

2024 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

Update for the Richmond City School Board

Presented By: Matthew Stanley, Director, Advocacy & Outreach

Venue: Richmond City School Board Meeting

Date: January 8, 2024

Reform Virginia’s Education Funding Streams & Formulas

Virginia’s education funding formulas are in need of student-focused and equity-based reforms.

Current education funding streams in Virginia are antiquated, and punish, rather than invest, in school divisions with high levels of poverty and trauma. Virginia should implement the recommendations of the JLARC [report](#) on our current K-12 funding formula.

With a possible \$20 million reduction in state funding to Richmond, the General Assembly must hold local school divisions harmless from major reductions.

We request hold harmless funding to prevent Richmond from receiving less direct aid to public education in the 2024-26 biennium.

Year	Estimated Distribution (millions)	Change from FY24 Enacted
FY24 (Enacted Sept. '23)	\$184,141,681 (source)	N/A
FY24 (Proposed Caboose)	\$179,019,761 (source)	(\$5,121,920)
FY25 (Proposed)	\$163,242,460	(\$20,899,221)
FY26 (Proposed)	\$164,317,470	(\$19,824,211)

[Source](#) for FY24 Enacted Budget Distributions

[Source](#) for FY24-26 Proposed Budget Distributions

Reform the Local Composite Index (LCI)

Adopt Recommendation 7 from JLARC to reduce the effect of any major year-to-year changes.

Richmond continues to experience multi-billion dollar increases in the value of property and the income of our residents. However, the state still does not account for concentrated poverty that exists and the significant human services and infrastructure costs that Richmond must maintain – as well as the public services that must be provided to the state government complex and several large, tax-exempt institutions.

Richmond’s new LCI for the 2024-2026 biennium is 0.574, converted to meaning that Richmond should pay for 57.4 percent of the cost of funding RPS. Richmond saw a similar spike in its LCI from 0.4688 to 0.5139 from the FY20–22 biennium to the FY22–24 biennium. As a result, FY23 state SOQ funding to Richmond dropped approximately 5 percent, or \$6.75M. Based on the new LCI, we will receive significantly less funding in the 2024-26 biennium, about half attributed to the LCI change.

As JLARC shares in their recent report, “LCI recalculations each biennium can result in sudden, large losses of state funding... During these two years, some localities can experience unexpectedly large shifts in one or more of the LCI’s five components.” RPS supports several of the recommendations in the JLARC report to reform the LCI formula. Recommendation 7 would change the LCI calculations by using a three-year average of the relevant data. According to JLARC, “this would reduce the effect of any major year-to-year changes and make any changes to divisions’ LCIs more gradual.” If Richmond’s FY23 LCI was recalculated using a three-year average, the state’s contribution to Richmond would have increased by \$4.5 million for the FY23 year.

Richmond’s LCI Progression

Biennium	LCI
20-22	.4688
22-24	.5139
24-26	.574

Comparison Localities

Locality	24-26 LCI
Richmond	.574
Loudoun	.5518
Henrico	.4273
Chesterfield	.3563
Roanoke	.3388
Norfolk	.3212

[LCI Data](#)

Increase and Reform the At-Risk Add-On

Increase and Reform the At-Risk Add-On program to support economically disadvantaged students.

As the JLARC report detailed, “Higher needs students require additional services,” and “Funding for higher needs students has declined or trails benchmarks.” Additionally, as shared by [The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis](#), “to achieve national average outcomes in very high-poverty districts (poverty rates over 40%), states need to invest more than 3 times the amount per pupil as it does in relatively low poverty districts (poverty rates under 10%), according to a 2018 study from researchers at Rutgers University ([source](#)). The General Assembly currently funds Virginia’s At-Risk Add-On program with a maximum 36% add-on, which is still insufficient to provide the services necessary to serve economically disadvantaged students.

The General Assembly should enact Recommendations 9 and 10:

- Amending the Code of Virginia and including language in the Appropriation Act to direct use of the federally approved Identified Student Percentage measure to calculate funding for all at-risk programs that currently rely on the outdated free lunch estimates.
- Amending the Code of Virginia and including language in the Appropriation Act to consolidate the At-Risk Add-On program and Prevention, Intervention, Remediation program and create a new At-Risk Program under the Standards of Quality. Funding for the new At-Risk Program would be allocated based on each school division’s weighted Identified Student Percentage, and 60 percent of funding would be distributed to divisions using a flat per student rate and 40 percent would be distributed using a variable rate based on the concentration of poverty in each school division.

