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**December 17th, 2019**

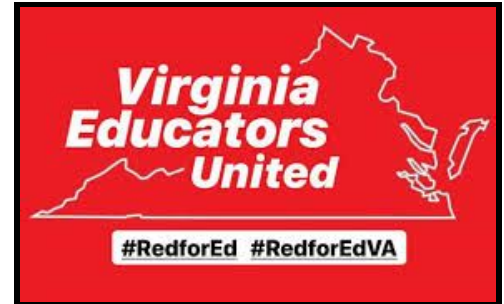
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## **Virginia Educators United Responds to Northam Budget Release**

**Richmond, VA:** Governor Northam's K-12 budget is being heralded as a \$1.2 billion unprecedented investment in our public schools. While we recognize that it includes some necessary investments, we believe that overall this proposal falls far short of what is desperately needed. The roughly \$800 million proposed for re-benchmarking in this budget only keeps pace with inflation and increased enrollment. The Governor is not proposing a \$1.2 billion increase; he is proposing a \$400 million restoration in funds (less than 4% of total K-12 funding) weighed against over \$10 billion in accumulated cuts from the recession, from an education system that was already underfunded when the recession started. We have identified four particular failures in the proposal.

For one, this budget does not include full funding for the Standards of Quality set by the Virginia Board of Education. These standards are established to articulate the bare minimums needed to consider our schools adequate. We cannot applaud any budget that does not fund these standards. **That is why Virginia Educators United has included funding of the SOQs as one of our six demands.**

In terms of pay, the budget only includes a 3% increase to staff compensation over two years. With the national inflation rate hovering around 2% annually, a 3% raise over two years, this 'raise' is actually a de facto pay cut that pushes educators further below the national average for another two years. How the governor proposes to compensate Virginia's educators is a reflection of the value he places on these workers and the students they teach. Given the disgraceful situation facing educator compensation in Virginia, the current proposal is not only deeply inappropriate but also sends the message that educators are simply not important enough to receive average pay. **Virginia Educators United is calling for raising teacher pay to the national average and guaranteeing a living wage for all support staff.**

The Governor's announcement also did not address school facilities. Teachers and students spend every day in unsafe conditions that threaten their health, safety, and learning. It is indefensible that we allow for a yacht tax loophole in our State budget while kids sit bundled up in coats, shivering at their desks because their school has no heat. At our recent Fund Our Schools campaign launch one of our students, Lux Aghomo, heartbreakingly shared this message with the crowd: "When my peers and I perform low in school, we are often asked, 'Why don't you care? Don't you care about your education?' Well, when you come to a school with desks falling apart [and] mold in the ceiling...you begin to think, 'Who cares about me? Who cares about my future? Who cares about my education?'" We must invest in our children the way we ask them to invest in themselves. **We are calling for the state to restore the Construction Grant Program that it funded prior to 2010 and increase the use of Literary revenues for school construction projects.**

Finally, the Governor took no action on the state's capped funding for support staff, which was implemented more than a decade ago and has resulted in over \$400 million per year in lost school funding. When we faced

economic hardship as a State, we continued to financially prioritize businesses while the belt was tightened on schools in the form of lay-offs for non-instructional personnel. As educators, we know how critical support staff are to the well-being of our students. **That is why Virginia Educators United call for, at a bare minimum, an elimination of this arbitrary cap on support staff positions and a return to 2009 levels of funding for school support staff.**

We recognize that this criticism will be met with frustration from the Governor's office, and the defense that the money we need to fix schools will not appear overnight; but the tightness of our budget used to justify underfunding is a myth. Our government has the money it needs, but for years it has chosen to direct our tax dollars to private businesses rather than the public services they are intended for. Companies buy influence with our legislators to secure tax breaks and incentives for themselves, leaving us fighting over insufficient funding for basic rights like quality schools, affordable housing, and healthcare.

The community is crying out for school investment, and more and more voices are piling on. Rather than answering this call by modernizing our corporate income tax system to ensure large multi-state corporations are paying the same as mainstreet businesses, or updating our personal income tax so that millionaires are not paying the same top tax rate as people struggling to pay their bills, they have chosen to take money out of the pockets of the lowest income residents. We know that regressive taxes like a gas tax, a cigarette tax, and a skilled gaming tax fall disproportionately on the families of the children that the supposed 'historic investment in the At-Risk Add-On' is supposed to aid. To fund these children at school while squeezing their parents for even more tax dollars is one step forward and two steps back. The choice of revenue streams for this budget represents a moral failing. We are asking the Governor's office to find the courage to honestly examine where our tax dollars are going, and to realign them with the priorities of the citizens he represents. **Virginia Educators United proposes a systemic realignment of the Commonwealth tax system toward a fairer, less regressive system.**