

VEA Local Affiliate Guidance on State Bonuses for School Employees

Topline: The Virginia state budget provides a lump sum one-time bonus to all school divisions equal to \$1,000 for each state-supported Standards of Quality (SOQ) instructional and support position. This is the only state-provided bonus for school employees in this budget and must be paid out this school year. Divisions have full flexibility to give it to any of their employees in the amount they choose.

Key Facts About the Bonus Distribution

- The total amount of funding each division receives is based on SOQ-funded positions, but once received no later than June 1, 2025, **school divisions have full discretion** over how the funds are distributed by July 1, 2025.
- While the funds will be distributed to each division based on its number of SOQ-funded positions, the funds **are not restricted to SOQ-funded employees**, meaning school divisions may distribute them to any employee at any amount. The SOQ funding formula is based on minimum education standards and many divisions employ more instructional and support staff than are funded by the SOQ.
- **Budget language encourages** localities to use additional available funds to provide bonuses to **all** instructional and support staff: “Localities are encouraged to use additional available funds to provide bonuses to other eligible instructional and support positions.”
- School divisions are not required to distribute the funds as a \$1,000 bonus to each eligible employee. Some divisions may prorate the funds, resulting in lower amounts per employee unless local funding is used to supplement them.

Local Union Advocacy Recommendations

1. Push for Formal School Board Discussion

- Request that the bonus distribution be added to a formal school board meeting agenda as a specific action item.
- If the board declines to add it, speak during the open public comment period to ensure union voices are heard.

2. Engage Directly with Division Leadership

- Encourage members to **email, call, or request meetings** with superintendents and school board members to advocate for fair distribution.
- Local affiliates should decide their preferred distribution model (e.g., equal bonuses for all employees, larger bonuses for hard-to-fill roles like bus drivers and special education aides, etc.) and communicate that position clearly.

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3. Advocate for Full \$1,000 Bonuses for All Employees

- If additional funds are available locally, push for school boards to allocate local funds to ensure all school employees receive the full \$1,000 bonus.
- If the division is unable to meet the full \$1,000 amount this year, encourage them to budget for the difference in the next school year to make employees whole.

4. Promote Transparency and Accountability

- Ask the school board to publicly explain how they plan to distribute the funds.
- Consider requesting a written report or official statement on the distribution process and criteria.

Sample Advocacy Message for Local Affiliates

Subject: *Request for Fair Distribution of State Bonus Funds*

Dear [Superintendent/School Board Member],

We appreciate the state's allocation of funds for one-time bonuses to support our school employees in the current conference budget. While the state budget will not be finalized until the reconvened session in April, such a large and non-controversial budget item is highly unlikely to be line-item vetoed by the Governor, and accordingly, we should begin planning for it as a division. As you may know, while the total funding amount is based on SOQ positions, divisions have flexibility in determining how the funds are distributed among staff.

We strongly encourage [Division Name] to use this opportunity to **provide all instructional and support staff with the full \$1,000 bonus** by supplementing state funds with local resources. Our dedicated educators and school employees deserve to receive the amount that has been publicly advertised, ensuring fairness and equity across all positions.

We request that this matter be formally placed on the next school board agenda for discussion and that employees receive a clear, public explanation of how these funds will be distributed. Please let us know how we can assist in this process to ensure a transparent and fair outcome.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Role]

[Local VEA Affiliate Name]