



THE
COMMONWEALTH
INSTITUTE
*Building a Prosperous
Virginia for All*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 4, 2016

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More Virginia Schools and Students Isolated by Race and Income

New report shows increasing number of public schools in Virginia with high percentages of students from low-income families and high percentages of students of color

Richmond, VA -- There are more public schools isolated by race and income in Virginia than there were over a decade ago, according to a new report from The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis, an economic and policy research organization in Richmond.

This is alarming because schools with high concentrations of students of color and from low-income families face significant challenges in attracting high-quality teachers, overcoming the influence of low-achieving classmates, and providing sufficient resources for students. The unfortunate result is that too many students do not receive the level of education Virginia is capable of providing, diminishing the opportunities available to these students and weakening the state's future economic prospects.

"Allowing these disparities to continue and even worsen puts in place barriers to striving students that will affect the opportunities available to them for the rest of their lives," says Chris Duncombe, a policy analyst with the Institute and author of the study.

The report shows the number of public schools in Virginia isolated by race and income increased by over 60 percent rising to 136 schools from 82 since the 2003-2004 school year. There are now 38,500 more students attending racially and economically isolated schools in Virginia. In these "isolated schools," 75 percent or more of students are Black or Hispanic and 75 percent or more are from low-income families.

Richmond City and Norfolk Public Schools are the school divisions with the most isolated schools in the state. Combined, they have over one-third of the state's total. Other divisions with many isolated schools include Prince William, Newport News, Henrico, Petersburg, and Roanoke City.

The report recommends that state lawmakers take action by targeting more resources to school divisions with the highest concentrations of students living in poverty. This support can help reduce class sizes, attract the best teachers, and buy supplies and equipment for career and technology classes that are in-demand by employers. At the local-level, the report advises school divisions to implement enrollment policies that encourage diverse, balanced schools. In particular, regional strategies of “controlled choice” enrollment could be used to promote choice and diversity within public schools.

“The state and local school divisions can play a role to support and diversify Virginia’s public schools so that every student has an equal opportunity at success.”

The full report, *Increasingly Separate and Unequal in U.S and Virginia Schools*, is available online at www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org.

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About The Commonwealth Institute

The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis provides credible, independent, and accessible information and analyses of fiscal and economic issues with particular attention to the impacts on low- and moderate-income persons. Our products inform fiscal and budget policy debates and contribute to sound decisions that improve the well-being of individuals, communities and Virginia as a whole. Visit www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org for more information.