

These Legislative Policy Position Statements provide a summary of key issues identified by the Education Affairs Division of the Beckley Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce. They were adopted by the Board of Directors to be presented to Legislators for the 2016 Legislative Session.

Drop Out Rate

Because the Chamber recognizes the growth of Raleigh County is dependent on our youth and their future, the dropout rate within our local high schools is a concern to us. Data suggests that high school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, to need public assistance, and to be involved in crime, further supporting the need to address our dropout rates. The Chamber supports innovative programs and mentorships that target at-risk students (who are likely to leave high school before graduation) with an increased focus on middle schoolers and ninth graders, and their families. In addition, the Chamber supports funding for local advocacy programs that address dropout rates, rewarding schools that improve their graduation rate, tutoring, and mentoring programs. The Chamber supports programs that work with students who have dropped out of school to give them a second chance to re-enter school. Furthermore, it is desirable to link the Chamber, local school officials, and the business community together in an effort to reach new, creative solutions that will positively impact our youth and encourage them to finish high school.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization (ESEA)

The Chamber believes all children throughout Raleigh County deserve a world-class education. As a collective body representing business and industry, we recognize the positive outcomes from the current Elementary and Secondary Education Act better known as the No Child Left Behind Act and look forward to the reauthorization in hopes of increased emphasis on strengthening student literacy, science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The Chamber believes that aligning

rigorous and relevant curricula with improved standards and assessments based on college and career readiness anchors, students will be prepared to become productive Raleigh County citizens. The Chamber believes opportunities to access learning through real world application, expanding access to 2-year, 4-year, and technical colleges will substantially improve the quality and productivity of the Raleigh County workforce. The Chamber freely accepts the responsibility to partner with our preschool-to-adult education system to provide a world-class educational system for all.

Fostering a Climate of Culture of High Expectations

The Correlates of Effective Schools research conducted by Dr. Ron Edmunds and Dr. Larry Lezotte reported that an effective school must have strong instructional leadership, a strong sense of mission, demonstrate effective instructional behaviors, hold high expectations for all students, practice frequent monitoring of student achievement and operate in a safe and orderly manner. The Chamber not only accepts these premises but also implores school and district leadership to implement these principles in Raleigh County.

Leadership Program

Recognizing that strong school leadership increases student achievement, the Chamber encourages the maintenance of the “Building Leaders for the 21st Century” program designed to provide professional development for aspiring principals in Raleigh County. The Chamber further encourages the local school board to expand the current program to include individuals currently assigned as School Administrators. Professional development should include, but not be limited to, effective instructional practices, teaching by design, assessment for learning, personnel management, communication skills, 21st Century Skills, methodologies to

measure student engagement, strategies to provide personalized learning, and technology integration.

Preparedness of Students

The Chamber takes the position that our children must be prepared to enter college and/or the workplace. One of the major concerns from our membership is that the students who are entering the workplace or pursuing higher education do not have the basic math, English, social, and problem solving skills to be a viable employee. Students have difficulties making change without a calculator, speaking to customers or co-workers in a professional manner, and solving problems. College-bound students have difficulties in the same areas and are too often required to take developmental courses to get their skill level to an acceptable college level. These developmental course credits do not go towards the credits needed to graduate. There should be a skills enhancement program for students performing below basic competency skills on state assessment as defined by WV Department of Education.

Professional Development for Teachers

The Chamber supports legislation and/or funding to increase opportunities for professional growth of teachers. As educators search for ways of improving student achievement, it is imperative that focus be placed on teacher learning and development. As a Chamber we believe a greater emphasis must be placed on sustained embedded professional development. According to the U. S. Department of Education, “research confirms that teachers are the single most important factor in raising student achievement.” Higher standards for teachers accompany the push for higher standards for students and greater accountability for student learning, and professional development is a critical link among new policies, school reform, and improved educational practice (Knapp, 2003).

Recruiting and Retraining Teachers

The Chamber recognizes that the recruitment and retention of quality teachers is critical to ensuring Raleigh County provides a quality educational system to its students. Raleigh County Schools currently offers a New Teacher Academy which provides support to new teachers to help ensure their success as well as providing mentors and support from academic coaches and technology integration specialists. The Chamber encourages the licensure process while ensuring that teachers completing the process have the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to effectively teach children. The Chamber further encourages the Legislature and State Board of Education to enhance the salary and benefits provided to teachers in order to attract teachers to the profession.

School Counselors

The Chamber recognizes school counselors provide a set of skills and services to our schools, to our students and to our communities. School counselors help students gain academic achievement and personal/social development of skills and attitudes needed to reach their fullest potential and to be college and career ready. The Chamber encourages support of increased funding to provide full time school counselors in ALL West Virginia schools.

Student Attendance

The Chamber supports Raleigh County School's Attendance Matters initiative. Attendance is critical to the success of our students. Research shows that missing just 10% of the school year - two or three days a month - can add up to so much lost time in the classroom that children just can't keep up. The Beckley-Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce and Raleigh County Schools Collaborative Mentoring Program targets at risk students to provide support to improve attendance and student success.

Technology Integration — iRaleigh

“Do not confine your children to your own learning, for they were born in another time.” This Chinese proverb reminds us all that teaching and learning in a 21st Century classroom must be different from the classroom of the past. The foundational practices of the West Virginia Next Generation Content Standards and Objectives require students to demonstrate learning at a much higher degree of authenticity than ever before. As a Chamber, we recognize the future success of our students hinges on our schools' ability to change how teaching and learning occurs in the classroom. As such, the Chamber supports our school system's comprehensive technology integration initiative, iRaleigh. This first-of-its-kind deployment in West Virginia came about through extensive planning and research of best practices. Students and teachers in Raleigh County have been provided a tremendous opportunity as a result of this initiative. The Chamber asks the legislature to remove funding barriers and to allow districts to use existing state technology funds in a manner that promotes flexibility and best practices.

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