



1 2025 DRAFT Human Development & Education Policy Statement

2
3 **I. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

4
5 The strength of our communities determines the strength of our democracy. Emotional, social,
6 and economic poverty weakens the fabric of our society and threatens our democracy. Policy
7 leaders must ensure access to opportunities and invest the proper resources necessary for all
8 children to grow up in nurturing surroundings, and to reconnect and strengthen the bonds of
9 individuals and institutions in communities so that they thrive and favorably compete in the
10 global economy.

11
12 **A PLATFORM FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

13 VML endorses the National League of Cities’ Platform for Children and Families which
14 recognizes that strong communities are built on a foundation of strong families and
15 neighborhoods. VML supports and encourages efforts by our communities and the state that
16 emphasize:

- 17 • Opportunities to learn and grow: family literacy programs, quality out-of-school time
18 programs and early childhood programs;
- 19 • Safe neighborhoods to call home: sufficient state support for local law enforcement,
20 juvenile justice, and re-entry programs;
- 21 • Healthy lifestyles and environment: improving access to healthy foods, physical activity,
22 and recreation programs; and
- 23 • Financially resilient families: workforce development, curbing predatory lending, and
24 increasing access to mainstream banking and financial services and other resources to
25 advance their economic mobility.

26
27 VML supports approaches (such as the Virginia Grocery Incentive Fund) to provide financial
28 and technical support for businesses to expand and ensure greater access to healthy food for
29 residents of the state as well as improving people’s ability to get to grocery stores and
30 community gardens.

31
32 **INTERGOVERNMENTAL ISSUES & FUNDING**

33 Federal, state, and local governments share the same citizens and same taxpayers. Local
34 governments request a restoration of a meaningful and fiscally balanced intergovernmental
35 partnership in human services and education.

1 **A working partnership.**

- 2 • The federal and state governments should allow local governments maximum flexibility
3 in developing and funding public/private partnerships to address human service needs.
4 • Local government must be a partner with the state and federal government in the process
5 of developing regulations, policies, and funding allocation methods.
6 • The State should require interagency review of regulations to reconcile conflicts and to
7 avoid duplication among agencies.
8 • The State should share data with communities and build a comprehensive human services
9 database to promote greater planning coordination and evaluation of services.

10
11 **Funding commitments.** Human services funding formulae should reflect identified needs,
12 adequate resources to meet those needs, and not pit localities against each other. Equity in
13 funding cannot be achieved by simply redistributing insufficient state aid among jurisdictions.

14
15 **Cost shifting and unfunded mandates.** VML opposes the imposition of new federal or state
16 requirements without the funding to pay for them. If the state reduces its funding and assistance
17 to localities, it must ease or eliminate requirements it is unwilling to support. In the case of
18 federal mandates, the state must at the very least maintain its share of responsibility for program
19 supervision and funding. For example:

- 20
21 • funding the administration of the FAMIS eligibility and case management;
22 • paying the cost of federal penalties when the state does not meet its obligations for
23 human services programs, including adequate administrative funding, technology,
24 training, and technical assistance necessary to properly do the job;
25 • maintaining state funding for the costs for federally mandated and state-supervised
26 programs such as adoption assistance, and
27 • upholding the state funding ratio for local welfare administrative costs, in which the state
28 pays 80 percent, and the localities pay 20 percent.

29
30 **WORKFORCE NEEDS**

31 VML recognizes the challenges faced by localities in attracting and retaining employees in the
32 human services arena, including public health, social services, behavioral health, and juvenile
33 justice, as well as the public pre-K-12 system. Local governments support efforts in cooperation
34 with state and private partners and the K-12 and higher educational system to create more
35 comprehensive and supportive career paths for this vital workforce.

36
37 **ADULT SERVICES**

38 **Community programs.** As alternatives to institutionalized care wherever appropriate, the state
39 should develop Medicaid waivers or otherwise fully fund community-based programs like
40 companion services, respite care, homemaker services, and adult day ~~care programs for the~~
41 ~~elderly.~~

42
43 **Housing.** The state should support policies that increase the affordability and availability of
44 senior housing throughout the Commonwealth.

1 OPIOIDS, HEROIN, SYNTHETIC DRUGS

2 VML supports an intergovernmental and interdisciplinary partnership to address the epidemic of
3 opioid (including fentanyl) and heroin overdoses and deaths in Virginia. Further, VML urges
4 federal and state action to address the public health threats posed by any emerging synthetic
5 drugs that pose a similar addiction/overdose threat.

