# Understanding Funding of the Equity in Action Plan and Other Recent Capital Projects

Roanoke City Public Schools' transformational Equity in Action Plan was a comprehensive, three-part facilities strategy announced in 2021 to address long-standing equity, educational, and operational needs across the school division and to expand opportunities for students and families.

The plan included:

1. **Creation of the Charles W. Day Technical Education Center (DAYTEC)** in the former William Ruffner Middle School building.
2. **Relocation of RCPS Central Office** to the former Roanoke Times headquarters downtown.
3. **Transformation of the former administration building** into the Community Empowerment Center at Booker T. Washington, creating a community-serving space while expanding student and family support services.




At the time, the former Ruffner Middle School was used as an operations center housing additional Central Office staff. RCPS also leased a warehouse for $6,000 per month. This means that Central Office staff – which includes not only division leaders but staff who work across multiple schools and operational staff such as technology, payroll, human resources, and mailroom workers – were spread across three buildings.

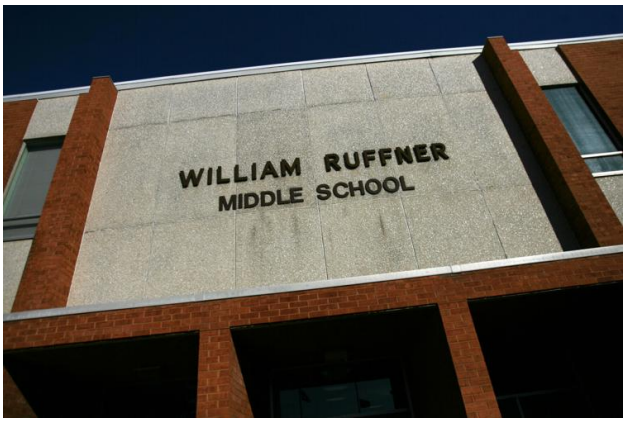
## The Challenge: Expanding Opportunity for Students

One of the primary drivers behind the Equity in Action Plan was a need repeatedly identified by students, families, educators, and the business community to expand Career and Technical Education (CTE).

For years, RCPS heard concerns that students at William Fleming High School did not have the same level of access to CTE opportunities as students at Patrick Henry High School. William Fleming students often had to sacrifice an elective period to travel across town to the Roanoke Technical Education Center (ROTEC), located adjacent to Patrick Henry High School.



At the same time, local employers and workforce partners emphasized the need for additional workforce training opportunities and expanded technical programs beyond what ROTEC could accommodate.




The former Ruffner Middle School building presented an ideal solution. Located adjacent to William Fleming High School, it offered the opportunity to significantly expand CTE programming and better serve students throughout the division.

However, there was one challenge: The building was already occupied.

At the time, Ruffner housed several Central Office operational departments, including Human Resources, Technology, Student and Occupational Health, and Operations. In addition, RCPS leased a separate warehouse facility at the other end of the city for $6,000 per month to store supplies and materials that warehouse workers transported to schools throughout the city.

Administrative and operational personnel were spread across multiple buildings, creating inefficiencies and limiting the division's ability to repurpose existing facilities for student programs.

## Why Centralizing Staff Downtown Made DAYTEC Possible

By relocating Central Office staff to a single centralized location, RCPS was able to:

- Vacate the Ruffner building and convert it into DAYTEC.
- Consolidate administrative operations that had been spread across multiple sites.
- Eliminate a separate warehouse lease, saving approximately $6,000 per month.
- Create more efficient collaboration among departments that support schools. The building also provides division-wide professional learning and meeting space for new employee orientations, principal meetings, instructional leadership teams, curriculum planning, and cross-department collaboration that benefits every school.
- Repurpose the former Central Office building into the Community Empowerment Center.

In other words, the William B. Robertson Administration Building was necessary in order to create the other opportunities.



The plan was publicly presented by Superintendent Dr. Verletta White to the Roanoke City Council on May 3, 2021, followed by a joint press conference attended by members of both the City Council and the School Board.

At the time the plan was developed, RCPS was uniquely positioned to move forward. Pandemic-related operational savings, federal relief funding, and healthy reserves above the School Board's required fund balance threshold created a rare opportunity to invest in long-term infrastructure improvements without impacting instructional operations. In the presentation to City Council, division leaders described the situation as a unique moment in which "the stars were aligned" to advance equitable opportunities for students and families.

Division leadership specifically emphasized that one-time expenditures are an appropriate use of fund balance, whereas using those funds to support recurring operating expenses would create long-term financial risk. At the time, the School Board's fund balance policy required a minimum reserve level of $10 million, and financial projections indicated the division would remain above that threshold even after the purchase and renovation projects.

Because all school facilities are legally owned by the City of Roanoke, City Council approval was required for the project to move forward. Following a public hearing, City Council unanimously approved the purchase of the former Roanoke Times building on May 17, 2021. This ordinance, motioned for approval by former Councilman Bill Bestpitch, seconded by former Vice Mayor Trish White-Boyd, and unanimously approved by all seven members, authorized the city manager to execute the $5.85 million purchase. The agreement was subsequently signed by then-City Manager Bob Cowell.

## What the Equity in Action Plan Achieved

### The Charles W. Day Technical Education Center (DAYTEC)

The creation of DAYTEC, which opened in January 2024 and was formally dedicated in April 2024, represented a generational investment in workforce development and student opportunity.



