



Funding Press Conference w/ VEA  
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Anne Carson, President

"A world-class education is the single most important factor in determining not just whether our kids can compete for the best jobs but whether America can out-compete countries around the world."

-President Barack Obama, July 18, 2011

"To guarantee every young person in the state the opportunity they deserve to succeed, we must provide them with the world-class education they need. We are doing that by combining smart, targeted increases in state funding with a focus on providing more accountability, innovation and choice in our public schools."

-Governor Bob McDonnell, January 13, 2102

A world-class education. From the White House to the Capitol building here in the Commonwealth, this is the resounding, repeated goal and promise from our leaders. And yet, our cities and counties are again, red pens in hand, forced by those leaders to make further, deeper, more profound cuts to our already frail system.

Let's talk for a minute about a world-class education. In the minds of PTA parents across the state, it means reasonable class size. Not today. Richmond City public schools are looking at a 3rd straight year of increasing class size. It also means well-paid, well-respected teachers. Not likely. A teacher in Roanoke tells us she is making less today than she was 4 years ago.

A world-class education requires world-class facilities with world-class technology and access to world-class materials. In Henrico county, schools are only able to repair about half of the state of the art projectors they invested in 5 years ago.

How are the Governor and General Assembly proposing to create this world-class education, the same education they claim to be a requirement to our students in order to shape an innovative and prosperous future? By failing, again, to fully

fund the Standards of Quality - SOQ's. By budget actions that force local governments to cut, again, teacher salaries and benefits. By reducing, again, access to vital services for students and parents. And by shifting public funds in the form of tax credits for private school education.

The parents of the Virginia PTA want to know how any of this equates to building a world-class education for the children of Virginia? Because to them, schools are doing more and more on less and less and that feels like an impossible equation. World-class? Not likely.

In our country, we know how to create world-class athletic franchises. We build stadiums and we pay generously the coaches and players. We know how to build world-class corporations. We provide tax-credits and employee incentive programs to attract the finest and most dedicated workers.

But what do we do with our public school students and teachers while we are talking about world-class education? We divert public money to private schools and call them 'scholarships'. We create ways for charter schools for free themselves from procurement contract and allowance for innovative techniques and schedules. But we leave our public schools to find their way through outdated bureaucracies and red tape, failing to offer them the same opportunities and innovations.

As a result of cuts in state support, Virginia now ranks 35th in the nation in state per-pupil spending. And yet, each year, our schools have welcomed every student in their districts - including more low-income families, more ESL families, children from every type of household and every discipline and special needs situation you can think of. How do we tell those schools that we expect them to be world-class, but we fund them like they are third class, behind our corporations and special interests?

On any given day, in any given PTA, in any district in Virginia, you could walk into an elementary, middle or high school, and see parents dropping off supplies, or a teacher taking time out of their day to serve as a counselor, or a principal striving to balance a budget while maintaining morale. We are watching the communities, parents, teachers, principals and staff doing their part, living with smaller and smaller budgets, pushing their students to score higher and higher on tests - and then those same people watch their government cut more and more and more.

Quality begets quality. Quality teachers build quality students. Quality materials make quality classrooms. Quality investments yield quality rewards. If we want a world-class education in Virginia, we have to provide world-class funding and the over 300,000 members of the Virginia PTA demand nothing less than world-class from the General Assembly.