

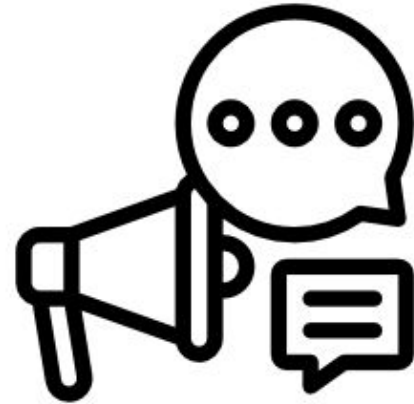
State Advocacy 101

RPS Legislative Advocacy Priorities Training

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Welcome!

What's your advocacy story?



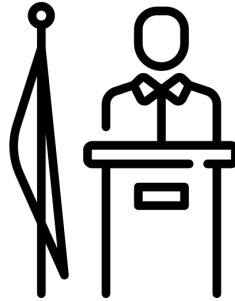
Our Advocacy Strategy

Inform



Being informed is the first step towards being an advocate. Knowledge of the issues and your "ask" is a critical first step for preparing yourself for your advocacy journey.

Empower



Being empowered to be an advocate means having the tools and resources to effectively navigate the complex structures of government and politics.

Share



Sharing the stories of who we are and what we are doing is critical to being an advocate! It is what inspires others to join your efforts, act on your calls to action, or even emulate the work you are doing with another group.

Levels of Change

Your School

Advocating for students and staff on the school-level is often the most immediate and accessible way to get involved.

Advocacy topics include:

- Academic support
- Student behavior supports
- School nutrition
- Language access

Your School Division

School divisions are governed by elected School Boards and Superintendents who are charged with making decisions for the division to meet the community's expectations and aspirations.

Advocacy topics include:

- Staffing and compensation
- Policy changes
- Facility and infrastructure requests
- Redistricting

Your State Government

In Virginia, education policy is created and overseen by the General Assembly, the Governor, and the state's Board of Education.

Advocacy topics include:

- Accreditation system
- Graduation requirements
- Staffing ratios
- Funding formulas
- School construction support
- Early childhood education

A Brief Legislative History since 2019

Session	Appropriation	Impact on RPS	Recurring?
2019	At-Risk Add-On Funding - Increased max add-on to 16%	\$1.5 million	Yes
2020	At-Risk Add-On Funding - Increased max add-on to 26%	\$0.5 million	Yes
2020	Per-Pupil Allocation for Infrastructure & Operations	\$1.8 million	No
2020	SB888: Creation of Commission on School Construction & Modernization	N/A	N/A
2021	Per-Pupil Allocation for Infrastructure & Operations	\$0.6 million	No
2021	Specialized Student Support Staff (3:1000)	\$1.1 million	Yes
2022	At-Risk Add-On Funding - Increased max add-on to 36%	<i>Indeterminate</i>	Yes
2022	Per-Pupil Allocation for School Construction & Modernization (\$400 million statewide)	<i>Indeterminate</i>	No
2022	Creation of School Construction Assistance Program (SCAP)	See next slide	Competitive
2022	Partial Elimination of Support Staff Cap	\$4.1million	Yes
2023	<i>Budget stalemate (skinny budget) & ALL In Learning Loss Funding</i>	<i>Indeterminate</i>	<i>No</i>
2024	Per-Pupil Allocation for School Construction & Modernization	\$0.3 million	No
2024	At-Risk Add-On Funding and Reform (11% per-at-risk pupil and max add-on to 37%)	\$7.2 million	Yes
2024	SB105: Proficiency Based Ratios for English Learners	\$8.9 million	Yes
2025	Elimination of Support Staff Cap	\$3.1 million	Yes

School Construction & Modernization Needs

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

- More than half of all school buildings in Virginia are more than 50 years old. To replace, update, or rebuild all of those schools would cost roughly \$25 billion.
- In RPS, the average age of a school building is 63 years.
 - 36 of our 50 buildings are more than 50 years old, including 15 that are more than 95 years old.
 - Notably, our Title I schools are older, averaging approximately 86 years old.
 - In the last 50 years, we have built 14 new buildings.
- [RPS currently needs over \\$40 million](#) to address immediate repairs for our aging infrastructure.
- RPS cannot levy tax funds independently, so we rely on what the City and State can provide.
- Our neighboring counties do not struggle as much as the City because Virginia counties generally have more flexibility, more tools, and more capacity—making it easier for them to finance school facilities than cities.