6
7 VML supports a statewide policy framework that targets the following:

- 8 • prevention - tracking and reduction of the supply of illegal opiates such as heroin and
9 synthetic substances; continuing efforts with the medical community to limit
10 use/prescribing of opioid medications; and educating vulnerable communities and
11 populations about the risks of these drugs;
- 12 • harm reduction – active intervention until treatment is available and accepted;
- 13 • treatment – for those who are addicted, and support/recovery resources for family
14 members of people in treatment; and
- 15 • culture change - discourage use/overuse of legal opioids and remove stigma regarding
16 addiction treatment and recovery for individuals of all ages and their families.

17 BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

18 **Planning for the future of the community & facility system.**

19 Any plan for the publicly funded behavioral health and developmental services system should
20 include adequate state funding for:

- 21 • A community-based, comprehensive system of care;
- 22 • Crisis intervention teams and centers to ensure that adults and children experiencing a
23 mental health crisis are able to can obtain timely evaluation and assistance as close to
24 their home community as possible;
- 25 • A robust statewide system of alternative transportation and custody options to help
26 individuals in crisis get to evaluation services and treatment and eliminates the reliance
27 on local law enforcement for extended transportation and custody services;
- 28 • Accessibility to inpatient beds and crisis services on a regional basis, including public-
29 private partnerships, to decrease long-distance transports for critical care;
- 30 • Comprehensive services and support for people returning to the community from any
31 type of state facilities (public safety as well as behavioral health), as well as for people
32 diverted from state facilities.
- 33 • Children’s mental health services, including community-based early interventions and the
34 Mental Health Initiative;
- 35 • Medicaid waivers to eliminate service waiting lists; and
- 36 • Availability of services for individuals voluntarily seeking treatment services, regardless
37 of their ability to pay.

38
39
40 Private and federal grant opportunities (including SAMHSA funds)ARPA and robust state
41 revenues offer an opportunity for the state to make new investments in the community-based
42 system of care (which includes public and private service providers) and to state hospitals to
43 maintain vital services.

44
45 Investments must go to both build the community network of care and assist state hospitals to
46 mend the safety-net and create the infrastructure necessary to serve Virginians of all ages. This

1 cannot be a zero-sum funding situation whether one part of the system benefits at the cost of the
2 parts of the system.

3 VML supports Community Services Boards (CSBs) as the single point-of-entry into the publicly
4 funded system of care and as a choice for services to individuals and families.

5
6 Any restructuring plan should assure the following:

- 7 • Local flexibility in planning and service provision, particularly for local-only funds;
- 8 • No changes in the local match that would increase the burden on local budgets or shift
9 local-only funds to other localities;
- 10 • Meaningful consultation with local officials and community services boards regarding
11 strategies and funding proposals for publicly funded services;
- 12 • Sufficient time and opportunity for public comment on legislative proposals;
- 13 • Strategies to discourage the concentration of consumers in facility communities; and
- 14 • State facilities are not so drastically reduced that the potential for inpatient care is
15 effectively eliminated.

16
17 **Crisis response and Marcus Alert.** Successful implementation of the crisis response
18 component of the STEP-VA program and the Marcus Alert program and protocols requires
19 sufficient and sustained state funding and technical assistance to communities: along with
20 continuing review of program data and community experiences to gauge progress and determine
21 where funding and assistance is needed to ensure greater success. This State program funding
22 should not come at the expense of other community-based service initiatives and requirements;
23 nor should the burden of funding these initiatives be shifted to local governments.

24
25 **Part C early intervention.** VML urges the General Assembly to assure full state funding for
26 infants and toddlers eligible for therapeutic services under Part C of IDEA to improve their
27 school readiness and quality of life.

28
29 **Behavioral health services for youth funding.** The state should build upon its funding and
30 seek federal-state funded waivers to provide behavioral health services, in particular, prevention
31 services for youth. VML supports greater state funding to the Mental Health Initiative and other
32 community-based initiatives to diagnose and serve children with behavioral health needs early,
33 to prevent more complex, costly, and restrictive interventions.

34
35 **Treatment beds.** The state has greatly decreased state facility beds and state-funded services for
36 children, including those with long-term or hard-to-treat conditions, and those in the state and
37 local juvenile detention system. VML urges the state to continue its support of the
38 Commonwealth Center for Children and Adolescents as a part of the array of behavioral health
39 services, and to fund treatment beds for those committed to the juvenile justice system. Further,
40 the state should fund supportive services for children leaving treatment and their families to
41 further stabilize their living situations and allow for recovery.

