



# 2023 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

The Virginia School Boards Association is a voluntary, nonpartisan organization of Virginia school boards that promotes excellence in public education through leadership, advocacy, and services. This is accomplished in part by advancing the legislative priorities of Virginia's 132 school divisions. The legislature has been supportive in response to the ongoing needs of our students and we look forward to continuing progress on this commitment to our students, schools, and communities.



**LOCAL CONTROL:** VSBA opposes any attempts to divest local school boards of their constitutional authority to supervise schools. The VSBA further opposes any efforts that interfere with the day-to-day activities of school boards in performing their constitutional responsibilities.



**FUNDING & BUDGET:** Article VIII of the Virginia Constitution establishes public education as a shared responsibility. School Boards work in partnership with the Virginia General Assembly, Virginia Board of Education, and local appropriating bodies to provide education in the Commonwealth. Past changes to state funding for education widened existing gaps between the actual costs of services at the local level and the state's reimbursement for the provision of these services.

- VSBA applauds efforts made by the Virginia General Assembly to address the state's share of funding for SOQ Support Staff Positions during the 2021 and 2022 sessions. VSBA encourages the legislature to continue policies that will lead to the full repeal of the support cap during the 2023 session.
- VSBA supports local flexibility for implementing all mandates and programs passed by the Virginia General Assembly. VSBA supports full funding of all mandates and programs passed by the Virginia General Assembly. Partial funding or the absence of funding for mandates and programs places additional burden on local school divisions.
- VSBA opposes any attempts by the Virginia General Assembly to remove revenue streams of local governing bodies that are used to fund school division operations without state resources that hold school divisions harmless from the loss in revenue.



**SCHOOL SAFETY:** School divisions have a responsibility to families, students, and staff to ensure a teaching/learning environment that is safe and free of disruption. There are incidents involving weapons, assaults and threats at schools which require interventions in addition to those school personnel are able and authorized to provide.

- The VSBA supports state government, local communities, law enforcement agencies, and school cooperation to provide appropriate prevention and intervention programs that are effective in addressing violence, and the precursors to violence, in schools and their communities.
- The VSBA supports the authority of local school boards to prohibit guns at all school-related functions/events regardless of setting.
- The VSBA supports the existing authority of local school boards to adopt firearm safety curriculum; and opposes any attempt to mandate a state-wide firearm safety curriculum upon local school divisions.
- The VSBA supports the authority of local school boards in deciding whether to enter into Memorandums of Understanding with local law enforcement agencies to establish a School Resource Officer program in their divisions.
- The VSBA urges the Virginia General Assembly to:
  - Support local school division efforts to achieve strong, fair, and consistent disciplinary expectations and applications to all students.
  - Appropriate sufficient funds to the School Resource Officer Grants Program so that each school board may choose whether to employ uniformed officers in their schools, as well as sufficient funds for local school boards to use at their discretion in ensuring safe and respectful school environments through effective programs such as peer mediation, conflict resolution, character education, and other proactive initiatives appropriate for individual school communities.
  - Pass legislation which would afford greater protection to students, school employees, and volunteers who are exposed to bodily fluids which put them at risk of dangerous infectious diseases.



**CHARTER SCHOOLS:** VSBA believes that all public schools should be freed from regulations impeding education reform. The power to operate, maintain and supervise public schools in Virginia is within the exclusive jurisdiction of local school boards and is granted to them by the Constitution and the Code of Virginia.

- The VSBA supports the existing charter school law, which allows local school boards to establish such schools/programs and opposes any attempt to remove local school board authority from this process.



**SCHOOL CHOICE:** VSBA believes that all public schools should provide a quality education for each student and that in meeting local educational needs, locally developed policies and program options which give parents the opportunity to select schools or programs for their children should be considered among a variety of possible educational strategies.

- The VSBA opposes federal or state efforts to mandate school choice, including efforts to divert funding from existing federal and state programs that benefit public schools.



**SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE & MODERNIZATION:** VSBA is extremely appreciative of the Virginia General Assembly's appropriation in the 2022-2024 biennial budget for school construction and infrastructure modernization. VSBA encourages the Virginia General Assembly to continue efforts to provide funds to localities to address school construction and infrastructure upgrades.