School Construction & Modernization Grants

A meaningful, equitable, and consistent program for state support of school construction and modernization!

In 2022, the General Assembly created the School Construction Assistance Program (SCAP); a new, reliable and equitably competitive stream of state support for school construction and modernization.

In 2023, I published [this law review article](#) with the University of Richmond's Public Interest Law Review that reviews the impetus, development, and early outcomes of the Commission.

Year	School	Amount
2023	Maury Street CTE High School	\$20 million
2023	JL Francis Elementary School	\$1 million
2023	Henderson Middle School	\$1 million
2023	William Fox Elementary School	\$5.6 million
2024	John Marshall High School	\$0.6 million
2024	Richmond Alternative School	\$0.375 million
2025	Woodville Elementary School	\$12.4 million
2025	Armstrong High School	\$0.24 million
2025	Richmond Community High School	\$0.34 million
TOTAL		\$41,555,000

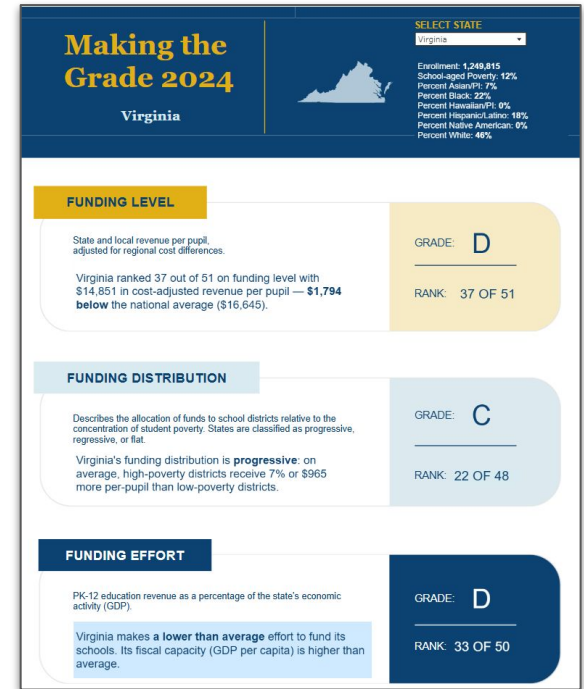
State (Under)Funding

Although the city can do more to fund RPS, the much larger problem is underfunding by the state.

- Virginia is the **12th wealthiest state** in the nation based on GDP. Meanwhile, we rank **37th for per pupil funding** relative to the national average.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) studied this further and [released a report in 2023](#). Their findings were staggering:

- "Virginia school divisions receive less K–12 funding per student than the 50-state average, the regional average, and three of Virginia's five bordering states (figure). School divisions in other states receive 14 percent more per student than school divisions in Virginia, on average, after normalizing for differences in cost of labor among states. This equates to about **\$1,900** more per student than Virginia."



