



Newport News School Board 2011-12 Legislative Program

The Newport News School Board annually publishes its legislative program containing a number of policy and funding positions. This program represents the School Board's recommendations for improving public education and the partnership between local and state government. The School Board approved the legislative program at its November 15, 2011, meeting.

Priority Legislative Positions 2012

SUPPORT ADDITIONAL STATE FUNDING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

The Newport News School Board urges the General Assembly to use additional funds available in the upcoming budget to partially restore the massive reductions in state aid to K-12 public education enacted over the past three years. During that time period:

- The percentage of state K-12 funding dropped from 34.6% to 30%
- State per-pupil funding dropped from \$5,274 to \$4,600

Newport News Public Schools has worked diligently to trim spending and create greater efficiencies that limit the negative effects of state and local budget cuts on student needs. During the past three years, NNPS has cut \$37.5 million from its budget due primarily to reductions in state aid and is now operating on a budget that is \$16 million below that of the FY 2007 level

At the same time, the School Board recognizes that continued cuts to public education will have an inevitable impact on the ability to sustain the positive growth in student achievement witnessed over the past several years.

To maintain its commitment to all students, the School Board will continue to advocate for the resources needed to address the growing needs of students in Newport News and across Virginia. These include closing the achievement gap, ensuring that all students meet or exceed federal and state benchmarks, providing students with the resources needed to succeed in the 21st century work force, providing competitive compensation that attracts and retains the best teachers, ensuring a safe environment, and meeting the infrastructure demands brought on by new technology and aging schools.

The School Board urges the General Assembly to oppose additional funding reductions that further erode the connection between what the state is obligated to pay for K-12 education and the actual costs of providing services.

SUPPORT ALLOCATING A PORTION OF STATE SURPLUS TO K-12 EDUCATION

The Newport News School Board encourages the Governor and Legislature to allocate a portion of the \$544.8 million FY 2011 surplus to K-12 public education as a way to partially restore \$900 million in previous reductions to K-12 funding, including

- \$68.9 million from Federal Fiscal Stabilization funds that were added to the state's FY 2010 general fund, thereby eliminating the funding for FY 2011
- \$79.6 million reduction to the state textbook fund for FY 2010
- \$61.3 million from rebenchmarking update in FY 2010
- \$9.4 million in the biennial budget by eliminating the rebenchmarking update for inflation
- \$34 million over two years by updated the "Federal Deduct" calculations
- \$78.7 million reduction for support staff funding
- \$19.4 million in school bus replacement funding
- \$67.1 million in state support for school construction over two years
- \$16.1 million in state support over two years for the Enrollment Loss provision
- \$164.1 million eliminated from the General Fund over two years by transferring Remedial Summer School, Textbooks and ESOL funding to the Lottery funding category
- \$244.7 from Basic Aid funding over two years by removing certain expenditures costs normally included in Basic Aid calculations
- \$169.2 million over two years by recalculating health care payments

OPPOSE TRANSFER OF SOQ FUNDING OBLIGATIONS TO LOTTERY

The Newport News School Board opposes shifting additional Standards of Quality (SOQ) and other recurring cost programs into the state's lottery funded accounts. In the 2011 General Assembly session, the state transferred \$161 million in obligations from the General Fund to the Lottery. The result is a reduction of funds available to educational programs already funded by the lottery and the potential for certain obligations, such as textbooks, to lose funding if lottery projections are not met. According to the approved budget, if actual Lottery proceeds for fiscal year 2011 do not meet the estimate contained in Chapter 890, the Textbook per pupil amount will be adjusted down to prevent payments for Lottery-funded accounts from exceeding available Lottery proceeds.

SUPPORT JLARC RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROMOTE THIRD GRADE READING PERFORMANCE IN VIRGINIA

The Newport News School Board supports the following recommendations of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) included in the 2011 report: *Strategies to Promote Third Grade Reading Performance in Virginia*.

- *To help schools bring greater focus to reading skill development in third grade, the Board of Education should limit the Standards of Learning tests taken by third grade students to reading and math.*
- *The General Assembly may wish to consider providing funding for literacy coaches to improve reading instruction in the early grades.*

According to JLARC: *Third grade is the first year in which students take any SOL test, and third graders are required to take an SOL test in four subject areas: reading, math, science, and history. The extent of testing in fourth grade is less than in third grade, as science is not tested and the testing of history depends on whether the division chooses to have Virginia Studies taught in fourth or fifth grade. A review of practices in other states found that most states only administer statewide examinations for reading and math to third grade students. To enable third grade teachers to focus more heavily on reading skills, which are necessary for learning in all other content areas, the State may want to consider limiting the third grade SOL tests to reading and math. Reducing the number of third grade SOL tests has been considered previously by the Board of Education, and is recommended by this study.*

PROMOTE STEM EDUCATION IN VIRGINIA

The Newport News School Board applauds the Governor and Legislature for providing resources to increase STEM (Science, Technology, Education and Math) education opportunities and encourages additional funding that will stimulate partnerships between the private sector and local school boards.

EARLY COLLEGE/DUAL ENROLLMENT

The Newport News School Board encourages the General Assembly to promote college access by reducing/waiving tuition for qualified high school junior and seniors who take community colleges courses through a school division's early college or dual enrollment program.