42
43 **Mental health parity.** The Federal Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008
44 (MHPAEA) generally provides that financial requirements - such as co-pays and coinsurance -
45 and treatment limitation - such as visit limits - imposed on mental health or substance use

1 disorders (MH/SUD) cannot be more restrictive than those applied to substantially all
2 medical/surgical benefits.

3
4 For Virginia, failure of insurance plans to adhere to federal and state standards can shift the
5 burden of costs to the public system (such as CSA and CSBs), often at the point when an
6 individual requires more intensive services.

7
8 VML supports the 2020 recommendations of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review
9 Commission (JLARC) to strengthen and expand the Virginia Bureau of Insurance oversight of
10 insurance plans and compliance with federal and state mental health parity requirements.

11
12 **Mental health service access for community college students.** VML supports efforts by the
13 Virginia Community College System to seek state funding to address the mental health needs of
14 students through partnerships with community services boards to support and keep adult learners
15 in school and on track to meet career goals and greater financial independence. Such
16 partnerships with CSBs should be separate from the local match for CSB services.

17 18 **CHILDREN’S SERVICES ACT**

19 When the CSA was developed in the early 1990s, the plan called for comprehensive prevention
20 programs for at risk youth and families. Unless the state commits to developing and funding
21 services that address the root issues that bring children and families into CSA, the CSA program
22 will continue as an expensive “catch-up” approach to addressing the complex needs of children
23 and families.

24
25 **Administrative funding.** VML supports greater funding from the state to support the program’s
26 substantial administrative requirements carried out at the local level.

27
28 **Base-budget funding.** The costs of CSA should be fully funded in the state’s base budget.

29
30 **Expansion of the mandated population.** VML opposes attempts to expand the CSA mandated
31 population. VML also opposes efforts to expand local responsibility for Medicaid match to new
32 categories of individuals, or to require localities to pay the educational costs for children placed
33 in residential treatment outside of the local FAPT process.

34
35 **Incentive funding.** The CSA funding formula should include an incentive component that
36 rewards those local governments implementing innovative and cost-effective interventions.

37
38 **State agency policy coordination.** The State Executive Council must ensure that the
39 administrative and policy requirements of the state agencies involved in the CSA are consistent
40 with one another and consistently applied to local governments.

41
42 **Service coordination.** State and local governments should work together to ensure the greatest
43 degree of coordination between Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and CSA service plans.

44
45 **Sum sufficiency.** CSA serves many children who are entitled to sum sufficient services; the
46 state must keep its commitment to fund its share of services costs for this population.

1 **Utilization review.** Local governments must maintain the flexibility to develop utilization
2 management processes that are approved by the State Executive Council.

3 **Fair rates and statewide contracts.** VML supports state oversight of special education private
4 day and residential program rates. VML supports state contracts that localities may use to
5 procure such services.

6 7 **FACILITIES FOR ADULTS AND YOUTH**

8 **Auxiliary grant program.** The state should assume full responsibility for the cost of the
9 auxiliary grant program ~~for elderly persons and people with disabilities.~~

10
11 **Licensure and regulation of group homes.** VML urges the state to continue to work with local
12 governments to assure adequate licensure and regulatory requirements to meet resident and
13 community needs.

14 15 **HOMELESSNESS**

16 VML supports measures to prevent homelessness in Virginia and to assist the chronic homeless,
17 including veterans, in obtaining appropriate rehabilitative and recovery services, job training and
18 support, and affordable and appropriate housing. VML urges further state support for the housing
19 trust fund to help communities develop and support housing for this population.

20 21 **LOCAL AND REGIONAL JAILS**

22 **Jail per diems.** There is no requirement in the Code of Virginia to adjust per diem rates to keep
23 pace with actual costs. VML requests that the Code of Virginia be amended to require that jail
24 per diem rates for all offenders held in a local or regional jail, including those awaiting
25 sentencing or serving (tier I) and state-responsible offenders (tier II) be regularly adjusted for
26 inflation in line with the Consumer Price Index so that per diem payments keep pace with actual
27 costs, such as is done with other areas of the budget (e.g., Standards of Quality).

28
29 **State-responsible inmates in local/regional jails.** Local and regional jails should have a choice
30 as to whether ~~it~~ they will keep state-responsible inmates (tier II) in their facility after the 60-days
31 from the date of the final sentencing order. Willing facilities could contract with the state to
32 keep such inmates past the 60-day period; those jails unable to keep state-responsible inmates
33 due to space or resource limitations should not be compelled to keep state inmates past the 60-
34 day period.