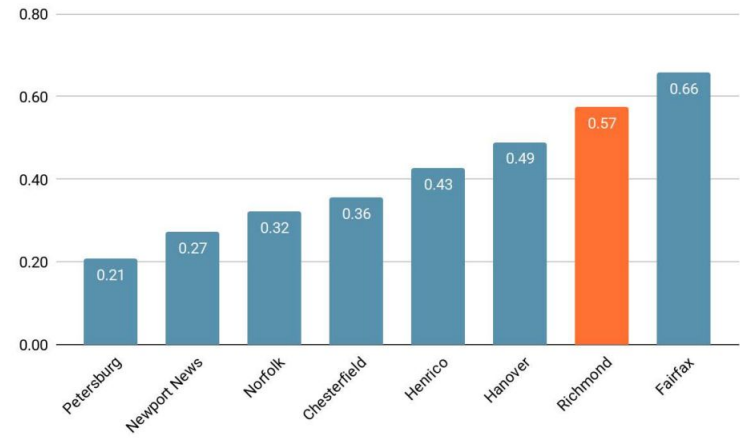
Education Law Center, 2024

The Local Composite Index (LCI)

The LCI judges a locality's ability to pay based on property values, adjusted gross income, and taxable retail sales and for Richmond, it severely overestimates how much RPS can afford to spend.

- In areas with high income inequality, property values and AGI are not really reflective of the general wealth of the locality as a whole, they are reflecting the most wealthy earners and the most valuable property.
- Richmond has one of the [highest rates of income inequality](#) in the state of Virginia.
- Localities with high poverty rates and high density often have much higher costs for public welfare, public works, public safety, and public health – these factors are not included in the calculation for determining the LCI.
- The LCI creates winners and losers; when it goes down for one district, it has to go up for another. This makes it politically very difficult to change.

RVA has the lowest state funding support in Central VA



2026 Legislative Priorities

Informed by existing legislative priorities, school division needs, and student and school board feedback, the RPS Legislative Advocacy Priorities address school construction and modernization, K-12 funding reform, and student mental health.

1. School Construction & Modernization

- Renew the Commission on School Construction and Modernization.
- Pass 1% sales tax legislation to allow voters to fund modern facilities.
- Fund per-pupil infrastructure grants to address maintenance needs.

2. Reform Virginia's K-12 Funding Formula

- Implement JLARC recommendations.
- Reform the Local Composite Index (LCI).
- Increase the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT).

3. Strengthen Student Mental Health Supports

- Increase specialized support staff ratios.
- Expand community-based partnerships.
- Support telehealth expansion and Medicaid alignment.



Priority 1 – School Construction & Modernization

Renew the Commission on School Construction and Modernization.

The Commission, created to assess school facility needs and recommend funding solutions, is set to expire in 2026. **The General Assembly should re-authorize it to continue its work supporting localities with data, technical assistance, and equitable funding recommendations.** Reauthorizing the Commission will ensure Virginia continues to make progress in addressing its \$25+ billion backlog of school infrastructure needs.

Let voters fund modern facilities.

The General Assembly should once again approve legislation allowing localities to hold referenda for a 1% local sales tax dedicated solely to school construction and modernization. This measure, which passed twice with bipartisan support before being vetoed, gives communities a local tool to fund urgently needed school improvements while maintaining voter oversight and accountability.

Fund per-pupil infrastructure grants.

The 2022 school construction package provided a one-time per-pupil allocation for infrastructure improvements across Virginia. This approach helped local divisions like Richmond make critical repairs and upgrades. **We ask the General Assembly to reinstate this program with a minimum statewide appropriation of \$500 million, ensuring that every student learns in a safe, modern, and well-equipped school.**

Priority 2 – K-12 Funding Reform

Implement JLARC recommendations.

In 2023, JLARC found that Virginia underfunds K–12 education by over \$3 billion annually and recommended transitioning to a student-based funding model. **The General Assembly should take the next step in implementing these recommendations to ensure funding reflects student need rather than outdated staffing formulas.**

Reform the Local Composite Index (LCI).

Richmond’s LCI continues to overstate the city’s ability to pay for schools, resulting in less state support. **The General Assembly should enact JLARC’s recommended reforms to the LCI, including using a multi-year average of income, property, and sales data to smooth volatility and better reflect fiscal reality.** Adopting these changes would direct more equitable funding to localities like Richmond.

Increase the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT).

