

VASS 2018-2019 Legislative Positions

VASS is committed to seeking positive changes in public education and fostering what is best for students and staff in the Commonwealth of Virginia. VASS continues to support the curriculum changes and movement toward the greater use of authentic assessments in measuring student learning. In addition, students across the nation have voiced school safety as a fundamental factor in their ability to learn and succeed.

In considering these factors, there are certain fundamental principles that are required for their success. These include the full funding of all mandates passed by the General Assembly and required by the Virginia Board of Education. Also, local school boards should have primary authority in the implementation of these mandates. In addition to these two basic requirements, school divisions are facing some critical needs and issues.

- The Shortage of Qualified Teachers:
 - A long-range plan to raise teacher salaries above the national average should be developed. (VA-\$51,049, National Average - \$60,483 (NEA))
 - Added state funding is needed for enhanced mentoring programs for new teachers.
 - Based on the local superintendent's recommendation, the use of performance on the standards listed in the Virginia Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criterion for Teachers should be allowed as an alternative assessment for teachers employed with a provisional license who have taken but not passed the Praxis. The rating on these standards should be *Proficient* or above.
- Student discipline:
 - The Code of Virginia should be amended to eliminate the requirement in Va. Code § 22.1-279.3:1(D) that principals report to law enforcement any act that may constitute a misdemeanor offense.
 - The General Assembly should provide school divisions with additional funding needed to implement proven methods of preventing and addressing misbehaviors that lead to suspension and expulsion (i.e., VTSS, Restorative Justice, Regional Programs, Virtual Services, and community-based/parental services).
 - The General Assembly should provide school divisions with additional funding for local and regional alternative education programs such that alternative education programs are available for elementary and secondary students in every school division.
- Modernizing the Assessment System to Strengthen Virginia's Standards of Learning:
 - Standardized tests should be supplanted by more effective assessments that encourage student acquisition and application of deeper knowledge and skills.
 - Assessments used to determine student academic growth as part of the SOA should be funded by the state.

- State Budget:
 - SOQ staffing changes recommended by the State Board and required by the revised SOA's must be accompanied by appropriate state funding in addition to staffing flexibility if qualified applicants cannot be found to fill these added positions. Removal of the SOQ Support CAP will be critical toward this effort.
 - Additional state funds for technology and construction/renovations of school facilities are needed to meet SOA requirements and better manage student learning needs.
 - Additional state funds are needed to assist with implementation of new Accreditation requirements (i.e. - chronic absenteeism)

- Student Safety:
 - Added state funding is needed to renovate and adapt school buildings to enhance student safety.
 - Added state funding is needed to increase counseling and behavioral assistance to students in school.
 - Added state funding is needed to place an SRO/SSO in each school building

- Dual Enrollment and the Virginia Community College System:
 - School divisions and local Community Colleges must have flexibility in setting tuition costs for those courses delivered on-site at the local high school.
 - Local high schools should have maximum flexibility in establishing the class loads and makeup of these courses.

- Unified Statewide System of Preschool Services:
 - The Virginia Department of Education should be the lead agency for preschool services offered by the Commonwealth of Virginia.
 - Governance of preschool programs that are housed in local schools should rest with each local school board.

- Closure of Schools due to Government Action:
 - In cases where schools are closed due to government action to address issues of public safety, a waiver of required teaching days or hours should be granted to all impacted school divisions without the requirement of petitioning the State Board for such a waiver.