
Local Governments Across Virginia Join Effort to Advocate for more Education Funding

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Local Governments Across Virginia Join Effort to Advocate for more Education Funding

Since 2009, state funding for K-12 education is down 9%, while overall student population has grown by 5%.

Richmond, VA – Today, local elected officials from across the Commonwealth are joining the call for more state funding for K-12 public education. Leaders from a number of localities have signed on to support the March For More, which was announced on Wednesday by Mayor Levar Stoney, Richmond Public Schools leadership and education leaders from the across the region. March For More will take place on December 8th starting at Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School in Richmond and end at the State Capitol steps.

The March is also supported by a growing number of organizations committed to increasing state funding for education, including the Virginia Education Association, Virginia Municipal League, Virginia First Cities, and the NAACP, to name a few.

Leaders from across the Commonwealth, representing a diversity of Virginians, support the March For More and are encouraging parents, students, teachers, administrators and others in the education field to participate in the march in Richmond:

Virginia Municipal League

“We represent 38 cities, 160 towns, and eight counties in the Commonwealth of Virginia,” said Michelle Gowdy, Executive Director of the Virginia Municipal League. “In July of this year, the City of Richmond came to our legislative committee meeting asking our members to support advocating the state to fund the true cost of education. this initiative, and our members did overwhelmingly. We then took this issue to our entire membership in October and again they overwhelmingly supported this initiative, and we look forward to supporting it going forward.”

Virginia First Cities

“We are a coalition of 14 cities from across the Commonwealth and want to express our strongest possible support for increased funding for Virginia public education,” said Kelly Harris-Braxton, Executive Director of Virginia First Cities. “We represent cities all across the state, including: Charlottesville, Danville, Hampton, Hopewell, Lynchburg, Martinsville, Newport News, Norfolk, Petersburg, Portsmouth, Richmond, Staunton, Williamsburg, and Winchester.”

"Year after year, our cities are digging deeper and deeper and making incredibly hard decisions about where to cut in order to adequately educate our children because Virginia continues to disproportionately rely on local governments to fund public schools..."

Mayor Justin Wilson, City of Alexandria:

"Localities like Alexandria are committed to the investment necessary to create 21st century learning environments for our children. However, we believe that the Commonwealth needs to recognize and fund the true cost of public education in our communities. Simply put, Virginia needs more state funding for K-12 education in our communities. Our children need it. Our families deserve it. Our leaders must demand it."

Chairwoman Katie Cristol, Arlington County:

"As a locality that receives the smallest percentage of funds from the state for K-12 education, we've watched funding dwindle since the start of the recession in 2009. The Virginia Department of Education's data shows this in stark terms: Arlington's local expenditures for operations for the Standards of Quality in 2017 exceeded our required local effort by 181.6 percent. Shifting such a disproportionate burden of educating young Virginians on to the Commonwealth's localities is as inequitable as it is unsustainable."

Mayor Nikuyah Walker and Superintendent of Schools Dr. Rosa Atkins City of Charlottesville:

"We've asked the General Assembly to recognize and fund the true cost of public education. From adequate SOQ funding, to increasing the At Risk Add On, to funding for extended school day/extended school year programs, the Commonwealth's attention to funding a quality public education is being called on and it's urgent, for our children cannot afford to be kept waiting."

Mayor Treney Tweedy, City of Lynchburg:

"Jobs are the key to economic recovery and adequate education is essential for the foundational preparation of the current and future workforce. The State should fully fund the Standards of Quality (SOQ), including support staff costs and categorical incentive funds for At-Risk students and restore funding from cuts to education over the last biennium. The state must meet its education funding obligations and should refrain from changes in methodology and division of financial responsibility that result in a further shift of funding responsibility from the state to localities. These shifts do not change what it actually costs to provide education but simply transfers additional costs to local governments, and ultimately to the local real estate tax base."

Mayor Gene Teague and Superintendent of Schools Dr. Zebedee Talley Jr, City of Martinsville:

"We are asking for statewide parity in state funding for school construction, maintenance and operations. Further, we have asked the Commonwealth to fully fund the expenditures imposed upon local school systems by implementing the Standards of Quality because Martinsville invested 148.2% above the required local effort for SOQ programs in 2016-2017."

Mayor Kenneth Alexander, City of Norfolk:

"State support of K-12 education has steadily declined over the last generation when compared to the total growth of the general fund. Since FY2009, the state's K-12 appropriation has dropped from 35.2% of total general fund appropriations to 29.9% in FY2019. There have been zero direct state grants for capital improvements since FY2010, and even literary fund loans to school divisions have been impacted. Localities have been forced to make up the difference, and other vital services for families and communities have suffered in the balance. In a time when Virginia is experiencing significant economic growth and state revenue forecasts are improving, it is critical that we atone for these cuts in investment imposed on our schools and restore state funding for K-12 education."

Councilwoman Jill Carson, Town of Pennington Gap

"The formula for funding public schools, as it currently exists, does little or even perhaps fails to meet the educational needs of poor rural school districts."

Mayor John Rowe, Jr., City of Portsmouth:

"The local, state, and federal shares of school operations funding has shifted since 2008-2009 and Portsmouth has taken on a much larger share of funding. Portsmouth invested 296.3% above the required local effort for SOQ programs in 2016-2017. Obviously, we cannot raise property taxes on an already stressed citizenry. The state needs to step up funding for K-12 education."

Vice-Mayor Anita James-Price, City of Roanoke:

“Now is the time for leadership to clearly establish that education is Virginia’s top priority. Frederick Douglas said it best: “it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men”. Let’s invest today for the future of tomorrow’s commonwealth.”

Mayor Carolyn Dull, City of Staunton:

“The General Assembly simply needs to fully fund K - 12 education and fix the SOQ formula to recognize the true cost of education, as our children deserve, and our future workforce demands.”

In Virginia, localities are required to fund 45% of K-12 education, but are funding 57% of the spending – to the tune of about \$4 billion more than required. In Virginia, localities are funding more than \$4 billion over the State’s required local contribution.

“This is not just an urban school problem, but a statewide issue that effects our rural and suburban localities as well. Since 2009, state funding for K-12 education is down 9%, while overall student population has grown by 5%,” **said Mayor Levar Stoney**. “I’m proud to stand with local governments and school districts across Virginia to say this is not only unacceptable – it is unjust and immoral.”

For more information about the March For More, visit MoreBetterStronger.com.

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