

Hampton Roads, Virginia teachers face school closures, health care premium hike, measles crisis

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Educators: What are conditions at your school? Tell us by filling out the form below; all submissions will be kept anonymous.

Public educators in the Hampton Roads, Virginia area are reeling under the combined impact of austerity and attacks on public health. Norfolk is closing nine schools in predominantly working class neighborhoods. In Virginia Beach, teachers are facing a 110 percent health insurance premium hike. The city is also experiencing a measles outbreak as schools open for the year.

These crises are symptoms of a nationwide assault on public education and the social rights of the working class. The Trump administration's "One Big Beautiful Bill" is slashing federal education aid while expanding voucher schemes to funnel public money into private hands. At the same time, anti-vaccination policies championed by figures like Robert F. Kennedy Jr. are eroding public health safeguards, allowing preventable diseases like measles to resurface in schools.

Norfolk

Norfolk City Public Schools (NCPS) is the eighth-largest district in Virginia, and currently serves 26,800 students across 49 schools. Beginning in the 2026–27 academic year, the board's plan would shutter 10 schools, displacing more than 3,200 children, roughly 13 percent of the district's student body, and jeopardizing 300–350 educator and staff positions.

The closures disproportionately target schools in working class neighborhoods and include two early childhood centers, a special education program and the

Norfolk Technical Center. Virtually all affected schools have free and reduced lunch rates near 100 percent. Students will be forced into larger classes and have to travel farther to school, with some having to endure multiple transfers as they are moved first to a receiving school and later to newly built facilities.

Parents have denounced the closures at public meetings, warning that students with disabilities will lose critical services and younger children will be thrown into chaotic, overcrowded environments.

Responding to the news of the closures on Facebook, one community member noted, "So pretty much all of the elementary schools? Wait...not the ones where the rich people live, though." Another commented, "Yeah...basically getting rid of Title 1 schools. And elementary schools at that. Sickening."

Virginia Beach

Across the Elizabeth River, teachers and staff in Virginia Beach are suing the Superintendent Donald Robertson for concealing a 110 percent increase in health insurance premiums until after they signed up for the new school year.

"That's fraud in the inducement—employees committed in good faith, without being told the truth about what was coming," Tim Anderson, a Virginia Beach attorney representing the employees, said.

The increases are staggering: between \$2.04 and \$210.97 per pay period for employees, and between \$52.28 and \$445.25 per month for retirees. Teachers have rallied against what they call the monumental increase,

pointing out that it effectively erases recent pay raises.

“I just got the notice on August 7th that our insurance was going up 110%, it was just outrageous,” Donna Lightfoot, a special education bus driver for Virginia Beach City Public Schools, said.

The premium hikes impact every school employee, from bus drivers and cafeteria workers to teachers and support staff. Attorney Tim Anderson noted that the timing of the increases coincided with the district’s Superintendent, Dr. Don Robertson, securing a 13 percent pay raise for himself.

On social media, the Virginia Beach Education Association (VBEA) is being criticized for failing to warn its members of the premium hike. Anderson posted on Facebook, “They (the VBEA) warned none of their members—ever.” He added, “If you are paying dues, you have a reasonable expectation that the VBEA would sound the alarm long before they all re-upped.”

“This same demand should be made across our state. The VEA and localized chapters take dues monthly from teaching staff, they know of policies negatively affecting the dues payers and do nothing to stop it,” one educator commented.

The VBEA has so far confined its response to lobbying efforts and statements of concern, with no serious plan to mobilize opposition.

Measles outbreak

The attacks on education and teachers in Hampton Roads are compounded by a measles outbreak in Virginia Beach. Unvaccinated students and staff at Trantwood Elementary must stay home until mid-September.

An infected student developed symptoms just two days into the school year, exposing classmates and the public at multiple locations, according to the Virginia Department of Health. This is the fourth recorded case of measles in the Commonwealth in 2025.

“Virginians are holding steady with the MMR vaccination rate from 93 to 95 percent, and that is within the range in what we aim for herd immunity,” said Christy Gray, director of the Division of Immunization at the Virginia Department of Health.

Gray noted, however, that a rising number of parents seeking exemptions from school-required vaccines is a trend the agency is monitoring closely.

A teacher in Virginia Beach posted on Reddit, “This is a terrifying prospect that I could be exposed now or at a later date and bring home to my newborn.”

The resurgence of measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases in the Americas is being worsened by deliberate political actions from Trump’s Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and his appointees, which scientists say erode trust in vaccines and endanger childhood immunization programs.

On June 9, 2025, Kennedy abruptly dismissed all 17 members of the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and re-formed the committee, which is calling into question the safety and scheduling of routine vaccines.

What Must Be Done

Neither the teachers’ unions nor the Democratic Party are mounting serious opposition to the latest threats to public education and health systems. Teachers, parents and students must draw the necessary conclusions. The closure of nine Norfolk schools, the effective pay cut in Virginia Beach, and the public health crisis sparked by the measles outbreak are part of the accelerating assault on the working class by the ruling elite.

The struggle to defend education is inseparable from the broader fight of the working class against austerity, inequality, and war. Teachers must link their struggle with that of workers in logistics, health care, and other sectors to secure the resources needed for a truly high-quality, public education system for all.



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