

Ensure Productive, Safe Learning Environments for All

Eliminate the State's Cap on School Support Staff

Issue

Instructional and support staff play vital roles in the safety and success of students. Yet since the 2008-2009 school year, there has been a profound drop-off in state investment for support staff positions. This is because in 2009, during the Great Recession, lawmakers added language to the budget creating a “cap” on support staff funding, cutting hundreds of millions in state funding for support staff.

Between 2009 and 2019, support staff in Virginia schools has declined by 2,800 positions while student enrollment increased by more than 57,000 students.

Solution

Support the School Equity and Staffing Act submitted by Del. Aird and Sen. McClellan that strike the language from the Appropriation Act (Item 136 C.5.k) that establishes the support positions cap to fund school support staff based on how many positions schools have and need.

Why This Matters

- The state helps pay for less than 40% of support staff in Virginia's public schools. This means many local governments have to fund the majority of these positions on their own and not all communities have sufficient resources to make these investments.
- Support staffing has declined at four times the rate for school divisions with the most students of color (as a share) compared to school divisions with the fewest since the 2008-2009 school year.
- Support positions are vital for addressing and improving challenges that are particularly faced by students from low-income families and students of color such as chronic absenteeism, high rates of suspensions and expulsions, and overall school climate.
- The cap is not based on sound policy. A 2004 JLARC review found that the state's prior method of funding support staff was “neither inadequate nor excessive.” The report noted that Virginia's per-pupil expenditures for non-instructional services were below the national average and similar to the average for the southern region.
- The support cap is updated every two years and has gotten more stringent every update since 2010, making it function more like a ratchet that continues to put tighter and tighter financial restraints on localities.

Support staff are essential in meeting the academic, social, and emotional learning needs of students in and out of the classroom, and they maintain school safety, keep school facilities functional, aid teachers, and promote healthy learning environments. Adequately staffing these positions leads to better academic and life outcomes for students and helps build a system of public education that works for all.

Virginia must eliminate the cap on school support staff and fully fund the new SOQ