35
36 **Behavioral health regulations for jails.** The 2019 General Assembly approved legislation
37 directing the Board of Local and Regional Jails to draft standards for new regulations to address
38 health and behavioral health service needs in local and regional jails, as well as discharge
39 planning for inmates with behavioral health needs. VML supports sufficient and sustained state
40 funding to meet these new requirements including enhanced per diem payments and otherwise
41 funding new positions and associated costs through the Compensation Board for newly required
42 services.

43
44 **Substance abuse and behavioral health needs in the justice system.** VML supports the
45 creation of state-funded programs and facilities, and funding of current programs, such as drug
46 courts and day reporting centers, to divert individuals with mental illness and substance use

1 disorders from jails and juvenile detention into appropriate community-based or in-patient
2 treatment programs. VML supports state funding for programs in local and regional jails to
3 address mental health and substance use disorder issues among inmates and connect individuals
4 with continued assistance upon release but opposes changes in state funding formulae to turn
5 local and regional jails into in-patient behavioral health treatment centers.

6
7 Waiver for behavioral health-substance use medication services. VML supports efforts by
8 the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services to apply for a 1115 demonstration
9 waiver from the Centers for Medicare/Medicaid. This waiver, approved in nine states and
10 pending in 11 states and the District of Columbia, allows correctional facilities to better respond
11 to the behavioral health/substance use disorder medical needs of incarcerated individuals up to
12 90 days before they re-enter the community. In Virginia, it would help our local and regional
13 jails pay for medication services for incarcerated individuals with behavioral health or substance
14 use disorders that could help lead to better outcomes when these individuals return home to their
15 communities.

16 17 **JUVENILE JUSTICE PROGRAMS**

18 Local and regional juvenile detention facilities. Local and regional juvenile detention
19 facilities are an integral part of the continuum of Virginia’s juvenile justice system. Local
20 governments pay a large share of operational as well as capital costs for these facilities, and the
21 staff are local employees. As facility populations have decreased over time from licensed
22 capacity levels, facilities have reduced operational beds and staffing.

23
24 A major consideration in maintaining a system of local and regional detention facilities is to
25 serve youth closer to their communities, to their families, to the courts with which they are
26 involved, and the legal counsel assisting them.

27
28 Imposing state pressure to consolidate and close facilities affects everyone involved: youth are
29 moved farther from their community, family, their legal counsel, and the court with which they
30 are involved; families must travel farther and incur greater expense to visit and participate in
31 sessions at the center; and the facilities and law enforcement incur greater costs for transporting
32 youth greater distances.

33
34 Any state-level discussion of local and regional detention facilities must include the major
35 stakeholders involved in the system, including the judiciary, the detention facility managers, and
36 youth/family advocates. Discussions should also include the need for localities/region to open a
37 detention facility to serve the needs of their communities instead of having to send youth long
38 distances for a bed.

39
40 Such discussion should also look at ways to improve facilities by updating key infrastructure; to
41 find ways to address state requirements for education in facilities; and to better address the
42 behavioral health needs of youth to ensure better outcomes when they return to their
43 communities.

44
45 **Virginia Juvenile Community Crime Control Act (VJCCCA).** The Virginia Municipal
46 League urges the General Assembly to restore the 71 percent funding reduction taken in the early

1 2000s to the Virginia Juvenile Community Crime Control Act (VJCCCA) program, and to
2 support an equitable and stable funding allocation process for the program.

3
4 The VJCCCA directs localities, in cooperation with judges, court-services unit directors, and
5 Community Policy and Management Teams under the Children’s Services Act to implement
6 programs that divert youth from state or local confinement or help ensure the success of those re-
7 entering the community from confinement. Every city and county participate in the program.

8
9 VJCCCA gives judges the ability to order first-time and less serious offenders to services such as
10 electronic monitoring, intensive individual or family counseling, and group homes. Such
11 appropriate services reduce costlier and less suitable placements in local secure detention or state
12 prisons. It also serves non-mandated youth under the Children’s Services Act.

13
14 VML opposes any effort to divert existing VJCCCA funds for other purposes; any new
15 populations proposed for services under this program must be accompanied by additional state
16 funding.

17
18 **System transformation.** VML supports juvenile justice system transformation that:

- 19 • Gives juvenile detention centers flexibility, not mandates, to contract with the state to
20 house lower-risk offenders from state facilities;
- 21 • Pays juvenile detention facilities the actual costs for housing and serving lower-risk
22 offenders from the state; and
- 23 • Allows the Department to reinvest savings or otherwise provides sufficient, stable
24 funding to implement a treatment continuum with more service and treatment options and
25 support to ensure better outcomes and lower recidivism.

