

Roanoke City Public Schools

VSBA • NOVEMBER 2026

Don't Get Caught Flat-Footed

How School Divisions Can Drive Legislative Change

Verletta White, Ed.D., Superintendent
Alan Seibert, Ed.D., Constituent Services & Government Relations Officer

We Are One #RCPSProud

LET'S START WITH A QUESTION

Have you ever seen the latest legislation and wondered if someone from a school weighed in?

AND ONE MORE

Do you want to drive change rather than react?

WELCOME

Introductions



Verletta White, Ed.D.

Superintendent

Roanoke City Public Schools



Alan Seibert, Ed.D.

Constituent Services & Government Relations Officer

Roanoke City Public Schools

By the end of today, you will:

1. Build relationships
2. Create systems
3. Develop advocacy capacity


Roanoke
City

About RCPS

2025-2026 Data

13,547
students in PK–12

2,718
total staff members

29
Schools and programs: 17 elementary, 5 middle, 2 high; 5 specialty programs

8,067
students from economically disadvantaged households

2,748
students receiving special education services

2,182
English language learners



YOUR TURN

Turn & Talk



What is the last bill that surprised your division? When did you first hear about it?

2 minutes

Turn to a neighbor

SETTING THE CONTEXT

The Cost of Being Flat-Footed

Reactive

- Learning about bills late
- Scrambling to respond
- Explaining impacts after decisions are made

VS

Proactive

- Building relationships early
- Sharing priorities before session
- Helping lawmakers understand the impact

AUDIENCE QUESTION **Which side describes your division today?**

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What Gets Governed Gets Done

Year-round advocacy that turns partnerships and policy into positive outcomes for students.



Government Relations Officer

Part-time position dedicated to building relationships with elected officials and advancing RCPS legislative priorities year-round.

01



Superintendent-Legislative Relations

Superintendent Dr. Verletta White serves as Chair of the Region 6 Legislative Committee, helping shape regional advocacy efforts.

02



School Board-Legislator Relations

School Board members engage directly with legislators, including annual visits to Richmond to advocate for public education priorities. School Board Trustee Joyce Watkins serves as VSBA's Legislative Positions/Federal Relations Chair.

03



Legislative Priorities

RCPS develops and promotes annual legislative priorities, achieving a 93% success rate on key initiatives in 2026.

04

Advocacy Is a Year-Round Process



Spring

Relationship building

Best time to build: May-June

Summer

Data gathering

Fall

Priorities

Deadline to connect: mid-Nov to early Dec

Winter

Session

After Session

Follow-up and preparation

Your work doesn't end with the General Assembly session.

LEGISLATIVE STRATEGY

Your Role in the Process

Boards

Set the priorities

Superintendents

Connect policy to daily operations

Principals

Provide real examples

Teachers

Share classroom stories

Families

Offer the parent perspective

Students

Bring authenticity

Advocacy does not belong to one person.

THE RCPS APPROACH

Community Builders Legislation





Partnership over partisanship

Focus on student outcomes

Our legislators want to help.

1. A longstanding, bipartisan partnership
2. Listening, understanding, and knowing what we need
3. Year-round relationship building, so legislators share opportunities

The Community Builders Story

2024

The General Assembly creates the pilot (HB 626 / SB 484) for RCPS and Petersburg.

Summer 2024

First cohort: 55 students from all five middle schools.

2025

99 students in summer camp. VSBA Showcasing Innovation Award.

2025–26

Clubs in all five middle schools. 154 students. Expands to two high schools.

2026

HB 1153 makes it permanent and names RCPS the statewide demonstration site.







THE RCPS APPROACH

Community Builders: The Results

Students who attended at least half of the program (171 students), 2023–24 compared with 2025–26

54%

decreased chronic absenteeism

24% → 11% of participants

55%

decreased suspension days

2.33 → 1.04 days per student

62%

decrease failing grades

1.54 → 0.59 failures per student

JUVENILE GUN VIOLENCE IN ROANOKE CITY

12 → 0 offenders **23 → 0** victims

2023 compared with 2026 (through May 31)

2026 · HB 1153

Made Community Builders permanent and named RCPS the statewide demonstration site.

Source: RCPS Community Builders Pilot Program Final Report, July 1, 2026.

Advocacy That Works

71% **2023 session** 5 of 7 top priorities

78% **2024 session** 7 of 9 top priorities

91% **2025 session** 10 of 11 top priorities

93% **2026 session** 14 of 15 top priorities

2023

Penalties for "Swatting" Schools

Passed to protect students and staff.

2025

Work-Based Learning

Included in the 3E Framework.

2025

Support Staff Cap Repealed

Fully repealed in the state budget.

2026

Dual Enrollment Instructor License

Teacher license reestablished.

2024 + 2026

Community Builders

Passed and budgeted. RCPS named a demonstration site.

