

# Preserve Funding for At-Risk Students



Low income students need additional resources to succeed. The General Assembly has found that poor children are more at risk of educational failure than children from more affluent homes, and that targeted at-risk programs result in improved academic performance.<sup>1</sup> Virginia invests \$354 million annually on programs for at-risk students, and it's money well spent.

## All Virginians Have a Stake in the Educational Success of At-Risk Students.

### At-risk funding works.

- **Smaller class size matters.** Small class size yields long-term educational benefits, especially for minority students.<sup>2</sup>
- **Preschool matters.** Quality preschool gives children the basic social, emotional, and academic tools they need to succeed in school.<sup>3</sup>
- **Teacher quality matters.** There is a direct link between highly qualified teachers and higher SOL test passage rates.<sup>4</sup>
- **Intensive early reading programs matter.** Identifying children who fall behind and intervening early prevents them from leaving elementary school with inadequate reading skills.<sup>5</sup>

### The Choice is Clear: *Invest Now or Pay More Later.*

**Without targeted investments, today's at-risk students may become tomorrow's dropouts – and dropouts are expensive.**

- States with more residents holding a high school diploma have **lower violent crime rates.**<sup>6</sup>
- A 5% increase in male graduation rates could benefit Virginia's economy by **\$180 million annually.**<sup>7</sup>
- As of June 2007, **one of every 44 Virginians** age 18 and over was in prison or jail or on probation.<sup>8</sup>

Forecasts suggest that Virginia will build one prison per year for *the next six years*, at a cost of:

\$100 million per facility and  
\$25,000 per bed per year.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, the state at-risk expenditure is just \$903 per at-risk pupil.<sup>10</sup>

# Virginia Needs More At-Risk Funding, Not Less

## Virginia's Business Leaders Want a Larger and More Qualified Work Force

Over half of skilled trade jobs in Virginia go unfilled due to a lack of qualified applicants.<sup>11</sup>

## When it Comes to At-Risk Funding, Virginia is Behind the Curve.

While Virginia is the 7th wealthiest state, it ranks just 32nd in state per pupil support for public education.<sup>12</sup>

## Virginia's Demographics are Changing.

Virginia's at-risk student population is increasing, and localities report that they cannot serve all eligible at-risk students due to a lack of funds.

- More students participate in free and reduced price lunch: from 326,004 in 1995-96, to 392,042 today.<sup>13</sup>
- Localities are serving more limited English proficient students: from 22,716 in 1995-96, to 84,344 today.<sup>14</sup>

## At-Risk Funding is Working in Virginia

Virginia narrowed the achievement gap for African-American and Hispanic students in English and math between 2002 and 2006.<sup>15</sup>

Virginia's dropout rate has fallen steadily over the last ten years.<sup>16</sup>

## Money Matters for At-Risk Students

- Authorities estimate a 40-60% "add-on" is needed<sup>17</sup> to fund research-based interventions such as high quality preschool, teacher quality, smaller class sizes, and intensive early reading and math programs for students at-risk of education failure.<sup>18</sup>
- Virginia spends \$903 additional dollars per at-risk student, well below 40-60%.<sup>19</sup>
- Localities use the funds to reduce class sizes, provide early reading interventions and literacy programs, preschool for at-risk four-year-olds, and more.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Va Code Ann. § 22.1-199.1.

<sup>2</sup> "Jeremy D. Finn, "Class Size and Students at Risk," U.S. Dept. of Education, April 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Barnett, W. Steven, "Maximizing Returns from Prekindergarten Education," (Nov. 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Fiscal Analytics Ltd & Nat'l Conf. of State Legislators, "A Preliminary Study of the Adequacy of the K-12 Educ'l Funding System of the Commonwealth of Virginia (2004).

<sup>5</sup> Torgeson, Joseph K., "Preventing Early Reading Failure," American Federation of Teachers (2004).

<sup>6</sup> Justice Policy Institute, Education and Public Safety, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Justice Policy Institute, Education and Public Safety, 2007. Savings come from reduced crime-related costs and additional tax revenue.

<sup>8</sup> Adult Corrections Senate Finance Committee, presentation by Dick Hickman, November 15-16, 2007, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> \$354 million for FY 08 divided by 392,000 students receiving free and reduced price lunch in 2006-07.

<sup>11</sup> "The Race to Close the Skills Gap in Virginia," Virginia Manufacturing Association 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Congressional Quarterly, State Fact Finder 2007.

<sup>13</sup> The Role of At-Risk Funding in Improving Achievement and Opportunity for All Virginia Students, Presentation to the Joint Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education Funding, November 27, 2007, Dr. Billy K. Cannaday, Jr., Superintendent for Public Instruction.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> "Demographic Trends in Virginia," Weldon Cooper Center 2007.

<sup>17</sup> "How States Shortchange the Districts that Need Help the Most," The Education Trust, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Rebell and Wardenski, "Of Course Money Matters," The Campaign for Fiscal Equity, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> See *supra*, n10.

<sup>20</sup> *Supra*, n13.