26 27 **SOCIAL SERVICES**

28 **Family First Prevention Services Act.** Approved by Congress in 2018, the FFPS Act is the
29 first major revision of the title IV-E foster care program since the early 1980s. Changes in the
30 program’s requirements and allowable services require cooperation between the state, local
31 governments, and private service providers to ensure successful implementation. VML supports
32 this cooperative effort but opposes any proposal to impose new local match requirements to this
33 program.

34
35 **Child and family services program improvement plan.** The state must fund the technology
36 and systems to improve the quality of all casework activities related to child welfare services
37 (prevention of child abuse/neglect; prevention foster care, foster care, and adoption).

38
39 **Childcare.** Affordable, high-quality childcare is crucial to parents in the Temporary Assistance
40 to Needy Families (TANF) program and to low-income parents whose wages cannot cover
41 childcare costs. The state must help fund childcare costs to help these families. The state should
42 consider ways to ensure safe, affordable childcare, such as grants for nonprofit or public
43 organizations offering childcare, and employer incentives to provide child care centers or other
44 assistance for their employees.

1 **TANF Expanded Program Funding Healthy families.** As balances in the Temporary
2 Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program diminish, VML supports recommendations of a
3 Virginia Department of Social Services block grant workgroup (2023) that focus on ensuring
4 structural balance; evaluating grantee performance data in furthering the statutory purposes of
5 the TANF program (e.g., promoting job preparation/work and formation and maintenance of
6 two-parent families; assisting needy families so that children can be cared for at home); and
7 determining what other resources, if any, such programs receive. If TANF balances are
8 insufficient to fund programs with promising or proven results, the state should continue to
9 support them using state general funds. VML supports expanded use of state general funds for
10 the Families Forward Healthy Families program, a voluntary program that offers parental
11 education, support, and assistance to help families succeed and prevent the need for costlier
12 interventions.

13
14 **Social Services Block Grant.** Virginia uses Title XX-Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)
15 funding for a variety of non-cash-assistance services, including in-home services for the elderly,
16 child and adult abuse investigators, and domestic abuse and family preservation services.
17 Congress has consistently underfunded the SSBG at the levels authorized in the 1996 federal
18 welfare reform law. VML urges Congress to live up to its commitment to fully fund the SSBG.
19 Until the federal budget fully funds SSBG, VML urges the General Assembly to continue to first
20 use any Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) balances to replace SSBG funds.

21 22 **PARKS & RECREATION**

23 **Recreational programs.** Local parks and recreation departments offer a variety of affordable
24 activities and programs for children, teenagers, and adults. These programs abide by local
25 health, safety, and risk-management requirements and are ultimately accountable to the local
26 governing body. Efforts to categorize these programs as childcare are inappropriate, and such
27 recreation programs should not be subject to duplicative state agency regulation and oversight.

28 29 **HEALTH**

30 **Cooperative health budget.** The General Assembly should provide sufficient funding to local
31 health departments. VML opposes any efforts by the state to impose new local funding
32 requirements on local health departments.

33
34 **Local flexibility.** District health offices should be locally controlled to the maximum extent
35 consistent with protecting public health.

36
37 **Emergency-related infrastructure and needs.** Sufficient state funds should be provided for
38 public health emergency services to enable the state and local health departments and
39 stakeholders to better prepare for and respond to public health emergencies, such as a pandemic.

40 **Health IT needs.** Increased investment is needed for public health information technology and
41 staff so that critical, timely information about public health emergencies is made available to
42 policy makers, first responders, and the public.

43 44 **HEALTH CARE REFORM**

45 VML supports continued state funding for Medicaid eligibility determination services.

46

1 **HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

2 VML supports the state’s efforts to address human trafficking, including the appointment of a
3 sex trafficking response coordinator at the Department of Criminal Justice Services and the
4 proposed development of much-needed public outreach, education, and treatment services.
5 Outreach efforts and avenues for reporting trafficking must address language barriers for those
6 reporting and those seeking rescue from trafficking. Since human trafficking also includes labor
7 trafficking and affects a wide range of ages, all types of trafficking situations should ultimately
8 be addressed in Virginia’s response plan.
9

10
11 **II. EDUCATION**

12
13 The Virginia Municipal League supports the goal of ensuring quality, well-funded and effective
14 teaching in every classroom in the Commonwealth. Localities have greatly exceeded their
15 responsibilities for K-12 education funding. It is essential for the state to fully meet its
16 responsibilities to fund education.
17