The project:

- Doubled CTE seat capacity.
- Expanded career pathways available to students.
- Increased access to workforce training programs.
- Addressed longstanding equity concerns regarding access between high schools.
- Strengthened partnerships with local employers and industry leaders.
- Better aligned student preparation with regional workforce needs.

Today, students from across Roanoke City can access modern technical education opportunities in a dedicated facility designed for that purpose. During the 2025-26 school year, more than 4,000 students enrolled in CTE coursework, illustrating the significant demand for expanded career and technical education opportunities in Roanoke City.

**William B. Robertson Administration Building (WBR)**

The William B. Robertson Building was dedicated in April 2024. The building improved service delivery by:

- Bringing departments together under one roof
- Creating professional learning and meeting spaces for staff
- Improving accessibility for families and community partners
- Reducing reliance on leased space
- Better utilizing existing facilities throughout the division

**Community Empowerment Center at Booker T. Washington**

The move also allowed RCPS to transform its former administration building into the Community Empowerment Center at Booker T. Washington. The center opened in July 2025, with dedication occurring in August 2025.

Built in direct response to family feedback, the center provides wraparound services in partnership with more than two dozen community partners to support the entire family, including:

- Enrollment assistance
- Adult education opportunities
- Community resource connections
- Family support services
- Partnerships with local organizations



In its first year, the center served more than 2,600 visitors, demonstrating a substantial community need.

## Appendix A: Funding and Costs of Recent Capital Projects

A common question is whether the Equity in Action projects contributed to RCPS' current budget challenges. The answer is no.

It is important to distinguish between **capital funding** and **operating funding**.

| Capital Funding (One-Time Costs) | Operational Funding (Recurring/Ongoing) |
|---|---|
| Buildings | Daily school operations |
| Renovations | Instructional programming |
| Construction projects | Employee salary/benefits |
| HVAC replacements | Utilities |
| Infrastructure improvements | Operational expenses (meals, transportation, etc.) |

The Equity in Action projects were funded using one-time capital dollars and federal pandemic relief funds.

Those funds were legally restricted, specifically designated, or available only for limited periods. They could not be used to permanently fund recurring expenses such as salaries, benefits, or annual operating costs.

Even if the Equity in Action Plan had never occurred, the one-time funding sources used for these projects could not have been redirected to permanently support recurring operational expenses such as teacher salaries, employee benefits, or annual budget obligations.

The projects were funded primarily through a combination of:

### Federal Pandemic Relief Funding (ESSER)

RCPS received approval to use approximately **$29.3 million** in federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds for capital improvements, including:

- DAYTEC renovations
- HVAC improvements across the division
- Air filtration upgrades
- School modernization projects
- Addition to James Breckinridge Middle School

The Equity in Action Plan was made possible because several unique funding opportunities aligned at the same time. RCPS was able to leverage one-time federal pandemic relief funds, local capital reserves, and state school construction assistance to make investments that otherwise would have taken many years to complete through traditional funding sources. These funding opportunities were temporary and specifically intended for facility improvements and infrastructure investments.

**One-Time Local Capital Funding**
During the pandemic years, revenue estimates were intentionally conservative. As a result, RCPS ended several fiscal years with one-time surplus funds that were committed to capital improvements through the Capital Projects Fund, which was created at the suggestion of a now-former City Council member. These funds were saved specifically to address major facility needs and reduce reliance on debt. **RCPS is no longer permitted to retain this fund, based on the 2026 Amend School Funding Policy.*

**State School Construction Assistance**
DAYTEC also benefited from Virginia School Construction Assistance Program funding, helping offset project costs.

The chart below illustrates total project costs and funding sources from recent school infrastructure projects:

| Project | City Debt Funding | RCPS Local Funding | ESSER Funding | Virginia SCAP Grant |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Morningside ES | $5,440,000 | $208,000 | $0 | $0 |
| Breckinridge MS | $174,302 | $2,325,000 | $6,005,628 | $0 |
| Charles W. Day Technical Education Center | $1,600,000 | $86,382 | $15,500,000 | $7,350,000 |
| William B. Robertson Administration Building | $0 | $17,213,664 | $0 | $0 |
| Community Empowerment Center | $0 | $3,000,000 | $0 | $0 |
| Preston Park ES | $28,139,384 | $6,012,301 | $0 | $10,138,315 |
| TOTAL | $33,753,686 | $28,845,347 | $21,505,628 | $17,488,315 |

## Appendix C – Sources of Information

### Original Documents

- Equity in Action Plan (May 2021)
- RCPS Budgets (multiple years available)
- City Council Agenda and Minutes (May 3, 2021)
- City Council Agenda and Minutes (May 17, 2021)

### News Coverage

The Roanoke Times: Roanoke City Public Schools to upgrade technical education, relocate offices to newspaper building (May 3, 2021)

WDBJ: Roanoke City Public Schools proposes to buy former Roanoke Times building, repurpose current facilities (May 3, 2021)

WDBJ: Roanoke City Schools opens Charles W. Day Technical Education Center (April 12, 2024)

The Roanoke Times: Roanoke schools celebrates new Robertson Administration Building (April 12, 2025)

WDBJ: Roanoke City Public Schools opens new administration building (April 12, 2025)

WFXR: RCPS celebrates grand opening of Community Empowerment Center (August 29, 2025)

WVTF: Roanoke city schools roll out Community Empowerment Center (August 29, 2025)

The Roanoke Times: Roanoke 'addressing barriers' with Imagination Library, empowerment center (July 8, 2026)