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Approved Budget's Increased Funding Will Help Students, Public Schools

VEA President Jim Livingston's statement on the General Assembly's budget agreement:

Today, our elected leaders deserve credit for their bipartisan agreement to expand Medicaid, which will provide essential health coverage to thousands more Virginians and allow for greater investment in public schools and other vital public services.

Teachers and other educators witness every day the effect that the lack of health services and adequate educational opportunities have on children in the Commonwealth. We want the best for every student, yet we know that children whose families lack the means to ensure health care and learning opportunities need an extra boost. Today's budget agreement will make a real difference in the lives of Virginia children and families.

The Virginia Education Association has fought very hard for greater investment in our public schools because it is the right path forward, not just for each child but also because the economic well-being and civic vitality of our Commonwealth depend on a well-funded system of public education.

It's important to view this budget agreement in light of where the Commonwealth stands compared to other states with whom we compete for businesses, high-caliber employees, and classroom teachers.

State funding for public schools has slipped to the point that we now rank 43rd in state commitment to K-12 funding. We are 34th in teacher pay. Only a serious and sustained commitment to funding our public schools will change that.

Eighty million dollars of additional funding in the compromise budget, versus the introduced budget, will allow for the state share of a 3% increase in pay for teachers and SOQ-funded positions. That is a down payment and a first step on restoring the funding our schools need and the professional pay educators in Virginia deserve.

VEA also commends the inclusion of \$7.1 million in the approved budget to increase the range of the At-Risk Add-on Supplement. This is funding specifically targeted for students the most in need.

This budget is a step in the right direction, and House Speaker Kirk Cox, Delegate Chris Jones, Senator Emmett Hanger, and Senator Dick Saslaw deserve the thanks of all Virginians dedicated to our students in public schools. We look forward to continuing to build upon the steps taken here to move toward an even stronger commitment to our public schools in future legislative sessions.

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The Virginia Education Association represents nearly 50,000 teachers, school support professionals, and others committed to the vision of a great public school for every child.

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