18 **VISION**

19 A strong public education system is the pillar of American society and a passport to the future.
20 Our country cannot be strong without an excellent education system that prepares students for
21 the future with the critical thinking skills that will enable them to be productive citizens. A solid
22 foundation of learning is essential for our communities, state, and country. A strong public
23 school system is essential to economic development and prosperity.
24

25 A strong educational system requires accountability; parental, community and business
26 involvement; and the wise and efficient use of resources. Standards are an essential part of the
27 accountability system but cannot be measured simply by standardized tests. Students need to
28 learn not only facts and figures, but also those critical learning skills that will enable them to
29 leave high school prepared for either the workplace or higher education.
30

31 Students, parents, school administrators and teachers all have roles in the educational system and
32 must be part of that accountability system. Parents should be involved with their children’s
33 education, but support for parents is essential, particularly for those whose children have
34 behavioral health issues, physical disabilities, substance abuse disorders or bullying problems.
35 Students across the economic spectrum should have equitable opportunities to learn in a variety
36 of settings, including vocational and career preparation programs as well as in four-year
37 university programs.
38

39 A sound education system puts resources where they can be most effective, includes
40 collaboration between school boards and local governing bodies, uses technology effectively,
41 embraces innovation and regional opportunities and focuses on early intervention to tackle
42 problems at the earliest time possible.
43

44 **STANDARDS OF QUALITY**

45 The SOQ should be broad enough to include the major components of what is required for a
46 quality educational program.

1 The current SOQ does not reflect the actual cost of a sound public education system. The SOQ
2 are not based on prevailing practices, nor do they reflect the cost of meeting state accountability
3 standards. Because of this disconnect between the accountability standards and the SOQ, the cost
4 that the state recognizes in its funding formulas is too low, and too much of the burden of
5 funding public education falls on local governments.

6
7 The state and local governments should partner to determine the minimum funding levels
8 necessary to sustain high quality services for schools and other local government operations
9 while also addressing capital and maintenance needs.

10
11 VML supports the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission findings to determine how
12 the SOQ may be revised and adequately funded to meet the requirements contained in the
13 Standards of Learning and Standards of Accreditation. VML also supports the implementation
14 of JLARC recommendations included in the recent study to promote overall academic
15 performance.

16 **SOQ FUNDING**

17 VML supports full funding of the state's share of the actual costs of the SOQ based on prevailing
18 practices, and full funding of the state's share of categorical educational mandates in areas such
19 as special education, alternative education, and gifted education.

20
21
22 The state should fully recognize and fund the costs of rebenchmarking of the various educational
23 programs including the Standards of Quality, incentive, categorical, and school facilities
24 programs. Changing the process of rebenchmarking to artificially lower recognized costs does
25 not change what it actually costs to provide education. Instead, it simply transfers additional
26 costs to local governments, and ultimately to the local real estate tax base.

27
28 The state must be a reliable funding partner in accordance with the Virginia Constitution and
29 state statutes. The Standards of Quality should recognize resources, including positions, required
30 for a high-quality public education system.

31
32 The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) completed a two-year study in
33 July 2023 regarding the cost of education in Virginia and making an accurate assessment of the
34 costs of the Standards of Quality (SOQ). JLARC made several recommendations to update the
35 SOQ in the short and long term. The recommendations included items VML has long supported,
36 including the elimination of the support cap and providing additional staff and funding for staff.

37
38 VML supports the findings and recommendations of the 2023 JLARC study and encourages the
39 General Assembly to implement these recommendations to ensure the overall success of students
40 across the Commonwealth.

41
42 Funding for the SOQ should include:

- 43 1. Establishment of a new, predictable, and meaningful source of funding for construction,
44 including funding for new construction, renovation, maintenance, and land purchase. The
45 Literary Fund and the Virginia Public School Authority are not sufficient means for the
46 state to help localities pay for capital needs and should be expanded.

