

LEGISLATION ACTION ITEMS (LAI): are requests for the introduction, passage, or defeat of specific legislation by the General Assembly and/or regulations by the Virginia Board of Education or other appropriate agencies.

POLICY STATEMENTS (PS): are statements of Virginia PTA on general issues and may be used as the basis for addressing issues before the General Assembly, Virginia Board of Education or other appropriate agencies.

LEGISLATION ACTION ITEM #1:

VA PTA supports additional state funding for the implementation of any increased PE requirements in grades K-8 so that there is no compromise of art, music, technology or foreign language programs currently in place.

Rationale:

In 2002, Virginia PTA members adopted a resolution in favor of daily PE in public schools. While our members has robust debate about the cost of a daily program of PE, we did not specifically state that there needed to be additional state funding to implement an increased daily PE requirement. Our members believed that with our positions on the state fully funding its portion of all SOQ requirements, any increase in a PE requirement would also come with an increase in the portion of the SOQ funding that covers PE teachers. During the 2011 General Assembly session lawmakers determined that the additional PE requirement would have no fiscal impact on the state, therefore there would be no additional funding to support the new requirement. The statement on fiscal impact went on to say there would *"likely be a significant local impact to employ sufficient staff to meet the minutes per week physical education*

requirement in grades kindergarten through eight. At this time, the number of additional staff that would need to be hired and the divisions impacted are unknown; therefore, an estimate of the local fiscal impact cannot be determined.” Our lawmakers admit that the local governments would solely fund this mandate and there is potential for significant costs. Virginia should include state funding for this mandate to offset the cost to the local divisions.

Right now, Virginia funds five (5) resource teachers for every 1,000 students in grades K-8. Resource teachers are art, music and PE. Many school divisions also employ technology and foreign language teachers in this category. Since the state is currently not considering increasing that ratio even with a requirement that would increase the load on PE teachers by as much as 5 times, there is concern that localities would be forced to allocate all 5 state-funded resource positions to PE. This could eliminate music, art, technology and foreign language teachers and/or programs currently available since that curriculum is not mandated by the state.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION ITEM #2:

VA PTA reaffirms our position in support of legislation granting a local option in setting school calendars and school year start dates.

Rationale:

In 1988 members of Virginia PTA adopted a position in favor of local school divisions being able to set their own calendar and school start dates. Our original position was in response to a law passed by the General Assembly in 1986 that prohibits school divisions from beginning classes before Labor Day unless granted a “good cause waiver” by the Virginia Department of Education (DOE). This law is often referred to as “The King’s Dominion Law” and has remained in effect since 1986.

The law passed in large part because of the efforts of the hospitality and tourism groups. They argue that opening school before Labor Day could result in a decrease in tax revenue from last minute summer vacation-goers who may opt out of travel if school is in session. Additionally the law intended to allow high school workers to remain on the job through the Labor Day holiday to help manage the increased demands on the tourist destinations in Virginia. There was no educational foundation or reasoning behind the law.

Virginia PTA is seeking a reaffirmation of this position given the changes that have happened since we took our original position. Since then almost 60% of Virginia’s school divisions are granted waivers by the DOE to open before Labor Day. Additionally with the implementation of the SOLs and associated tests, many school divisions argue that they are at a disadvantage having to start school later than those divisions that are granted waivers while saving to meet the same test requirements. Also since 1986, most School Boards in Virginia are elected rather than appointed which would make a local option in setting school start dates responsive to the needs of the families they serve.

Every year since 1986 bills have been introduced in an effort to repeal “The King’s Dominion Law” and every year those bills fail. In the 2011 General Assembly session there was a crack in the wall when Roanoke City Schools were granted the right to open before Labor Day not by a waiver but by law. Many believe that this may be an opening for a change in the law. When VA PTA members testify on behalf of this position at the General Assembly we are often asked if our current membership supports allowing schools to open before Labor Day. The reaffirmation of this position will allow our advocates to state that this is a position of our current membership.

POSITION STATEMENT #1:

The Virginia PTA supports virtual and online schools designed to provide alternative learning opportunities for students in surrounding school districts insofar as those virtual schools do not divert funds or resources from localities. Virtual and online schools should comply with Virginia's Standards of Accreditation.

Rationale:

On-line programs and "Virtual Schools" are different. A school division may offer an on-line course that targets a specific need in that division and supplements their current programs. Virtual Schools are on-line academies that a student would enroll in full-time. They would not attend a traditional bricks and mortar public school; all of their courses would be taught on-line. The school division that establishes the contract with the provider operates these Virtual Schools. Students enrolled in these virtual schools are considered students in the county or city that provides the Virtual School. For instance, a Fairfax County Public School student enrolled in a Virtual School offered through Carroll County Public Schools would be considered a Carroll County Public School student.

Because the state of Virginia continues to invest in its technological infrastructure, state-of-the-art environments are now created in which virtual and online schools can thrive. These virtual schools are now capable of offering Virginia's alternative student population opportunities for exceptional education outside of the traditional classroom.

Research shows that online and virtual education can be beneficial to various groups of students including those with disabilities. The VAPTA supports initiatives dedicated to providing all students the educational opportunities necessary to meet and exceed their individual needs.

As these schools become available statewide and students from one school district can enroll full-time in a Virtual School in a different school district, care must be taken to protect funding for traditional public schools. Currently, funding formulas to these "Virtual Schools" are the same as traditional "bricks and mortar" buildings. We must ensure that the Virtual Schools are funded at their true costs. Funding for building construction, buses, and other costs associated with traditional schools should not be allocated to the providers of a virtual school. Online and virtual schools must not negatively impact the regular public school programs through diversion of funding. They must include health and safety standards for all students. They must be nondiscriminatory and offer equal educational opportunities for all enrolled students.