

# Missing Class

## State budget cuts mean over 11,000 fewer staff in our schools, including 4,200 teachers

By Chris Duncombe and Michael Cassidy

Recent headlines have suggested that Virginia has 5,000 fewer positions in its K-12 schools now than before the beginning of the recession. The problem is actually much worse. Taking into account growing student enrollment, Virginia's schools are missing over 11,000 positions, including 4,200 teachers.

Also missing from Virginia's schools are an additional 1,500 instructional staff, who should be assisting teachers in the classroom and helping students outside of it, and 5,500 support staff, who should be keeping the schools safe and running, getting students to and from class, and caring for student's physical and behavioral health.

These missing positions stem from a combination of schools eliminating positions that they can no longer afford

to support and schools not hiring staff to keep up with growing enrollment.

Schools made these tough decisions because the state cut school funding moving out of the recession, pushing a greater share of the cost onto cash-strapped localities. In turn, as school divisions responded to budget pressures, they started to reduce staff and cut salaries.

Making matters worse, staff are missing at a time when students need more help and support than ever. Since 2007-2008, the number of economically disadvantaged students has risen by 39 percent; the number who have limited English proficiency is up 33 percent; and the number who are homeless is up 73 percent.



### IN BRIEF

#### The Problem

Reductions in school staffing relative to enrollment means over 11,000 missing positions in our schools, including 4,200 teachers, 1,500 fewer other instructional staff, and 5,500 fewer support staff. Meanwhile, the number of students with high needs has grown as the number of economically disadvantaged students rose 39 percent, students with limited English proficiency rose 33 percent, and homeless students rose 73 percent.

#### The Cause

During the recession, state lawmakers chose to decrease support for Virginia's schools by altering the state's funding formula. After adjusting for inflation and enrollment, this change could reduce the state's support for schools by over \$1 billion during next fiscal year. Though it's been years since the end of the recession, many of the changes made to the formula have remained in place. This has put an increasing burden of supporting schools on cash-strapped localities that have been forced to decrease staff.

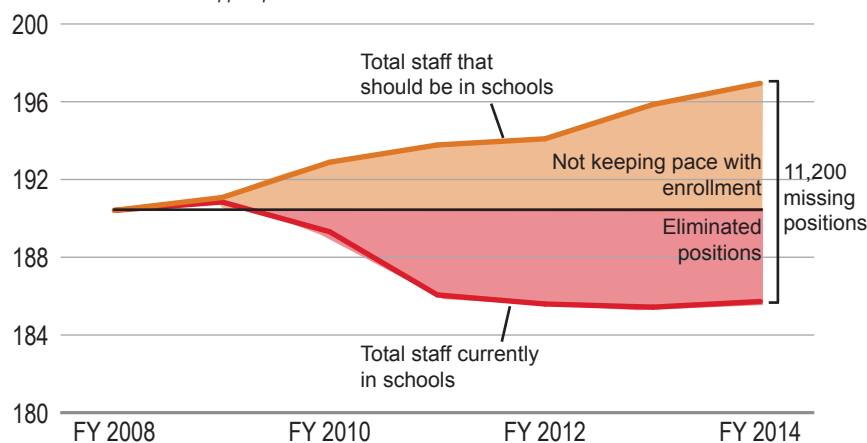
#### The Solution

Lawmakers and the administration need to reinvest in our public schools by strengthening the state education funding formula. The formula should more accurately reflect the actual costs that school divisions face as they provide students with the highest quality education. That means reversing many deep cuts that have been in place since the recession and improving the formula to support all the staff needed to provide a high-quality education to Virginia's students.

## The Cost of Cutting Corners

Virginia's schools are missing over 11,000 positions since the recession, while the state reduced annual support for schools by \$1 billion.

School instructional and support positions in thousands



Source: Virginia Department of Education, Superintendent's Annual Report Tables 17 and 18, FY 2008-2014

## Reduced Staffing, Rising Enrollment

Since the 2007-2008 school year, enrollment in the state's public schools has grown by 42,000 students, putting more demands on the school staff that remain. Combining the number of staff needed to keep up with that growth with the number of staff lost to budget cuts, Virginia's schools have a shortfall of over 11,000 staff.

## Instructional Staff

Right now, Virginia's schools are missing 5,700 instructional staff that they should have if staffing levels had grown with enrollment since 2007-2008. That includes 4,200 teachers, 400 guidance counselors and librarians, and about 200 teacher aides.

### Instruction vs. Support Staff

Schools need a wide range of talented professionals to provide students with a quality education. The state classifies these as either instructional or support positions.

Instructional staff are not just classroom teachers. They're also teachers' aides, guidance counselors, librarians, principals, and assistant principals. Instructional staff also include "district-wide instructors" who teach summer school, classes for adults, and pre-k.

But instructional staff can't run a school alone. They need help from a wide variety of support staff. And these positions aren't just clerical; they also include school bus drivers, school nurses and psychologists, social workers, truancy officers, some library and media staff, school security officers, operations and maintenance staff, and finance professionals.

