

2025 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

Update for the Richmond City School Board

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Venue: Richmond City School Board Work Session

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2025 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

Informed by existing legislative priorities, school division needs, and student and school board feedback, the RPS Legislative Advocacy Priorities address K12 funding reform, school construction and modernization, and student mental health.

1. Implement JLARC Funding Recommendations including:
 - Eliminating the Support Staff Cap
 - Reforming the Local Composite Index
 - Codifying the At-Risk Add-On Program and add-ons for students with disabilities and English Learners

2. Support Localities in School Construction and Modernization including:
 - Funding the School Construction Assistance Program to meet statewide demand
 - Permitting localities to hold 1% sales tax referenda for school construction

3. Investing in Student Mental Health including:
 - Funding School-Based Mental Health Integration partnerships
 - Expanding telehealth partnerships and infrastructure support for school divisions
 - Further study of state policies to support student mental health

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Act now to Advocate for Richmond Public Schools!

The best way to show love for our kids is by advocating for RPS to get the support and funds it needs to provide an amazing education.

Your voice is critical during the General Assembly session in January and February. Phone, email, and legislative visits are all great and accessible ways to get involved. RPS has three legislative priorities, and your perspective will help our lawmakers understand why kids need them. For more information and resources to support advocacy, visit the RPS website at rvaschools.net/advocacy. Find your legislators and their contact information on the Virginia General Assembly website at viriniageneralassembly.gov.

Priority 1 — Implement JLARC Funding Recommendations

In 2023, our state research agency (JLARC), found that Virginia has been **underfunding** K12 public education by **over \$3 billion**. They made 20 specific recommendations and five policy options to reform our school funding formula so that all students have the support they need to reach their full potential, regardless of their zip code.

Below are details on some of the most important recommendations that will support RPS and our students.



Eliminate the Support Staff Cap

Since the Great Recession in 2009, there's been a cap on state-funded support staff like nurses and social workers. These staff members are **crucial for helping students facing challenges**, and we currently fund some of these positions without any state support. The General Assembly has started reducing this unfair cap, but should undo it completely to restore the funding for these critical staff.



Reform the Local Composite Index

Richmond faces budget challenges despite increasing property values and income. The latest state analysis suggests Richmond should pay for 57.4% of school costs, **leading to less money from the state**. The JLARC report suggests a fairer way to calculate education costs, using a three-year average, **which could mean more money for Richmond schools**. Families supporting this change could mean more funding for Richmond schools and ensure kids have what they need to learn.



The At-Risk Add-On, English Learners, and Students with Disabilities

Additional recommendations aim to ensure that funding meets **the needs of students facing the greatest barriers to success**, including those with disabilities, English Learners, and students from under-resourced communities. By moving the At-Risk Add-On program (supplemental funding for low-income students) into the Standards of Quality (the state's main funding formula) and **shifting to student-based funding add-ons** for special education and English Learners, the proposals would make funding **more equitable, predictable, and tied to actual costs**.

Support SB977, patroned by Senator Hashmi, to implement these recommendations!

Priority 2 — Support Localities in School Construction & Modernization



Fund school construction grants

Given the state's infrastructure needs, we need the General Assembly to fund **the School Construction Grant and Assistance Program**. The Governor has proposed **\$290 million** for competitive grants in the **School Construction Assistance Program** and we encourage the General Assembly to build on this proposal with further funding to meet the \$25 billion in documented school infrastructure needs across the state.

Support doubling the Governor's proposed \$290 million in school construction grants!



Let voters fund modern facilities

With local governments struggling to keep up with public infrastructure demands, we need the state to keep helping us build and update safe, modern buildings. We're asking the General Assembly to let us have an **optional 1% Local Sales Tax for school construction**. This means we can ask voters to increase the sales tax by 1 percent, and the money will go to building and updating schools.

Support SB1307, patroned by Senator McPike!

