

Underfunding of Educational Support Professionals Sabotages School Success

Educational Support Professionals (ESPs) are the essential non-teaching staff that ensure Virginia students get the services they need to succeed at school (i.e., bus drivers, librarians, classroom aides, custodial staff, food service providers, etc.). They are critical to welcoming, safe, and healthy school communities and deserve to be treated like the professionals they are. That starts with a fair wage and safer working conditions.

ESPs Are Committed to Students and Communities

- ESPs are committed to their communities, with 66% of ESPs [reporting giving](#) their own money to help schools provide supplies, field trips, and class projects – averaging \$264 a year.
- ESPs are invested in the school community, with 71% living in the school district where they work, and [research shows](#) students do best when the staff understands community and cultural needs.
- Research shows that [well-trained and supported ESPs](#) help attend to students' emotional and behavioral needs inside and outside the classroom.
- Having robust, safe, and compensated support staff within public schools results in a [higher quality of service and more accountability](#) than outsourcing or privatization.

ESPs are Essential and Deserve Better

- ESPs in Virginia currently make, [on average, \\$13,000 less than the state living wage](#). Adjusted for inflation, the average [K-12 ESP salary has fallen since 2011](#).
- Between 2009 and 2020, Virginia schools saw an increase in [60,000 students and lost 1,600 ESP positions](#).
- Virginia has already experienced [statewide ESP staffing shortages](#) due to poor compensation.
- According to a recent survey, over a quarter of paraprofessionals reported that [they are likely to seek a job outside of education](#) within the next year, 71% due to insufficient pay.
- The Virginia Association of School Superintendents estimate underfunding support staff has cost the state over [33,000 unrealized positions and \\$3.1 billion in unrealized revenue from 2010 to 2021](#).

Virginia Can Do More to Support ESPs

- State lawmakers should use the budget surplus to boost pay for ESPs substantially each budget cycle (at least 10%) until we get to competitive wages that stem the staffing shortages.
- State lawmakers can adequately support the needs of Virginia's students by lifting the Great Recession era ["Support Staff Cap"](#) on the amount that the state will invest in ESPs.
- Create comprehensive collective bargaining agreements at the local level for education employees: ESPs in states with collective bargaining earn almost \$6,000 a year more.
- Follow Washington state's example and create a [board for ESPs](#) that sets requirements and policies for ESP professional development and advancement.