- 1 2. VML supports the statewide authority for local governments to impose a one percent
2 sales tax to help raise funds for school construction and renovation. For those already
3 imposing an approved one percent sales tax for local or regional special funding needs,
4 an additional one percent for school infrastructure funding should be authorized for
5 school construction and renovation purposes. Options could include creating a two-year
6 pilot program of competitive grants using funds from the Virginia Public Building
7 Authority to offset new construction or renovation costs for publicly owned and operated
8 K-12 schools in fiscally stressed communities as defined by the Virginia Commission on
9 Local Government.
- 10 3. A predictable and reliable source of funding for technology infrastructure and personnel
11 costs.
- 12 4. Realistic state funding for salary increases for professional and non-professional school
13 employees. Salary increases should be funded for a full year starting July 1, the start of
14 the fiscal year.
- 15 5. State funding to meet the goal of the Commonwealth (VA Code §22.1-289.1) that teacher
16 compensation be competitive; at a minimum, at or above national average teacher
17 compensation, provided that the true costs of meeting the SOQ are funded by the state.
- 18 6. Funding to initiate and continue to enable school systems to address school safety issues.
- 19 7. Recognition of adequate support costs based on realistic measures of the importance of
20 support positions to achievement on state accountability standards. Current state funding
21 for support positions is not based on prevailing practices or on any scientifically derived
22 staffing ratios.
- 23 8. Flexibility where possible in areas such as funding of student health services.
- 24 9. Support for funding of recommendations made by JLARC to promote reading by grade
25 level by the third grade.
- 26 10. Development of realistic cost estimates that are based on prevailing practices and not on
27 the availability of state funding.
- 28 11. Review by JLARC in order that data and information can be provided to the State Board
29 of Education on the cost of meeting the SOQ, SOLs and SOAs.
- 30 12. Lottery funds are distributed to localities without a corresponding reduction in direct aid.
- 31 13. Assessing school construction maintenance needs.

32
33 The state should not require any maintenance of local effort other than that associated with the
34 SOQ. A maintenance of effort requirement that is not connected to the SOQ will punish those
35 localities that voluntarily spent beyond the required minimum in an effort to achieve a high-
36 quality system of education. Further, it will simply perpetuate the current mismatch in state-local
37 funding for education.

38
39 The General Assembly should recognize that local governments traditionally have funded their
40 share of costs of meeting the SOQ and, in fact, most have funded education beyond their
41 required share in efforts to provide quality education. These higher funding levels have meant
42 that localities have had to raise local taxes and fees and defer spending on other important local
43 priorities including public safety.

44
45 The local composite index (LCI) is a crude and often inaccurate proxy for determining the ability
46 of each locality to pay its share of K-12 expenses as defined by the SOQ. The Commonwealth's

1 education funding formulae (SOQ and LCI) are more sensitive to the state’s revenue situation
2 than the educational needs of Virginia’s students. VML supports a JLARC or other state study
3 that examines the ways other states fund education and whether the Commonwealth should use a
4 funding strategy that establishes a more realistic base foundation amount per pupil – plus add-on
5 funding to reflect higher costs for educating at-risk, disabled, ESL, and gifted students, etc.
6

7 Because spending increases alone may not produce desired levels of student achievement, the
8 State Board of Education and other responsible bodies are urged to develop measures of results
9 to determine the actual effectiveness of expenditures on education. VML supports the use of
10 school efficiency reviews to help determine ways to ensure that public funds are spent as
11 effectively and efficiently as possible.
12

13 VML believes that the methodology for costing the SOQ does not consider the differences in
14 costs in the state’s various regions, nor does it adequately address unique local conditions such as
15 small, large, declining, or diverse student populations.
16

- 17 1. The methodology artificially lowers the state average salary by using the “L-estimator”
18 instead of average salary figures.
- 19 2. The L-estimator is based on dated information that does not reflect current salary levels.
- 20 3. The methodology uses an artificially low limit on the number of professionals per 1,000
21 pupils for which state aid is given.
- 22 4. the methodology does not address the differences in providing education to students with
23 special needs or the heavy additional cost of educating English as Second Language
24 students. The add-on funding for at-risk students is a start toward meeting unique local
25 circumstances and should be increased.
26

27 The first priority for the use of a state surplus should be the funding of mandated educational
28 programs.
29

30 Disparity should not be addressed by simply redistributing existing state aid among jurisdictions.
31

32 **LOCAL AUTONOMY**

33 Because public education should be as close as possible to the people, local school decisions
34 cannot and should not be made by the state. Local school boards should be responsible for the
35 direct supervision and management of local schools.
36

37 The state should not take any actions that limit authority of local school boards and local
38 governing bodies to finance and manage local schools. Otherwise, decisions that affect the
39 funding of public schools potentially could be made by a statewide, appointed body that has no
40 direct connection to the council or board of supervisors.
41

42 ~~Authority over local school funding board unexpended balances. VML supports the current~~
43 ~~practice in which school boards may keep any unexpended funds at the end of the fiscal year if~~
44 ~~approved by the local governing body. Local governing bodies are solely responsible for raising~~
45 ~~the revenue that comprises the local share of funding appropriated to a school board to support~~
46 ~~K-12 public education in the community. VML supports the codified practice as of July 1, 2024.~~