- VSBA supports efforts to amend §58.1-605.1 of the Code of Virginia to include all cities and counties among those localities authorized to impose an additional local sales and use tax up to one percent, as determined by the governing body, if initiated by a resolution of the local governing body and approved by voters. Revenue from the tax would be used solely for capital projects for new construction or major renovation of schools.
- The VSBA urges the Virginia General Assembly and the U.S. Congress to provide substantial and sustained funding to finance local school construction, renovation, and debt service costs with disbursements to local school boards.



**EMPLOYEE SHORTAGES:** Effective employees are essential to providing a high-quality education as required in the constitution of Virginia. The recruitment and retention of employees in the face of critical shortages across regions is essential to maintaining education quality.

- VSBA supports increased funding for employee compensation.
- VSBA supports increased funding for programs that encourage individuals to enter the education profession in shortage areas and to remain in Virginia.
- VSBA supports alternative entry routes into the teaching profession to provide localities flexibility in hiring qualified persons who have not formally prepared for teaching careers.
- VSBA supports the provision of individual waivers by the Virginia Board of Education from specific licensure requirements that prohibit local school divisions from retaining otherwise qualified personnel who have demonstrated proficiency in the classroom and are teaching a critical shortage area.
- VSBA supports minority recruitment and promotional practices, including college scholarships for minority students entering the education profession.
- VSBA supports policies that allow local school divisions to recruit and retain individuals to support positions that are crucial to the daily operations of public schools.



**BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY:** The use of the internet is a necessity for providing each student with a quality education. Because access to the internet is unavailable or inadequate in parts of the Commonwealth—VSBA supports policies that provide technologies that allow internet data to be transmitted at high speeds—as universally as possible.

**During each session of the Virginia General Assembly, the VSBA Executive Director and lobbyists are in daily contact discussing legislation and the VSBA policies that drive the Association's lobbying efforts which include the decision to send action alerts to the membership. The lobbying efforts of the Association are based on positions outlined in the VSBA Legislative Positions Handbook, which is approved each year by the VSBA Delegate Assembly. No school board in Virginia is bound by any position of the Association. Any school board that wishes to adopt a legislative position differing from the actions taken by the VSBA Delegate Assembly needs only to meet after the VSBA Delegate Assembly meeting and adopt a local position.**

**For questions about VSBA's legislative priorities, contact J.T. Kessler, Director of Legislative Services at [jason@vsba.org](mailto:jason@vsba.org).**

The VSBA is comprised of 132 locally-appointed or elected school boards representing over 1.2 million students attending Virginia's public schools. With input from their communities, staff, students, parents and families, school boards establish legislative priorities that are brought forth and voted on as **legislative positions** at the Association's Delegate Assembly.

The formal adoption of these positions follows the Commonwealth's democratic process outlined in the Constitution of Virginia, the Rules of the Senate, and the Rules of the Virginia House of Delegates. Here is a side-by-side comparison of both:

## Virginia's Legislative Process

State legislators are elected by a majority of voters within their legislative district.



A Delegate or Senator brings forth a bill that represents the interests of their constituents. Bills that fail to move through the process favorably are considered dead for the session.



Members of the House Education Committee, Senate Education, and Health Committee meet in public session review and vote on the bill. If favorable, the Committees then report the bill to the floor of either chamber.



The bill then goes through first and second readings. Once the bill passes the second reading, it is engrossed. The third reading then takes place, the bill is voted on and approved by the House or Senate.



The bill then goes through a similar procedure in the opposite chamber. Once passed by both houses of the General Assembly, it is sent to the Governor for approval.

## VSBA's Legislative Process

State school board members are elected or appointed in accordance with their local process.



Each spring the VSBA Legislative Positions Committee contacts each school board and requests recommendations on legislative positions.



The Committee reviews all suggestions and recommends changes to the Board of Directors. Approved proposals are sent to members of the Delegate Assembly.



Delegates are appointed by individual school boards and share the responsibility to elect VSBA officers, adopt amendments to VSBA's Bylaws, and vote on submitted legislative positions.



During the Delegate Assembly, Delegates vote on the submitted positions. A majority vote of delegates present is required to approve a submitted position. These legislative positions then shape VSBA's legislative agenda.