These recommendations would infuse \$250 million in additional aid to support economically disadvantaged students.

Strategically Support Stimulus-Funded Investments

Support school divisions in navigating the stimulus-funding cliff impacting mental health staffing.

Many school divisions have funded mental health positions in recent years with federal COVID stimulus funding. As this funding ends this year, divisions will be faced with eliminating these positions at a time when we know our students desperately need mental health support. The General Assembly should fund a competitive grant program for economically disadvantaged school divisions that face a high incidence of community violence.

Create a VDOE competitive grant program for extended-year school calendars.

Based on the preliminary success of the RPS200 program, the General Assembly should create a new VDOE competitive grant program that provides school divisions with funding to support schools that wish to adopt a 200-day school calendar. There is precedence for such programs; the General Assembly has previously funded pilot programs that support year-round and extended-year calendars.

Supporting all Levels of English Learners

Implement proficiency-based ratios for English Learner Teachers.

[Virginia currently underfunds](#) the support of English Learners (ELs) and a more equitable approach is necessary to ensure they have enough support from EL teachers through proficiency-based student-to-teacher ratios. The current flat ratio of 1 EL teacher per 50 EL students does not recognize the varied needs of EL students and stretches teachers thin.

Data demonstrates the stark achievement gaps for English Learner students, which is compounded by proficiency level and reinforces the need for differentiated instructional support. EL students in Virginia have faced unique challenges during the pandemic and have had the most significant drop in state achievement scores of any student groups measured for state reading, math, and science tests.

The EL teacher ratio should be amended from 20 positions per 1,000 EL students in FY23 (1 per 50) to:

- one position per 25 students for each EL identified at Level One;
- one position per 30 students for each EL identified at Level Two;
- one position per 40 students for each EL identified at Level Three; and
- one position per 50 students for all other EL students.

Invest in Teachers and Support Staff

Eliminate the Support Staff Cap.

[Since 2009, there has been a cap](#) on the number of state-funded support staff positions such as nurses and social workers. These staff are critical in addressing the needs and challenges of our students, especially students and families experiencing chronic absenteeism, violence, and language barriers.

This cap was put in place during the Great Recession as a cost-savings measure and advocacy for eliminating it has been supported by divisions and advocates across the state. From 2011-2021, Richmond lost over \$47 million in state support due to this cap. In 2023, the General Assembly directed \$152 million to eliminating the cap. Full elimination of the support staff cap would cost an additional approximate \$115 million per year.

Invest in teacher and staff compensation.

[According to the Economic Policy Institute](#), Virginia has one of the least competitive teacher salaries in the country. Despite recent investments in teacher and staff compensation, and the establishment of collective bargaining in RPS, more state support to compensate our staff is necessary.

Virginia, like many other states, is experiencing unprecedented staff shortages. To remain a competitive job sector and reach the current national average for teacher pay, Virginia still needs to increase teacher salaries by about 10%. The General Assembly should continue to make progress towards this goal and ensure that divisions are supported and provided flexibility in their compensation efforts.

Support Localities in School Construction & Modernization

Support localities to address modern learning facilities for all students.

Continued efforts to fund school construction and reform related state policy through legislation, the budget, and the Commission on School Construction & Modernization are critical to ensuring safe and modern learning facilities for our students and staff. There is approximately \$25 billion of documented needs by school divisions across the state. [The Commission's 2022 recommendations](#) should receive due consideration by the General Assembly and Governor.

The General Assembly should authorize the optional 1% Local Sales Tax for school construction to allow localities to hold a referendum to ask voters to increase the sales tax by 1% to raise money for school construction and modernization.

Fund school construction grants.

Per the Commission's recommendations (link above), the General Assembly should include additional funding of \$2.5 billion in the appropriation act for the School Construction Grant and Assistance Program (\$500 million for direct grants in School Construction Grant Program; \$2 billion for competitive grants in School Construction Assistance Program).

Governor's Budget: Caboose Budget General Fund Reductions

General Fund appropriation changes in the introduced Caboose bill are the result of technical reforecasts to formula driven funding models.