Source: RCPS Legislative Advocacy Highlights, 2023–2026 sessions

Relationship Building in Action







- School visits
- Legislative breakfasts
- Student showcases
- Sporting events
- Graduation
- Community celebrations

Trust is established one conversation at a time.

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The Advocacy Toolkit

Roadmap	A year-round plan for who, what, and when
Legislative priorities	Turns big issues into a clear ask
Grip card	A one-page summary legislators can keep
Event tools	Checklists for visits and showcases
Communication resources	Ready-to-use messages and updates



Developing Legislative Priorities

Focus on meaningful issues, not wish lists.

1

Problem

What is going wrong for students?

2

Evidence

What do the data and stories show?

3

Impact

Who is affected, and how?

4

Requested Action

What exactly do we want lawmakers to do?

Developing Legislative Priorities

Community Builders - Demonstration Site Established

Empowering Youth, Strengthening Communities, and Saving Lives

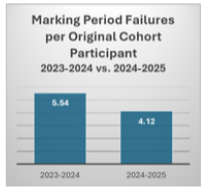
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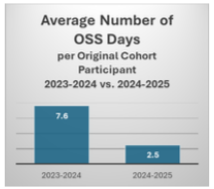
Current Reality: Gun violence among youth continues to be a concern within Roanoke and across Virginia. In particular, there is a troubling rise in incidents during the summer, often linked to a lack of structured engagement and opportunity. With bipartisan support from Governor Glenn Youngkin and the General Assembly, in 2024, Roanoke City Public Schools (RCPS) launched Community Builders, a pilot program aimed at disrupting the cycle of violence by investing in youth development and community collaboration.

Program Highlights & Impact: Community Builders Pilot students from all five middle schools through year-round programming focused on:

- Workforce Development: Career and Technical Education (CTE) exploration and job shad
- College & Career Readiness: College tours and soft-skill development
- Community Engagement: Service learning with police, fire, healthcare, and other sectors
- Social-Emotional Growth: Restorative justice practices and mentorship
- Family Empowerment: Strengthening family-school partnerships

Evidence of Promise: Initial data from the pilot (June 2024-July 2025) indicates improvements in behavior, and academic performance. Additionally, data suggest a reduction in youth involvemer incidents since the launch of the pilot. The Community Builders program is a strategic investmen community safety. With continued funding, RCPS can lead the way in showing how schools and c together to prevent youth gun violence and build a brighter future.





RCPS recommends that the General Assembly:
Provide sustained funding to support RCPS as a demonstration-model site for the Community Bu investment will allow other school divisions to visit, learn, and replicate the model.

Funding Request & Timeline: To continue this impactful work and serve as a statewide demonstr requests $250,000 annually to grow the Community Builders Program and fund opportunities fo to visit, receive training, and program materials.

Student Performance and Support Framework (SPSF):
The Role of Federal Identification in Performance Categories

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Background: In January 2025, the U.S. Department of Education approved the Commonwealth of Virginia's decision to bifurcate its accreditation system into two distinct components: the Student Performance and Support Framework (SPSF), a performance-driven model focused on student outcomes, and an operations-driven accreditation system focused on institutional compliance. To determine if a school is federally identified, the SPSF calculation process is repeated for each federally identified subgroup. Schools with a subset that performs below the top-performing school of the lowest 5% of Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) schools are federally identified. These classifications – Targeted School Improvement (TSI), Additional Targeted School Improvement (ATSI), and CSI – automatically result in a one-level drop in a school's SPSF performance category, regardless of the school's overall performance.

Current Reality:
Lowering a school's performance category based on its federal classification poses many concerns:

1. Performance categories no longer reflect the performance of all students, reducing transparency, weakening the public's ability to interpret a school's performance category accurately, and distorting their perception of school quality.
2. This approach shifts attention away from the student groups that require targeted intervention in favor of a summative label and complicates providing support where it is most needed.

RCPS recommends:

1. Add an additional label alongside the SPSF performance category for any school receiving a federal classification to clearly identify the underperforming subgroups, rather than lowering a school's performance category. This would:
   a. Preserve the integrity of the existing performance categories by keeping them focused on schoolwide outcomes
   b. Ensure the federal classification system highlights disparities among specific student populations
   c. Create a transparent and accessible accountability process for educators by presenting performance data in a clear, disaggregated format
   d. Reinforce the accountability system's role in advancing educational equity and providing actionable information.

