West Virginia's Voice

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West Virginia's VOICE

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West Virginia's Voice Executive Summary

Background

Operating under the tenets of a representative democracy, including the voices of the citizens is not optional; they are central to the American and the Mountaineer way of life. This document, the West Virginia's Voice Education Reform report, is the result of a statewide process that was open to all. It captures public input of more than 20,000 West Virginians to help inform the special legislative session.

We heard the voices of a diverse set of stakeholders including, but not limited to:

- Students
- Parents and caregivers
- Community members
- Educators and other school staff
- Representatives of higher education
- Advocacy groups
- Elected officials

A free public education is the gateway to success for the majority of West Virginians. It is the essential rung on the ladder to upward mobility and is accessible to everyone. Schools in West Virginia are the centerpiece of the community. As the great equalizer, education can break the chains of poverty, under achievement and stagnation. A thriving education system is the best chance our students have to overcome the high-stakes obstacles facing our state, and our state has to produce a robust economy.

Process

As the state's lead education agency, the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) embraced the opportunity to facilitate input from all stakeholders. WVDE encouraged active participation by providing multiple feedback opportunities. It is important to note that only a small fraction of West Virginia adults participated in this exercise to gather input. Despite widespread publicity, scheduling conflicts and travel distance prevented participation for some; obstacles that were inevitable due to the brief time allotted for generation and delivery of this report. Another probable scenario is that the level of participation signifies most West Virginians are generally satisfied with their child's school and don't accept as true the need for comprehensive education reform is as great as some in leadership portray.

According to the national 2018 *Phi Delta Kappan Survey on the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*, 70% of parents of current students give their child's school an A or B. Similarly, 76% of public school parents in West Virginia agree or strongly agree they are satisfied with their child's school overall according to the WVDE's *Family and Community Survey*.

Those who participated are applauded for investing personal time to engage in productive dialogue and present their ideas and concerns. WVDE recognizes that those who are passionate about our state's education system will be valuable partners in continuing to improve the system.

Key Findings

It is apparent more needs to be done to address the consequences of poverty and the opioid crisis on West Virginia's children. Public schools carry much of the burden created by abuse, neglect and household dysfunction. As a result, school staffs need additional resources ranging from increased personnel and mental health services, to support for students and faculty impacted by the toxic stress they encounter daily. Progress moving forward will be significantly impeded if this crisis is not aggressively addressed.

Currently, there is widespread misunderstanding surrounding flexibility that currently exists at the local level. Policymakers must work to ensure counties and schools are aware of existing flexibility while seeking to expand additional freedoms for innovation to occur. Schools that demonstrate a pattern of high performance should be rewarded with additional flexibility from certain rules, regulations and policies to enable continuous success. Strengthening communication with schools will also empower school-level staff to foster innovative practices to support the needs of their students.

"The strength of any profession depends upon the degree of commitment of its members" (Fox, 1964, p. 18). West Virginia educators are committed to the achievement of their students. Only as West Virginia provides competitive benefits, inclusive of adequate pay, will we be able to recruit and retain the best talent in our classrooms. West Virginia teachers currently rank 49th nationally in teacher pay and a majority of participants viewed increased compensation for school employees as a worthwhile investment.

Student math achievement among West Virginia students has been a concern for several decades. Teachers are often not prepared to teach math and strategies must be considered to assist schools in recruiting teachers into hard-to-fill positions. Funding a professional learning stipend for teachers in shortage areas, beginning with math, will strengthen teachers' skills and deepen their content knowledge.

Next Steps

This report outlines recommendations drawn from the perspectives and ideas shared throughout this process. While all agree there is work to be done, West Virginia has much to celebrate. Our students routinely demonstrate they can compete and succeed on a national stage alongside their peers in various competitions, scholarships and programs reinforcing that West Virginia's education system is not broken.

This report expands on key findings around the state's strengths and challenges and offers recommendations to address these findings. The report is not exhaustive, rather, it is intended to serve as a guide to support local school districts, educators, service personnel and students. Contrary to past education audits and reviews that called for central control of education in West Virginia, this compass points us towards local flexibility and responsibility.

Now is time for West Virginians from the Capitol to the classroom to unite to deliver the education that children across the Mountain State deserve.

TOP PRIORITIES

Provide a pay raise to all school employees

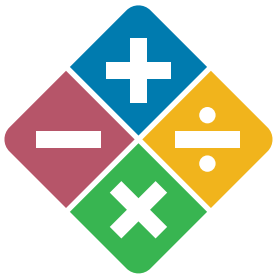
WV teachers rank 49th in the nation in teacher pay and 77% of Family and Community members indicated "Increased teachers' salaries" as a worthwhile investment.

Increase funding for social emotional supports with local flexibility

Nearly 100% of participants agreed with the need for additional student support personnel.

Incentivize high-performing schools by providing additional flexibility

80% of participants support increased flexibility from certain rules, regulations and policies.



Fund a supplement to strengthen teachers' skills in shortage areas with an initial focus on math

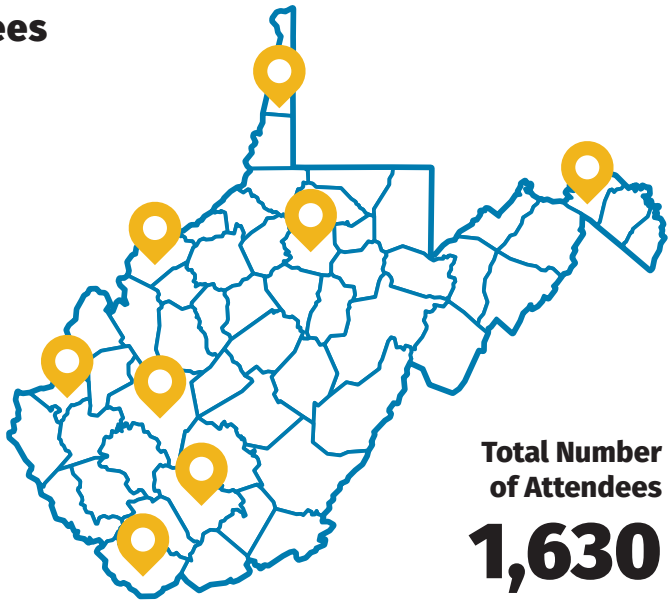
Student math achievement has been a concern for several decades and research affirms content-focused professional learning is a powerful vehicle for promoting student learning.

West Virginia's VOICE

OVERVIEW

Forum Locations & Number of Attendees

Cabell Midland High School	260
Mount View High School	140
Capital High School	300
Woodrow Wilson High School	150
Blennerhassett Middle School	185
Robert C. Byrd High School	260
Wheeling Park High School	160
Berkeley Springs High School	175



Total Number of Attendees
1,630

Approximately
600
Roundtable Discussions

Approximately
90
Legislators Attended

Approximately
40%
of attendees identified as parents and community members

Who Attended?

- Students
- Parents and caregivers
- Educators and other school staff
- Community members
- Representatives of higher education
- Advocacy groups
- Elected officials

Total Number of Comment Cards Received **2,586**

Responses to Online Surveys

Students	5,119
Family and Community	4,093
Educators	7,598
Teachers/Counselors	*7,112*
Principals/Assistant Principals	*486*
Survey of Employer Skill Needs:	200
	17,010

Funding Opportunities
Findings and Recommendations

Funding will continue to be a key topic of discussion related to education betterment. Research outlined in the School Funding Literature Review (*Appendix D*) indicates that the two key questions to consider regarding the funding component of education reform are:

- Is school funding adequate for essential programs and services?
- Is the allocation process providing equitable funding that enables all schools to meet the needs of the student population they serve?

During the forum discussion and in survey responses, stakeholders expressed support for additional funding to meet students' needs and improve student outcomes. However, they suggested that support for any additional funding for school employee compensation, small county systems, or additional needs is not without conditions. There are tradeoffs that participants, both from within and outside of public education, are not willing to make. Still, survey responses indicate that stakeholders are inclined to fund school improvement initiatives. In fact, most respondents to the *Education Survey for Family and Community* (*Appendix B*) expressed a willingness to pay additional taxes to fund education at the state (54%) and local (58%) levels.