While the impact from these reductions varies across the state, having fewer teachers for every student and less support for teachers and students with unique needs can only spell trouble for the quality of education. In any given school, these cuts might result in eliminating an art class, ballooning class sizes, or teachers going without professional development. And in all of these cases, the quality of education suffers.

## Support Staff

Schools are also missing staffing in a variety of support positions. Virginia schools should have about 5,500 more support staff than they currently do to run administration and finances, keep equipment functional and buildings safe, care for the physical and mental health of students, and to get students to and from class. That's about 10 percent of the 55,900 support positions employed in 2013-2014.

Over a third of the missing staff positions are for instructional support, such as technical and clerical staff and people who provide professional development for teachers. Another third of these are for operation and maintenance positions, the people we rely on to keep our schools running smoothly. Fourteen percent of these missing support positions are in transportation, and 10 percent are in administration, attendance, and health.

All of this means that staff members who remain have to make up the difference. Fewer staff both in and out of the classroom leaves our students without the support that they need to learn, particularly those students who need the most help.

## Compensation

As Virginia's schools have shed both instructional and support staff, and those who remain have taken on larger workloads, teachers' salaries have also

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failed to keep up with inflation. Since the last recession, teachers' salaries have fallen back to levels not seen since the turn of this century.

Average teacher salaries across Virginia peaked in the 2008-2009 school year at about \$57,300, after adjusting for inflation. Since then the average budgeted salary for last year came in 5.5 percent lower, at about \$54,100. Teachers got a 1.5 percent salary bump from the state during the 2015 legislative session, if their local governments could match state funds, but that does not restore salaries to the more competitive levels seen before the recession.

## Rising Needs

At the very time when schools have had to cut back on teachers, guidance counselors, and support staff, the needs of Virginia's students have grown.

Since the 2007-2008 school year, the number of students in Virginia's schools has risen by just 3.4 percent, but the number of students considered economically disadvantaged has risen 39 percent -- 143,200 students. At the same time, the number of students who have limited English proficiency rose 33 percent, and the number of homeless students spiked 73 percent.

And because the recession and slow recovery also hurt families and weakened the support networks for students outside of the classroom, a larger share of those students are turning to schools for extra help and support at the very time when

school divisions all across the state are having to do more with less.

These problems are compounded by the fact that students who need the most help are more likely to be in schools without enough resources on hand and with the lowest ability to replace state cuts with increased local funding.

### Locking in Low Funding

The deep revenue shortfalls at both the state and local levels after the recession resulted in dramatic cuts to Virginia's schools. And many of these cuts remain in place, enshrined in the formula the state uses to calculate how much money it provides school divisions and how much is left for localities to cover. As the state pulls back, localities are left holding the bag and having to cut back or eliminate services.

The state's education funding formula, the SOQ formula, was designed to calculate the costs that school divisions face in meeting minimum requirements for

providing a high quality education to their students. The state then divvies up the responsibility for paying for these costs, taking on a share for itself and requiring the localities to pay the rest.

During the recession, state lawmakers chose to alter the SOQ formula to reduce the state's obligation. Though it's been years since the end of the recession, many of the changes made to the SOQ formula have remained in place. After adjusting for inflation, per student state direct aid during last school year was down about 13.6 percent from the peak during 2008-2009. To return to pre-recession state funding levels, Virginia's lawmakers would need to invest over \$1 billion more next fiscal year.

That we need such a large increase in education funding just to get back to where we were is another sign of just how far Virginia has fallen. But Virginia's lawmakers can and should reverse this trend, since it's clear that these cuts have real implications for our schools.

### What to Do?

Lawmakers and the administration need to reinvest in our public schools by strengthening the state education funding formula. The formula should more accurately reflect the actual costs that school divisions face as they provide our students with the highest quality education.

The impact of the state cuts to the SOQ formula has been clear, resulting in fewer teachers, principals, and support staff even though our students have higher needs. Virginia's localities are paying for a higher share of school division costs, even though they too have struggled balancing their budgets.

State lawmakers need to take steps to shore up our schools during the next session. That means heavily reinvesting in education during the next two-year budget, reversing many deep cuts that have been in place since the recession. It's time for the state to stop shirking its responsibilities to our schools, our kids, and our future.

<b>Missing staff for different school positions</b>	
<b>Reductions in staffing relative to enrollment from FY 2008 to 2014</b>	
	<b>Missing positions</b>
<i>Total positions</i>	<i>11,200</i>
<i>Instructional positions</i>	
Teachers	4,200
District-Wide Instructors	700
Guidance Counselors and Librarians	400
Teacher Aides	200
Principals and Assistant Principals	100
<i>Support positions</i>	
Instruction	2,000
Operations and Maintenance	1,900
Transportation	800
Administration, Attendance, and Health	500
Technology	300

Source: Virginia Department of Education, Superintendent's Annual Report Tables 17 and 18, FY 2008-2014

Note: Instructional and support positions do not add to total due to rounding

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