

Issue: K-12 Education Funding in Virginia

## Talking Points: K-12 Education Funding in Virginia

Funding for public schools has not been a priority in Virginia. Both teacher pay and state funding per student are among the lowest in the nation. The Republican-dominated legislature prioritizes school vouchers, tax havens and charter schools that bleed even more resources away from public schools.

### Teacher Pay

The statistics on teacher pay in Virginia are unsettling. At \$51,994 per year, Virginia ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> among the states for average teacher pay in 2018. Adjusted for inflation, Virginia's teachers actually earn 4.5% less than they did ten years prior. This has led to a crisis in teacher staffing and retention.

### Classroom Funding

With respect to state funds allocated to education, Virginia has much room for improvement. According to the Virginia Education Association, in 2018, Virginia ranked 42<sup>nd</sup> in the nation for per-pupil, state-allocated funding to K-12 schools. Virginia is among a handful of states that spend less money per student in schools that serve poorer students than those that serve wealthier ones.

### Obstacles to Quality Public Education

The Republican-controlled legislature has repeatedly killed bills sponsored by Democrats seeking to improve public education. Bills that would have capped the size of science classes, provided school nurses, added mental health and special education staffing and provided for full-day kindergarten were all killed by Republicans in 2018.

Charter schools often operate outside of the same rules as regular schools and have less accountability to local school boards. Voucher programs divert state funds to private schools at the expense of public schools. In 2017, then-Governor McAuliffe vetoed Republican-sponsored bills that promoted charter schools and school voucher programs.

An existing, widely-used program in Virginia allows a state tax credit of 65 percent or more for donations to scholarships that cover private school tuition for low-income students. In effect, this program operates as a tax haven for the wealthy and indirectly diverts tax revenue from public to private schools.

### Recent Changes for the Better

Earlier this year, Democratic Governor Northam succeeded in pushing through a five percent pay raise for teachers and an \$87 million increase in K-12 funding. Even so, teacher salaries are still below the national average, and thus may be insufficient to address the severe teacher shortage.