Many forum participants expressed confusion about the levy rates and local share cap proposals. More discussion time was spent on explanation than in discussion of the merits of each policy idea. This uncertainty impacted participants' confidence in providing detailed suggestions. Forum facilitators reported that many participants needed more information to fully understand the implications of these policy ideas.

1.1 Increased Compensation

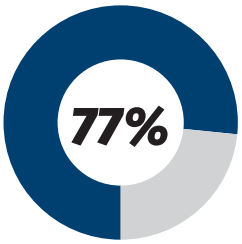
Background

Increased Compensation was defined at the forums as providing increased compensation to school employees. The proposal presented at the forums did not explicitly define the type and size of any increased compensation for school employees. In general, participants referred to the salary increase for professional and service personnel proposed as part of SB 451. This increase would be equal to 5% of average salaries of professional and school service personnel. The fiscal note for SB 451 estimated that this would provide a flat salary increase of $2,120 per year for professional personnel and $115 per month for service personnel.

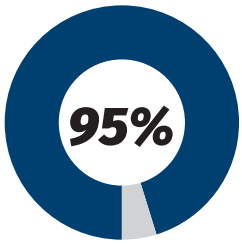
Findings

Stakeholders' support for increased compensation of school employees is evident in forum comments and survey data. Nearly eight in ten (77%) respondents to the *Education Survey for Family and Community* said that increasing teacher salaries is a worthwhile investment of state and local tax dollars. At the forums, nearly all (95%) of 371 comment card respondents strongly agreed (86%) or somewhat agreed (9%) with increasing compensation for professional and service personnel.

Increased Compensation Support



Survey Respondents



Comment Card Respondents

However, all stakeholders expressed concerns about how the funding for raises would be generated. There was not a clear consensus about how to raise the needed revenue. Stakeholders were also concerned with the use of a percentage to communicate the amount of the compensation increase. In prior years, the actual raise was the same dollar amount for each employee; therefore, forum participants indicated it is misleading to communicate the raise as a percentage when every employee is getting an increase of the exact same dollar amount.

> ***"I support increased compensation to help keep and attract highly qualified teachers and service personnel in the state of West Virginia."***

While stakeholders generally supported increased compensation for school employees, the conditions of that support varied by stakeholder group:

- Public education employees wanted assurance that pay raises would not be negated by increased PEIA costs. They also did not want to see increased compensation result in reduction of funding for additional positions or initiatives. They expressed such cuts would further deteriorate working conditions and result in negative impacts on recruitment and retention.
- Public education employees also expressed a desire to receive benefits available to them in the past, such as free optical and dental benefits. These benefits may have been provided by local county boards of education, but likely, for budgetary reasons, are no longer offered.
- A small sector of parents and other community members wanted to see increased compensation tied to additional work or new responsibilities. In response, others pointed out how little teacher pay had risen in recent years compared to other professions in West Virginia. Some stakeholders suggested that pay raises be tied to teacher evaluations or some measure of effectiveness. Principals and teachers responded that the current evaluation system does not effectively differentiate educators for this purpose.

Discussions among forum participants routinely touched on increased compensation as a critical component to addressing low morale and staffing shortages. They expressed that not routinely accounting for increases in cost-of-living and inflation further compounds the situation. According to their responses, increased compensation alone is not sufficient to address these challenges. Participants conveyed that restoring social respect and prestige to the teaching profession is equally important.

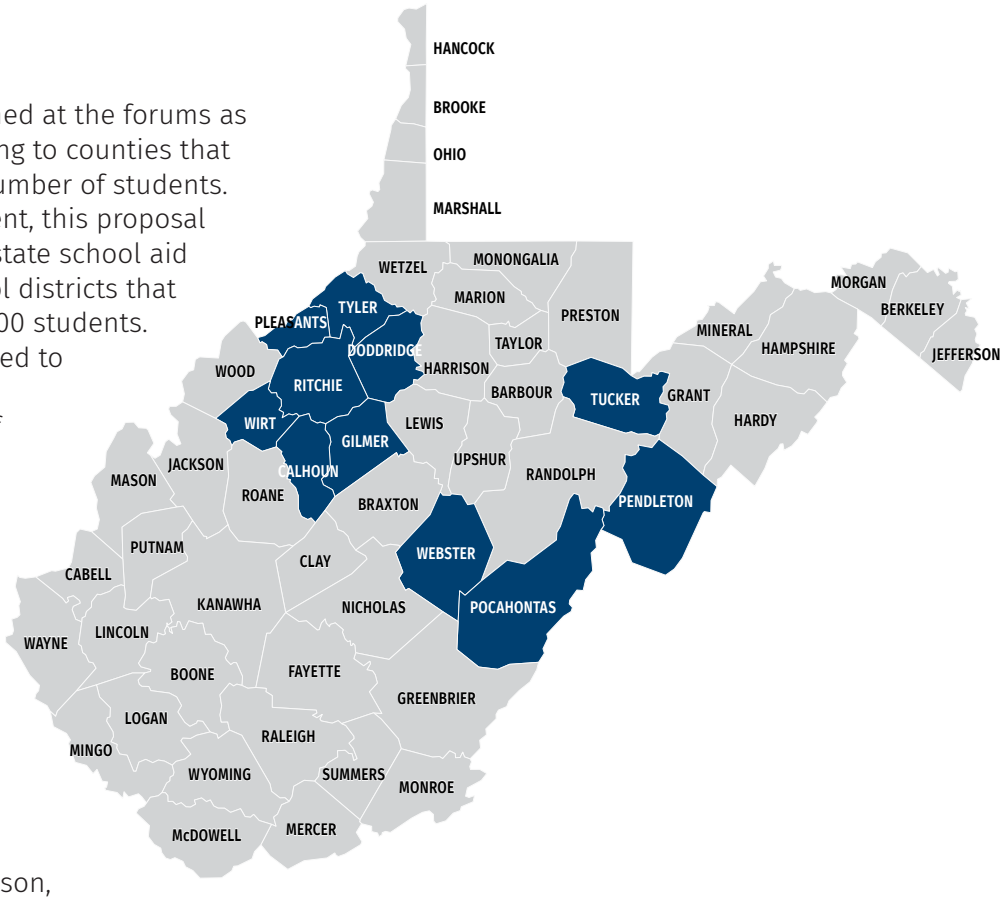
Recommendations

1.1.1. Increase compensation for school employees without imposing negative consequences through personnel cuts or increased employee benefit costs.
1.1.2. Develop a routine statutory increase to account for heightened cost-of-living and inflation.
1.1.3. Communicate the amount of any compensation increase in terms that are easily understood.

1.2 Enrollment Floor

Background

Enrollment Floor was defined at the forums as providing additional funding to counties that have less than a certain number of students. Based on current enrollment, this proposal would provide additional state school aid funding to 11 county school districts that have enrollment below 1,400 students. This proposal was developed to address ongoing concerns about the fiscal viability of small districts that do not receive enough funding, based on enrollment, to cover basic operational expenses.



Findings

Stakeholders indicated that students deserve equitable educational opportunities regardless of the size of their county school district. For this reason, they supported a funding floor to cover the fixed costs of county school districts with low student enrollments. On more than eight in ten (83%) of 368 comment cards, respondents indicated support for the floor at the forums, though only about one in ten (13%) educators ranked it in their top three proposals on the *Educator Voice Survey* (*Appendix B*).

This topic often led to discussion of other ways to contain operational costs such as unifying some district services among clusters of small counties rather than having each county provide them separately. Numerous stakeholders felt that policymakers should consider the idea of combining county school districts. They view investigation of this idea as necessary to address the financial situation in low-population counties, especially as student enrollment decreases.

Recommendations

1.2.1. Institute a funding floor at the level of 1,400 students to ensure that county school districts with low enrollments can provide an adequate education to students. This action will protect local community schools and their ability to maintain high-quality services for students in school districts with low student enrollments.

1.2.2. Commission a study to devise a process for unifying small counties when their enrollment falls below 1,400 students. The study would produce a thorough plan that addresses the inherent complexities of unifying county services. The funding floor recommended in 1.2.1 would create a financial safety net for low-population counties while the study commission develops a plan.

