Newport News School Board 2014-15 Legislative Program

The Newport News School Board annually publishes a legislative program containing 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 18, 2014 meeting.

Priority Legislative Positions

K-12 EDUCATION FUNDING
The Newport News School Board urges the General Assembly to direct the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to conduct a study of the K-12 state funding to assist in determining whether current practices are realistic in relation to the Commonwealth’s current educational needs and practices.

Budget comparisons from 2009 to today illustrate the large decreases in state spending for K-12 education:
- The percentage of the state budget allocated for K-12 education from dropped from 34.6% to approximately 30%
- State per-pupil funding dropped from $5,274 to $4,804. When adjusted for inflation, the comparative value of today’s state funding is even lower.

Recent changes to the SOQ formula include:
- Eliminating most textbook funding from the SOQ formula
- Eliminating inflationary adjustments for operating costs in certain years
- Transferring Remedial Summer School and English as a Second Language funding out of the SOQ formula
- Moving retirement costs to the literary fund, reducing funding that would be available for school construction
- Increasing the state-approved life span of school buses from 12 to 15 years, resulting in reduced funding for student transportation
- Capping funding for support positions

Today, Newport News Public Schools receives $22 million less in state revenue than in 2009. And while we have worked diligently to create greater efficiencies that limit the negative effects of state budget cuts on student needs, lower funding comes at a price, including deferred school maintenance, delays in technology updates, reduced professional development for teachers and more. Most significantly, a reduction of 492 full-time employees means larger class sizes and fewer course offerings.
**SOL ASSESSMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY REFORM**
The Newport News School Board strongly supports continued efforts for comprehensive reform of the state assessment and accountability system in a way that provides more educationally valuable information through tests that measure individual student growth. Specifically, the School Board urges the state to institute a process similar to the federal “Safe Harbor” system as a way to recognize schools that are making acceptable progress in SOL achievement but did not reach the Full Accreditation benchmark.

**VIRGINIA PRE-SCHOOL FUNDING HOLD HARMLESS**
The Newport News School Board supports full hold harmless funding in the FY 2014-16 biennial budget for the Virginia Preschool Initiative to ensure that no school system receives fewer pre-K slots than they had in the previous year.

**LICENSURE REFORM STUDY FOR STEM TEACHING**
The Newport News School Board supports a study of the regulations governing teacher licensure in Virginia with a focus on encouraging more STEM professionals to enter the teaching profession.

Newport News Public Schools has embarked on a comprehensive STEM education initiative that prepares students to take full advantage of STEM opportunities in higher education and career fields. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics are key to a prosperous community and quality careers for this and future generations.

In order for NNPS to accomplish its goals around STEM education, it will need to hire skilled professionals with diverse educational and professional backgrounds. Our STEM instructors may not graduate from a traditional teacher preparation program and many will come from the technical and scientific communities.

Current regulations serve as barriers to attracting professionals from these areas to the K-12 teaching profession. Specifically, requirements relating to industry certification, the Technical Education Certificate, definitions of what constitute acceptable college math coursework, and transcript verifications that include copies of course syllabi have been identified as unnecessary roadblocks.

To move STEM forward in the K-12 environment we propose that the General Assembly, in concert with the Virginia Department of Education and related stakeholders, examine what licensure roadblocks school divisions are facing in hiring STEM teachers.

**PREPARING STUDENTS FOR STEM AND STEM-H CAREERS**
The Newport News School Board encourages the following initiatives to further stimulate partnerships between the private sector and local school boards in order to meet the growing demand for STEM and STEM-H employees.

- **STEM Workforce Training & Education**
  Offer competitive grants to high schools to implement training programs to prepare students for employment in STEM and STEM-H careers. Recent studies have documented a gap in the number of current and future jobs in advanced manufacturing and health services and the number of qualified applicants to fill those positions.
**STEM Summer Learning Centers**

Provide seed funding for STEM Summer Learning Centers across the Commonwealth that address the related needs of STEM professional development for teachers and summer workshops to increase student achievement in STEM subjects. Past state initiatives provide an excellent model for encouraging competition among K-12 school divisions to develop and implement effective programs that accomplish key Virginia goals. For example, past state grants identified and provided seed money for promising Youth Development Academies that are providing outstanding opportunities for students.

STEM Summer Learning Centers would provide an excellent opportunity for:

- teachers to engage in focused professional development in STEM education and project-based learning;
- teachers to develop an understanding of STEM career fields and the growing demand for employees who are qualified in STEM areas;
- students to engage in hands-on, project-based learning in STEM subjects.

**CONTINUING POSITIONS**

**OPPOSE TRANSFER OF SOQ FUNDING OBLIGATIONS**
The Newport News School Board opposes shifting payments for Standards of Quality (SOQ) and other recurring costs to the state’s Lottery and Literary funds.

- Since 2011 the General Assembly has transferred approximately $200 million in obligations from the General Fund to the Lottery Fund. 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. In the 2014 Special Session, the legislature transferred another $28 million in textbook funding to the Lottery Fund.
- Transfers of costs such as teacher retirement to the Literary Fund reduce funding available for much-needed school construction financing across the state. The 2014 Special Session resulted in another $15 million in teacher retirement obligations shifted to the Literary Fund. There are 39 projects that applied as early as 2007 that are still on the Literary Fund priority waiting list.

**REVIEW STANDARDS OF ACCREDITATION/LEARNING COSTS**
The Newport News School Board encourages the General Assembly to review the Standards of Accreditation and Standards of Learning to determine which standards impose costs on local school boards that are not recognized in state funding formulas. In particular, changes adopted since 2009 to SOAs and SOLs should be examined as state funding on a per-pupil basis is now far below 2009 levels.

**RESTORE SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION/RENOVATION FUNDING**
The Newport News School Board encourages the General Assembly to reinstate funding of the School Construction Program, which was eliminated entirely in 2010 and to develop additional sources of funding for public school construction. With the average NNPS school 48 years old, renovation and maintenance are essential for maintaining a good environment for students and staff. The elimination of state funds for construction and renovation means that school divisions must use funds that once went for student instruction to make needed repairs.
ELIMINATE THE STATE’S “FEDERAL DEDUCT” PROVISION
The School Board urges the General Assembly to eliminate the “Federal Deduct” provision, which deducts a percentage of federal revenues from the state’s Basic Aid funding calculation. State funds should not be reduced because a school division receives funds earmarked to implement federal mandates.

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

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.

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, including the provision of salary increases. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, average teacher pay in Virginia is down 5.8% from 199/2000 to 2012/13 in constant dollars. And statistics from the Virginia Education Association show that Virginia is the 9th wealthiest state but 37th in teacher salaries, with the average Virginia teacher making $7,456 below the national average.

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.

SINGLE-LETTER GRADING SCALE FOR SCHOOLS
The Newport News School Board supports legislation that would overturn the law mandating that the state institute a single-letter (A-F) grading scale for schools. It has been argued that schools deserve to receive a letter grade because students are graded. This argument may sound reasonable, but the current A-F legislation assigns only ONE grade to a school that teaches multiple subjects. Just as a student receives multiple grades -- for English, science, social studies, math, art, physical education and more -- schools should be graded on their performance in the subjects they teach. In fact, the SOL rating system and school report cards provide parents and the community with a detailed look at school performance in multiple areas. One collective grade for an entire school is not remotely adequate as a label to show parents and the community how a school is performing.
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.

CHARTER SCHOOLS
The Newport News School Board opposes efforts to further 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.

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. In 2012 the General Assembly approved the Educational Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit for K-12 students. The tax credit is equal to 65 percent of the donation, with an annual cap of $25 million from the state.

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.

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.