

Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education – Public Policy Advocacy

CALL TO ACTION

We need your help with this matter and we need it now!

February 24, 2010

Cutting or Block-Granting the Virginia Pre-school Initiative (VPI) and other At-Risk Programs: *A Step Backward for Virginia's Students*

Action Requested:

Senate

Contact your member of the Senate of Virginia, asking him/her to reject the House of Delegates' budget proposal to "block grant" K-12 educational programs for children at risk for educational failure.

House of Delegates

Please call/e-mail the House budget conferees (separate attachment) asking them to accept the Senate budget provision for the VPI program.

Issue:

VAECE praises Governor McDonnell and the Senate Finance Committee for showing strong support for the *Virginia Preschool Initiative*, but roundly denounces the House Appropriations Committee's education proposals as a race to the bottom for Virginia's neediest students. While the Governor's education proposal does make harmful cuts to key programs for at-risk students, he spares the Virginia Preschool Initiative.

Background:

A block grant consolidates a number of existing programs under one funding umbrella.

- Studies show that Block Grant funding diminishes over time, leading to the elimination of valuable and proven programs serving students at risk of educational failure, including the Virginia Preschool Initiative.
- Block grants make it difficult for policymakers to know how funds are being used and whether the implemented programs are achieving their intended purpose. Often, the block grant mechanism provides an indirect means of reducing funding for key social programs.
- The Commonwealth has an obligation to identify and support programs that work. Pooling funding for preschool with other programs is an abdication of the state's policymaking function. If history is a guide, block-granting at-risk program funding will lead to the ultimate reduction of these vital and effective programs.

Talking points:

VAECE Call to Action, VPI Program

Devastating problems with the House’s proposal include:

- The House budget slashes funding for programs targeted to at risk students, including the Virginia Preschool Initiative, by at least \$70 million over the biennium, meaning at-risk students will fall further behind.
- Included in these cuts is a new block granting approach, which lumps together funding for the Virginia Preschool Initiative, early reading, and other targeted programs for at-risk students, but not before hacking \$50 million off the top of what these programs received in the introduced budget.
- The House budget also removes the Local Composite Index cap for VPI, which had successfully reduced barriers for high wealth, high LCI divisions to offer preschool to at risk four-year-olds.
- And in the most radical departure from the most effective approach to providing preschool and other programs to at-risk students, the House budget also distributes block grants based on average daily membership (ADM) in a school division instead of based on the division’s Free Lunch population.
- This change in how at-risk program dollars are distributed privileges size over need. As a result, there will be fewer at-risk dollars to go around in divisions with smaller numbers of students but high concentrations of poverty—mostly cities and rural areas. This is a major policy change; at-risk program dollars were intended to be targeted toward the students who need them the most.

Contacting Your Delegate and Senator

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA

COMMUNICATIONS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Virginia Online Legislature: <http://legis.state.va.us>

The Virginia General Assembly web site provides contact information for legislators, access to bills and resolutions, membership on committees, committee schedules, and much more. One can even determine their own legislators by clicking on “**Who’s My Legislator**” on the top right side of the page.

Legislative Information System (LIS): <http://leg1.state.va.us/>

The LIS provides almost any information one would need about the legislative session, including text and status of bills and resolutions, detailed information on each Delegate and Senator, committee schedules, budget bills and activities of budget committees, daily floor calendars, subject index of bills, as well as the Code of Virginia and the Virginia Administrative Code. Information is also available for past legislative sessions.

Constituent Viewpoint Opinion Line: As a savings the Opinion Line has been discontinued.

VAECE Call to Action, VPI Program

Mail addresses for legislators:

House of Delegates, P.O. Box 406, Richmond, Virginia 23218

Senate of Virginia, P.O. Box 396, Richmond, Virginia 23218

Legislative Information: 804-698-1470 (General Assembly Information)
804-698-1500 (House of Delegates)
804-698-7410 (Senate)

Legislators' Phone Numbers: The phone numbers for legislators' offices at the General Assembly Building can be obtained from legislative information and the web sites above. They can also be determined as follows: For Delegates, dial 804-698-10xx, replacing the xx with the delegate's two digit House district number; for Senators, dial 804-698-75yy, replacing the yy with the senator's two-digit Senate district number.

Clerks' Offices: 804-698-1619 (House of Delegates)
804-698-7400 (Senate)

FAX Numbers: 804-698-1800 (House of Delegates)
804-698-7651 (Senate)

Bill Room: To request copies of bills (if one does not have access to the internet), one can request a bill be sent to them by the bill room at 804-786-6984. One can obtain copies of any bill, resolution and document by visiting the bill room in the basement of the General Assembly Building between 8:15 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. There is also a bill room on the first floor of the Capitol.

E-mail Addresses for Legislators:

House of Delegates: [del\(first initial\)\(last name\)@house.state.va.us](mailto:del(first initial)(last name)@house.state.va.us)
Senate of Virginia: [district\(\)@sov.state.va.us](mailto:district()@sov.state.va.us)

Parentheses () indicate information that varies for each legislator. (e.g., after "district" insert the two digit number of the Senator's district, such as 01. Do not include the parentheses in the e-mail address.

Some legislators may prefer to use personal e-mail addresses rather than their legislative e-mail addresses. One should check with their offices to be sure.

Who's my legislator?

At the following website you may enter your address and find your legislators: <http://conview.state.va.us/whosmy.nsf/main?openform>