

**VASS Press Conference
Richmond, Virginia
January 22, 2009**

Remarks by Dr. Donald Ford

Good Morning.

I am Don Ford, superintendent of Harrisonburg Public Schools and current president of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents. While it may sound trite to some, we really are meeting today to speak out on behalf of the children of Virginia. We currently face the most drastic cuts in K-12 educational spending that many of us have ever experienced, and there is no doubt that these cuts will adversely affect the quality of education in the Commonwealth.

No one in this room questions whether our state and our nation are facing a financial crisis. And we all acknowledge that belt tightening is required. In Harrisonburg we face reductions in administrative, support and instructional positions. Travel, instructional materials and supplies, field trips, extra-curricular activities, computer purchases, and needed capital repairs or replacements are also areas being reduced or removed from our budget and from school budgets across Virginia. Despite the Governor's proclamation that his proposed budget cuts protect classrooms, the reality is that classrooms will be impacted significantly and children will not have the same opportunities for learning that resulted in Virginia just recently being ranked 4th in the nation in educational quality.

Each year our organization develops a short list which we call legislative priorities. The list is short, not because there are not a multitude of issues that we believe legislators should discuss, but because we realize that like us, legislators are human, they have a finite amount of time available to do the state's business, and as important as that multitude of issues are to us, there are non-educational priorities in the state that also need attention. Therefore, we seek to bring to the forefront those items that we believe have the greatest significance in determining the quality of our educational programs in our school divisions. I acknowledge up front that each of our adopted priorities this year is directly related to funding. The reason is

simple. Without adequate resources, no company, no business and certainly no school has ever been able to grow or produce acceptable outcomes.

With that in mind, we have prepared 2009 Legislative priorities for VASS and these have been made available to you today. Rather than read all of them, I will just highlight that we continue to seek full funding of K-12 education to enable us to meet the Standards of Quality, we ask the General Assembly to find a way to restore state construction funding, we request flexibility for localities in dealing with budget cuts and we oppose permanent budget cuts or changes to the funding formula, and we support the Governor's request to take funds from the Rainy Day Fund to support education in 2009. We further implore the General Assembly and State Board of Education not to adopt new laws, regulations or standards that require more local staff time or more reporting when we struggle already to have the resources to do what is required of us. As always, we oppose unfunded mandates.

I will now call on some of my colleagues to share with you specific ways that the proposed budget cuts in the state will affect their school divisions.

(Introduce other speakers)

Let me conclude by pointing out that a large amount of the stress that these difficult budget times produce are directly related to the No Child Left Behind law. Common sense, which is never a surplus commodity in Washington, has in fact been a scarce resource in the passage and implementation of this law. It has been under-funded from its inception, it has led to unfair and I believe discriminatory testing practices, and its unrealistic expectations, unless modified, will ultimately lead to all public schools being classified as failures. We call on our new President to work with Congress to change the law and to fully fund it, and we continue to ask our state legislators to insist that this be done.

Difficult times require difficult decisions. Those who have chosen to serve as our legislators in the General Assembly chose to do so not only in good times but also in bad times. I have no doubt that all of them at some point have assured the children, the parents and the citizens of their communities that they are pro-education, that they will do all that they can to see that quality education is provided to the students in the schools in their districts

and that children are indeed our future and we cannot afford to waste the potential of even one child.

We call on these same legislators to honor these commitments. We cannot sit idly while educational gains and vital services for children pass quietly into the night. We must be diligent in insisting that our students leave our schools prepared to be successful because in the world of not just tomorrow, but in the world of today, their survival does depend on it. We need adequate resources to do what is right for kids. It is the responsibility of every superintendent in every school division in the state to stand up, to speak boldly, to garner support, and to lead efforts to protect funding of vital educational services.

Our purpose today is not to bash either the Governor or our legislators. It is, though, our purpose, as you have seen, to point out that cuts in budgets will adversely impact education in Virginia. Our purpose is to say, “Make only those cuts that are absolutely necessary, recognize and be honest about the impact of the cuts on our children, do not make the cuts permanent, and provide flexibility for us at the local level.”

Thank you for being here today and for supporting education in the Commonwealth.