

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Fund Our Schools Coalition Response to the Passed Budget**

*State budget makes critical investments, yet leaves much undone to adequately fund schools and meet levels prescribed by the Virginia Board of Education*

Richmond, VA — On Thursday afternoon, the General Assembly agreed on the state's next two-year budget and sent it to the governor for consideration. The budget contains many important investments in K-12 education, including more money for school districts with a high share of students who live in poverty, additional funding for more teachers for English Learners, and improving the ratio of school counselors to students. Yet, while making some improvements, ultimately this budget does not move school funding forward from levels before the Great Recession, despite a statewide enrollment increase of more than 55,000 students and increasing student needs. **The budget falls far short of what our Board of Education said was needed to adequately fund Virginia's schools, funding just 10.6% of their prescribed Standards of Quality (SOQs).** Areas unaddressed include social workers, mental health staff, school nurses, reading specialists, and the elimination of a cap on support staff implemented by the state in 2010.

Although we acknowledge the hard work to secure the new investments for K-12 this year, it is important to keep that dollar amount in perspective. The new investments fall far short of what's needed to fully fund our schools, and the legislature passed up progressive revenue opportunities this session to raise the funding needed. The Fund Our Schools coalition calls on lawmakers to come back next year with a plan to raise revenue to fully fund our schools.

Below is a comparison of key K-12 items that passed in the conference budget versus what the Virginia Board of Education said was needed to meet the prescribed Standards of Quality.

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<b>Prescribed Standards of Quality</b>	<b>Major New K-12 Investments Included in the General Assembly Approved Budget</b>
<b>\$271.2 million</b> to establish an Equity Fund, directing more At-Risk Add-On support to the highest needs schools and consolidate other existing equity funding programs	<b>\$149.1 million</b> for the At-Risk Add-On, which is a supplement that goes to districts with a high share of students that live in poverty
No recommendation on general teacher pay	<b>\$290.5 million</b> for the state share of a 2% pay increase for state supported educators in FY21 and an additional 2% increase in FY22 (this payout is contingent on the state hitting certain revenue targets)
<b>\$180.4 million</b> to improve the school counselor to student ratio to the nationally recommended best practice level of 1:250	<b>\$46.1 million</b> to improve the school counselor to student ratio to 1:325
<b>\$62.7 million</b> to improve the ratio and provide additional support to English Learner students with the most needs	<b>\$20.9 million</b> to improve the certified teacher to English Learner student ratio
<b>\$813.5 million</b> to lift the support cap put in place during the Great Recession, which severely cut state funding for school support positions such as nurses, psychologists, social workers, and custodians	Not included

**Quotes from Fund Our Schools coalition members**

*“While we are encouraged by the small steps that were taken during this legislative session, we are disappointed in the continued disinvestment in public education. We always hear politicians say that zip codes shouldn’t determine education, but unfortunately, that’s still true in Virginia. We are committed to continue working to promote equitable education throughout the commonwealth,” said Virginia Excels Youth Ambassadors in a joint statement.*

*“This budget makes some important new investments in K-12 education, but Virginia is still far off from meeting its constitutional obligation to fund our schools,” said Rachael Deane, Legal Director of the JustChildren Program at the Legal Aid Justice Center. “The budget fails to fund the Standards of Quality and makes none of the desperately-needed improvements to staffing levels for social workers, nurses, and mental health staff. Our most vulnerable students continue to wait for adequate education funding.”*

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*"As education in Virginia stands today, we have school buildings that are unsafe for children to learn in, an increasingly dire shortage of people willing to teach in our schools, and staffing levels that fail to meet our constitutional obligation," said Emma Clark, a Teacher with Virginia Educators United. "Although the dollar amount invested may look large, this budget falls short of bringing us to the bare minimum standard of safe and legally staffed schools."*

*"This budget marks a significant improvement to Virginia's overall support for K-12 schools, but we still have a long way to go to catch up to other states and adequately fund our students who face the most barriers." - Chris Duncombe, Policy Director at The Commonwealth Institute*

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### **About the Fund Our Schools Coalition**

**Fund Our Schools** envisions a Virginia where every student has the opportunity to attain a high-quality public education. Led by the **Legal Aid Justice Center**, **The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis**, **New Virginia Majority**, **Virginia Educators United**, and **Virginia Excels**, the Fund Our Schools campaign is a growing coalition of advocacy groups, parents, teachers, and students that demands the Commonwealth prioritize student needs and fully fund Virginia's K-12 schools.

With adequate investments through the state budget, Virginia can make educational opportunity a reality that lifts every individual student to new heights and, with them, the communities they live in. The priorities of the Fund Our Schools coalition are:

- sufficient staffing to provide students the instructional, social, and emotional support to be successful;
- fair funding in order to meet the needs of every student in every zip code; and
- just compensation and supports for educators in order to recruit and retain a diverse workforce of highly qualified educators so that every Virginia student has a meaningful opportunity to learn.

[www.FundOurSchoolsVA.org](http://www.FundOurSchoolsVA.org)