HB 1171 - Alternative graduation pathways to earn Standard Diploma; development, approval, and implementation,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. *§ 1. The Board of Education shall develop, approve, and implement alternative graduation pathways to earn the Standard Diploma that expand opportunities to complete the verified credit requirements for the Standard Diploma that do not require achieving a passing score on applicable Standards of Learning assessments including pathways responsive to the needs of English learners and Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE). In developing, approving, and implementing such alternative graduation pathways, the Board shall:*

1. Consult with and integrate the perspectives of a broad range of relevant stakeholders, including public school educators, division superintendents, school boards, school principals, school counselors, parents of public school students, student representatives, major education association representatives, and such other stakeholders as the Board deems necessary;

2. Consider alignment of any alternative pathways with the competencies articulated in the Profile of a Virginia Graduate: critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, collaboration, and citizenship;

3. Consider the following elements for incorporation into any such alternatives pathways: (i) nonassessment demonstrations of competence that allow students to demonstrate mastery of academic and career skills without relying solely on standardized assessments, including capstone projects, portfolios, locally developed performance assessments, completion of work-based learning experiences, completion of dual-enrollment courses, service-learning opportunities, and attainment of industry-recognized credentials; (ii) alternative assessments that could be used in lieu of or alongside of Standards of Learning assessments to earn verified credits, such as nationally normed tests or other assessments as may be approved by the Board; and (iii) other pathway structures or elements designed to encourage hands-on learning and civic engagement, including career and technical education sequences, apprenticeships, early college experiences, or community service projects with attention to accessibility for English learners and SLIFE students;

4. Ensure that no alternative pathway impacts or replaces the current requirements for earning a Standard Diploma or an Advanced Studies Diploma;

5. Ensure that at least one pathway is approved that includes a nonassessment demonstration of competence as a means to earn verified credit, in lieu of receiving a

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YOUR TURN

Turn & Talk

A legislator steps into the elevator. You have 60 seconds before the doors open. Make your ask.



Pick one: *teacher staffing • school construction • chronic absenteeism • special education funding*

YOUR PITCH

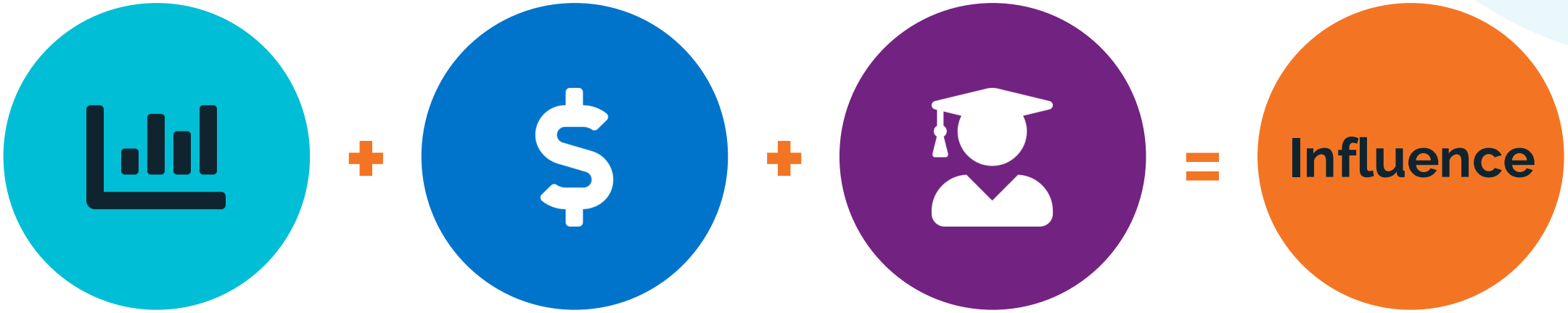
"In our division, **[problem]**. Last year, **[one number]**. That means **[what it does to students]**. We're asking you to **[one specific action]**."

4 minutes

Pitch, then switch

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Data + Stories = Influence



Student outcome data

Budget implications

A specific student experience

External Stakeholders

Education is community work.

Business partners/ Chamber of Commerce

Business leaders who need strong schools

Higher education

Colleges and workforce development that welcome our graduates

RCPS

Nonprofits & PTAs

Partners who serve students and families

Local government

City and county partners

Hosting Effective Events

Objective
Know what you want legislators to learn

Participants
Invite the right guests and the right students

Student-centered experience
Let students lead and show their work

Follow-up
Thank guests and share what comes next



MEASURING SUCCESS

What Counts as a Win?

Not every win becomes a bill.

New relationship

Greater awareness

Legislator understanding

Budget conversation

Sometimes, a bill



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INTERACTIVE

Quick Win Planning

Before you leave today, write down:



One relationship

Whom will you call or invite?

_____

_____



One event

What could you host or attend?

_____

_____



One priority

What is your top ask for session?

_____

_____

Commit to one action within the next 30 days.

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CALL TO ACTION

Don't Get Caught Flat-Footed



Build relationships Before you need them.



Tell your story Continuously.



Create a system So advocacy survives personnel changes.

Advocacy is an organizational habit.

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RESOURCES

Thank You! Questions?

Scan to download our toolkit

rcps.info/governmentrelations



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