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“Fund Our Schools!” Demand Advocates at the Launch of a New Statewide Campaign

*The **Fund Our Schools** campaign is fighting to ensure every student has the opportunity to attain a high-quality K-12 education.*

Richmond, VA— Advocates, teachers, parents, and students gathered at Armstrong High School this evening to launch the **Fund Our Schools** campaign, a new statewide advocacy effort that envisions a Virginia where every student has the opportunity to attain a high-quality public education. The Fund Our Schools campaign, launched by the Legal Aid Justice Center, The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis, New Virginia Majority, and Virginia Educators United—and supported by a growing coalition—demands the Commonwealth prioritize student needs and fully fund Virginia’s K-12 schools.

“Strong, well-supported public schools are vital to ensuring that every child in every zip code is able to pursue their educational and career ambitions,” **said Angela Ciolfi, Executive Director of the Legal Aid Justice Center**, “But Virginia does not invest enough in its K-12 schools to fulfill its constitutional obligation to ensure that every child receives a high-quality education—and children in low-income families experience the most harm from this disinvestment.”

Across Virginia, in communities that cannot afford to supplement state funding for education, student outcomes have suffered while students and educators languish in crumbling buildings with inadequate technology, textbooks, and other resources. Even in communities that can afford to supplement the state’s investment, students who need extra support to succeed often lag far behind their peers.

“Fully supported schools are vital to ensure that all Virginia students have access to a high-quality public education regardless of their zip code, race, immigration status, or country of origin,” **said Kenneth Gilliam, Policy Director of New Virginia Majority**, “Now is the time for Virginia to take the lead and make high-quality public education our calling card and advance racial equity in our commonwealth.”

The campaign laid out a plan to advance its goals by eliminating recession-era cuts such as the state’s cap on support staff and by improving the equity of the state’s funding structure to ensure that each student has the resources and opportunities to be successful. In addition to eliminating cuts, the campaign said Virginia can fulfill this vision by fixing its outdated and inadequate state revenue system and by making sure corporations pay their fair share.

“Virginia is a high-income state with the resources to invest in creating broadly shared opportunity and prosperity,” **said Michael Cassidy, President and CEO of The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis**, “How we choose to invest our shared resources through the state budget shapes the Commonwealth’s future and can fortify the building blocks of thriving communities, such as education and public health.”

“Funding is an essential part in the success of students in all grades. It is not only vital in the performance of students but a constitutional obligation. An obligation that is nowhere near being fulfilled,” **said Myasia Goode, student at Open High School and a Virginia Excels Youth Ambassador**. “Inadequate funding along with the severely imbalanced ratio of social workers, counselors, and nurses to students enrolled in RPS is detrimental in ensuring the well-being of our student’s futures. So the Fund Our Schools campaign seeks that these issues be addressed and resolved with sufficient staff to support students and fair funding to provide for students.”

“While the challenges facing our schools have grown, Virginia has actually decreased its state aid to our public schools since the Great Recession. The 40,000 teachers and school support professionals of the VEA support your campaign work and call on our elected officials to Fund Our Future,” **said Jim Livingston, a teacher at Prince William County Public Schools and President of Virginia Education Association**.

“Our future is now. Virginia, it is time to fund our schools! Virginia prides itself on being the ‘best state for business,’ meanwhile ranking 40th in the nation for state education funding, and dead last for workers rights,” **said Carla Okouchi, a Fairfax County Public Schools teacher with Virginia Educators United**, “We believe that Virginia can have a thriving economy and great public schools. It is time our schools reflect the expertise of our education professionals, the insights of our students, and the dreams of their parents.”

“Properly funding our schools is not only the RIGHT thing to do, it’s the SMART thing to do. With better schools and supports, communities can be uplifted, crime rates can go down, businesses can flourish, and we can start to close some of the racialized gaps that have persisted in this state for far too long. I speak up not only for my kids, but also for other children whose futures are directly impacted by the quality of education they receive. It is time for the Commonwealth to invest in our schools, thereby investing in our communities and our state,” **said Kai Banks, an RPS parent and advocate**.

"Virginia's economy has experienced phenomenal growth since the Great Recession. However, funding for public education has not been restored to pre-recession levels. This has the largest impact on small and rural localities who don't have the capacity to make up for the loss of state funding," **said Keith Perrigan, Superintendent of Bristol City Schools**.

“I truly believe that children aren’t simply products of their environments. They’re products of expectations; theirs and ours. How can their dreams and aspirations be realized, when the influential and affluent adults who are charged with setting policies to support all students, see fit to perpetuate educational policies that allow inequities to persist? Too many of our students continue to have their dreams deferred and their expectations for their futures denied because we have failed to prioritize a strong public education system,” **said Damon Jiggetts, Executive Director of Peter Paul Development Center in Richmond**.

“Perhaps no issue strikes at the heart of equity more than the funding of public education. VASS believes that the most significant concern is the overall amount of state funding made available to school divisions. Specifically, the funding that is made available to PK-12 public education by Virginia is well below the actual investment in the children by localities, **said the Virginia Association of School Superintendents**, “While this is a 21st century challenge, this issue has been discussed for the better part of 40 years and has yet to be adequately addressed.”

“Our student population has shifted in the past decade and now has higher rates of students with special learning needs, economically disadvantaged students and English language learners. Concurrently the role of technology in the classroom has changed and there is a new emphasis on project-based learning and early career planning,” said **Jenna Alexander, Vice President of Advocacy for Virginia PTA.** "It's time for Virginia to modernize the way it funds our schools to close the widening opportunity and skills gap."

"I spend a large portion of everyday listening to teachers, listening to parents, and students," said **Thomas Calhoun, President of Norfolk Federation of Teachers.** “We’re missing the basics here - clean halls, roofs that don’t leak, books, computers, enough teachers. Our educators and students deserve better. We deserve a professional environment that has the resources and tools to empower our students.”

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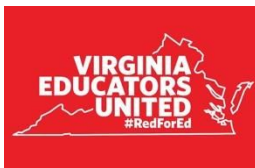
The Legal Aid Justice Center partners with communities and clients to achieve justice by dismantling systems that create and perpetuate poverty. Their mission is to seek equal justice for all by solving clients’ legal problems, strengthening the voices of low-income communities, and rooting out the inequities that keep people in poverty.

The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis is deeply committed to advancing policies that create opportunities for people with low and moderate incomes in Virginia, with a particular focus on dismantling the barriers that face communities of color. They are a non-partisan, non-profit policy research and advocacy organization that provides accessible, independent analysis on policies to help build thriving communities.



NEW VIRGINIA MAJORITY
DEMOCRACY, JUSTICE, PROGRESS

New Virginia Majority works to create a powerful multi-issue, multi-racial movement to transform Virginia through large-scale civic engagement, issue advocacy, community organizing and strategic communications. They organize within Latinx, African American, Asian American Pacific Islander and youth communities, centering the leadership and demands of working-class women of color. Together, they vote, mobilize and engage within communities to advance racial and economic justice in Virginia.



Virginia Educators United is a grassroots campaign made of teachers, staff members, parents and community members who are fighting to ensure that after 10 years of systematic defunding, our children get the support they deserve.

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