



VSBA

Virginia School Boards Association

Students and Schools in Challenging Environments Month Guide

March 2023



Sponsored by:



Participation in VSBA initiatives and observances is optional. School boards in Virginia have the discretion on whether to participate locally. Any related materials from the Association are shared as suggested ideas for implementation for any board that may choose to do so.

MARCH 2023 – VSBA Students and Schools in Challenging Environments Month

Dear School Board Members and Superintendents:

School systems exist to deliver positive student outcomes. Public schools in Virginia drive our Commonwealth's economic, social, and quality of life excellence through our commitment to serving the opportunities for preparing our students for success in college, career, military, and productive pathways our students pursue. In an effort to increase awareness of and support for each and every student in Virginia, the VSBA Board of Directors has designated the month of March as VSBA Students and Schools in Challenging Environments Month.

The VSBA Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments was established by the Board of Directors in 2013 to educate state and local policy makers how VSBA can partner to help challenged students and schools in Virginia, and to identify and share research, resources, and strategies that will empower Virginia's schools to reach higher levels of student achievement. As a result of listening to board members and superintendents, interacting with parents and students, conducting extensive data analyses, and engaging with public and private sector leaders, the Task Force determined that every school division in Virginia serve students who can benefit from this month-long focus combined with year-round action.

Through the release of three reports over the past decade, the task force has played a key role in providing federal, state, and local school boards with best practices for implementation on educating students in challenged schools and students who may face unique challenges with them no matter the school they attend. We must work together to ensure that all students no matter their zip code, area of the state they reside, or size of their school division receive the supports necessary to achieve positive academic outcomes. From NOVA to Southside, the Urban Crescent to the Rural Backbone, when inequities in education persists, there is a cost to all involved including missed opportunities for economic development, greater dependence on government supports, and fewer Virginians ready to serve and lead.

School board members, superintendents, teachers, and families play a critical role in defining vision, values, and goals of excellence for student outcomes while creating educational climates where all students receive the resources they need, so they graduate prepared for success after high school.

VSBA will publicize Students and Schools in Challenging Environments Month in our newsletter, on the VSBA website, through social media and will send out a statewide news release urging news organizations to provide coverage of local activities. School divisions are encouraged to issue their own news releases, and it would be helpful if divisions would apprise the VSBA of any related activities taking place in their division. Potential activities could include:

- Adopt a proclamation similar to the one adopted by the VSBA Board of Directors (see enclosed).
- Review the "State of Students and Schools in Challenging Environments Report" and conduct a local comprehensive needs assessment or similar analysis of student performance data giving critical attention to students and schools in challenging environments.
- Write a letter to the editor or contact a local reporter to see if they will do a story about best practices or centers of excellence taking place in the division.
- Hold school or division student contests (poster, video, writing, etc.) around the ideas for improvement around the theme of "Students and Schools in Challenging Environments" inviting student voice.
- Conduct community listening and engagement workshops, which could include the opportunity for community members to discuss the challenging environments students are attending school within and possible solutions.

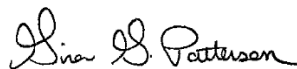
This guide includes several resources to assist you in these efforts, including references to references to the five areas of focus, a sample news release, and a proclamation adopted by the VSBA Board of Directors.

We hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to spread awareness, examine and discuss strategies, and review current trends and best practices that will positively impact the educational outcomes for all students.

Sincerely,



David Woodard
VSBA President



Gina G. Patterson
Executive Director

AREAS OF FOCUS & BEST PRACTICES

In October 2014, the Virginia School Board Association adopted a comprehensive and aspirational report from the Task Force on Schools in Challenging Environments. The Task Force affectionately named this report 1.0 with an emphasis on following up with future work. The Task Force, after considerable deliberation and attention to best practices and research, prioritized five domains in the 1.0 report, which were each addressed individually:

- Community & Family Engagement
- Funding & Resources
- Specialized Training
- Student Learning
- Teacher Quality

The Task Force targeted the following groups and aligned practices with advocacy of these groups:

- School Board / Governance Leadership Teams
- Community Groups
- Internal / External Stakeholders (e.g., faculty, parents, business, community, local government)
- General Assembly, including the governor and state offices
- VSBA

In the Spring and Summer of 2018, the VSBA asked the Challenged School Task Force to review the impact of the report. Surveys were completed by school divisions across the Commonwealth indicating that there was a profound impact from the Task Force Report, with still much work to be done. In March 2019, the VSBA Board of Directors approved a name change to the VSBA Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments. In September 2020, the task force issued its 2.0 Report which provided recommendations on how to address the COVID-19 pandemic. And, In June 2022, the VSBA Board of Directors approved the task force's 3.0 Report and the State of Students and Schools in Challenging Environments overview.

VSBA BOARD OF DIRECTORS PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, challenging environments in schools have become an increasingly significant area of concern in the United States and Virginia; and

WHEREAS, the majority of school-aged kids are children of color and over fifty percent of public-school students qualify for subsidized meals; and

WHEREAS, the code Commonwealth of Virginia through the acts of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches acknowledges geographical, local challenges with funding public education and seeks to remedy disparities across the state; and

WHEREAS, we recognize that factors including, but not limited to, disability, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status have a demonstrated history of impacting the educational opportunities provided to a student; and

WHEREAS, the promise of public education is for every child to be successful in school and life; and

WHEREAS, it is important for Virginia families, students, teachers, and school administrators to be aware of the diverse needs and strengths of learners, and to encourage discussion of the challenges and opportunities as a school community; and

WHEREAS, the VSBA has established a Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments to make recommendations and to stay at the forefront of these discussions in Virginia schools;

WHEREAS, we recognize that disproportionalities in resources, including educational settings, supplies, technology, and building, impedes student learning;

Now, **THEREFORE**, Be it Resolved, the Virginia School Boards Association recognizes the month of March 2023 as VSBA Students and Schools in Challenging Environments Month, with the intention to advocate and increase awareness about the supports necessary to improve Virginia's challenged school environments

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
[DATE]

Contact [NAME] [PHONE]

March Is Students and Schools in Challenging Environments Month

[CITY/COUNTY], VA -- School board members, superintendents, teachers, and families play critical roles in defining vision, values, and goals of excellence for student outcomes while creating educational climates where all students receive the resources they need, so they graduate prepared for success after high school. For this reason, the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) has declared March to be Students and Schools in Challenging Environments Month.

Obstacles exist in every school division in the Commonwealth and students attending schools in challenging environments is a significant area of concern nationwide. With the added difficulties that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the hurdles that students, school staff, and families face economically and socioemotionally, it is more important now than ever before that we as advocates and servants of public education are addressing these challenges head on.

We are committed to doing our part to ensure that all students no matter their zip code, area of the state they reside, or size of their school division receive the supports necessary to achieve positive academic outcomes. When these challenge in education persist, there is a cost to all involved including missed opportunities for economic development, greater dependence on government supports, and fewer Virginians ready to serve and lead.

[INSERT QUOTE FROM BOARD MEMBER AND/OR SUPERINTENDENT]

Local activities include [INSERT LIST OF ACTIVITIES]

The Virginia School Boards Association, a voluntary, nonpartisan organization of Virginia school boards, promotes excellence in public education through advocacy, training, and services.