

Adopted 2015 SCPTA LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

A core purpose of PTA is to secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth. In keeping with SCPTA's mission and core purpose, fully funding public education is our legislative priority. **Accordingly, the SCPTA hereby resolves to urge the General Assembly to support state funding of K-12 education at levels required by South Carolina law.**

In South Carolina, the state government is required to ensure that every school system has sufficient funding to provide every child with the opportunity for free public school education, as defined by the South Carolina Constitution and state law. Local governments also provide funds, but the state is required to make sure the total amount of funding is adequate. SCPTA encourages and supports initiatives at all levels of government—local, state and federal—to assure that every school system has sufficient funding to provide every child with an equal opportunity for access to a quality education. That includes sufficient funding for qualified teachers in all classrooms and skilled administrators in all schools.

SCPTA urges our state legislature to fully fund state laws that support public education including, but not limited to, the Education Finance Act of 1977, teacher compensation, and the 2007 law requiring a 15-year school bus replacement cycle.

We ask the General Assembly to fully fund the EFA.

The Education Finance Act (EFA), passed by the legislature in 1977, established a per pupil amount of state funding for school districts. The amount, called the "base student cost" (BSC), was based on a 1975 model of what it would cost to provide an adequate education for a student. Under EFA for each subsequent year the base student cost amount increases based on the rate of inflation. For most of the last decade, the state has funded the base student cost far below the amount required under the Education Finance Act. The state has not fully funded the base student cost for the last seven years (including this year). For the last six years, BSC has been funded at less than 80%. For 2014-2015 school year, the funded BSC of \$2,120 is approximately 76% of what is required under the EFA (\$2,772). This amount also includes additional weightings for poverty, English-language learners, and gifted and talented students. The house approved \$137 million in additional funding for the base student cost to increase BSC from \$2,101 to \$2,120 and to provide for the additional weightings. Of this amount, \$54 million is from new General Fund revenue and the remaining \$83 million is money transferred from other K-12 budget line items, including the Education Improvement Act. The \$54 million in new funds is just below last year's total funding increase.

We ask the General Assembly to raise South Carolina teacher salaries to the national average and to establish a salary structure that would be appropriate considering differentiated responsibilities so as to compensate teacher leaders in relation to skills and performance.

The base student cost is the primary source of funding to pay teachers. Salaries are important for attracting, developing, and retaining a top-notch teaching force in each zip code. However, over the last decade, the national buying power of teacher salaries has declined. In the state's quest to improve student achievement, we must not overlook the importance of qualified, effective teachers in every classroom. If South Carolina is serious about raising student achievement, then a salary structure must be developed that is competitive with neighboring states and will allow us to hire and retain qualified teachers. A plan to compensate teachers on a differentiated scale according to responsibilities, skills and performance will allow districts to keep master teachers and teacher leaders in the classroom.

We ask the General Assembly to provide funding to replace our public school buses after fifteen years.

South Carolina is the only state that provides the buses for their school districts. A law passed by the state legislature in 2007 calls for a 15-year bus replacement cycle: Approximately one-fifteenth of the school bus fleet is to be replaced each year with new school buses resulting in a complete replacement of the fleet every fifteen years.

The state is not meeting the requirements of this law. The last year the state appropriated funding to meet the 15-year replacement cycle was in 2008. In 2010 the state purchased 130 used school buses averaging 18 years old from Kentucky and other states. Money to purchase these buses came from the sale of junked buses for scrap metal. For 2012-2013, the state provided \$12.7 million for the purchase of new school buses. This is about one-third of the annual amount needed to meet the requirements of the 2007 law. In December 2012, the state used funding from two fiscal years and scrap metal sales to replace 7% of school buses in the state—enough to replace those buses over 25 years old.