Priority 3 — Invest in Student Mental Health



Fund school-based mental health integration

School-based mental health services encompass a range of multi-tiered supports and programs designed to enhance access to mental health resources across the care spectrum. The state should help **fund community-based mental health providers within schools** as a critical measure to improve access to care, foster stronger community ties, and ease the strain on school professionals grappling with the growing youth mental health crisis.

Support Budget Amendment 295 #5h for \$7.5M to support school-based mental health partnerships!



Telehealth

By fostering national partnerships, utilizing state infrastructure funding, and optimizing in-school Medicaid programs, Virginia can **expand student access to mental telehealth services**. This approach ensures schools receive the necessary technical support, expertise, and coordination to bill Medicaid accurately and efficiently.

Support HB1945, patroned by Delegate Reaser!



Virginia commission on youth study

Given the significant needs of Virginia's youth in addressing mental health issues, we encourage further study of this issue by the Virginia Commission on Youth. Such a study would review policies to support student mental health in Virginia's elementary and secondary schools, with a focus on **improving funding and other resources, training and professional development, partnerships with health services, curriculum development, research and evaluation, and public awareness campaigns**.

Support HJ441, patroned by Delegate Martinez!



For more updates and resources, visit the RPS website at rvaschools.net/advocacy.

Scan QR code to download.



Current Status of JLARC Recommendations

Recent work of the Joint Subcommittee to Study Elementary & Secondary Education Funding has resulted in several major legislative proposals being considered by the legislature.

After the 2024 General Assembly failed to enact legislation implementing any of the recommendations from the [2023 JLARC Report](#) on Virginia's K-12 Funding Formula, a [Joint Subcommittee was established](#) to further review the recommendations and consider long-term implementation of each recommendation. RPS submitted [public comment](#) to the Subcommittee in October 2024.

General Assembly Members have introduced the following proposals that are now under consideration:

- [SB977](#) (Hashmi) codifies the At-Risk Add-On, removes the Support Staff cap, creates a special education add-on, and implements several technical benchmarking recommendations from JLARC, with a [budget amendment](#) for \$1.2 billion in state funding.
- [HB1831](#) (Simonds) and [SB1236](#) (Aird) remove the Support Staff Cap, with budget amendments ([House](#) and [Senate](#)) for \$222.9 million in state funding.
- Budget Amendments [125 #1h](#) (Rasoul) and [125 #6s](#) (Hashmi) would begin calculating the local composite index (LCI) using a three-year average of available data.
- [HB1964](#) (Rasoul) codifies the At-Risk Add-On and creates a special education add-on, with a [budget amendment](#) for \$277.5 million in state funding.

Further background on these topics can be found on the following three slides.

Support Staff Cap

Adopt Recommendation 4 to eliminate the Support Staff Cap.

[Since the Great Recession in 2009](#), there's been a cap on state-funded support staff like nurses and social workers. These staff members are crucial for helping students facing challenges, and we currently fund some of these positions without any state support. The General Assembly has started reducing this unfair cap, but should undo it completely to restore the funding for these critical staff.

This cap was put in place 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 \$220 million per year.

Local Composite Index (LCI)

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

“Over the past decade, Richmond’s score has risen from 0.4758 to 0.5740, one of the biggest increases in the state.” - [Cardinal News](#)

LCI recalculations each biennium can result in sudden, large losses of state funding. Richmond continues to experience multi-billion dollar increases in the value of property and the income of our residents. However, the state does not account for concentrated poverty 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.

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.”

Background

- Richmond’s LCI for the 2025-2026 biennium increased about 6% to 0.574, meaning that Richmond pays for 57.4% of the cost of funding RPS. This increase had an approximate \$8 million negative impact on the FY25 budget.
- Richmond saw a similar LCI increase for the 2022-2023 biennium of about 5%. This increase had an approximate \$6.75 million negative impact on the FY23 budget.
- 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
Alexandria	.800
Richmond	.574
Loudoun	.551
Hanover	.489
Henrico	.427
Chesterfield	.356
Roanoke	.338
Norfolk	.321
Petersburg	.207

[LCI Data](#)

At-Risk Add-On

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

The At-Risk Add-On program is the state's funding stream that supports school divisions with addressing the needs of economically disadvantaged students.

