

Senate Finance Education Subcommittee
January 20, 2009, 3:30 p.m.
VEA President – Kitty J. Boitnott, PhD., NBCT

Chairman Colgan, subcommittee members, ladies and gentlemen; I am Kitty Boitnott, president of the Virginia Education. I thank you for this opportunity to address you today.

As your time is of the essence in this short session, I will be direct.

My message to you, as you attempt to deal with the impact of declining state revenues on K-12 funding, is clear and simple: minimize the cuts to the extent possible and don't make the cuts permanent.

Virginia entered this recession ranked 37th in the nation in "Per Pupil Elementary and Secondary School Revenue from State Sources" (See attached table). Our Governor said to us last week that "the economy will come back." When it does, Virginia's support for public education should come back as well. This will not happen if the cuts to K-12 funding are permanent.

I'll try to keep my preaching to a minimum, but Virginia is but one of many states facing the kind of decisions that are before this subcommittee. If, as a nation, we disinvest in the next generation, a generation that will face unimagined economic challenges, our nation will descend as others rise.

I urge you to make one time deferrals to minimize the cuts in basic aid. Cut funding for text books and school construction if necessary to reduce lay-offs of personnel. Utilize the Revenue Stabilization Fund to the extent possible (See attached VEA position). I do caution you in regard to one area you are examining, state support for the health care costs of school personnel. That one is not as simple as it looks. Examine the chart I have attached entitled "Health Insurance Premium Increases Hit Educators Harder!" You will see that school board employees are paying much more out of pocket for their health insurance than state workers. The health insurance is also usually inferior to what is enjoyed by state workers. Please look deeper into this area before making cuts.

The misalignment of state support for instructional and support positions our Governor highlighted warrants attention. We believe that this issue should be carefully and deliberately studied by the Board of Education. We believe that this misalignment should be carefully addressed in a manner that does not undermine the long-term formulaic support for our schools.

For now, we fear that the Governor has underestimated the harm his proposal in this regard will do to our schools. First, although the Governor has done his best to shield K-12 from the first rounds of cuts, we all know that the greatest support for our schools (53.7%) comes from local sources, and our schools have seen cutbacks and freezes consequent to the ravages of the current recession on local revenues. Second, although the Governor can target state support

for certain classes of positions in his budget, his targeting is meaningless once the reduced funds from state sources arrive at the local school divisions. Local school boards will and should make the difficult personnel decisions in this time of declining revenues. The Governor can talk about keeping cuts away from the classroom all he wants, but the truth is that when you cut over 9% from state support for our schools it will hit the classroom. Any reduction in the low level of funding now provided by our Commonwealth will result in increased class sizes, reduced supply accounts, elimination of professional development and training, and compromised student achievement. Localities have few alternatives. Just this last week, Hanover schools indicated they planned to eliminate 52 teaching positions and 10 special education instructional assistants. These cuts will have a real and unfortunate impact on the classrooms of Virginia.

I thank you for this opportunity to address you. You face tough choices in the days ahead. Please minimize cuts to K-12 funding and make those cuts temporary.