



Palmetto State Teachers Association 2018 Legislative Agenda

The Palmetto State Teachers Association Legislative Agenda outlines our priorities for the legislative session.

1. Full Funding of Mandated Programs

Education funding should not be dependent on sales tax revenue alone. The General Assembly needs to adopt a plan to restructure and stabilize the education funding in our state.

Full Funding of the Education Finance Act

The General Assembly must establish education as the state's top funding priority. The cost of providing a sound educational program for all of the state's children should not be funded using nonrecurring money. PSTA supports an increase in the Base Student Cost to meet or exceed the level required by law. The education of 21st Century students necessitates 21st Century funding. The current Base Student Cost is \$2,425. Based on the EFA computation from the South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office, the Base Student Cost for 2018-2019 should be \$3,018.

Security of the EIA Penny for Innovation

The Education Improvement Act should be thoroughly examined and updated. Money from the EIA funds should NOT be used to supplant funding intended to be paid from the General Fund. To ensure that all sales tax revenues adequately fund the EIA programs, the majority of the sales tax exemptions must be eliminated.

State Must Fund the Fringe Benefits Program

Passing the costs of funding the fringe benefits program to the individual districts creates an unequal burden on the smaller, poorer districts and robs them of dollars that should be used to fund instruction. The legislature must appropriate funds to cover the costs of providing employee benefits.

Full Funding of the Education Accountability Act

The passage of the Education Accountability Act was a milestone in improving the education system in South Carolina. The General Assembly MUST fund the cost of the programs mandated by the EAA.

2. Funding K-12 Education

PSTA supports funding programs and resources for our poorer school districts. Even though the Supreme Court dismissed the Abbeville court case, legislators should not dismiss their responsibility of providing students with the resources to receive a high quality education. The geographic area in which children are born should not determine resources provided for educating them. The tax base of many South Carolina school districts does not provide adequate funds for a high quality education. PSTA supports revamping the tax structure in South Carolina in order to fund a high quality education for all children regardless of where they live.

3. Funding K-12 Reading

PSTA supports summer reading camps and reading/literacy coaches in every school district to work with teachers of struggling readers so all children are reading on grade level. PSTA supports professional development for teachers in reading which should be paid for by the state and/or provided by local school districts at no cost to teachers. PSTA supports the use of reading/literacy coaches who will help assist schools during the first year of mandatory retention from the Read to Succeed legislation. Reading/literacy coaches should be able to work with teachers, individual students, small groups of students, and entire classrooms.

4. Enact Comprehensive Tax Reform

While protecting the state's fiscal solvency and to ensure revenues necessary to properly fund public education, PSTA supports comprehensive tax reform.

5. Recruitment, Retention, Compensation, and Evaluation of Professional Educators

Recruitment

As public education in South Carolina moves forward, it is imperative that teaching is an attractive career. PSTA supports a lottery enhancement for high school students deciding to pursue a degree in education. Additionally, providing scholarships for outstanding students to go into education in programs such as (Teaching Fellows Program and Call Me MiSTER) and funding salary supplements for National Board Certified teachers are ways to increase the number of highly qualified teachers in our state. In addition, to address the shortage of teachers in critical need subject and geographic areas, the legislature should provide additional resources to attract individuals to these areas (i.e. mileage compensation, student loan forgiveness, housing assistance, etc.)

Retention

Research shows we lose many of our new teachers within the first five years of teaching. The beginning salary needs to be increased in addition to providing support to teachers.

To maintain a cadre of quality teachers in the classroom, the cap on the increments of the state salary schedule should be raised from 23 to 30 years. Adding steps to the state minimum salary schedule recognizes the value and worth of our veteran teachers, encouraging them to stay in the profession. The General Assembly must also:

- fund comprehensive induction programs for new teachers that include networking, release time, and full-time mentor coaching for the first two years, and
- fully fund mentor training for districts and allow trained National Board Certified Teachers to serve as mentors.

Compensation

PSTA believes educators are professionals and should be duly compensated. The General Assembly must address the discrepancies between South Carolina teachers' salaries and the southeastern average teacher salary. Any changes to the current way teachers are compensated must be carefully considered and studied with teacher input. PSTA recommends the General Assembly increase the number of steps on the minimum salary schedule to 30 by annually funding an additional step for the next seven years. PSTA supports the revamping of the minimum state teacher salary schedule which would increase pay of all teachers.

Housing Assistance

Some teachers have a desire to teach in rural areas but either does not desire to live in the same area or cannot live in the area due to lack of adequate housing opportunities. The state should provide stipends for those who travel to work more than 25 miles one way and offer housing supplements for those who live within the school district. This could increase the number of qualified teachers in rural areas.

Enhancing the Teaching Profession

Education is a profession, and educators are professionals. The state must ensure that only certified educational leaders lead all schools, and that a properly trained, certified, and compensated educator teaches every class. PSTA encourages members of the General Assembly to work creatively to recognize outstanding teachers in their districts. PSTA values a working relationship between legislators and educators. We invite legislators to collaborate with teachers when making decisions that affect education. PSTA supports giving teachers the opportunity to serve as teacher leaders within schools and districts while remaining full time teachers.

Evaluation

PSTA supports accountability for educators. PSTA believes evaluations should be reliable, valid, and implemented with fidelity. PSTA welcomes the opportunity to work with other stakeholders to further develop the evaluation process that we feel will be beneficial to South Carolina students and educators.

6. Tuition Tax Credits and Vouchers

PSTA does not support any legislation that will direct public funds to pay for private, religious, or home schooling. Tuition tax credit plans draw against our state's general fund revenue resulting in unstable budgets for our public schools and other state agencies.

7. School Safety

The best way to protect our children in schools is to have a well trained and armed School Resource Officer (SRO) in every school. PSTA supports having a School Resource Officer in every public school with funding provided by the General Assembly. PSTA believes school districts should have updated safety plans based on recommendations from experts in school safety and the South Carolina Department of Education.

8. Assault and Battery of School Employees

PSTA supports changing criminal laws so that anyone who commits assault and battery on a school employee faces penalties that are consistent with or greater than the penalties that apply for making threats to school employees.

9. School Choice

PSTA strongly supports public school choice as smaller learning communities within the public schools. These choices include charter schools, magnet schools, virtual schools, single gender, and Montessori education as public school choice options.

10. South Carolina Retirement System

It is important to PSTA that the retirement system is solvent for our current and future retirees. PSTA does not support employment contribution increases to fund billions of dollars of debt in the pension program. We support the South Carolina retirement system staying a defined benefit plan. Defined benefit plans deliver retirement benefits in a proficient and cost-effective manner, consistently outperforming defined contribution plans. We feel the defined benefit plan is one tool to attract and retain quality teachers in our state.

11. School Governance

The legislature must provide for the election of all school board members in nonpartisan elections and for fiscal independence of these elected school boards so they may raise the local funds needed to comply with state and federal mandates.

