



# **DRAFT: 2020 Legislative Agenda**

Priorities & Position Statements

## 2020 Draft Legislative Priorities

### **SCHOOL SAFETY AND STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH**

**ACPS supports** improving school safety and security and, as such, we believe that General Assembly should prioritize mental health and the physical security of school facilities by doing the following:

- Eliminating the state’s arbitrary cap on funding for support positions, which would help more directly link state funding with actual local staffing needs and costs. In the absence of full elimination, positions related to direct student services and to student mental health and safety, such as school social workers and school psychologists, should be shifted out from under the cap; and
- Making legislative changes that authorize the school board to prohibit guns at all school-related functions/events regardless of setting. Local school boards are held to act “in loco parentis” by various courts, and students often attend functions like athletic events and school board meetings that are hosted and/or approved by school boards. These functions are, at times, held in non-school building sites but those in attendance are nonetheless counting on school officials to ensure their safety there.

### **SCHOOL DISCIPLINE**

ACPS is concerned about national and statewide<sup>1</sup> reports of disproportionate discipline for minority students. Although the disparities in our schools are narrower than those reported in the national data, any disparity is troubling. We are working to improve student discipline outcomes and reduce demographic disparities in discipline in ACPS.

This year, we implemented a pilot program at our middle schools, a new approach for handling minor drug and alcohol infractions by students. Instead of giving them a 10-day suspension, they now get a three-day in-school suspension and also enroll in Teen Intervene. Teen Intervene is a brief intervention program run by Region 10 that is aimed at educating students on drug and alcohol abuse and on teaching them to make better choices. These efforts help us further address the achievement gap, incarcerations, suspensions and missed school, and drug and alcohol abuse. This program costs the division \$160,000, but our own staff could run this program at a savings to taxpayers if our school division had adequate funding for school counselors.

As such, **we support** revisions to the Standards of Accreditation to include provisions for the recommendation of schools exhibiting suspension and expulsion rates above the state average to implement evidence-based intervention programs designed to improve suspension and expulsion

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<sup>1</sup> 42,999 Black students were suspended from Virginia K-12 public schools in a single academic year. Blacks were 24% of students in school districts across the state, but comprised 51% of suspensions and 41% of expulsions.

rates. We also support full funding of the SOQ requirement for school counselors as recommended by the American School Counselors Association (ASCA), which is 1 school counselor per 250 students.

## **RAISING SOLAR POWER PURCHASE AGREEMENT CAPS**

The codification of Virginia's first Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) in 2013 has been a large driver of solar installations in the Commonwealth. In 2017, ACPS installed six solar photovoltaic (PV) systems totaling 1 Megawatt (MW) of capacity as part of its first solar PPA.

Solar PPA rates in Virginia have become even more favorable over the past 2 years, with some recent PPA contracts selling electricity for \$0.08/kilowatt-hour (kWh). This rate is approximately 2 cents less per kWh than Dominion's all-in rate. If ACPS decided to participate in another solar PPA at the current rates with a similar system size of 1 MW, significant utility savings can be realized. Assuming a conservative 1% escalation for Dominion's rates and a PPA rate of \$0.09/kWh the 1 MW system could generate a savings of over \$500,000 for the school division over 20 years.

Further, a 1 MW solar PV system will lead to the conservation of energy resources amounting to the equivalent of<sup>2</sup>:

- Almost 100,000 gallons of gasoline;
- Almost a million pounds of coal;
- Almost 200 passenger vehicles driven for a year; and
- Over 100 homes' energy use for one year.

Virginia law currently places an overall limit of 50 MW on projects installed in Dominion Energy territory using third-party power purchase agreements (PPAs), the primary financing mechanism for tax-exempt entities. This program has been so successful that it is now in danger of hitting its aggregate program cap before June of 2020.

Therefore, **ACPS supports** raising the Dominion and Appalachian PPA cap to at least 500 MW as part of the 2019 bi-annual review so as to avoid market uncertainty and disruption of the fastest-growing industry in Virginia's economy this year and for the next two years.

