



Dear Chair Andrews and Members of the Board of Supervisors,

On behalf of the Albemarle County School Board, I want to express my appreciation for your continued commitment to public education as we engage in the annual budget process. Your support for public education is more than a financial contribution—it is an investment in our students, our educators, and the future of our community.

Public education is one of the most significant investments the community can make in the long-term success and prosperity of Albemarle County. A strong school system not only prepares our students for the workforce and higher education, but also strengthens our local economy, enhances property values, and fosters a vibrant, engaged citizenry. As stewards of this investment, we are committed to ensuring that every dollar allocated is used efficiently and effectively to generate meaningful returns for our students and our community.

Our strategic plan, *Learning for All*, provides a framework for ensuring that this investment yields tangible outcomes. By upholding our core values—equity, excellence, family and community, and wellness—we are creating an educational environment that benefits all students. We see the returns on this investment every day: in student achievement, in teacher retention, and in the success of ACPS graduates who go on to contribute meaningfully to society.

In this budget cycle, our focus has been on ensuring that students have the health supports and safe learning environments they need to thrive, recognizing and retaining our exceptional educators and staff, and sustaining and strengthening programs that have demonstrated a positive impact on instruction. Our Funding Request preserves our Student Safety Coaches, maintains our current levels of Social-Emotional Learning Coaches and Mental Health Support Specialists, and adds two School Resource Officers. It also includes a 3% compensation increase for all employees, along with targeted market adjustments to keep ACPS competitive in attracting and retaining top talent across all employee groups. Additionally, the Funding Request invests in expanding instructional resources in alignment with recommendations from our 2023 Bellwether instructional practices audit, supports the staffing and operational needs of our Scholars Studios, and enhances intensive behavioral supports for K-12 students with emotional disabilities while expanding functional life skills instruction for Post High students.

As you are aware, Virginia Code requires us to present a “needs-based funding request” to you, and we view this to mean that we present what we believe are necessary investments in the people and programs to foster high-quality learning in our schools. After the deep cuts we experienced in FY 25, having the shortfall in state funding again this year has been challenging and undermines our efforts. Of course, we understand that at the end of this process, we must develop a balanced budget and we will.

To balance priorities with available funding, we have proposed \$6.4 million in service reductions for 2025-26, following \$3.5 million in cuts in the current fiscal year, bringing total reductions over two years to nearly \$10 million. These reductions include, among others, freezing or eliminating central office and department-based positions, reducing the number of instructional coaches by 40%, eliminating the Foreign Language in Elementary Schools program, and eliminating the furniture replacement program.

Fiscal responsibility remains at the core of our budgetary decision-making. We are committed to using taxpayer dollars wisely, maximizing impact, and maintaining transparency in our financial processes. Our goal is not merely to sustain our schools but to continuously enhance their ability to serve our students and our community effectively. However, ACPS is falling behind our nearest neighbor, Charlottesville, in teacher compensation, and a quality education needs financial support.

Investing in our schools is investing in the strength and future of Albemarle County. Together, we can continue to build a school system that not only meets the needs of today's students but lays the groundwork for generations of success.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Katherine L. Acuff". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Kate Acuff
Chair, Albemarle County School Board