1.3 Local Levy Rates

Background

Local Levy Rates was defined at the forums as allowing local communities to generate more funding locally to support their local schools. Current law directs the legislature to set levy rates. This proposal would move that authority to the local level, but within a specified range set by the legislature. It should be noted that this proposal is separate from and does not affect the current excess levy process. One specific concern during legislative debate on this issue was whether the county boards of education would vote to set the levy rate or whether the citizens would do so through a direct, popular vote.

Findings

During forum discussion, participants generally opposed allowing local boards of education to raise local levy rates. The most prevalent concern is equity between county school systems, which could potentially raise a challenge of Pauley v. Bailey (Recht Decision). Stakeholders also expressed concerns that under this proposal, local school board elections would focus on tax policy rather than on improving student outcomes. For this reason, stakeholders overwhelmingly felt that if control over the local levy rate is shifted to the local level, rates should be set through direct referendums by the citizens of each county rather than by the school board. Finally, stakeholders expressed concerns that this would place too much of the burden of school funding on local property owners. They preferred to tap areas of economic growth at the state level to generate revenue for education funding.

> ***"Levy rates should be decided by the voters."***

Responses to the survey and the comment cards paint a more diverse picture. Of the 367 comment card respondents at the forums, a slight majority (54%) agreed with the local levy proposal. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents to the *Education Survey for Family and Community* supported increased funding from local levies, and educators ranked "Opportunities to increase school funding at the local level" in their top three reform ideas, second most often at 33% (*Appendix B*).

The difference between discussions, survey responses and comment card submissions likely reflects the confusion about how local levy rates are currently set and how those funds are allocated under the state aid formula. Stakeholders seemingly recognize a need for additional funding, but they are hesitant to endorse this method unless the concerns noted above are addressed.

Recommendations

1.3.1. Require that any increase of local levy rates be determined by direct referendum of county voters, rather than by the local school board.

1.4 Local Share Cap

Background

Local Share Cap was defined at the forums as increasing the state's share of the school aid formula by allowing more local funding to remain in the county for counties that are experiencing property value increases. This proposal would create a cap on the local share calculation Public School Support Program (PSSP) at the 2015-2016 levels. Thirty-eight (38) counties are currently estimated to have a local share that is higher than their 2015-2016 level and would benefit from this proposal at this time.

Findings

Forum participants had concerns that raising the local share cap will only help counties with growing property tax bases, which are not necessarily the counties that need the most help. Stakeholders would prioritize helping economically disadvantaged counties instead. There was widespread concern about funding levels in small, rural counties that have not seen increased revenue from natural gas. Most participants expressed it is more important to focus revisions to the state aid formula on helping county school districts with fewer financial resources.

> ***"The idea of having local communities helping to contribute to local schools is nice, but I worry it might still leave schools in poor areas in the dust."***

Seven in ten (69%) of 356 comment card respondents expressed support on the local share cap question, but the question asserts, "Increasing the state's share of the school aid formula" before it states, "... and allowing more local funding to remain in the county." This makes it difficult to interpret why card responses and table discussions at the forums differed.

Recommendations

1.4.1. Adjust the local share calculation rate, which is currently 90%, down by five percentage points per year for the next two years. The resulting local share rate of 80% would benefit all counties. It would also balance the desire for increased local funding and the desire for funding equity between counties.

1.5 General School Funding Considerations

Stakeholders generally reported that the state school aid formula should be revised. They expressed concern that county school districts often appear to purchase unnecessary equipment and supplies to spend down their budgets for specific steps in the funding formula that have restrictions on how money is spent. This spending occurs while districts are simultaneously cutting needed staff and services funded by other steps of the formula that run short of meeting the county's needs.

Discussions of restrictions on school funding highlighted the need to provide clear information about the existing flexibility in the funding formula. Currently, county school district and school-level staff do not recognize all the options to remove spending restrictions with the aim of using funds most effectively.

Many participants also expressed frustration that funding decisions are often controlled at the district level with little or no input from school-level staff. This often results in funds being spent on programs and materials that do not meet the needs of individual schools. Teachers want more input

into the selection of and allocation of funds for services, programs and instructional materials used in their schools. In the same vein of these concerns, survey results suggest that a substantially smaller percentage of teachers feel they have adequate access to support personnel (60%) than they have to technology (75%) and instructional resources (74%).

Finally, forum participants requested revisions to the state aid formula to differentiate per-pupil allocations based on costs for serving different populations of students (e.g., early childhood students, students with disabilities, students in court-ordered placements). Many participants did not realize the scope of services, personnel and related equipment that county school districts must provide to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Likewise, many stakeholders were unaware that county school districts must pay for the educational costs incurred when the courts order children in state custody to be placed in private, out-of-state treatment facilities. These costs far exceed the per-pupil allocation in the school aid formula.

Recommendations

1.5.1. Maximize use of school aid funding formula flexibility to meet individual county and school needs.
1.5.2. Provide additional funding to account for the cost differences of various populations (e.g., early childhood, special education and court ordered placements, etc.).
1.5.3. Develop processes that assure school-level input from administrators and teachers regarding budgeting, selection of resources and services used in each school.

Instructional Quality Findings and Recommendations

Instructional quality is key to increasing student achievement. Numerous research studies have confirmed that the number one indicator of student success is the quality of the teacher in the classroom. Improving the effectiveness of teachers will improve educational outcomes more than any other school-based factor including class size, funding, parental involvement, or curriculum (*Appendix D*).

During forum discussions of instructional quality, the need to holistically improve the teacher lifecycle emerged as a key theme. Special care should be paid to growing respect for the profession to attract new teachers and retain current ones. The antagonistic culture that has emerged in and around the teaching profession and schools was a frequent theme during forum discussions.

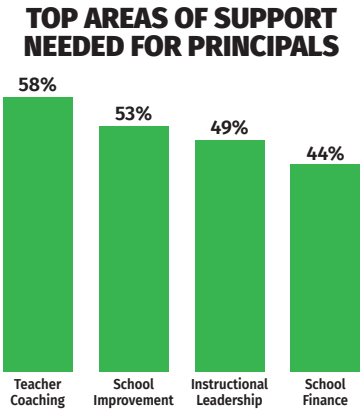
The effects of this atmosphere are evident in the on-going teacher shortage with 9% of *Educator Voice Survey* respondents planning to leave education next year, and with enrollment in teacher preparation programs decreasing by 2,000 students in the last five years (Explorer West Virginia's Higher Education Data Portal, n.d.).

Integrated and coherent recruitment, preparation, growth, retention and compensation initiatives will be required to address these challenges. Currently, efforts to recruit high school students (e.g., Educators Rising in CTE), transform educator preparation programs and provide professional growth for educators occur in silos within the WVDE and between the department, the county school systems and the institutions of higher education (IHEs). All parties invested in improving the education system in West Virginia should unite these efforts to actively recruit those candidates with a "teacher's heart." These recruitment efforts must be coherently linked with preparation and continued support throughout teachers' careers to promote continued growth and life-long learning. Developing a system which supports teachers in ongoing professional learning and refinement of teaching practice is critical to sustainably increasing student achievement.

2.1 Teacher Leaders

Background

The concept of Teacher Leaders was defined at the forums as creating positions with increased coaching responsibilities and higher pay, but lighter teaching loads. Strong school leadership is one of the common indicators of high-performing schools and fostering teacher leaders is a way of expanding leadership capacity within a school. Nearly 6 in 10 (58%) principals surveyed on the *Educator Voice Survey* indicated a need for support in instructional coaching. This is an area in which teacher leaders can assist.



Findings

While participants see potential benefits for this idea, they have concerns about how it would be implemented, especially considering the existing lack of teachers with specific endorsements. Many participants questioned if it is good judgment to reduce the amount of time the most effective teachers spend in the classroom. They also questioned what precautions would be taken to curtail favoritism/nepotism and sustain support/training for teacher-leaders from state and/or county school districts.

The mixed opinions of participants are reflected in the *Families and Community Survey* and comment card responses. While seven in ten (69%) of 568 comment card respondents supported the idea of teacher leaders, only half of survey respondents viewed the proposal as a worthwhile investment of tax dollars.

Recommendations

2.1.1. Support districts and schools interested in creating teacher leader positions to obtain waivers and identify funding.

