Virginia Association of School Superintendents

2026-27

Legislative Positions

VASS 2026-2027 Legislative Positions and Talking Points – DRAFT

GOVERNANCE, BUDGET, AND FUNDING FORMULA REFORM

Strategic Talking Point: It is critical that the legislature fully fund all state mandates while giving local school boards the primary authority to implement these mandates.

Key Recommendations:

A. State funding must match the true costs of education, while covering any new or expanded requirements.
B. VASS supports the position that the decision whether to utilize collective bargaining rests with the local school board
C. The Office of School Quality needs substantial allocated funding to provide systematic supports for schools designated as needing intensive support.
D. We support the Joint Subcommittee's work to reform the SOQ formula.
E. Changing the local composite index to be calculated using a three-year average of the most recently available data, rather than a single year of data every other year, is a key priority.
F. We ask the legislature to expedite revising the school funding formula, including the recognition of non-SOQ positions such as work-based learning coordinators, instructional aides, facilities, and transportation staff.
G. We call for additional state funding for High-Quality Work-Based Learning programs, Career and Technical Education (CTE) centers, and CTE staffing.
H. Funding should be provided for recovery high schools to assist students with substance abuse issues.
I. We ask the General Assembly to fund VDOE's Office of School Quality to maintain dedicated special education expertise on its staff.
J. To ensure the integrity of action taken to fund salary improvement, funding should avoid local match requirements and seek to provide salary improvement to all LEA employee groups

TEACHER SHORTAGE & WORKFORCE PIPELINE CRISIS

Strategic Talking Point: Virginia is experiencing a critical educator shortage that requires the full attention of our state legislature. This is the most urgent issue facing our schools.

Key Recommendations:

A. We believe our teacher salaries should be above the national average and competitive with equivalent professionals outside education. Calculate salary and other cost assumptions using the division average, rather than the linear weighted average.
B. We know this issue extends far beyond pay alone—encompassing teacher preparation, working conditions, and professional respect.
C. The locally awarded license should be made renewable based on the superintendent's recommendation, giving teachers more time to achieve full licensure.
D. State funding should be directed to recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers through tuition assistance, student loan forgiveness, daycare funding, and housing assistance.
E. SOQ positions should be funded by function rather than by title or licensure to address current staffing needs.
F. Divisions are experiencing a shrinking pool of administrators and more must be done to encourage educators and other professionals to enter the field.
G. We urge the General Assembly to fund a substantial expansion of the Virginia Teaching Scholarship Loan Program and comparable incentive programs specifically targeted to special education and related-service (OT/PT/speech-language pathology) shortage areas, given that the annual supply of newly credentialed special education teachers has for years fallen far short of statewide need.
H. We urge the Board of Education to overhaul how special education teachers are assigned to classrooms by licensure type and disability category, and to grant local school boards greater flexibility in staffing self-contained and cross-categorical classrooms.

REGIONAL FLEXIBILITY

Strategic Talking Point: The state must recognize differences in school division size, locality, and access to staff or partners when aligning mandates and funding for accountability and resource allocation.

Key Recommendations:

A. School divisions need latitude in how they meet standards, allocate resources, and implement policies.
B. The state should provide differentiated support and guidance that allows school divisions to tailor implementation strategies based on their unique community needs, workforce capacities, and operational contexts.
C. Seek to realize efficiencies and expanded learning opportunities through incentivization of regional partnerships in collaboration with VCCS, SCHEV, and/or VA Works.

ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY REFORM

Strategic Talking Point: We support higher standards for all students. The implementation of new SOL cut scores must be transparent and data driven.

Key Recommendations:

A. Stabilize accountability and assessment systems before introducing additional changes.
B. We support VDOE publishing impact modeling for any proposed changes to SOL cut scores or accountability formulas at least one full school year before implementation.

C. Higher standards must be paired with comprehensive support systems, adequate resources, and time for divisions to develop targeted interventions.
D. We request professional learning around NAEP alignment with existing SOL standards.
E. We support codifying an alternate assessment pathway for students who receive specialized services but do not follow a modified curriculum and require additional support, ensuring this option exists in statute rather than as a matter of VDOE discretion.
F. We support the "braiding" of federal and state accountability systems; however, the SPSF should
    i. provide additional detail in advance related to federal performance thresholds
    ii. per JLARC recommendations, reduction of a school's performance rating due to TSI designation should be refined

MATHEMATICS ACHIEVEMENT

Strategic Talking Point: Virginia has made a significant, sustained state investment in early literacy through the Virginia Literacy Act. Mathematics achievement deserves the same level of legislative attention and structural investment.

Key Recommendations:

A. We urge the General Assembly and the VDOE, in partnership with math educators and researchers, to develop a comprehensive statewide numeracy initiative modeled on the Virginia Literacy Act, including universal screening/diagnostic tools, a required evidence-based instructional framework, and structured intervention requirements for students not on track.
B. We support state funding for division-based math specialists or coaches, comparable to the reading specialist positions funded under the VLA.
C. We request dedicated funding for teacher professional development in evidence-based mathematics instruction, particularly at the elementary level.
D. We ask for a gap analysis of current math SOLs and instructional materials against current research on numeracy development, to inform any future "Virginia Numeracy Act."

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Strategic Talking Point:
Virginia families are looking to their schools for clear guidance on how AI tools should be used with students. Virginia divisions need the state's help striking the right balance between legitimate concerns about screen time and the reality that AI literacy is now a basic workforce competency.

Key Recommendations:

A. We urge that the state to develop and regularly update statewide guidance on instructional use of AI, including a model acceptable-use policy divisions can adapt locally, so individual divisions are not left to build this guidance from scratch or in conflict with one another.

B. We support the Board of Education to incorporate AI literacy expectations into existing technology or computer science SOLs, rather than treating AI as a separate, optional add-on.
C. We request state funding for teacher professional development on responsible AI integration in instruction and assessment.
D. We ask that state-level data privacy and vendor-contracting standards for AI tools used in instruction be established, so divisions are not each negotiating student-data protections separately with the same vendors.
E. We recommend that a standing advisory body, including parents, teachers, and division leaders, to guide state AI policy in education, both to ensure sound policy and to build public confidence that concerns about screen time and student wellbeing are being taken seriously alongside the need to prepare students for an AI-integrated workforce.

STUDENT AND SCHOOL SAFETY, MENTAL HEALTH, AND BEHAVIOR

Strategic Talking Point: Keeping our schools safe requires full state funding and greater flexibility.

Key Recommendations:

A. Safety measures should be tailored to individual school needs with appropriate state funding.
B. Our schools are seeing increasing behavioral and mental health challenges, especially among early elementary students. Increased support for mental health services and/or behavior management training and staffing in schools is absolutely critical.
C. Provide state funding for virtual health services to support needs in communities with limited numbers of providers and services in multiple languages.

DUAL ENROLLMENT, CTE, AND WORK-BASED LEARNING

Strategic Talking Point: The state must provide dedicated funding to dual enrollment, which is essential to students' secondary education and future success.

Key Recommendations:

A. School divisions must have greater flexibility in licensing and assigning staff to teach dual enrollment courses at local high schools.
B. Tuition assistance should be extended beyond Passport and UCGS programs, including no-cost CTE dual enrollment courses leading to high-demand credentials.
C. Require that all Virginia Colleges and Universities recognize the Associate's degree, even if earned while in high school.
D. Explore options already available in several states for implementation in Virginia that guarantee admission to Virginia graduates to state public universities with reduced tuition based on high school academic performance.