



LEGISLATIVE POSITIONS 2015

The Alexandria City School Board believes that, as a locally elected body, it is better able to respond to the needs of students and interests of families than is the State through additional mandates. While the Board benefits from State goals and guidelines, we believe that local school boards should have the flexibility to determine policy in areas such as bullying, childhood obesity, educational alternatives, grading, instructional spending, school safety, sensitive materials, and student discipline.

Priority Issues

- Comprehensive Education Study: We support a comprehensive review of school funding that measures the Standards of Quality (SOQ) requirements against the actual funding models. We expect this data can contribute to future education direction and in funding and programming.
- Pre-K Funding Alignment – We support exploring Pre-K funding that is aligned with the local districts’ budget calendar. This would lead to the opportunity to access the funding any time during the school year for which it is budgeted. We also support a process for allowing districts to access the funding in a second round after the initial deadline has passed.
- Pre-K Funding Analysis – We support a study that analyzes at the very least:
 - The preschool funding model to make it represents the full cost of the program requirements
 - The percentage of funding that returns to the Virginia Commonwealth general fund if unused
 - The factors that might prevent a district from accessing the funding
 - The effectiveness and citizen access to the programs that are being funded
- Elementary and Pre-K Science Initiatives – We support building supports for advancement in elementary and Pre-K science curriculum in the way of material funding and coaches that align with the Commonwealth’s career and technical goals.
- Teacher and School Leadership Retention Report: We support the development of a teacher and school leadership retention report that would analyze successful retention models against our individual schools’ data for retention. This report could look at:
 - Supporting teacher career paths and growing leadership skills
 - Suggesting retention and leadership models in schools that struggle to retain teachers

- Ways to work with the university system to support new teachers in the Commonwealth's public schools
- Analyze salaries against the data composition of the schools.

Funding Issues

- Cost of Competing – We support the continuation of the full funding of the Cost of Competing factor, which was established to address the higher cost of living and the teacher salary differentials in the Northern Virginia area.
- Virtual Schools Funding – We oppose measures that would require the transfer of local taxpayer funds to other jurisdictions or to private providers should a student choose to attend a virtual program outside of the home school division.
- Virginia Retirement System – We support a modest extension of the phase-in period for contribution rates for the teacher plan to lessen the impact of rate increases on local school divisions. We support fully funding our pension and ensuring that state contribution is in line with actuary requirements in the future.
- Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) Poverty Rate – We support our City's recommendation by the Department of Community and Human Services to seek to have the eligibility level raised to 185% of poverty (slightly more than \$43,000 annually for a family of four), which would cover more low-income families and provide preschool opportunities to more children. The current formula used to determine a locality's VPI funding is based in part on the percentage of a locality's children that qualify for a free lunch through the USDA lunch program. For a child to be eligible for a free lunch, the child's family income must be at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines (this is slightly more than \$30,000 annually for a family of four).
- VPI Statistics - We support our City's recommendation by the Department of Community and Human Services that also recommends that Virginia use more accurate numbers to project the number of preschool-aged children within a locality (projections are now based on free lunch eligibility forms submitted by all K-12 students, but older students often do not return forms to the school to indicate whether they are eligible for free or reduced lunches; if State projections were based on the number of free lunch eligible kindergarten students only, the projections of the number of VPI-eligible 4-year olds in a locality would be more accurate).
- Funding through Taxing for Pre-K – We support new funding for localities for Pre-K and education programs through a state tax and local tax on the sale of electronic cigarettes and similar vapor devices. This is taxing model is the same as other tobacco products such as cigarettes or cigars.

Legislative Issues

- A – F Grading Scale for Evaluating Individual School Performance – We support a comprehensive rubric that allows for accreditation models based on school growth, ELL, special education and other factors that challenge a school’s success rates. We oppose the statewide A – F grading system as currently enacted and request that all language creating and requiring such a system for individual schools be removed. This method does not help student achievement and creates a hardship for schools applying turnaround models.
- Public School Calendar – We support legislation to return control of the public school calendar to local school boards. In the absence of repeal, we support additional definitions of good cause for opening school prior to Labor Day to include: additional instructional time, particularly prior to nationally-administered assessments of student academic achievement such as AP and IB tests; the provision of appropriate summer remediation programs for students; or increased professional development opportunities for staff.
- State Assessment Program – We believe that substantive reform is needed to Virginia’s current assessment and accountability system to:
 - utilize a more complete picture of student learning by providing both measures of achievement and authentic measures of student growth in a school year
 - adopt a provision for how often schools are accredited
 - include reducing the number of required SOL exams during a student’s school career without disadvantaging core subject areas
 - providing student access to flexible test taking and expedited retakes
 - allowing local control of the testing window
- Vouchers and Tax Credits – We oppose any diversion of public education funds to non-public schools and specifically oppose the use of tuition tax credits, tax deductions, or vouchers as a means of reimbursing parents for their children’s private K-12 education expenses.