2.2 Teacher Preparation Programs

Background

The policy topic of Teacher Preparation Programs was defined at the forums as reforming teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities to better prepare teachers to enter the classroom. Good teacher education programs place teacher candidates in the classroom early and often working with expert master teachers while also teaching these candidates how students learn, how to assess learning and effective teaching strategies (Darling-Hammond, 2001).

Findings

Participants overwhelmingly supported changing teacher preparation programs to include more student teaching (at least one year), more content-specific pedagogy and additional strategies addressing social-emotional challenges. Most comments on this topic were strongly in support of developing more robust educator preparation programs to prepare teacher candidates to become effective teachers. Nine in ten (89%) of the 574 comment card respondents supported changes to teacher preparation, and eight in ten (79%) *Education Survey for Family and Community* respondents saw it as a good use of tax dollars, putting it fourth out of 20 proposals. Respondents indicated they felt teacher preparation programs do not fully prepare graduates to be successful teachers upon entering the profession (Improving Teacher Preparation, n.d.).

"Teacher preparation programs need to include more 'real classroom' experience prior to graduation."

Recommendations

2.2.1. Fund service scholarships for teacher preparation students who fill program and content shortages and commit to work in West Virginia for 3 to 5 years.

2.2.2. Continue policy changes and collaborative work with institutions of higher education (IHEs) to ensure teacher preparation programs include longer student teaching experiences, increased content knowledge and research-based pedagogy.

2.2.3. Review West Virginia educator/administrative preparation program requirements to ensure inclusion of content related to social-emotional learning (SEL) and support (e.g., trauma-informed education).

2.2.4. Provide additional resources so that the student teaching experience more closely aligns with the apprenticeship model allowing student teachers to be paid, and mentor teachers to be compensated.

2.3 Math Teachers/County-Level Salary Supplements

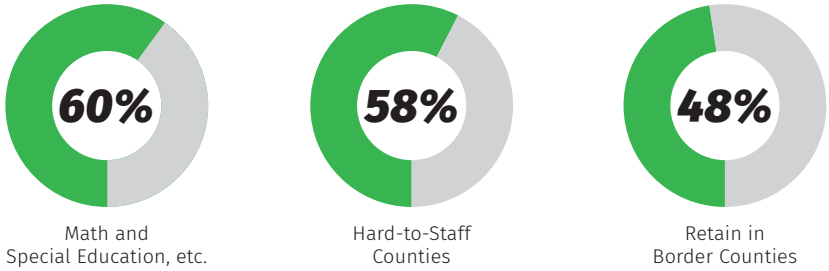
Background

Math Teachers/County-Level Salary Supplements was defined at the forums as providing support, both financial and otherwise, to teachers pursuing coursework to become certified in shortage areas and allowing counties to provide increased compensation to attract certified teachers into hard-to-fill positions. In school year 2018-2019, a substantial number of ninth grade math teachers taught courses for which they were not fully endorsed. Other content areas are heading toward similar shortages without intervention.

Findings

Most participants viewed proposals for supplemental pay by subject to be divisive. Survey and forum comment cards pointed to greater support for creating incentives for math and other high-need subject areas as opposed to expanding the ability of counties to provide supplemental pay individually.

Support for Supplemental Pay



from Family and Community Survey

Participants said this proposal would lead to resentment among teachers. Furthermore, there is concern that it would create shortages in other subject areas if teachers transfer to earn the incentive. Participants and facilitators generally indicated it would be a better idea to provide education grants/loan forgiveness to recruit teachers in high-need subject areas. Some view the Math Praxis as too difficult while others do not think a person should be able to start teaching a subject based on a Praxis score alone. There was also considerable confusion around processes and procedures of alternative certification programs.

West Virginia students have historically underperformed in math. In an effort to address this deficit, the WVDE has designed a professional learning program to assist math teachers to deepen their foundational content knowledge. To make significant progress in the area of math achievement, West Virginia classrooms must be filled with fully certified, highly qualified teachers. If this effort is successful, similar professional learning programs can be replicated in other content areas.

Recommendations

2.3.1. Fund a professional learning stipend for teachers in shortage areas to deepen their content knowledge and strengthen their practice, with an initial focus in math.

2.3.2. Fund loan forgiveness for teachers who commit to stay in West Virginia for a period of 3-5 years in teacher shortage areas (e.g., math special education, professional support personnel).

2.3.3. Offer multiple, free, online professional learning opportunities to increase content knowledge and pedagogy through content boosters, modules and courses.

2.4 Reduction in Force Decisions (RIF)

Background

Reduction in Force (RIF) Decisions was defined at the forums as allowing RIF/transfer decisions to be based on other criteria than seniority alone. Currently, transfer decisions are based primarily on the seniority among certified teachers in the area of the reduction. Most RIF/transfers are due to decreased student enrollment and made at the district level with limited input from school-level leadership. In 2013, legislation passed changing the hiring process, which had formerly been based solely on seniority, to include multiple criteria.

Findings

During forum discussions stakeholders disagreed about whether criteria beyond seniority should be included in RIF/transfer decisions. Of 561 comment card respondents, 39% support adding criteria compared to 47% who oppose it (13% were neutral). On the *Educator Voice Survey*, 11% of teachers and 16% of principals ranked making "RIF decisions based on qualifications" as a top three proposal. Educators and administrators lack faith in the Educator Evaluation System to provide objective information, although reasoning for this belief was not articulated.

Those with the least exposure to the system, such as parents and less experienced teachers, seemed most likely to support other criteria when determining RIF/transfers. Many forum participants acknowledged that making personnel decisions by "drawing straws" is deeply flawed, but others struggled to envision an alternative process that would be fair to teachers and students. In response to this concern, some participants suggested using elements of the hiring matrix.

County board members were concerned grievance hearings will increase if criteria beyond seniority are used for RIF decisions. Parents and other community members had mixed opinions, but expressed concerns that performance is not a consideration. Parents of students with special needs were particularly concerned that highly skilled special education teachers may lose their positions based solely on seniority.

In contemplating changes to the RIF/transfer process, we cannot forget that experience matters. Our veteran teachers provide value in the classroom and we cannot completely depart from considering seniority when making these decisions.

Recommendations

2.4.1. Establish a hire date in state code that will adhere to additional criteria for RIF/transfer decisions moving forward and require county boards to develop policy defining which additional criteria will be used.

2.5 Class Size

Background

While not on the list of topics articulated by the WVDE at the forums, the issue of placing caps on class size was routinely raised by participants. Under current law, W.Va. Code 18-5-18a and WVBE Policy 2510, the maximum number of students that may be placed in a classroom is as follows (*Appendix D*):

Grade	Maximum Enrollment	Exceptions
Pre-K	20	0
One ECCAT* is required		Includes classrooms having two or more grades that includes Pre-K
Kindergarten	20	3 additional with compensation
One ECCAT is required for enrollments of more than 10		Includes classrooms having two or more grades one of which includes kindergarten
Grades 1 through 3	25	0
		Includes classrooms having two or more grades that include grades 1-3
Grades 4 through 6	25	3 additional with compensation
Grades 7 and above	No limit	

** Early Childhood Classroom Assistant Teacher*

Certainly, the research demonstrates, particularly at lower grade levels, that smaller class sizes can result in an increase in student achievement. However, the average class size for elementary grade levels is presently lower than the statutory cap. Likewise, the aggregate data for secondary grade levels do not show that, statewide, classrooms are overcrowded.

This is not to suggest, however, that there are particular areas in this state where the large size of certain classes is impeding a teacher's ability to effectively teach and his or her students' ability to learn. Alternatively, perhaps the trauma some students bring into the classroom today make it difficult for a teacher to provide meaningful instruction to the typical size class. If teachers are expected to differentiate for varying learning styles, have high academic standards, while also teaching social emotional skills, work with students in small groups, nurture children who have suffered adverse childhood experiences and form relationships and connect with parents, class size must be a consideration (Crumrine, 2019).

Rather than instituting a statewide directive on this issue, further analysis should be done to determine those grade levels, content areas and geographic locations where class overcrowding is problematic. Once more precise data is obtained, it will enable policy makers to develop a solution and provide the appropriate support and financial assistance where needed.

