

## **VA PTA Statement to the Education Subcommittee of the SFC January 28, 2010**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, good afternoon. I am Kathy Burcher, the Legislation Chair of Virginia PTA. As you all know our organization represents over 325,000 parent, teacher and student members across our Commonwealth. I would like to share with you things that have changed and things that have not changed since I was here in November.

Here are some things that have changed:

For school year 2010-11

- RIF Guidelines and notifications have been posted on many school division's web sites
- After school enrichment programs have been eliminated including sports
- Instructional programs including music and foreign language have been eliminated
- Funding for field trips, textbooks, and buses has been eliminated
- Whole day KG is being phased out in some localities
- Schools are closing or being consolidated
- Schools are becoming more crowded as divisions push back all construction and renovations
- In June, hundreds of highly qualified teachers across the state will become the newest unemployed Virginians
- Class sizes are increasing
- Summer school, general and remediated, is being eliminated or cut back
- Assistance to at-risk students is being reduced
- Teacher training and development is being eliminated
- Tutoring and remediation programs are being cut back or eliminated

Here are some things that will not change in school year 2010-11:

- Just under 1.5 million school-aged children will still report to school to learn
- The standards for meeting AYP will increase under NCLB
- Mandated programs and reporting for every school division will increase
- Parents will continue to expect the very best education for their child

These two lists do not match up.

VA PTA realizes that everyone is "in a box" and your backs are to the wall. As we have stated all along, we do not envy the position you are in but if anyone in this room believes that the proposed cuts to public education will not impact the classroom and the children in them, you have not been listening, you have not been talking to your constituents, and you are sorely out of touch with what is going on in schools across our great state. School systems are actually weighing out which schools inside their divisions can bear the greatest burden so as to minimize the

impact on the lowest performing schools inside the division. What an awful thing for school superintendents and leaders to think through. Superintendents and school boards are actually pondering the question, "How much can some children bear so that the others might still succeed?" knowing that the actions they take might change succeeding schools to under performing schools.

So what else hasn't changed since I was last here? VA PTA is steadfast in our position that any cuts to public education should be temporary, flexible and fair. Let me again go over what we mean when we say this.

Temporary- Not permanent. Any restructuring of SOQ formulas is a reduction in funding that will not go away once revenues increase. An economic recovery will not equate to a recovery in our schools if the SOQ formulas are changed. We urge you to take the Board of Education's recommendations to heart and ensure no permanent, structural changes to the SOQ funding formulas. Specific to support staff, VA PTA is certain that every member on this committee is familiar with SOQ reporting error that led to the exaggerated data used to justify support staff funding outpacing instructional spending. In actuality between 2001-2007 instructional staff growth has exceeded support staff growth 15% to 12%. There is no justification from any source for making a permanent change to the SOQ funding formulas.

Flexible- We must offer flexibility to our school divisions in order for them to make decisions that make the best fiscal sense. Holding every school division to the current level of mandates and requirements only puts additional strain on their already strapped budgets. VA PTA urges you to consider providing local school divisions flexibility.

Fair- A one size fits all approach does not work for K-12 public education. Treating every school division the same regardless of location, size, or student demographic will place unfair and unequal burdens on some divisions, often those that can least afford it.

As to VA PTA's recommendations, our membership has two positions specific to tax increases. The first is an increase to the cigarette tax where the additional revenue would go directly to funding the SOQs or other spending related to children's health. The second is in support of a local option of a ½% sales tax increase with the proceeds used for education. We are certainly aware of many legislators' view on tax increases. We hear regularly that this is no time to raise taxes. Frankly, given Virginia's inability to fund her core services, how is it not a time to raise taxes? My question to you is if not now then when?

As to specific recommendations to cutting current funding levels, VA PTA will defer to our partners in education sitting behind me. They are the subject matter experts on funding and costs. I will simply reinforce one last thing that hasn't really changed except for possibly in Fairfax County. Our members do not understand the impact these cuts will have and they won't until a program, a teacher, or an activity

currently available to their child is cut. I took a phone call this past weekend from a parent in Virginia Beach, a school division that is looking at \$56.6M in cuts, and she asked and I quote, "I am hearing about all of these cuts, but they are proposals, they aren't really going to happen are they?"

We in this room know that these cuts are not proposals and they will only increase. VA PTA urges you to consider our recommendations- temporary, flexible and fair- when making any decisions. Our children are counting on you.