



VSBA
Virginia School Boards Association

Equity in Education Month Guide

March 2026



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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 member board that may choose to do so.

March 2026 – VSBA Equity in Education 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 excellence of quality of life through their commitment to preparing our students for success in college, career, military, and other productive pathways our students pursue. 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 Equity in Education 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 on 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 serves students who can benefit from this month-long focus, combined with year-round action.

The Task Force has played a key role in providing federal, state, and local school boards with best practices for educating students in challenged schools and students who may face unique obstacles no matter which school they attend. As part of this, the Task Force developed five areas of best practice to help improve equity in education. We must work together to ensure that all students, regardless of their zip code or the size of their school division, receive the support necessary to achieve positive academic outcomes. From NOVA to Southwest Virginia, when inequities persist, there are costs to all involved including missed opportunities for economic development, increased need for community support, and fewer Virginians ready to serve and lead.

School board members, superintendents, teachers, and families play a critical role in creating a climate and curriculum where all students receive the resources they need, so they graduate prepared for success after high school.

VSBA will publicize Equity in Education Month in our newsletter, on the VSBA website, and through social media. School divisions are encouraged to issue their own news releases, and it would be helpful if divisions apprise the VSBA of any related activities taking place in their division. Potential activities could include:

- Adopt a proclamation like the one adopted by the VSBA Board of Directors (see enclosed).
- Write a letter to the editor or contact a local reporter to see if they will do a story about educational equity initiatives taking place in the division.
- Hold school or division student contests (poster, video, writing, etc.) around the theme of "Equity in Education."

This guide includes several resources to assist you in these efforts, including references and links to all three Reports from the Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments, a proclamation adopted by the VSBA Board of Directors, a sample news release, social media templates, and information on understanding equity vs. equality in education.

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,



Jenny Nichols
VSBA President



Gina G. Patterson
Executive Director

Task Force Areas of Focus & Best Practices

The mission of the VSBA Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments is to identify and share research, resources and strategies that will empower Virginia's schools to reach higher levels of achievement for each student.

The charge from the VSBA Board of Directors is for the Task Force to make recommendations to the Board of Directors, the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education on how VSBA can partner to help challenged students and schools in Virginia.

1.0 Report:

In October 2014, the Virginia School Boards Association adopted a comprehensive and aspirational report from the Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments. The Task Force 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 officials
- VSBA

In the Spring and Summer of 2018, the VSBA asked the Students and Schools in Challenging Environments 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, even with much work still to be done.

[A link to the report can be found by clicking here.](#)

2.0 Report:

In September 2020, the Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments released the 2.0 Report. This report was released during a time in which the Commonwealth and nation were facing multiple issues stemming from the Corona-virus/COVID-19 pandemic. The 2.0 Report acknowledged the deep concerns from Task Force members of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent shut down of schools from face-to-face instruction and the detrimental impact of the equity framework that the Task Force has consistently advocated.

[A link to the report can be found by clicking here.](#)

3.0 Report

In June 2022, the Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments released its most recent report, 3.0. Members of the Task Force remained committed to studying the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students and schools in challenging environments. The charge to study this topic and make recommendations was affirmed by the VSBA Board of Directors at the August 2021 meeting of the board.

Work leading to the contents of the 3.0 Report began in earnest in the spring of 2021 and the contents of the report were approved for consumption by the public at the June 2022 meeting of the VSBA Board of Directors. For far too many students and schools in challenging environments, COVID-19 worsened structural inequities that have long produced a pandemic of unfinished learning.

[A link to the report can be found by clicking here.](#)

4.0 Focus

Task Force Goals SY 2025 – 2027

- **Literacy & Support:** Improve student outcomes in literacy by supporting effective school board governance.
- **Accountability:** Analyze the State of Students and Schools Report to reflect changes to Virginia's new School Support Framework.
- **Advocacy:** Engage with Virginia General Assembly and Virginia Board of Education.
- **Collaboration:** Establish a Bi-Partisan Challenged Students and Schools Caucus in the Virginia General Assembly.

Domains of Best Practices and Research

- Student Learning Including Workforce Readiness
- Leadership and Teacher Quality
- Specialized Training
- Funding & Resources
- Family, Parent, Community Engagement & Outreach

VSBA Board of Directors Proclamation

WHEREAS, inequities in schools have become an increasingly significant challenge in the United States and Virginia; and

WHEREAS, the majority of school-aged students are children of color and over fifty percent of public-school students qualify for subsidized meals; 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 of learners, and to encourage discussion of the challenges 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 discussions on equity in Virginia schools; and

WHEREAS, we recognize that inequities in resources, including educational settings, supplies, technology, and buildings impede student learning;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Virginia School Boards Association recognizes the month of March 2026 as VSBA Equity in Education Month, with the intention that educational equity, best practices, and programming be discussed in Virginia's schools, communities and classrooms during that time.

Sample News Release

News Release

For Immediate Release

[DATE]

Contact

[NAME]

[EMAIL, PHONE]

March is VSBA Equity in Education Month

[CITY/COUNTY], VA – Creating learning environments where every student has access to opportunity requires intentional effort from school boards, division leadership, educators, families, and communities. In recognition of this shared responsibility, the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) has designated March as VSBA Equity in Education Month.