## **EXPAND CRITICAL SHORTAGE DESIGNATION**

For the 11<sup>th</sup> year in a row, Albemarle County is suffering from a bus driver shortage. On the last day of the 2018-19 school year, 164 driver positions were budgeted and, of those, 14 were unfilled, amounting to 9%<sup>3</sup>. Drivers must do double-runs in order to cover routes and other division staff are frequently called to do runs so that all students can get to school. This driver

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<sup>2</sup> These numbers refer to the first year of solar PV production.

<sup>3</sup> For reference, 9% of students in the school division would amount to approximately 1,260 students.

shortage is taking a toll on families and employees; students are being picked up and getting dropped off at home late, causing parents to complain and students to miss time in classrooms.

Other divisions are struggling with the same problem. The Virginia Association of Pupil Transportation recently did a bus driver shortage survey to determine the gaps in staffing across the Commonwealth and determined that 80%<sup>4</sup> of districts are short on drivers. All divisions with more than 200 drivers have a shortage. There is currently a statutory concession for hard-to-fill teaching positions designated as “critical shortage.”<sup>5</sup>

**We support** legislation that extends the critical shortage designation to drivers.

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<sup>4</sup> 64 divisions contributed responses to this survey.

<sup>5</sup> In Virginia, the term “critical shortage” is defined in two ways: (1) shortages by subject matter as designated from the top ten academic disciplines identified in an annual survey of school divisions; or, (2) a school personnel vacancy for which a school division receives three or fewer qualified candidates for a position. The Virginia State Department of Education has identified ten critical shortage areas as being those positions for which school divisions face the largest difficulty in filling with qualified educators.

## **2020 Draft Positions & Policy Statements**

### **SOQ RE-BENCHMARKING**

**We support** full funding for the cost of the biennial SOQ funding re-benchmarking as adopted by the State Board of Education.

### **STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS VIRGINIA’S TEACHER SHORTAGE**

While ACPS has long felt fortunate to have a good supply of candidates for open teaching positions, we, too, have begun to feel the effects of the teacher shortage in the Commonwealth, recently experiencing a progressive decrease in applications. Public education for all children must be a priority when the state allocates resources, yet the state is not investing in teachers in ways that will encourage people to enter and stay in the profession.

#### **We support:**

- A comprehensive evaluation of initial teacher licensure and licensure renewal requirements, particularly in light of the piecemeal accumulation of legislative mandates for new licensure requirements over time; and
- Revisions to science teaching endorsement structures that create a single “science” endorsement rather than requiring teachers to be endorsed for separately for biology, chemistry, Earth science and physics.

### **BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE**

**ACPS encourages and supports** efforts that assist the school division and its communities in creating universal and affordable access to broadband technology, particularly in unserved and underserved areas. Access to broadband, or high-speed internet, is critical for 21st-century students and as such has become a basic requirement for equity in access to public education. Many Albemarle County students, particularly those in unserved rural areas, need long-term strategies to address the broadband gap. Accordingly, we believe state and federal support should include the following:

- Development of a statewide comprehensive plan for broadband and state support for local governments that are developing or implementing local or regional broadband plans;
- Provisions that provide for sharing utility and road right-of-way easements for expanding broadband;
- Support for linking broadband efforts for education and public safety to private sector efforts to serve businesses and residences;

- Consideration of proposals that would subject broadband to stricter and more developed regulation as a public utility.

## **CHARTER SCHOOLS**

**We oppose** any Constitutional changes that would decrease local control of public education by allowing external authorities to establish a charter school in a community without local school board approval.

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION**

**We support** legislation that will provide school divisions with greater flexibility in the use of Children's Services Act funding to enable students to remain in their neighborhood schools.

**We support** efforts to study and revise the funding/staffing formula for Special Education to better meet student needs.