Recommendations

2.5.1. Survey districts to determine those grade levels, content areas and geographic locations where class overcrowding is impeding student achievement and report to the legislature a tailored plan for reducing class overcrowding in such areas.

School Choice and Innovation Findings and Recommendations

Forum conversations around School Choice and Innovation largely addressed each topic individually with a range of participant support for different proposals. Many participants, including teachers, principals and parents, were concerned about the negative effect of school choice initiatives like charter schools, open enrollment and education savings accounts (ESAs) on funding for traditional public schools.

Misconceptions, from participants internal and external to the public school system, on some of the proposals created a sense of confusion. Participants generally supported efforts to enroll students in existing public schools with fewer restrictions. There was vigorous discussion about how school choice through charter schools and open enrollment would work in practice.

3.1 Innovation Zone Expansion

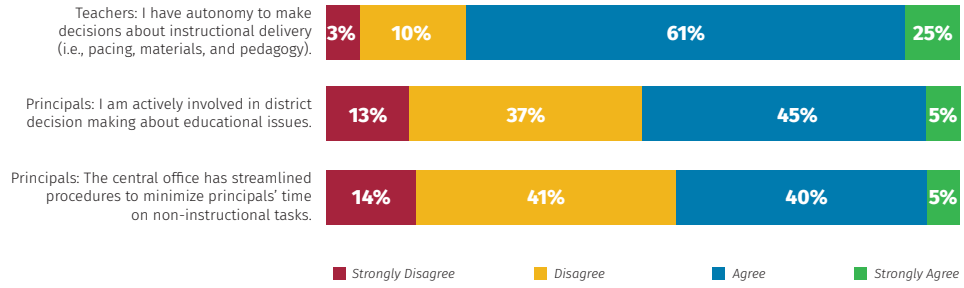
Background

Innovation Zone Expansion was defined at the forums as allowing schools and districts freedom from specific rules and regulations for increasing student achievement. The goal of this initiative was to foster testing grounds for innovative reform strategies to enhance student learning and increase accountability. Innovation Zones can address a range of topics from how to restructure time, configure staff and modify school-wide programs, to more specific ideas related to a specific grade, content level or student population. Due to budgetary constraints in prior years, legislative appropriations for Innovations Zones were zeroed out.

Findings

A large majority of forum participants were in favor of the expansion of Innovation Zones and most agreed that schools need to implement new practices to improve student outcomes. The 687 forum comment card respondents in this category also overwhelmingly supported the expansion of Innovation Zones with 79% strongly or somewhat agreeing. Support on the *Education Survey for Family and Community* was 64%. Out of 13 proposals for which educators were asked to select their top three, "Freedom from state and local rules and restrictions" was selected sixth most often (19%) and "$5 million for Innovation Zones to explore new education strategies" seventh most (15%).

Districts could do more to promote innovation by involving principals in decision making and freeing their time to focus on improving instruction. Percent of educators who agree with the following statements:



Participants suggested that existing restrictions in state code and state board policy limit such innovation. Results from the *West Virginia Educator Voice Survey* suggest that county school districts have a key role to play in expanding innovation. While the vast majority of teachers (86%) feel they have autonomy over instructional decisions, half of principals do not feel actively involved in district-level decision making. Furthermore, a majority (55%) do not think central offices have streamlined procedures to allow them to focus on instructional tasks. On the *Education Survey for Family and Community*, two-thirds (67%) of respondents see reducing restrictions on schools as a worthwhile investment.

Largely, participants sought suggestions from facilitators on established innovation practices in other places and shared that they lacked knowledge and understanding of Innovation Zones in general. Most attendees associated Innovation Zones with a grant application process through the WVDE and additional funding for a specific focus such as increasing the graduation rate.

Recommendations

3.1.1. Simplify the statutory process for schools and districts to obtain flexibility under the Innovation Zone Act.

3.1.2. Change policy to reduce Innovation Zones application process, required documentation and reliance on grant funding.

3.2 Expanded Preschool

Background

Expanded preschool was defined at the forums as providing access to preschool for three-year-old children at parents' discretion. Preschool expansion would create more educational opportunities for students at an early age to better prepare them for their academic career and research shows that students who attend preschool are better prepared for school. Head Start programs for three-year-old children show benefits for children who participate compared to those that do not. There was support for expanded preschool, at parents' discretion, but participants raised practical concerns (*Appendix D*).

Findings

Participants discussed the need to offer a supportive environment to high-needs three-year-old children who are not part of DHHR's Birth-to-Three intervention. Expanding preschool would offer a place for students to socialize, gain exposure to school and receive meals. Two-thirds (68%) of 694 comment card respondents supported expanded preschool, but it ranked 18th (out of 20 proposals) on the *Education Survey for Family and Community* with 49% viewing it as a worthwhile investment of tax dollars.

> ***"Many students come into grade school very behind and struggle to catch up. Starting students in preschool at an earlier age will help them learn materials and basic skills that they don't receive at home."***

Forum participants raised several concerns related to expanding preschool implementation. Specifically, school bus operators at the forums raised concerns about the safety of three-year-old children on buses and alternative transportation options available to families. Concern was also voiced by forum attendees for recruiting and hiring qualified staff, delivering developmentally appropriate activities for three-year-old children, and combining three and four-year-old children in the same classroom.

Recommendations

3.2.1. Phase-in an expansion of voluntary preschool to all three-year-old children similar to the process for four-year-old Universal Pre-K. Part of this phase-in will require accounting for higher costs associated with care and education of young children.

3.2.2. Use existing policies, in collaboration with DHHR and Head Start, for preschool to oversee expanded programs and ensure safe and effective provision.

3.3 Open Enrollment

Background

Open Enrollment was defined at the forums as allowing counties to enroll non-resident students from other counties without permission from the student's county of residence. While there currently is a process for students to transfer between counties, on occasion counties refuse to agree to a requested transfer with little or no explanation for the refusal.

Findings

Misunderstanding among forum attendees over this proposal was apparent. Less than one-quarter (23%) of 697 comment card respondents agreed with this proposal. Nearly four in ten (37%) strongly disagreed while 23% somewhat disagreed.

As discussion ensued around this topic at the forums, many participants indicated neither releasing nor receiving districts would have to consent to a transfer. Once the proposal was explained, participants could see the benefit of allowing students and parents to choose to transfer to a new district for transportation or other reasons. Furthermore, participants viewed requiring the receiving district's consent as a safeguard against overcrowding. Concerns were voiced by participants around funding, transportation, athletic recruitment and operational logistics of allowing open enrollment. Considering the responses from the comment cards with the views voiced from forum participants, there was support for open enrollment subject to certain safeguards.

Recommendations

3.3.1. Enable open enrollment with approval of receiving county to include the following safeguards:

a. Implement the funding enrollment floor (Recommendation 1.2.1) to eliminate any disproportionate burden for small counties that lose students to neighboring counties; and

b. Ensure restrictions are clearly delineated with regard to participation in extracurricular activities to minimize public misperception.

3.4 Public Charter Schools

Background

Public Charter Schools were defined at the forum as the creation of new schools exempt from most rules and regulations placed on traditional public schools. Public charter schools typically have more independence and flexibility from state laws and regulations than traditional public schools. Many supporters said this environment allows educators to experiment more with institutional structures and practices, instructional methods and curricula. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, there are approximately 7,000 charter schools nationwide that enroll more than 3 million students. More than half (56.5%) of charter schools are in urban areas, while approximately 17.5% of charter schools are in small towns or rural areas.

Findings

The information collected surrounding the authorization of public charter schools in West Virginia was diverse and passionate. Most participants reported opposition to the creation of charter schools in West Virginia while simultaneously reporting a strong desire to be free from state and local rules and regulations.

Participants in forum table discussions did not hesitate to communicate their concerns with public charter schools. Specifically, there was concern West Virginia's population density in rural areas of the state would struggle to support charter schools, particularly when some counties are struggling to support their current public schools. Forum attendees in larger, more urban areas did not share this concern to the degree of some participants of the smaller rural areas. Additionally, many voiced concern about the potential of oversight from an independent agency rather than from the state board or local county boards of education. Forum participants also worried about the possibility for de facto economic segregation if charter schools are not required to provide transportation. Participants expressed concern that public charter schools would attract the highest-performing students away from traditional public schools, thereby leading to a decrease in student achievement and perpetuating negative impressions of public schools.

