

Response to Bob Beard's Budget Questions: February 19, 2026

FY 2026–27 Draft Funding Request

Thank you, Bob, for these thoughtful and substantive questions. Each addresses core issues of fiscal responsibility, student achievement, and strategic investment. The responses below are grounded directly in the FY27 Draft Funding Request and prior adopted budgets.

1- Given that enrollment projections are essentially flat (see fall enrollment projections in Section G), how do we justify a 9.5% increase in the School Fund for FY 26-27 to Albemarle County taxpayers, who are seeing an increase in their property taxes as assessments increase?

The projected local funding to ACPS is based on the formula the Board of Supervisors uses to determine the percentage of general fund tax revenues transferred to ACPS. Increased property assessments, along with increases in other general fund revenues has led to an increase in the amount of taxes expected to be collected in FY27. Additionally, ACPS will receive increased state revenues through its formula-based distribution model.

In structuring a budget, we identified critical areas of unmet need within the school division to advance School Board priorities and deliver the level of service our communities expect from their public school system, as well as the return on investment for their tax dollars. So, while the overall K–12 enrollment projections are essentially flat (FY27 Draft Funding Request, Section G: Fall Enrollment Projections, p. G-3), we still have specific needs and areas for improvement.

While the student population is certainly one factor in establishing budget needs and priorities, it is not a direct correlate of a needs-based budget. Rather, the student population is used to establish baseline budget levels necessary to maintain current levels of service, which for FY27 is approximately \$292.5M (94% of the budget). Additionally, compensation and working conditions are costs to maintain service levels, ensuring we can attract and retain quality teachers and staff. This is an additional \$11.8M (3.8% of the budget).

Beyond compensation, the Collective Bargaining Agreement includes structural working-condition commitments, including a guaranteed duty-free lunch, guaranteed planning time for elementary teachers, and structured collaboration time. Providing guaranteed planning and lunch in elementary schools requires additional FTEs for instructional coverage. Even with a flat level, schools must add staffing to ensure classroom supervision while teachers receive

protected planning time. These are structural staffing increases tied directly to negotiated working conditions — not discretionary expansions.

The remaining \$6.9M (2.2% of the budget) is discretionary expenditures focused on addressing the most critical areas of need to achieve the School Board's priorities and the communities' expressed level of service from their public school system - improved instructional materials (primarily textbooks), special education support, math and data-driven instruction specialists, and capital improvements.

So, the 9.5% increase in the School Fund operating budget (to \$311.3 million) is driven primarily by structural, non-discretionary cost increases—not enrollment growth. Importantly, although the transfer to ACPS reflects a 9.5% increase over the FY26 budget transfer, we are recommending a \$4.08M transfer to the Board of Supervisors' CIP fund, earmarked for school projects. Therefore, the increase to the ACPS operational budget is 8.1%, not 9.5%.

Within our baseline budget are notable enhancements to the quality of education students will receive, as outlined below.

New Schools Coming Online

The FY27 budget includes operational funding for:

- Mountain View Upper Elementary
- Albemarle Career Exploration Academy at Lambs Lane
(FY27 Draft Funding Request, p. A-3)

Opening a new school requires full operational staffing — administrators, specialists, custodial, transportation, utilities, and security — regardless of whether overall enrollment increases.

Facilities require full operational funding once opened.

Literacy & Intervention Staffing Investments (FY23–FY25)

Over the past three budgets, ACPS made substantial structural investments in literacy and intervention.

FY24 Investments

The FY24 adopted budget included:

- Directed staffing for reading and intervention specialists at all schools
- Staffing to keep class sizes low

- A Learning Recovery Fund targeting achievement gaps in reading and math (FY24 Adopted Budget, p. A-4)

This represented a significant increase in divisionwide literacy intervention capacity.

FY25 & FY26 Investments

The FY25 adopted budget included:

- Investments in high-quality instructional materials in math and literacy aligned with the Bellwether Instructional Practices Audit and the Virginia Literacy Act (FY25 Adopted Budget, Executive Summary, p. A-6)

The Virginia Literacy Act requires divisions to adopt evidence-based literacy programs aligned with science-based reading research (FY26 Adopted Budget, p. A-41).

Implementation milestones included:

- Selection of VDOE-approved literacy intervention tools
- Professional learning plans for middle school math and literacy teachers
- Standardized MTSS systems using Branching Minds (FY26 Adopted Budget, p. A-41)

Additionally, in FY24 and FY25, ACPS revised staffing standards divisionwide to increase the number of literacy interventionists and general intervention staff across elementary, middle, and high schools. Those changes were intentional and equity-driven. They were designed to ensure that struggling readers and students needing academic intervention receive timely, school-based support.

