

TALKING POINTS FOR “A DAY AT THE CAPITAL”

JANUARY 29, 2009

These talking points are provided to help you formulate your “sale pitch” to legislators on January 29, and to help students and parents understand the benefits of Governor’s Schools – to gifted students; to parents of gifted students; to the residents and future residents of Virginia; and to the countrywide perception of our state’s educational status and standing.

The main points we need to make on the **budget plans specifically** are:

1. All K-12 schools receive funding from **two sources – the state (called “SOQ” funds), and the county/city/locality where the student resides**. In the case of Governor’s Schools – even though the student may not attend school is his/her resident locality – that per pupil money is allocated from the state and the resident locality; e.g. Hanover County pays part of the tuition for the Hanover resident students it sends to Maggie Walker Governor’s School, which is physically located in the City of Richmond; the state pays the rest.

It is likely that both these sources of funding will be cut because of the budget crunch.

2. Governor’s Schools are unique because they also get State funding from what are called “Incentive Funds,” dedicated to gifted education. If this source of state funding gets cut as well, Governor’s Schools will lose three times over: fewer State per pupil SOQ funds; local funds reductions; AND cuts in state Incentive Funds. We will be the only educational entity to get this triple hit.
3. The supporters of Academic-Year Governor’s Schools are not asking that our funding be held sacrosanct, and free from the painful cuts that all in education must endure. What we are asking is that our legislators **not cut Incentive Funds for Governor’s Schools, adding extra pain and hardship and cuts we alone will have to suffer.**

Talking points about the value of Governor’s Schools:

Governor’s Schools are an asset to economic development. According to the Chamber of Commerce, quality of education ranks at the top of the list for new businesses looking to invest in a region. Governor’s Schools promote close relationships with the corporate community through mentorships and partnerships with businesses and institutions of higher education. Governor’s Schools have brought high-school level national recognition to Virginia, with Thomas Jefferson and Maggie Walker receiving top marks yearly from institutions like *US News and World Report*; and *Newsweek*.

Governor's Schools are a model of regional cooperation:

The Governor's Schools are perhaps the most successful example of multi-jurisdictional collaboration in the Commonwealth and are a testament to the enormous benefits of cooperative efforts among the localities.

Governor's Schools are a non-sexist, non-racist, non-geographical opportunity for all:

Virginia's academic-year Governor's Schools are open to ALL students, regardless of race, creed or color. Competition is based purely on intellectual ability and achievement, connection with the community and potential for the future.

Governor's Schools offer perhaps the best example of school choice. Applications to Governor's Schools far exceed the number of spots available because of high parent and student demand for this unique educational experience. Most localities cannot provide "choice" for gifted students. Through their participation in multi-jurisdictional Governor's Schools, localities are able to provide the extended "choices" to their most gifted students.

Governor's Schools enhance their communities. Governor's Schools improve the quality of life in the community at large by sponsoring events such as town halls, lectures, cultural performances, and youth policy forums. Students provide countless hours as part of community service through projects, mentorships, and partnerships with local organizations. For example, many students tutor in schools in the participating school divisions. Some schools have played significant roles in the revitalization of surrounding neighborhoods.

Governor's Schools strengthen the public school system. Keeping these students in the public schools strengthens the system, raises test scores and improves public perception of the schools. Governor's Schools also serve as a resource for other schools in the region by providing tutors and hosting multi-jurisdictional teacher training sessions, academic tournaments, and student workshops and policy forums.

Governor's Schools are vital to the development of an indispensable national resource: our brightest young minds: In these uncertain times, as we face grave political, social and environmental challenges, we cannot afford to waste the potential represented by our future leaders and creative thinkers. On the whole, our nation's best and brightest students continue to lag behind those of other countries in achievement; yet Governor's School students have shown they can compete with the best worldwide.

Among the benefits of the Governor's School experience cited repeatedly by graduates:

- Fosters a climate of inquiry, intellectual curiosity, risk-taking, and innovation. Mutually supportive, non-competitive atmosphere promotes a feeling of belonging to a "community of learners."
- Diverse student body, breadth of curriculum and cultural exposure through assemblies builds awareness of relationships, as awareness of responsibilities of citizenship through community service/mentorships. "The Governor's School cultivated an international awareness in all of us that I find calls me to travel all of the time."
- A learning environment "where your peers are not only motivated and gifted, but just as important, they are your age. Students learn not only from their books and teachers but from their peers who are enduring the same issues that go along with growing up."
- Interdisciplinary emphasis in the curriculum helps build an awareness of the "big picture" and helps students "see beyond the assignments...to recognize that because all knowledge interrelates, all knowledge is important to cultivate."
- "Challenges your initiative; gives you a sense of being responsible for your own education." Abundance of activities encourages involvement, gives students an opportunity to practice government and leadership first hand. "The huge number of extra-curriculars and the relative ease of forming new ones

made it possible not only to develop one's interest but also to develop leadership skills. If you had issues you could poster, petition and protest – and usually you could make yourself heard. This empowering 'make-it-happen' attitude helped me become the active person I am today.”

- Oral communication and writing skills emphasized. Socratic seminars constant.
- “Uniquely challenging” environment, curriculum and teachers. “Engages students in a learning process that both masters the basics and strives beyond them.”... “I spent four years of my life completely stimulated.”