



Palmetto State Teachers Association 2019 Legislative Agenda

The Palmetto State Teachers Association's 2019 Legislative Agenda outlines our priorities for the legislative session.

1. Compensation, Recruitment and Retention, Evaluation, and Support of Professional Educators

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 national average teacher salary. **PSTA encourages the General Assembly to increase teacher salaries 10% as a step toward raising South Carolina teacher salaries to the national average.** We understand the financial responsibility associated with such a request. The General Assembly should look to the projected revenue from online sales taxes and the list of tax exemptions that deprive the state from potential revenue. Any changes to the current way teachers are compensated must be carefully considered and 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.

Recruitment and Retention

As public education in South Carolina moves forward, it is imperative that teaching is an attractive career. PSTA supports a lottery enhancement for students pursuing a degree in education. Currently, students majoring in math, science, and health fields receive this enhancement. Education should be added to this list. Additionally, providing scholarships for qualifying students to go into education in programs such as the Teaching Fellows Program and Call Me MiSTER and funding salary supplements for National Board Certified teachers will 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 expand resources to attract individuals to these areas (i.e. mileage compensation, student loan forgiveness, housing assistance, etc). PSTA also supports needs-based scholarships for students wanting to pursue public education as a career.

Housing Assistance

Some teachers have a desire to teach in rural areas but find it difficult due to lack of adequate housing opportunities. The state should provide stipends for educators 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. Fairfield, Saluda, and Dillion school districts have come up with creative solutions to this problem.

Reducing Testing

PSTA supports the reduction of testing and changing the types of tests given to our students. This must be done with careful and continuous input from current classroom educators. The state could instead use portfolio or performance-based assessments which would help the assessments address the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate.

Evaluation

PSTA believes the purpose of evaluations should be to promote educator growth and the evaluations should be reliable, valid, and implemented with fidelity. We support reducing the paperwork burden associated with the current evaluation system, for both teachers and administrators. We welcome 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.

Additional Support

- **Create Time:** PSTA supports giving teachers more time to manage non-instructional tasks. This can be done in the form of uninterrupted planning time and protected teacher work days.
- **Increase Support Staff:** Fund more support staff positions to help teachers with administrative tasks that keep teachers from planning quality instruction for their students.
- **Mentoring Support:** PSTA supports mentoring for novice teachers for up to their first 3 years of teaching. Mentoring has proven to be an effective way to retain teachers.

2. 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 \$2,485. Based on the EFA computation from the South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office, the Base Student Cost for 2019-2020 should be \$3,095. The Base Student Cost hasn't been fully funded since 2008-2009.***

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.

3. School Safety and Student Mental Health

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. The state should also provide wraparound services to include mental health counselors, school psychologists, and social workers in every South Carolina public school.

4. 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 comprehensive tax reform in South Carolina in order to fund a high-quality education for all children regardless of where they live.

5. 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. We support lessening the burden imposed by the Read to Succeed legislation on teachers going through recertification. The Read to Succeed legislation should be amended to allow reading/literacy coaches to be able to work with not only teachers but also individual students, small groups of students, and entire classrooms.

6. 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. Examples of tax exemptions that need to be eliminated include amusement rides, porta potties, airplanes, zoo animals, and many more.

7. Tuition Tax Credits and Vouchers

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

8. Assault and Battery of School Employees

PSTA supports changing criminal laws so that anyone (students and adults) who commits assault and battery on a school employee faces penalties that are 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.