The concerns voiced during table discussion are mirrored by the comment card question responses. Of 690 comment card respondents, 88% disagreed with creating charter schools. Less than one in ten (6%) strongly agree with the proposal.

Opposition to Public Charter Schools

Disagreed with proposal

On the other hand, many forum participants favored the idea of flexibility from regulation. This sentiment was echoed on the *Education Survey for Family and Community*, where two-thirds (67%) of respondents reported removing restrictions on schools as a worthwhile investment. Some parents articulated that charter schools return local control to the school level where parents are more involved, and parental involvement is often one of the key factors contributing to student and school success.

For many years, the subject of charter schools has been a divisive issue in West Virginia. Supporters and opponents alike have confidence that their position is the correct way to move education forward. However, the research is clear that public charter schools will not be the silver bullet to education reform, nor will they be the demise of public education. Irrespective of the initiative, local buy-in and leadership is paramount for success to occur. If the Legislature intends to authorize the establishment of public charter schools, it is suggested they be limited in number and subject to certain statutory protections (*Appendix D*).

Recommendations

3.4.1. Implement the following requirements if a limited number of charter schools are authorized:

a. Place oversight/authorization responsibility with the West Virginia Board of Education and local boards of education;
b. Prohibit for-profit schools and management companies, and virtual charter schools;
c. Report Balanced Scorecard results for charter schools;
d. Require use of random lottery for oversubscribed schools to ensure open access to all students;
e. Require public charter schools to provide services to students with disabilities, English language learners and other high-needs students;
f. Develop minimum level of qualifications for charter school educators; and
g. Evaluate successes of pilot charter schools for potential extension of the same flexibilities to traditional public schools.

3.5 Education Savings Accounts

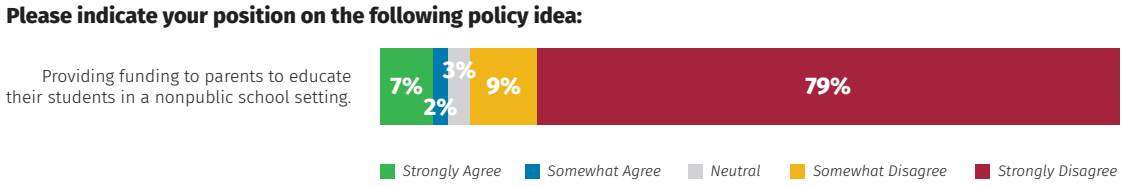
Background

Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) were defined at the forums as providing funding to parents to use to educate their students in a nonpublic school setting. ESAs are state-funded accounts that parents can use to pay for a variety of educational services outside the public-school system. To participate in an ESA, parents must remove their children from the public-school system and agree to provide education programming through homeschool or private school services. Of the few states that currently have an ESA program, some restrict access to only students with disabilities, while others offer ESAs to all students.

Study on the impact of ESAs on student achievement is very limited. The best evidence of academic outcomes is found in research around a similar program often referred to as educational vouchers that highlights concerns with accountability, access to educational services and segregation of students (*Appendix D*).

Findings

Participants across the spectrum, including parents, were opposed to education savings accounts. 88% of 695 comment card respondents disagreed with this proposal. Only 1% of educators ranked it in their top three proposals.



Participants voiced concerns that ESAs would divert money from public education. Some attendees echoed unease that such an option would be misused or abused, and there would be less accountability for those receiving funds through ESAs. Many participants stated that irresponsible parents could spend money on things unrelated to education and enroll their student in public school mid-year. The school would not have received the per-pupil allocation and would have to address lost instructional time. For this reason, participants suggested that tax incentives may be more palatable.

It was also noted that $3,500 is generally insufficient to send students to a nonpublic school, and thus ESAs could be used as a subsidy for high-income families who can pay the difference between this amount and private school tuition.

Recommendations

3.5.1. Do not implement ESAs due to public concerns over fraud, lack of accountability and concentration of benefits to higher-income families.

Social Emotional Supports Findings and Recommendations

Note: Due to the nature of this focus area, the sub-topics in the Background and Recommendations will be combined in order to address the interrelated characteristics of the policy ideas regarding social emotional supports.

To achieve both academic and personal success, students need more than high-quality instruction. All children need their basic physiological needs met including, but not limited to, access to housing, food, health care and social emotional and learning supports. With obstacles such as the opioid crisis, job and food insecurities and poverty, parents and the broader community in West Virginia need the ability to access coordinated, one-stop services that support children's development. Increasing access to student support services and embedding social services in schools to address the needs of students are proven to impact student outcomes and well-being.

Additionally, research indicates the effects of trauma may be mitigated when students learn in a positive school climate that includes strong relationships with adults. Adults who are trauma-informed and are equipped with the strategies to address social emotional needs in the classroom setting are better prepared to build relationships with students that are necessary to foster success.

Results from the *Education Survey for Students* and *Education Survey for Family and Community* help paint a clear picture of the social emotional challenges facing West Virginia students and the need to help schools better address them. It is troubling that more than four in ten (44%) parents see depression or other mental health problems as "somewhat of a problem" or "a big problem" in their children's schools. The perspective of students is even more grim. Four in ten (39%) student survey respondents witness these issues daily in their schools. Meanwhile, a majority of student respondents witness a lack of respect for teachers (52%) and classroom disruptions (59%) on a daily basis.

In facing these issues, many student respondents report a lack of trust with school staff. Half (50%) of student survey respondents are not "comfortable discussing problems with adults at [their] school." Only 14% of student respondents strongly agree that they are comfortable.

> ***"Mental health must be addressed before any aspect of education can occur. A student can't focus on learning if trauma has occurred and consumes their mind."***

With the challenges facing students in West Virginia, it is not surprising that forum participants recognize the need for greater social emotional supports and reported positive views of the proposals for this issue. Stakeholder input was solicited around social emotional support in four specific policy ideas.

4.1 Communities In Schools

Background

Communities In Schools was defined at the forums as redesigning schools to embed social services to address the needs of students. Teachers and school administrators who interact with children daily know that nonacademic issues can undermine academic success. Research supports that nonacademic factors influence students' ability to concentrate, learn, process information and behave well in class.

This, in turn, influences academic and life success as well as overall well-being. Students with poor physical or mental health, who are homeless, who experience instability at home or who come to school hungry do less well in school than students who feel safe and secure. For 40 years, the Communities In Schools (CIS) Model has proven to be a cost-effective model that district leaders recognize as a critical component of successful school turnaround. CIS is the nation's leading dropout prevention organization, helping kids stay in school and prepare for life. The mission is to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.

Findings

Forum attendees overwhelmingly recognized a need for greater social emotional supports for students. Additionally, the need to take significant action to address the heightened social emotional issues facing students in West Virginia was expressed due to the effects of increased drug use, including the opioid crisis.

Also supported was the idea of schools as a centralized touchpoint for wraparound social services. However, several participants raised challenges with programs in West Virginia including instances with outside providers supplying uncertified professionals to deliver mental health and other services. Participants also noted wraparound services have been more successful when funding flows through schools to hire outside organizations as it promotes more coordination and follow-up. However, schools do not always have the capacity to vet outside organizations and providers within this model unless they have additional staff to handle such processes. Participants expressed concern that bringing such services into the schools would inhibit the ability of local DHHR offices to hire qualified personnel creating additional social problems.

Despite these concerns, stakeholder support for embedding social services in schools is widespread. Three-quarters (75%) of respondents to the *Education Survey for Family and Community* see embedded social services as a worthwhile investment of tax dollars. Nearly all (93%) of the 605 comment card respondents agreed with the idea, including 78% who strongly agreed.

4.2 Student Support Personnel

Background

Student Support Personnel was defined at the forums as allowing flexibility to counties to employ the type of professional student support personnel (psychologist, counselor, social worker, etc.) that best meets the needs of the students in a particular school. Step 5 of the school aid formula provides funding for student support personnel. Presently, only nurses and counselors are considered eligible positions for this funding under the applicable statutory provisions.