The *2008 Virginia Plan for Dual Enrollment between Virginia Public Schools and Colleges* "recognizes that high school students who accrue college credit are more likely to continue with their education than those who do not." The *2008 Virginia Plan for Dual Enrollment* states that "Schools and colleges are encouraged to provide high school students the opportunity for dual enrollment at no tuition cost to them or their families." Providing free or reduced tuition to community college courses would encourage more high school students to take advantage of this opportunity. Currently, Virginia citizens age 60 and above may take undergraduate courses for free at Virginia public colleges and universities depending on income level and may audit courses for free regardless of income level.

FLEXIBILITY FOR TEXTBOOK FUNDS

The Newport News School Board supports a review of the permitted uses of textbook funding in conjunction with findings from the "Beyond Textbooks" pilot program.

In 2009 the Virginia Department of Education launched the "Beyond Textbooks" pilot program to explore the technical, social and policy implications of textbook alternatives such as the iPad or other electronic readers. NNPS is a participant in this program. According to the Year 1 "Beyond Textbooks" report, "most students clearly liked the e-book's ability to support individualized learning" and that "Interactive e-books increased student engagement, as evidenced by the students' words and the observations of teacher and researchers." Although the report is a preliminary finding, the Newport News School Board encourages the General Assembly to begin consideration of options that would permit textbook funding for technologies that support electronic access of books and other educational materials.

Continuing Positions

Definition of Instructional Spending ("65 Percent")

The Newport News School Board encourages the General Assembly to oppose efforts to define "instructional spending" funding in a narrow and limited manner that does not include items and programs essential to student learning. Legislation that would require each local school division to allocate 65 percent of its operating budget to instructional spending has previously failed to include a host of services and staff that are essential to students and parents. Past legislation has omitted principals, counselors, nurses, librarians, curriculum development, teacher training and background checks, testing programs to comply with NCLB and SOLs, heating and cooling classrooms, and more.

Restore School Construction Funding

The Newport News School Board encourages the General Assembly to reinstate full funding of the School Construction Program, which was eliminated entirely in 2010 and to develop additional sources of funding for public school construction.

Federal Deduct

The School Board urges the General Assembly to eliminate the “Federal Deduct” provision, which deducts a percentage of federal revenues from the Basic Aid funding calculation. State funds should not be reduced because a school division receives funds earmarked to implement federal mandates.

Charter Schools

The Newport News School Board opposes efforts to broaden Virginia’s charter school law, especially those that would create an appeals process, specify a funding formula without negotiations, require judicial review, or transfer authority for public education from local school boards to other entities. Additionally, the Newport News School Board requests that all public schools be provided with the same flexibility in meeting state requirements that are provided to charter schools

Support Staff Formula

The School Board opposes using an artificial formula to reduce the state share of educational support staff and encourages the General Assembly to direct the Joint Legislative and Audit Review Commission (JLARC) to conduct a thorough study of this issue before using it to cut education funding again. In 2009 the state reduced K-12 education funding by \$340 million by implementing a cap on support staff of one to every 4.03 instructional positions that are funded by the state. This formula fails to recognize:

- that local school divisions employ nearly 25 percent more instructional staff than are funded by the state,
- the value of support staff to the instructional process,
- that many support staff are responsible for state-mandated programs such as testing and reporting

Virginia Board of Education SOQ Recommendations

The Newport News School Board affirms its support of the revisions to the SOQ approved by the Virginia Board of Education, while recognizing the need to defer full implementation to a later year.

Recruitment and Retention of Teachers

The Newport News School Board urges the General Assembly to seek additional ways to attract and retain highly qualified individuals to the teaching profession in Virginia.

Preserve At-Risk Incentive Funding

The Newport News School Board encourages the General Assembly to maintain funding for at-risk incentive funds, which are essential for ensuring that K-12 students who are at risk of failing are receiving the quality education needed.

Funding for Classroom Technology

Recognizing the need to defer full implementation to a later year, the Newport News School Board seeks legislation to increase state funding to support classroom technology, hardware, software, and training needs, to enable school divisions to meet requirements found in the Virginia Standards of Learning and prepare students for success in a highly technological world.

Burden of Persuasion

The Newport News School Board opposes legislation that would place the burden of persuasion on the school division in an administrative hearing concerning the individualized education program of a child with a disability. Past legislation attempted to amend Virginia Code 22.1-214C to provide that "*The school division shall have the burden of persuasion in proceedings pursuant to this subsection.*" If such legislation were to pass, school divisions would bear the burden of persuasion every time a parent initiates a due process hearing. Passage of this legislation would conflict with a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision and most likely will encourage increased litigation by parents, thereby diverting valuable time and resources from educational services.

Vouchers and Tuition Credits

The Newport News School Board opposes legislation that provides for the use of vouchers or tuition credits for non-public school students, for a state-mandated program of choice that supersedes the local school board's authority to establish K-12 school zones, or allows for re-segregation of schools. Current state policies and regulations provide sufficient choice opportunities for local school divisions. Examples of choice opportunities which Newport News Public Schools currently provides includes specialized courses and programs, magnet schools, attendance at vocational centers, home instruction, and adult and alternative programs. These are all within the framework of public education.

Binding Arbitration

The Newport News School Board opposes legislation that would amend the Constitution of Virginia by limiting the authority of local school boards to make decisions affecting personnel matters.

Family Life Education

The Newport News School Board will monitor legislation that would limit, eliminate or change subject matter for the Family Life Education Program at the local school level. The desired goal of the program is education for the health and safety of students.

For more information about the NNPS Legislative Program, please contact Patrick Finneran, director of corporate and government relations, at patrick.finneran@nn.k12.va.us.