Those staffing changes are now structural commitments. Maintaining those positions adds to our baseline costs even when enrollment is flat. So when we talk about this budget increase, part of what we are sustaining is the literacy infrastructure we intentionally built over the past several years.

Once staffing standards are revised upward, those positions become ongoing baseline commitments. Maintaining those improvements increases expenditures even when enrollment remains flat.

2- Virginia ranked 51st in the U.S. in 4th and 8th grade math recovery post-Covid (according to the NAEP) from 2019-2024. I think we need to do a lot more to

improve our math scores. To that end, ACPS wants to hire (6) six new Math & Data Support Specialists, based in schools. Where will these specialists be working, and what will they specifically be doing?

According to NAEP data, Virginia remains above the national average in all areas of instruction (math, reading, science, and writing) for the most recent data sets ([NAEP Profiles](#)). They rank in the top 25 nationwide for both 4th-grade and 8th-grade math. However, we must provide focused acceleration to continue making gains toward pre-pandemic levels. This is particularly critical with our key membership groups (Black, Hispanic, Special Education, and Economically Disadvantaged) as we strive to narrow achievement gaps within ACPS.

That is why ACPS is recommending adding six new math and data-driven instruction support specialists. These staff members will be 11-month employees, totaling \$706,653 to be funded by additional discretionary funds in the FY27 budget. These licensed educators will be embedded in high-need schools where student performance on standardized tests is lowest. These schools are Agnor Elementary, Greer Elementary, Mountain View Upper Elementary, Woodbrook Elementary, Journey Middle School, and Burley Middle School (FY27 Draft Funding Request, p. A-36).

The math and data-driven instruction support specialists will...

- Facilitate weekly math-focused professional learning communities
- Implement “Driven by Data 2.0” protocols
- Guide teachers in analyzing student work and assessment data
- Support teachers by offering instructional planning and assessment design
- Coach novice math teachers to strengthen their ability to engage students with the math curriculum
- Vet high-quality instructional resources to support teachers in their lesson plans and instruction design
- Partner with principals on math-focused instructional leadership (FY27 Draft Funding Request, pp. A-36–A-37)

Each school will implement a 90-day instructional action plan aligned to priority standards (FY27 Draft Funding Request, p. A-37).

Recognizing the need for accountability whenever a new initiative is implemented, this budget item includes clear benchmarks:

- Increase Virginia Performance Framework scores in Year 1
- Reach ≥ 80 VPF score by Year 2
- Increase Black student achievement in math by at least 5% annually
- No new TSI or CSI school identifications

- High-fidelity data-driven instruction implementation (FY27 Draft Funding Request, p. A-37)

If benchmarks are not met, funding for positions does not automatically continue without School Board approval (FY27 Draft Funding Request, p. A-37).

This is a disciplined, accountable investment.

3- What Is “Driven by Data 2.0”?

Driven by Data 2.0 is a structured instructional framework that:

- Uses frequent formative assessment cycles
- Structure PLC meetings around the analysis of student work
- Requires teachers to translate data into specific instructional adjustments
- Builds principal leadership capacity
- Strengthens Tier 1 core instruction and support.

This initiative builds internal school capacity to reduce dependency on external programs.

Schools already implementing disciplined, data-driven instructional cycles (such as Brownsville and Mountain View) are demonstrating stronger instructional coherence and improved trajectories.

This proposal scales that capacity into the highest-need schools.

4- Are we doing enough, in this budget, in your opinion, to enhance reading and literacy, especially in our Title I schools?

Yes, we believe the heavy investments that the School Board approved in previous budgets are strengthening reading/literacy throughout the division.

Some of the key ACPS initiatives that have been implemented include:

- K–5 core literacy curriculum aligned with science-based reading research
- Grades 6–8 English Language Arts textbook adoption (\$750,000) (FY26 Adopted Budget, p. A-41)
- Expanded literacy intervention staffing
- Expanded general intervention staffing
- Branching Minds MTSS codification (FY26 Adopted Budget, p. A-41)

- Learning Recovery Fund focused on reading and math achievement gaps (FY24 Adopted Budget, p. A-5)

Additionally, Title I funds are budgeted to directly support reading and math for the highest-need students (FY26 School Board Funding Request Presentation, p. 17).

The reading infrastructure (staffing, materials, professional learning opportunities, intervention systems) is largely in place. However, we continue to monitor, refine, and enhance literacy instruction and curriculum while also coaching teachers and administrators to address specific issues at the school level. We believe it is appropriate to maintain current literacy funding levels in the FY27 budget.