[Research shows](#) that "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%).

While we have [increased the maximum add-on](#) from 16% in FY20 to 37% in [FY26](#), the General Assembly should continue to increase and reform the program. This includes:

1. Codifying the At-Risk Add-On in the Standards of Quality so that it is no longer an optional program (that could be removed in the budget) and is required by law.
2. Sufficiently funding the At-Risk Add-On with a maximum add-on of 40% to continue supporting school divisions with supporting economically disadvantaged students.

School Construction & Modernization

School facilities and infrastructure funding is an issue across the state of Virginia.

The [Virginia Commission on School Construction & Modernization](#) (created by RPS request in 2020) found that there is approximately \$25 billion of documented needs by school divisions across the state. More than half of all school buildings in Virginia are more than 50 years old and it would cost \$25 billion to replace or rebuild all of those schools.

- In Central Virginia, the average age of a school building is over 50 years.
- In RPS, the average age of a school building is 61 years.
 - 36 are more than 50 years old, including 15 that are more than 95 years old.
 - In the last 50 years, we have built 14 new buildings.

[Governor Youngkin has proposed \\$290 million](#) in school construction grant funding for the General Assembly to consider in 2025.

- With school modernization needs growing by about \$1 billion annually, we are asking the General Assembly to at least double this investment and take additional steps to setup further ongoing investment to address the backlog of needs.
- Delegate Cousins has introduced budget amendment [125 #7h](#) to double the Governor's proposal.

Student Mental Health

Prioritizing student mental health is an essential policy priority to foster emotional well-being, enhance academic performance, and equip students with the resilience needed to navigate challenges.

While there are many approaches to student mental and we encourage the General Assembly to have robust consideration of this topic, RPS supports consideration of the following three topics:

1. **School-Based Mental Health Integration** – The state should help fund community-based mental health providers within schools to improve access to care and ease the strain on school professionals.
 - Budget amendment [295 #5h](#) (McClure) creates a \$7.5 million school-based mental health integration pilot.

2. **Telehealth Access & Infrastructure** – By fostering national partnerships, utilizing state infrastructure funding, and optimizing in-school Medicaid programs, Virginia can expand student access to mental telehealth services.
 - a. [HB1945](#) (Reaser) and [SB1037](#) (Pekarsky) would help Virginia school boards implement telehealth policies, with budget amendment [295 #6h](#) (Thomas) allowing divisions to use existing state funds to contract with mental telehealth providers.

3. **Commission on Youth Study** – Given the significant needs of Virginia’s youth in addressing mental health issues, we encourage further study of this issue by the Virginia Commission on Youth to holistically review policies to support student mental health in Virginia’s elementary and secondary schools, with a focus on improving funding and other resources, training and professional development, partnerships with health services, curriculum development, research and evaluation, and public awareness campaigns.
 - a. [HJ441](#) (Martinez) would require the Commission on Youth to undertake this two-year study.

RPS 2025 Advocacy Day

RPS is on the Rise!

On Monday, January 27, about 50 students, parents, staff, and community members visited the General Assembly to advocate for RPS legislative priorities. In addition to discussing our advocacy priorities, attendees shared news about RPS' recent growth with state legislators. Check out this video of Senator Hashmi introducing our attendees to the Virginia Senate!



Advocating for RPS Priorities

Email, call, and visit legislators!

Visit www.viriniageneralassembly.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 meet with members and share your stories about why investing in public education is so critical. Visit www.viriniageneralassembly.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 [Fund Our Schools Advocacy Day](#) on Thursday, February 6.

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.

The Richmond Legislative Delegation

Senators



Lamont Bagby
District 14



Ghazala Hashmi
District 15

- ★ [Find Your Legislator](#)
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Delegates



Betsy Carr
District 78



Rae Cousins
District 79



Michael Jones
District 77