



DRAFT: 2019 Legislative Agenda

Priorities & Position Statements

2019 Draft Legislative Priorities

FUNDING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

The state is a partner in education yet, increasingly, school divisions are under financial stress because of a lack of adequate funding at the state level. This trend is even more troubling because it contributes directly to the statewide teacher shortage. We ask the state to demonstrate its commitment to education by using any increase in revenue that results from the new federal tax code to invest in Virginia's public schools and to raise teachers' salaries in order to encourage high-quality public education.

HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN

Albemarle County Public Schools were already in the process of modernizing their curriculum when the Virginia Department of Education launched its Profile of a Virginia Graduate guidance. These efforts can be seen in Albemarle County's High School 2022 initiative, designed to guarantee meaningful and relevant high school experiences for every student. We aggressively support curricular innovation through such initiatives as a pilot program with unweighted grades, support of limitations on the number of advanced placement courses students are allowed to take, and the creation of the Albemarle Tech educational center. These produce increased opportunities for students to pursue their diverse interests and educational objectives.

We are grateful to the General Assembly, the Board of Education, and the Governor for their support of high school curriculum modernization, and we are delighted that High School 2022 launched in August. To further support modernizing the high school curriculum we urge that you support the following:

- Funding designated to support High School 2022 and its innovative programs, which could provide data to inform future state-wide educational initiatives.
- Graduation requirements and credits that encompass student opportunities to develop and demonstrate adaptable skills in non-traditional classroom environments like internships, mentorships, and job shadowing.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

ACPS encourages and supports efforts that assist the school division and its communities in creating universal and affordable access to broadband technology, particularly in unserved and underserved areas. Access to broadband, or high-speed internet, is critical for 21st-century students and as such has become a basic requirement for equity in access to public education. Many Albemarle County students, particularly those in unserved rural areas, need long-term strategies to address the broadband gap. Accordingly, we believe state and federal support should include the following:

- Development of a statewide comprehensive plan for broadband and state support for local governments that are developing or implementing local or regional broadband plans;
- Provisions that provide for sharing utility and road right-of-way easements for expanding broadband;
- Support for linking broadband efforts for education and public safety to private sector efforts to serve businesses and residences;
- Consideration of proposals that would subject broadband to stricter and more developed regulation as a public utility.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Student mental health is an important component of our school security plan, and we continuously strive to maintain a safe and positive school environment for our students. The School Board is grateful to the General Assembly for its support in updating health Standards of Learning for students in grades nine and 10 to include mental health. In response to this clear need for strengthened resources supporting our students' mental health, ACPS has also expanded mental health counseling in schools by increasing the number of mental and emotional health counselors serving our middle and high schools. We hope that this will complement the new mental health curriculum and further enhance student understanding, attitudes, and behavior that promote health, well-being, and dignity. This expansion goes beyond SOQ requirements and is being financed solely by local funds.

- We request that on-site mental health counselors be added as SOQ requirements in order to create a safe and positive climate for all public school students.
- Accordingly, we ask for state funding that provides adequate resources to fund any staff coverage related to school safety and mental health counseling.

2019 Draft Positions & Policy Statements

CHARTER SCHOOLS

We oppose a Constitutional Amendment that would permit external authorities to establish a charter school in a community without local school board approval, as doing so usurps local control of public education.

FAIR & EQUITABLE COMPOSITE INDEX

The Local Composite Index fluctuates dramatically from biennium to biennium for many localities, and Albemarle County Public Schools were severely impacted by these fluctuations in early 2018. This was primarily because of a few individuals whose income rose dramatically due to the one-time sale of assets, creating millions of dollars in additional income, which skewed the income component of the calculation of the composite index. These income spikes did not increase local support for schools but translated into two years of substantially decreased state funding. We support solutions that would mitigate the adverse effects of these fluctuations on state funding, such as the use of median rather than mean income in the calculation and the reintroduction of a hold harmless provision.

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

We support funding that promotes the use of extended stop arms on school buses in any division where it is appropriate. ACPS conducted pilot programs through a state waiver in which extended stop arms were installed in school buses in the fall of 2017 and the spring of 2018. These showed reductions in school bus safety violations of between 50 and 89 percent. We also believe that all school divisions should be able to install extended stop arms without having to complete the current waiver process.

Although the use of the extended stop arms did deter many drivers from passing stopped school buses, if installed throughout the county, there would still be 660-3,000 school bus safety violations per year. To better protect our children, we request that the General Assembly amend Virginia Code subsection B of § 46.2-844 to allow the Department of Motor Vehicles to release pertinent vehicle ownership information to third-party vendors in the event of a driver unlawfully passing a stopped school bus. This change would be similar to the provisions contained in Virginia Code subsection 21 of § 15.2-968.1.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

ACPS is concerned about national reports of disproportionate discipline for minority students. Although the disparities in our schools are narrower than those reported in the national data, any disparity is troubling. Particularly for out-of-school suspensions, students are not only

stigmatized but also lose academic time and often fall behind. We are working to improve student discipline outcomes and reduce demographic disparities in discipline in ACPS. In pilot programs at two of our middle schools we have implemented the Short-Term Education Program (STEP), designed to reduce out-of-school suspensions and to lower discipline recidivism rates. STEP provides students with intensive in-school counseling and academic support in the school building in response to behavior infractions and aims to lower absentee rates, a factor in school accreditation. Since the STEP pilot began, the number of students in out-of-school suspension or in STEP has been reduced by almost half.

We support revisions to the Standards of Accreditation to include provisions for the recommendation of schools exhibiting suspension and expulsion rates above the state average to implement evidence-based intervention programs designed to improve suspension and expulsion rates.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

We support legislation that will provide school divisions with greater flexibility in the use of Children's Services Act funding to enable students to remain in their neighborhood schools.

We support efforts to ensure that Special Education state mandates come with adequate funding to support the implementation of those mandates. For example, school divisions would have benefitted greatly had additional funding accompanied the recent mandate to require autism, CPR, or dyslexia training.

We support efforts to study and revise the funding/staffing formula for Special Education to better meet student needs.

TEACHER LICENSURE

We support regulations reflecting waivers of certain licensure requirements that may be granted by school divisions to prospective CTE teachers and licensees.