Virginia’s localities provide services to many state-owned properties (i.e. Virginia’s Capitol Complex, VCU, and VCU Health) that are exempt from local taxes. **The General Assembly should increase the state’s PILOT contributions to help offset the true cost of those services and ease the burden on local taxpayers while supporting critical public education functions.**

Priority 3 – Student Mental Health

Increase specialized support staff ratios.

Students are facing greater mental health challenges than ever. **The General Assembly should increase the Standards of Quality ratio for specialized student support staff—such as school counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses—to at least four per 1,000 students.** This investment will ensure that every school has the staff needed to address student well-being and reduce barriers to learning.

Support telehealth expansion and Medicaid alignment.

The General Assembly should invest in telehealth infrastructure and improving Medicaid billing processes to help schools connect more students to licensed mental health professionals. This approach is cost-effective, sustainable, and critical for divisions with limited local mental health resources.

Expand community-based partnerships.

The General Assembly should expand access to school-based mental health services by creating a Community-Based Partnership Grant Program that funds collaborations and helps scale up services between school divisions and local mental health providers. These partnerships will enhance access to care, reduce wait times, and connect students to licensed professionals who can serve them within their schools.

Additional Policy Priorities

Increase support for economically disadvantaged students.

We support continued reform and greater investment in the state's funding stream that supports economically disadvantaged students, the At-Risk Add-On program.

Increase teacher and staff compensation to the national average.

We support continued investment in teacher and staff compensation to bring Virginia's average teacher salary to at least the national average, with maximum flexibility for local matching funds and timing of disbursement.

Fund Out-of-School Time partners.

We support additional funding for out-of-school and after school programs, including those run by the city, by city partners, and by non-governmental organizations.

Increase access to Early Childhood Education.

Richmond supports funding and resources to provide affordable, high-quality full-day, full-year early childhood childcare and education options in all areas of the city, including full funding of the Virginia Preschool Initiative and fully funding.

Who's My Delegate and Senator?

The first step to advocacy is knowing who represents you!

The Who's My Legislator tool helps you identify your legislator and the following information:

- Names
- Length of time in office
- Full-time profession
- Committee assignments
- Areas of interest
- Prior legislation



The screenshot shows the Virginia General Assembly website with the following sections:

- Instant Access to your General Assembly:** A message stating that users can now access the most requested information quickly, all in one place.
- Track a 2019 Session Bill:** A search bar with a "GO" button. Examples include "hb1, sj2, hr" and links for "Bill Text Search", "Session Tracking", and "Legislative Information System".
- Chambers' Status:** Information about the House of Delegates (adjourned at 1:48 p.m. on 8/30/18) and the Senate of Virginia (adjourned at 1:33 p.m. on 8/30/18).
- Member Listings:** Links for "House Member Listings" and "Senate Member Listings".
- Today's Events:** Links to "See the full 2019 IJS meeting schedule and the House of Delegates Meeting Schedule" and "Live Session Video".
- Who's My Legislator? Service:** A section explaining that the service is an online tool where the public-at-large can determine what legislators represent them. It includes a map of Virginia and notes that district maps are available from the service. A "GO" button is present.

At the bottom of the page, there is a navigation bar with a calendar (January to September), a "Close Bill Tracking, Meetings, Who's My Legislator?" button, and another "GO" button next to a search field labeled "Enter a Bill Number: Ex. HBxx".



The Richmond Delegation

United States Congress



Mark Warner
US Senate



Tim Kaine
US Senate



Jennifer McClellan
US House – District 4

Senate of Virginia



Ghazala Hashmi
Lieutenant Governor
President of the Senate

Virginia House of Delegates



Michael Jones*
House District 77



Betsy Carr
House District 78



Rae Cousins
House District 79



Lamont Bagby
Senate District 14



Mike Jones
Senate District 15

Skill Building Activity - “Elevator Speeches”

Pair Up: Get into pairs, with one person acting as the advocate and the other as the legislator.

