

Recommendations: Pandemic Impact on Public K–12 Education

JLARC staff typically make recommendations to address findings during reviews. Staff also sometimes propose policy options rather than recommendations. The three most common reasons staff propose policy options rather than recommendations are: (1) the action proposed is a policy judgment best made by the General Assembly or other elected officials, (2) the evidence indicates that addressing a report finding is not necessarily required, but doing so could be beneficial, or (3) there are multiple ways in which a report finding could be addressed and there is insufficient evidence of a single best way to address the finding.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

The General Assembly may wish to consider amending the Code of Virginia to define direct school counseling services to include only those activities established as direct counseling services by the Virginia Department of Education Principals' Memo 1014-19 and to expressly exclude from the definition administrative and support activities that are not considered direct counseling. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 2

The General Assembly may wish to consider amending the Code of Virginia to allow qualified, licensed psychologists in other fields to be provisionally licensed as a school psychologist. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Virginia Department of Education should ensure its model memorandum of understanding to help divisions establish partnerships with community mental health providers (i) reflects effective practices and (ii) is available by March 30, 2023 to allow it to be used by divisions for the 2023–24 school year. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 4

The General Assembly may wish to consider including language and funding in the Appropriation Act to create and fund a temporary math instructional improvement program to help elementary school students who fail their math Standards of Learning test. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 5

The General Assembly may wish to consider including language and funding in the Appropriation Act to provide additional, temporary funding for a subset of schools accredited with conditions to hire more instructional assistants to (i) help teachers provide small group and individualized instruction necessitated by widening academic needs within classrooms, (ii) help teachers manage challenging student behaviors within classrooms, and (iii) reduce teacher workloads. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 6

The General Assembly may wish to consider including language and funding in the Appropriation Act to provide the state share of funding to divisions that experienced an increase in teacher turnover during the pandemic to be used for providing retention bonuses for teachers. Retention bonuses should be structured to maximize the financial incentive for teachers to remain in their position. (Chapter 5)

RECOMMENDATION 7

The General Assembly may wish to consider including language and funding in the Appropriation Act to provide the state share of funding for teacher tuition assistance to divisions that experienced an increase in the number of provisionally licensed teachers during the pandemic to help provisionally licensed teachers in those divisions become fully licensed. (Chapter 5)

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Virginia Department of Education should develop and make available a standard template school divisions can use to develop their own continuity of operations plans for future prolonged periods of remote instruction. (Chapter 6)

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Virginia Department of Education should develop and include courses related to teaching remotely or using virtual learning resources in its catalog of professional development that address topics such as: (i) virtual classroom management, (ii) virtual curriculum, (iii) strategies for student engagement, (iv) use of learning management systems, (v) availability and offering of state resources like Virtual Virginia, and (vi) asynchronous strategies for students with limited internet. (Chapter 6)

Policy Options to Consider

POLICY OPTION 1

The General Assembly could include language and funding in the Appropriation Act for Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports to provide training and technical assistance to help staff at more schools better address disruptive classroom behavior. (Chapter 2)

POLICY OPTION 2

The General Assembly could include language in the Appropriation Act directing the Virginia Department of Education to collect and report information from school divisions about existing and potential partnerships between school divisions and mental health providers, including the partner organization, type of partnership, scope, cost, and funding source. (Chapter 3)

POLICY OPTION 3

The General Assembly could include language and funding in the Appropriation Act to help develop and support existing partnerships between school divisions and mental health providers to provide enhanced mental health services to students. (Chapter 3)

POLICY OPTION 4

The General Assembly could include language and funding in the Appropriation Act to provide the state share of funding for one-time signing bonuses to be offered to teachers who agree to accept employment with a school division that has experienced an increase in teacher vacancies during the pandemic. (Chapter 5)

POLICY OPTION 5

The General Assembly could include language in the Appropriation Act directing the Virginia Department of Education and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to review Virginia’s teacher licensure requirements and process, and propose updates, improvements, and simplifications. A summary of proposed changes could be submitted to the Virginia Board of Education and House Education and Senate Education and Health committees by November 1, 2023. (Chapter 5)