Youngkin Proposed Budget	FY24 Reduction (millions)
Update Lottery Proceeds	(\$125.9)
Update Sales Tax Revenues	(\$89.5)
Update Student Enrollment Projections	(\$58.7)
Update Incentive Programs	(\$37.2)
Update Lottery Supported Programs	(\$18.6)

Note: All figures represent statewide impact. RPS-specific impacts are not yet available.
Sources: Virginia Department of Planning and Budget - [Full Budget](#) and [Presentation](#)

Governor’s Budget: New Biennium General Fund Reductions

The Governor’s budget includes technical updates to formula-based programs that significantly reduce direct aid to local school divisions.

Youngkin Proposed Budget	FY25 (millions)	FY26 (millions)
Move VRS Retirement Contributions to NGF	(\$150)	(\$150)
Eliminate Hold Harmless for Sales Tax Reductions	(\$114.5)	(\$114.5)
Adjust Funding for Retirement*	(\$59.8)	(\$59.8)
Redirect VPI Nonparticipation Savings	(\$53)	(\$53.7)
Update Average Daily Membership Projections	(\$34.7)	(\$54.1)
Update Sales Tax Revenues	(\$47)	(\$16.1)
Update Local Composite Index	(\$30.8)	(\$30.5)
Update Inflation for Non-Personnel Costs	(\$16.5)	(\$16.7)
Update Lottery Supported Programs	(\$8.7)	(\$3.5)

Note: All figures represent statewide impact. RPS-specific impacts are not yet available.

Sources: Virginia Department of Planning and Budget - [Full Budget](#) and [Presentation](#)

Governor’s Budget: New Biennium General Fund Spending

The Governor’s budget proposals do not include any additional funding for the At-Risk Add-On, school construction, full removal of support staff cap or other reform of education funding streams.

Youngkin Proposed Budget	FY25 (millions)	FY26 (millions)
Rebenchmarking	\$72.6	\$87.9
2% Instructional & Support Staff Salary Raise*	\$0	\$122.8
1% Instructional & Support Staff Bonus*	\$53	\$0
Teacher Retirement Plan	\$115	\$0
Update Sales Tax Revenues	\$23.9	\$61.8
Expanded Reading Specialists per Va. Literacy Act*	\$30.5	\$30.7
College Partnership Laboratory Schools	\$30	\$30
Develop New State Assessment System	\$25	\$15
Diploma Plus Grants (industry recognized credentials)	\$20	\$20
Update Career and Technical Education Data	\$13	\$13.1
Support Student Access to Mental Health Services	\$7.2	\$7.2

*Requires local matching funds.

Note: All figures represent statewide impact. RPS-specific impacts are not yet available.

Sources: Virginia Department of Planning and Budget - [Full Budget](#) and [Presentation](#)

The Richmond Legislative Delegation

Senators



Lamont Bagby
District 14



Ghazala Hashmi
District 15

- ★ [Find Your Legislator](#)
- ★ [Senate District Map](#)
- ★ [House District Map](#)
- ★ [Virginia General Assembly](#)
- ★ [Legislative Information System](#)

Delegates



Betsy Carr
District 78



Rae Cousins
District 79



Michael Jones
District 77

Advocating for RPS Priorities

Email, call, and visit legislators!

Visit www.virginiageneralassembly.gov to find legislator contact information. Sample letters are available on the RPS website at www.rvaschools.net/advocacy. In-person visits with legislators and their staff can be very impactful. Consider arranging a group visit to meet with members and share your stories about why investing in public education is so critical. Visit www.virginiageneralassembly.gov for more information and email Matthew Stanley (mstanley@rvaschools.net) if you need planning assistance.

Join advocacy partner events!

Follow RPS and state advocacy partners ([VEA](#), [Fund Our Schools](#), [Voices for Virginia's Children](#), [Virginia PTA](#)) for updates throughout session on advocacy opportunities and events. Be sure to join the Virginia PTA for their [capitol day](#) on Friday, January 19 and the Virginia Education Association for [an advocacy day and rally](#) on Monday, February 19.

Advocate through media. Tell your story!

Telling your story and advocating through media is an important part of increasing the impact of your advocacy. Consider posting on social media, writing Op-Eds or letters to the editor, or creating your own media to share. These are ways to reach a large audience with your message and increase our collective voice. Contact the RPS Media Relations team at mediarelations@rvaschools.net if you would like help sharing your story!