Identify Your Issue and Ask: Choose a legislative issue or policy topic that you are passionate about or that your organization is focused on. What specific action do you want the legislator to take (i.e., support a bill, fund a program, etc.)?

Structure Your Elevator Speech:

- **Start with a Hook:** Open with a compelling fact, statistic, or personal story to grab attention.
- **State the Problem:** Clearly explain the issue or challenge that needs addressing.
- **Propose a Solution:** Offer a clear solution and explain why it’s the best approach.
- **Make the Ask:** Ask the legislator directly to take the specific action you defined earlier.

Tips for Success:

- Be brief and to the point (under 1 minute).
- Focus on why the legislator should care (link to their interests, constituency, or values).
- Use persuasive language and speak confidently.

Practice: The “legislator” will provide feedback on clarity, persuasiveness, and delivery.

Sample Elevator Speech

Hook: Good afternoon, Senator. Thank you for your time. As a constituent and advocate for public education, I'm deeply concerned about the current teacher shortage and the gap in teacher compensation in Virginia.

Problem: Our state's average teacher salary is over \$6,300 below the national average, with Virginia ranking among the least competitive states when compared to other professions requiring similar qualifications. This pay gap is contributing to a growing teacher shortage, with over 3,600 vacant teaching positions as of 2023—more than triple the number from just a few years ago.

Solution: I'm asking you to support legislation that increases teacher salaries to at least meet the national average. By providing competitive pay, we can attract and retain the highly qualified educators our students deserve. Let's make sure Virginia remains competitive and that our schools are equipped with the best educators to help our children succeed.

Clear Ask: Will you support efforts to raise teacher compensation in the upcoming budget?"

Advocacy Skills to Develop

Meetings with Legislators: present an issue, persuade the legislator, and make a specific ask.

★ **Pro-Tip:** put the date of your meeting request in the subject line!

Testimony: Speaking in front of legislative committees in support or opposition to bills under consideration.

Media Interviews: Deliver key advocacy messages under time constraints, answering rapid-fire questions.

Message Mapping / Talking Points: Organize thoughts and structure messages clearly and consistently, including a core message, supporting facts, and responses to potential counterarguments.

Storytelling: Highlight the power of personal stories and experiences to illustrate the impact of an issue and to create emotional connections with decision-makers.

Social Media Advocacy: Use social media in a strategic and effective way to raise awareness about an issue using hashtags, graphics, and calls to action.

Persuasive Writing: Write compelling letters, emails, and op-eds.

2026 Session Calendar

Wear
#Red4Ed on
Wednesdays!

January 2026

January 11: Light Brigade!

January 12: Advocacy Training, 4pm-5:30pm, GH Reid Elementary School

January 13: Advocacy Training, 5pm-6:30pm, Dogwood Middle School

January 14: Session begins, State of the Commonwealth

January 16: Screen Printing Workshop, 2pm-5pm, Studio Two Three

January 17: Inauguration Day

January 18: Poster Placing Blitz

January 23: [PTA Advocacy Day](#)

February 2026

February 2: RPS Advocacy Day

February 16: Virginia Education Association Advocacy Day - [Register here!](#)

February 22: House and Senate budgets proposals released

March 2026

Conference budget adopted

March 14: Session adjourns



For email updates with advocacy opportunities, form letters, and more information, please sign up for our advocacy email list!

forms.gle/ASE9w5h5R3nPkbxh6



Key Advocacy Partners & Resources

Partners

- [Fund Our Schools](#)
- [Virginia Educators United](#)
- [Virginia Education Association](#)
- [The Commonwealth Institute](#)
- [Voices for Virginia's Children](#)
- [Legal Aid Justice Center](#)

Frequently Used Links and Resources

- [Find Your Legislator](#)
- [Senate District Map](#)
- [House District Map](#)
- [Virginia General Assembly](#)
- [Legislative Information System](#)
- [RPS Tips for Writing to Legislators](#)
- [National Education Association Action Center](#)



Thank you!

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