Findings

In general, the conversation around student support personnel focused more on funding additional positions rather than flexibility. Participants did support making decisions at a local level rather than following hard rules concerning the number of nurses and counselors a county may hire. Nearly all (97%) of the 604 comment card respondents agreed with giving counties more flexibility around the type of student support personnel to employ. During discussions, some participants suggested safeguards to prevent discretionary hiring leading to nepotism.

4.3 Increased Student Support Personnel

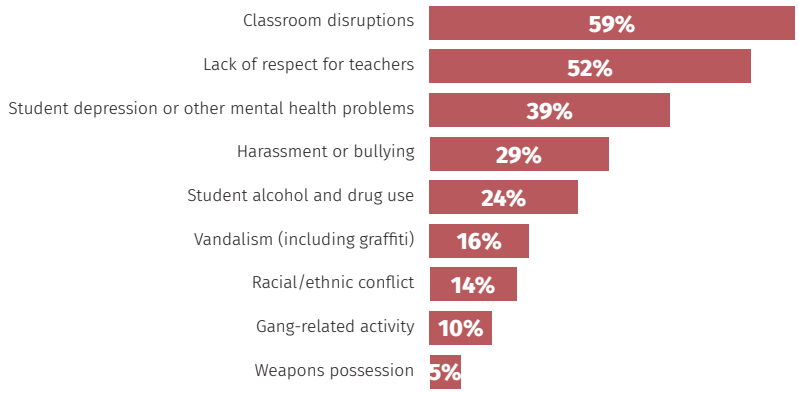
Background

Increased Student Support Personnel was defined at the forums as providing additional funding for student support personnel that works directly with students to support social emotional issues. As previously mentioned, Step 5 of the state aid formula provides funding for student support personnel. Presently, the amount of funding provided under this step is statutorily frozen at the 2012-2013 levels and has not been adjusted to take into account the increased social and emotional needs of today's students.

Findings

Many participants, including teachers and students, noted the increased mental health issues faced by students inhibit the ability of teachers to focus on instruction. Teachers often address students' urgent needs, which reduces the time they can help other students learn.

Many students observe behavior and mental health issues on a daily basis.



Participants voiced overwhelming support for increasing the number of support personnel to address the needs of students who are facing trauma or other issues. They see this as a way to allow teachers more time for instruction. Almost all (99%) of the 607 comment card respondents strongly (88%) or somewhat (11%) agreed with funding more student support personnel positions. Eight in ten (81%) *Education Survey for Family and Community* respondents viewed additional student support personnel as a worthwhile investment, which ranked third among all proposals. Educators ranked additional support personnel as their favorite proposal, with 40% putting it in their top three (*Appendix B*).

Participants were concerned there will not be enough qualified professionals to fill these additional positions, or hiring these professionals may deprive other agencies/organizations of the staff they need. During discussion, participants shared their concern that this could reduce the number of teacher positions. Several forum attendees prefer that funding for support professionals not deter resources currently used to provide needed instructional staff, or for increased positions to become an unfunded mandate for districts.

4.4 Training for Teachers

Background

Training for Teachers was defined at the forums as increased access to professional learning resources to address the needs of students who are experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences (i.e., Trauma Informed Education, Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports).

Findings

During forum discussions, participants who were educators expressed their appreciation for the trainings they have received to address the social and emotional needs of students. They were eager for additional training focused on these issues. However, participants indicated that often the professional learning provided was repetitive in nature addressing basic theory, without providing adequate strategies that could be applied in their schools. Participants expressed a need for similar training for school service personnel, in addition to educators.

> ***"Teachers and service employees need to be trained to recognize adverse childhood experiences."***

Beyond training, educators reported the need to address the secondary trauma they are experiencing. As with first responders, participants reported the opioid crisis in West Virginia is causing burnout and other mental health problems for educators. This added pressure combined with recent public discord around education, contributes heavily to the low morale reported in their profession, which likely contributes to the 9% of teacher and counselor survey respondents who plan to leave the education profession entirely next year.

Recommendations

4.1. Increase funding to districts for social emotional supports, but do not earmark funding for specific personnel or specific programs. Allow districts and schools to take responsibility for how they spend this funding to best fit their local needs.

4.2. Continue to expand Communities In Schools throughout West Virginia and explore ways for cross-agency collaboration in providing social emotional and wraparound services to students and families.

4.3. Provide requested social emotional training and support to professional and service personnel through the WVDE's mental health initiative, ReClaim WV, and similar initiatives.

4.4. Collaborate with higher education to incorporate additional training around social emotional learning and support into teacher preparation programs.

Additional Ideas to Increase Student Achievement Findings and Recommendations

During the eight (8) forums, participants were invited to provide comments for improving student achievement that had not been addressed on any of the topic-specific comment cards. Two hundred eleven (211) comments were recorded representing 30 different counties. This variety sparked conversations about multiple research-based ideas for further consideration which have also been included in the list below.

5.1 Innovation and Accountability

Background

The merger of innovation with accountability advances the state's education system to create new systems of support allowing West Virginians to act on what they value. This combination can support more equitable outcomes and shift focus from a static compliance model toward capacity building and continuous improvement (Shearer and Chow, 2018).

High-performing schools should be granted the opportunity to be exempt from certain statutes and policies and operate in a flexible environment. Universal success on the Balanced Scorecard would indicate that these schools are capable of operating independently of the certain safeguards placed on public schools.

Recommendations:

5.1.1. Incentivize high-performing schools by providing additional flexibility.
5.1.2. Reverse the school improvement diagnostic process by closely examining the top 5% of schools, then showcasing successes for replication in other schools.
5.1.3. Support the creation of more magnet or academy schools building upon successful models such as the Governor's Schools of West Virginia.

5.2 Career Technical Education

Background

Career Technical Education (CTE) opportunities increase students' engagement, retention and educational success while creating awareness of the need for lifelong learning. CTE programs motivate students to get involved in their learning by engaging them in problem-solving activities that construct knowledge and provide hands-on activities that enable them to apply knowledge; bring students and adults together in a setting of collaborative learning; and offer opportunities for students to interact with community members, potential employers and students and teachers who share similar career/vocational interests (Brown and Lankard, 2002).

Recommendations:

5.2.1. Increase the number of students in CTE programs and expand career awareness and exploration programs to middle schools.
5.2.2. Integrate project-based learning using CTE Simulated Workplace and Empowerment Academies as models to empower students to take ownership of their learning.

5.3 Instructional Leadership and Quality

Background

The chance of any reform improving student learning is remote unless district and school leaders agree with its purpose and appreciate what is required to make it work. Instructional leadership must be learning-focused for both students and adults. It must be measured by improvement in instructional quality and student learning. Instructional leadership must reside with a team of leaders of which the principal serves as the "leader of leaders." It occurs in a culture of reflective practice which is essential for effective instructional leadership and the improvement of instructional quality. Instructional leadership must address the cultural, socioeconomic and learning diversity in the school community (Leadership, n.d.; Leithwood and Levin, 2010).

Recommendations:

5.3.1. Focus on building instructional leadership capacity of administrators at all levels and create a pipeline of well-trained, experienced educators to enter school and district leadership positions.

5.3.2. Create a blueprint for preparing, recruiting and retaining exemplary educators.

5.3.3. Invest in professional learning that deepens content knowledge, develops practice and is tailored to the needs of educators.

5.3.4. Incentivize teacher attendance by establishing a statewide incentive program to bank personal leave days.

5.4 School Scheduling and Structure

Background

Scheduling is a valuable but untapped resource for school improvement. Schools across the country have shown how a well-crafted schedule can result in more effective use of time, space and resources (human as well as material); improve instructional climate; help solve problems related to the delivery of instruction; and assist in establishing desired programs and instructional practice. Deming suggests it is more often the structure of an organization than the inadequacies of the people who work within it that causes problems (ASCD, n.d.).

Recommendations:

5.4.1. Provide more time for collaborative planning during the eight-hour work day to improve implementation of the professional learning community (PLC) model.

