to reflect the true cost of early education.

Fund a Study on Adequacy of K12 Support

Many states have commissioned studies to determine funding required to meet their state's educational requirements and how much more needs to be allocated to give all students similar educational opportunities. Virginia should review base adequacy for K-12 support and the additional cost of educating low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities here, too.

The Alliance for Virginia's Students is a statewide, grassroots advocacy network promoting state policies and financial support that are necessary for excellence in public education.