

2025 Legislative Advocacy Update

Update for the Richmond City School Board

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Venue: Richmond City School Board Work Session

Date: March 3, 2025

Session Headlines

Both chambers of the General Assembly have reached agreement on lifting the support staff cap and providing add-on funding for special education students.

- After 15 years of advocacy, the largest K-12 funding investment made by this year's General Assembly is to lift the cap placed on state funding of support staff. In recent years, the cap was lifted to provide funding for 24 support staff per 1,000 students. The new proposal raises the cap to the statewide average of 27.9 positions per 1,000 students.
- For RPS, this means that we will receive approximately \$3.1 million in new, annual funding that covers the state salary match for approximately 78 support staff (Source: [The Commonwealth Institute](#)).
- The budgets also include new add-on funding to support students with disabilities. In the House [budget report](#), they "recognized that many localities must fully-fund a large amount of their special education teachers and aides," and the funding is meant to help address that gap.

The money committees would like further stakeholder engagement on K-12 funding reform.

- The support staff cap removal was one of the few recommendations advanced from the 2023 JLARC Study on K-12 Funding, including adjustments to the Local Composite Index formula and the transition to a student-based funding formula.
- Both chambers have agreed to provide \$1 million in funding for further staffing and public engagement around these recommendations before the 2026 General Assembly.

A \$1000 bonus for teachers to start the 2025-26 school year!

- While the budgets do not contain further salary increases, the money committees have both proposed a teacher bonus that will be fully funded by the state (and will not require a local match).

2025 Legislative Advocacy Priorities - At-a-Glance Status Updates

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

(Underlined items progressed this year, *italicized items failed*.)

House & Senate Budget Proposals - Estimated RPS Distributions

Proposal	Introduced		House		Senate	
	FY25	FY26	FY25	FY26	FY25	FY26
\$1000 Teacher Bonus	-	-	-	\$2.3	\$2.2	-
Eliminate Support Staff Cap	-	-	-	\$3.1	-	\$3.1
Special Education Add-On	-	-	-	\$0.7	-	\$0.7
Maintain .5 LCI Cap for VPI	-	-	-	\$0.6	-	\$0.6
Technical Updates	-	-	(\$0.07)	\$0.05	(\$0.07)	\$0.05
Estimated RPS Distribution	\$177.3	\$182.9	\$177.2	\$189.7	\$179.4	\$187.4

Sources: Virginia Legislative Information System [Budget Site: House](#) and [Senate](#) Committee Reports

Notes:

- All figures represent estimated RPS impact based on VDOE Average Daily Membership projections..
- For a more comprehensive comparison of the House and Senate budgets, [check out this resource](#) from The Commonwealth Institute.

Additional Priority Updates

School Construction

- [SB1307](#) (McPike) that allows for 1% sales tax referenda for school construction is headed to the Governor. While this legislation passed, it passed with just a couple votes less than the two-thirds majority that will be needed to override an expected veto from Governor Youngkin.
- While the introduced budget contained a total of \$290 million in new funding for the School Construction Assistance Program, the money committees scaled back the investments to only \$140 to \$150 million to ensure “sufficient Fund balances will be available for school construction loans or other allowable uses in the upcoming biennium.”

Mental health

- [HB1945](#) (Reaser) implements further permissive language supporting school divisions with offering telehealth services to students both during and outside of school hours.
- [HJ441](#) (Martinez) did not pass but was nonetheless sent to the Virginia Commission on Youth to undertake a study of policies to support student mental health in Virginia's elementary and secondary schools.
- [HB1947](#) (Seibold) and [SB768](#) (Favola) require the Virginia Department of Education to do a statewide survey of how school divisions provide and address mental and behavioral health services.
- [SB908](#) (Stanley) requires the Virginia Board of Education to revise their guidelines and model policies for codes of student conduct to include policies on cyberbullying.
- [SB1377](#) (Hashmi) requires the Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services to create a Commonwealth Mental Health First Aid program that will be available to school staff and students.
- Legislators also took time to address the use of cell phones in schools with [HB1961](#) (Rasoul), codifying components of Governor Youngkin’s 2024 Executive Order into state law.

2025 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

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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 virginiageneralassembly.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.



Advocating for RPS Priorities

Advocate with the Governor to Approve Legislation!

Now that the legislature has adjourned, all legislation that passed will be reviewed by Governor Youngkin. He can approve, veto, or recommend changes to legislation.

Since the state budget that the General Assembly passed does not include several of his priority initiatives, it is important that we advocate for him to approve the budget with the major investments that will support our students and teachers. Use this public form to send the Governor a message in support of the budget or any other piece of legislation that passed. A form letter template will be available at www.rvaschools.net/priorities.

Email, call, and visit legislators!

Advocacy is a year-round activity. Communicate and visit with legislators during the “off-season” to build your legislative advocacy skills and relationships!

Visit www.virginiageneralassembly.gov to find legislator contact information. Sample letters are available on the RPS website at www.rvaschools.net/priorities. 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.

The Richmond Legislative Delegation

Senators



Lamont Bagby
District 14



Ghazala Hashmi
District 15

- ★ [Find Your Legislator](#)
- ★ [Senate District Map](#)
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Delegates



Betsy Carr
District 78



Rae Cousins
District 79



Michael Jones
District 77