Across Virginia and the nation, schools continue to navigate persistent equity challenges. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that today's public-school population is increasingly diverse, with a majority of students identifying as students of color and many coming from economically disadvantaged households. At the same time, student performance data following the COVID-19 pandemic reveals that learners from across the Commonwealth are still working to regain academic momentum. Compounding these challenges, schools are seeing growing needs related to student mental health and well-being.

Ensuring equitable access to high-quality instruction, resources, and support services, regardless of geography or division size, is essential to student success. When students are not adequately supported, the effects extend beyond the classroom, impacting workforce readiness, community stability, and Virginia's long-term economic vitality.

VSBA Equity in Education Month highlights the importance of addressing these challenges and reaffirming a commitment to policies and practices that help every student thrive.

[INSERT QUOTE FROM BOARD MEMBER AND/OR SUPERINTENDENT]

In recognition of VSBA Equity in Education Month, local activities will include [INSERT LIST OF ACTIVITIES]

About the Virginia School Boards Association

The Virginia School Boards Association, a voluntary, nonpartisan organization of Virginia school boards, promotes excellence in public education through advocacy, training and services. The Association offers conferences, information, training, and counseling designed to meet the needs of the Commonwealth's educational leaders.

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Sample Social Media Posts

To help school divisions and board members raise awareness and share consistent messaging during VSBA Equity in Education Month, this social media toolkit includes sample social media posts that may be customized for local use. These templates are designed to highlight the importance of equity in education, reinforce the role of school boards and community partners, and promote ongoing efforts to support student success across Virginia.

General Awareness Posts

- March is VSBA Equity in Education Month! Across the Commonwealth, school boards and educators are committed to ensuring every student, regardless of zip code, has access to the resources and opportunities they need to succeed. Together, we can build stronger schools and stronger communities. #VSBAEquityInEdMonth
- Equity in education means recognizing that students have different needs, and responding with the right support so all can thrive. When students succeed, we all succeed. #VSBAEquityInEdMonth

Governance & Leadership Focused Posts

- School boards play a critical role in advancing equity through thoughtful policies, data-informed decisions, and community engagement. This March, we reaffirm our commitment to serving each and every student. #VSBAEquityInEdMonth
- Equity isn't a single initiative, it's a continuous commitment reflected in how resources are allocated, programs are designed, and student outcomes are measured. #VSBAEquityInEdMonth

Student-Centered Posts

- Students across Virginia are working to reach their full potential, academically, socially, and emotionally. Equity ensures they have the support they need to get there. #VSBAEquityInEdMonth
- Equity in education supports more than academics, it strengthens mental health, expands opportunity, and prepares students for life after graduation. #VSBAEquityInEdMonth

Community Post

- Families, educators, school boards, and community partners all play a role in advancing equity in education. Progress happens when we work together. #VSBAEquityInEdMonth

Local Activity Post

- In Recognition of VSBA Equity in Education Month, our division is highlighting programs and initiatives that support equitable student outcomes. Learn more about what's happening locally! #VSBAEquityInEdMonth

Understanding Equity vs. Equality in Education

The terms “equity” and “equality” are often used interchangeably, but they represent fundamentally different approaches to addressing the diverse needs of students in our schools. For school boards, understanding these differences is critical to fostering environments where all students can thrive.

Equality: Treating everyone the same

Equality is applying the same resources and funding regardless of student need ensuring everyone receives the same resources. Equality assumes that all students start from the same place and have the same needs. In practice, equality often fails to address the disparities that exist within our student populations and across our school divisions.

For Example:

Equality is when a school division in a community with ample resources receives the same state support as a division in a community with limited resources.

Equality assumes that all students learn with the same tools, such as identical technology or standardized instruction regardless of their individual learning styles or circumstances.

Equity: Meeting unique needs for success

Equity, on the other hand, is about fairness – providing each student what they need to succeed. It acknowledges that students have different starting points and barriers to overcome. Equity focuses on allocating resources and support based on those unique needs to ensure every student has the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

For Example:

Equity is rooted in state funding. The state pays a higher share of the SOQ formula estimate for school divisions in less wealthy localities and a lower share for divisions in wealthier localities.

Equity adapts teaching methods and materials to meet the diverse learning needs of students.

Equity is not a negative word

Unfortunately, the word “equity” is sometimes misunderstood or viewed negatively. It is crucial to emphasize that equity does not mean lowering standards or prioritizing one group over another. Instead, equity ensures that every student has a fair chance to succeed by addressing systemic barriers and leveling the playing field.

Equity Means:

Fairness | Accountability | Opportunities for all students

Equity in Action: How local school boards can lead the way

- **Assess Community Needs:** Conduct equity audits to identify disparities in outcomes, resources, funding, and opportunities.
- **Allocate Resources Thoughtfully:** Direct funding and support to the areas of greatest need, ensuring that all students have access to high quality education.
- **Engage Stakeholders:** Include students, parents, and community members in conversations about equity and build understanding and trust.
- **Monitor Progress:** Use data to monitor student progress, track the effectiveness of equity initiatives, and adjust strategies as needed.

We must work together to ensure that all students, regardless of their zip code or the size of their school division, receive the support necessary to achieve positive academic outcomes. From NOVA to Southwest Virginia, when inequities persist there are costs to all involved including missed opportunities for economic development, increased need for community support, and fewer Virginians ready to serve and lead. At VSBA we believe equity is essential to fulfilling the promise of public education. By embracing equity, we ensure that every child—regardless of their background—has the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to succeed.



VSBA

Virginia School Boards Association

Leadership • Advocacy • Support

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