1 whereby local school boards may keep any unexpended funds at the end of the fiscal year as
2 approved by its local governing body. VML supports maintaining the authority of local
3 governing bodies to make this determination because they are responsible for raising the revenue
4 that comprises the local share of funding appropriated to a school board to support K-12 public
5 education in the community. VML encourages local governments to work cooperatively with
6 their school boards on these issues. ~~determine if any funds unspent at the end of a fiscal year~~
7 ~~should revert to the local government or remain with the school board.~~

9 **COLLEGE LABORATORY SCHOOLS**

10 Local school boards should retain the responsibility for approving applications for charter or
11 college partnership lab schools. VML opposes any diversion of state funds or other resources
12 intended for local public schools to fund lab schools or state directives to shift local funding or
13 resources for those schools.

14
15 If the state officials or boards proceed down the path to expanding the size and scope of state
16 government by creating new types of “public” school systems that use public funds but are not
17 supervised by a local school board, any group proposing to operate such schools should be
18 required to demonstrate that their systems address diversity and equity in admissions and meet
19 the same requirements imposed on local school systems.

21 **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION**

22 The School Construction Grant Fund was created by the General Assembly to provide funding
23 assistance to localities for school construction and maintenance needs. Localities may receive
24 grants from this fund based on a point system created by the General Assembly to be calculated
25 and awarded by the Board of Education. In the 2022-2024 biennium the state provided ~~The~~
26 ~~current biennial budget provides~~ \$450 million ~~in FY 2022~~ for the program because until the
27 intended source of revenue, the Gaming Proceeds Fund, has lacked sufficient resources to fund
28 this initiative.

29 The School Construction Grant Fund should continue to be funded by the State at the current rate
30 of \$450 million annually or higher until the Gaming Proceeds Fund has sufficient resources to
31 ensure any locality with enough points to qualify may receive a grant. Further, revenue in the
32 Gaming Proceeds Fund should be used for the School Construction Grant Fund consistent with
33 the Code of Virginia.

35 **ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION**

36 Traditional approaches to discipline—long-term suspensions and expulsions—transfer the
37 problems of the student from the school division to the general government. There should
38 continue to be school alternatives to the traditional school environment for students who do not
39 behave appropriately or otherwise do not thrive in traditional school environments. The state
40 should develop and fund alternatives, including workforce development grants, for students
41 suspended and expelled from school, such as programs designed to encourage obtainment of
42 GEDs, career education, job skills, self-control training and drug and substance prevention.
43 Finally, there is little effective enforcement of truancy laws for students who are over 16 years of
44 age. Some of these students have full-time jobs and school divisions have difficulty in locating

1 them. VML encourages the development of initiatives to better enable schools to track these
2 older students, or otherwise determine if changes are needed to truancy laws.

4 **EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION**

5 Research has shown that the early childhood years (from infancy to age five) are critical years
6 for brain development. These early years are also critical for establishing healthy lifestyles –
7 eating nutritious foods, engaging in activities and exercise (i.e., playing), and learning basic
8 health and safety practices.

9
10 Children who are regularly read to and gain basic language skills, who participate in healthy
11 activities and learning experiences, and who learn basic social skills are more likely to enter
12 kindergarten ready to learn. They are also more likely to read at grade level by the third grade.
13 This early progress can lead to continued success in school and ultimately in the workforce.

14
15 VML supports state and local policies and initiatives that spotlight and encourage greater early
16 learning opportunities for children, along with access to information and resources that will help
17 parents and caregivers give young children the greatest chances to learn and grow in healthy
18 ways. This will ensure a better economic future for families and communities.

19
20 VML supports increased state funding for pre-kindergarten students to ensure that all children
21 entering the public system have the social and intellectual skills necessary to be successful
22 students.

24 **LIBRARIES**

25 VML supports state funding to help local and regional public library systems remain robust and
26 prepared to meet the growing needs of their communities.

28 **HIGHER EDUCATION**

29 Currently, community colleges are required to offer reduced tuition for high school students.
30 Local schools, however, are required to make up for the difference in tuition. This clearly is an
31 unfunded mandate. The state should find other resources within its higher education budget to
32 pay for the tuition for these students or assist institutions of higher education in finding resources
33 to help offset the cost of tuition.

35 **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

36 VML supports innovative approaches, including creation of satellite campuses, to ensure that
37 training and certification programs are widely available to high school students, GED candidates,
38 returning veterans, and other residents, particularly those representing underserved and at-risk
39 populations. Such programs are vital to prepare Virginians for careers important to Virginia's
40 economic prosperity.