Conclusion

West Virginia's leaders want the very best education for the state's students. The Governor, legislators and state and local board of education members are committed to providing the best policy solutions and adequate resources for our students. Likewise, the West Virginia Department of Education and local school system employees are all dedicated to delivering high quality instruction with the necessary support services to make educational opportunities accessible to all West Virginia children. The West Virginia's Voice Education Reform process conducted in March and April of 2019 provided an unprecedented opportunity for public engagement around education betterment to inform the key legislative proposals that could move the state's education system forward. Specific proposals have been outlined in the five recommendations sections of this report. Overlapping the public discussions on specific proposals are three overarching themes that need to be addressed through practice as we all strive to implement any policies to address the recommendations in this report.

First, there is an overwhelming outcry and support for flexibility at the local school level. School employees know their students' needs and they want flexibility in programming and resources to meet those needs. At the same time, educators indicate that they are willing to accept the high level of accountability that must accompany that flexibility.

Second, there are widespread misunderstandings about every policy topic covered by this report. Forum and survey participants are not aware of many existing flexibilities available to them, and they are operating under perceived requirements in many areas that do not exist. This is exacerbated by three levels of policy impacting public schools (legislation, state board policy and local board policy).

Finally, communication must be improved between policy makers (legislators and board members); educational leaders (WVDE and local school district leaders); and school level staff. School level staff must first be heard to inform the development of policy so that policy will support the needs they address with students every day. Policy makers and state and district leaders must clearly articulate the intent and rationale behind policy and support school level staff to implement the intent of policy. This must be done with flexibility that allows each school to provide the best services and achieve the best outcomes for their students.

The following chart depicts the recommendations of this report grouped under each entity with authority to enact the recommendation. This visualization is intended to highlight: 1) where flexibility already exists to implement recommendations; 2) where support is needed to correct misunderstandings and empower school level staff to be innovative; and 3) how important clear communication is to the success of any education reform effort.

Who has the authority to act on these recommendations?

West Virginia Legislature	West Virginia Board of Education & Department of Education	County Boards of Education and Public Schools
FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES		
1.1.1 Increase compensation for school employees 1.1.2 Enact a routine cost-of-living pay increase 1.1.3 Communicate the amount of compensation in easily understood terms 1.2.1 Institute a funding floor at the level of 1,400 students 1.2.2 Commission a study for unifying small counties 1.3.1 Require local levy rate changes be determined by voter referendum 1.4.1 Adjust the local share calculation rate 1.5.1 Maximize flexibility in school aid funding 1.5.2 Provide additional funding to account for the cost differences of various populations (e.g., early childhood, special education and court ordered placements, etc.).	1.5.1 Maximize flexibility in school aid funding	1.5.1 Maximize flexibility in school aid funding 1.5.3 Develop processes for school-level input into budgeting and purchasing decisions

The best evidence shows that money spent wisely has a significant impact on positive student outcomes. It is vitally important to prioritize spending on the most effective strategies, resources and initiatives.

West Virginia Legislature	West Virginia Board of Education & Department of Education	County Boards of Education and Public Schools
INSTRUCTIONAL QUALITY		
2.2.1 Fund service scholarship programs for teacher candidates in shortage content areas 2.2.4 Provide resources to make the student teaching experience an apprenticeship model 2.3.1 Fund a professional learning stipend for teachers in shortage areas to deepen their content knowledge and strengthen their practice, with an initial focus in math 2.3.2 Fund loan forgiveness for teachers who commit to stay in West Virginia for a period of 3-5 years in teacher shortage areas 2.4.1 Establish a hire date in state code that will adhere to additional criteria for RIF/transfer decisions moving forward and require county boards to develop policy defining which additional criteria will be used	2.1.1 Support districts/schools interested in creating teacher-leader positions to obtain waivers and identify funding 2.2.2 Continue policy changes and collaborative work with Institutions of Higher Education to ensure teacher preparation programs include longer student teaching, increased content and research-based pedagogy 2.2.3 Review WV educator preparation programs to include social-emotional learning and support 2.3.3 Offer multiple, free, online professional learning opportunities to increase content knowledge and pedagogy through content boosters, modules and courses 2.5.1 Survey districts to determine the extent and locations of class overcrowding	2.4.1 Develop policy defining additional criteria for RIF/transfers **These recommendations focus on providing funds and state support for improving instructional quality. However, county school systems bear the responsibility for recruiting, retaining and supporting high-quality educators. Based on stakeholder input, the quality of county efforts in this area directly impacts staff morale which is essential to a successful school.**

West Virginia Legislature	West Virginia Board of Education & Department of Education	County Boards of Education and Public Schools
SCHOOL CHOICE AND INNOVATION		
3.1.1 Simplify the Innovation Zone Act 3.2.1 Phase-in expansion of pre-school for three-year-olds 3.3.1 Enable open enrollment with approval from receiving county (with safeguards) 3.4.1 Implement certain requirements if a limited number of charter schools are authorized 3.5.1 Do not implement ESAs due to public concerns over fraud, lack of accountability and concentration of benefits to higher-income families.	3.1.2 Change Innovation Zone policy to reduce application process 3.2.2 Use existing pre-school policies (with DHHR & Head Start) to oversee implementation of expanded pre-school for three-year olds	
	The overwhelming desire for flexibility and freedom to innovate are highlighted within these recommendations. The county school systems should identify proven innovative strategies that will produce improved student achievement and garner the commitment of all stakeholders to make the innovation successful.	
SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS		
4.1 Increase funding to districts for social emotional supports with local flexibility on use	4.2 Continue to expand Communities In Schools and explore ways for cross-agency collaboration in providing services to students and families 4.3 Provide social emotional training and support to professional and service personnel 4.4 Collaborate with IHEs to incorporate additional content around social emotional learning and support into teacher preparation programs	4.2 Continue to expand Communities In Schools and explore ways for cross-agency collaboration in providing services to students and families 4.3 Provide social emotional training and support to professional and service personnel

West Virginia Legislature	West Virginia Board of Education & Department of Education	County Boards of Education and Public Schools

ADDITIONAL IDEAS TO INCREASE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

West Virginia Legislature

5.1.1 Incentivize high-performing schools by providing additional flexibility

5.3.4 Incentivize teacher attendance by establishing a statewide incentive program to bank personal leave days

This report should be used as a compass moving forward when considering education reform. The recommendations point us in the direction of local flexibility and responsibility and prioritize those actions most likely to improve student outcomes.

West Virginia Board of Education & Department of Education

5.1.1 Incentivize high-performing schools by providing additional flexibility

5.1.2 Reverse the school improvement diagnostic process by examining the top 5% of schools and showcasing success for replication

5.2.1 Increase the number of students in CTE programs and expand career awareness and exploration programs to middle schools

5.2.2 Integrate project-based learning using CTE Simulated Workplace and Empowerment Academies

5.3.2 Create a blueprint to assist counties in preparing, recruiting and retaining exemplary educators

5.4.1 Provide more time for collaborative planning during the eight-hour work day to improve implementation of the professional learning community (PLC) model

County Boards of Education and Public Schools

5.1.3 Support the creation of more magnet or academy schools

5.2.1 Increase the number of students in CTE programs and expand career awareness and exploration programs to middle schools

5.2.2 Integrate project-based learning using CTE Simulated Workplace and Empowerment Academies

5.3.1 Focus on building instructional leadership capacity of administrators and create a leadership pipeline

5.3.3 Invest in professional learning that deepens content knowledge, develops practices and is tailored to the needs of educators

5.4.1 Provide more time for collaborative planning during the eight-hour work day to improve implementation of the professional learning community (PLC) model

Appendices

To view all Appendices, visit wvde.us/edvoices

Appendix A

Research Partners
CBER Validation Memo
West Virginia Department of Education Response to CBER Memo
Forum Processes and Methodology

Appendix B

Report on Education Survey for Students
Aggregate Data on Education Survey for Students
Report on Education Survey for Family & Community
Aggregate Data on Education Survey for Family & Community
Report on Educator Voice Survey (Teacher & Counselor Survey)
Aggregate Data on Educator Voice Survey (Teacher & Counselor Survey)
Educator Voice Survey Addendum: Views on Policy Proposals
Aggregate Data on Education Survey for Principals
Employer Needs Survey Report

Appendix C

Report on Comment Card Responses
Funding Opportunities Comment Cards
Instructional Quality Comment Cards
School Choice Innovation Comment Cards
Social Emotional Supports Comment Cards
Other Ideas Comment Cards

Appendix D

Literature Review
References

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