

January 19, 2006
Senate Finance Education Subcommittee
10th floor – General Assembly Building at 3:30 pm.

Comments:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor and a pleasure to be here this afternoon representing VASBO, the Virginia Association of School Business Officials, as its president. The VASBO membership is representative of the many and diverse employee groups of the 130+ school divisions who make it possible for school divisions to perform economically, efficiently and effectively each and every day of the school year for the benefit of the students of Virginia.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for stepping up to the plate and supporting full funding of the Virginia Standards of Quality as outlined in Tier 1 & 2 by the Joint Legislative Audit Review Committee (JLARC) such as funding for technology resource teachers and technicians to bring technology to the classroom.

This was a great beginning. But as you know, it was only a beginning. Although VASBO has a lengthy legislative program, I would like to focus on just a few key issues today that are vital to your efforts to make Virginia public education the best in the country. These include:

1. Recruitment and retention of teachers (VASBO position 7)
2. Rebenchmarking (VASBO position 1)
3. SOQ Recommendations (VASBO position 4)
4. School Construction Funding (VASBO position 6)

The first items relates to teachers – because that’s where it all begins.

VASBO urges the General Assembly to seek additional ways to attract and retain highly qualified individuals to the teaching profession in Virginia. VASBO specifically supports the following initiatives:

- ◆ Raising Teacher Pay: VASBO urges the General Assembly to provide the state share of funding to move teacher pay in Virginia to the national average. During the past decade, teacher pay in Virginia has dropped significantly below the national average.

- ◆ **Effective Date for Teacher Salary Increases:** In concert with the above position, VASBO encourages the General Assembly to set July 1 as the date from which all future pay increases for public school personnel will be calculated.
- ◆ **Revision to the current formula used to calculate average teacher pay:** VASBO believes the state's use of the linear weighted average approach in calculating statewide salary figures for instructional personnel is faulty, resulting in state payments that are based on an artificially low average teacher salary.
- ◆ **Dollar-Match Benefits:** VASBO encourages the General Assembly to provide school division employees a similar "dollar match" benefit that is currently provided to state employees who contribute to a tax-deferred annuity through Virginia's Deferred Compensation Plan.

The next item is rebenchmarking the Standards of Quality to keep up with increased costs in a variety of areas.

The VASBO supports full funding of the rebenchmarking for K-12 public education. Rebenchmarking is the routine (biennial) assessment of the cost of funding the Virginia Standards of Quality. The rebenchmarking assessment is estimated by the Virginia Board of Education, and takes into account variables such as staffing ratios, student population, salaries, fringe benefits, prevailing support costs, and inflation. The Virginia Board of Education estimates that an additional \$1.18 billion is needed to rebenchmark K-12 public education for the 2006-08 biennium.

Third, staffing formulas must also keep pace with what our children need and our parents expect.

VASBO applauds the General Assembly for addressing many of the SOQ recommendations made by the Virginia Board of Education in 2003 and encourages the General Assembly to approve and fund the remaining recommendations. These include:

- Require one full-time principal in each elementary school
- Require one full-time assistant principal for each 400 students in each school
- Reduce the state required speech language pathologist caseload from 68 to 60 students
- Require one full-time instructional position for each 1,000 students to serve as the reading specialist

Finally, as we watch the progress of the Capitol Renovation Project, we all understand how important our facilities are to the business of the Commonwealth. The same is true for the buildings in which our students learn.

VASBO encourages the General Assembly to reinstate full funding of the School Construction Program, which was reduced by 50 percent in 2002 and 2003. With nearly half of Virginia's public schools over 30 years old, school divisions have pressing construction and renovation needs.

Please do not fall into the trap of indexing funding to population growth or inflation. Now we are hearing some talk about establishing a 65% expenditure mandate for the category of instruction. Let's keep in mind that setting a 65% mandate doesn't guarantee good learning or bad learning, good performance or bad performance. SchoolMatters, a service of Standard & Poors, in the Fall 2005 issue, specifically stated that "mandating a specific spending allocation is not likely to provide a 'silver bullet' solution to raising student achievement".

What is needed is a level of funding by the General Assembly sufficient for each school division in the Commonwealth so that school divisions can hire the best teachers available and provide them the best tools and facilities. Currently, to fill our schools with highly qualified teachers requires school divisions to leave the state and compete with divisions in other states for the best and the brightest. We all know that the classroom teacher has the greatest impact on student success and achievement.

Your task is enormous; the needs are many. While it is not possible to accomplish everything at one time, I encourage you to focus on increasing the funding for K-12 education and in so doing investing in Virginia's most valuable resource – its children. As my superintendent stated most recently, "Our nation's greatest resource is the potential of its children...invest in them for a brighter future".

On behalf of VASBO, please accept my sincere appreciation for all that you do for our children and schools. Thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon.