

WE WILL KNOW EVERY STUDENT

# Legislative Agenda



K-12  
FUNDING

TEACHER  
PIPELINE

DIVISION/LOCAL  
AUTHORITY

# 2024

# Learning for All

The Albemarle County Public Schools' strategic plan, *Learning for All*, establishes the guidelines by which all decisions pertaining our division are made.

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## Vision

Our learners are engaged in authentic, challenging, and relevant learning experiences, becoming lifelong contributors and leaders in our dynamic and diverse society.

## Mission

Our learners are engaged in authentic, challenging, and relevant learning experiences, becoming lifelong contributors and leaders in our dynamic and diverse society.

## Goals

### Thriving Students

ACPS will facilitate learning experiences grounded in high expectations, networks of care, and student curiosity to ensure academic and social-emotional development for all students while eliminating opportunity, access and achievement gaps.

### Affirming and Empowering Communities

ACPS commits to developing a culturally-responsive environment that respects and champions the diversity of life experiences of all stakeholders and supports the physical and mental health of our students, staff and families so they are actively empowered to engage in our school community.

### Equitable, Transformative Resources

ACPS will attract, develop and retain the highest quality staff; develop sustainable and modern facilities, infrastructure and equipment; and distribute all resources in an equitable manner to transform learning experiences and opportunities.

## Values

### Equity

We will provide every student with the level of support necessary to thrive.

### Excellence

We will mitigate barriers and provide opportunities for every student to be academically successful.

### Family and Community

We will engage with and share the responsibility for student success with families and community partners.

### Wellness

We will support the physical and emotional health of our students and staff.

# Who We Are

Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) serves nearly 14,000 students in preschool through 12th grade in Albemarle County, Virginia. Our division boasts a 94% on-time graduation rate with 79.5% of our students deciding to continue their education at the next level after graduation and 18.9% choosing to go directly into employment.

ACPS employs more than 2,600 teachers, administrators and classified staff to serve our division and 64% of our workforce reside in Albemarle County. Nearly 70% of our teachers hold at least a master's degree.

Despite our division outperforming the state average in a number of academic achievement measures, we have seen a persistent gap in the achievements of our students of color and economically disadvantaged students.

That's why, in 2023, we partnered with Bellwether to complete an Instructional Practices Audit. After meeting with students, staff and families over a several-month period, Bellwether identified five main root causes of achievement gaps and recommendations on steps that our division can take to begin to close them.

To this end, many of our legislative priorities for the 2024 Virginia General Assembly support an increase in K-12 funding. If Albemarle County and the Commonwealth of Virginia are to produce a competent and successful workforce, school divisions will need access to funding to implement programs that will help our students succeed.

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## New At ACPS

At ACPS, we are always striving to provide our students with the best possible learning environments we can create. We have worked on several projects over the past year aimed at providing our students with better facilities and more opportunities to excel:

- **High School Center II:** This new facility is designed to serve 400 students per day at a size of approximately 60,000 square feet. The purpose of this facility is to support our newly developed Career Learning Communities, which align with the Virginia Department of Education's Career Pathways program.
- **New Elementary School:** The ACPS community has determined that a new elementary school is needed to alleviate overcrowding at many of the elementary schools in our Northern Feeder Pattern. A new elementary school will allow us to retain our low class size average.
- **Albemarle Foundation for Education:** In order to provide our students with equitable access to opportunities, we have created an educational foundation to provide funding to schools who need additional funding.
- **Advisory Committee for Environmental Sustainability:** ACES was founded to advise and inform the School Board and Superintendent on measures to help ACPS develop and meet sustainability goals. The committee also guides and coordinates the Albemarle County Climate Action Plan as it relates to schools.
- **Lambs Lane Master Plan:** The ACPS Lambs Lane Campus houses Albemarle High School, Journey Middle School, Greer Elementary School, the Ivy Creek School and the Boy's and Girl's Club Albemarle County location. This study was completed in an effort to ensure that our facilities are serving our students and community in the most efficient way possible.

# Additional State Support

**Additional State Support and Funding Options:** A major impact of the General Assembly shifting costs from the state level to local governments is that many localities will be unable to adequately fund much needed capital projects. To remedy this, we **support** both the addition of state resources to school capital funds and the expansion of funding options for localities for capital and school construction costs. This would include expanding the dedicated local sales and use tax authority first given to select counties in 2019.

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## Local Composite Index

The Local Composite Index (LCI) recalculation has led to sudden, large changes at ACPS for the local funding share between biennia. Our new LCI calculation means that Albemarle County will pay a much larger share than in previous years, which amounts to a loss of around \$10M over the next two years. Changes to the way school divisions are funded might mitigate the impact of an excessively large jump in adjusted gross income, which is created in part by individual incomes that are clear outliers in our community. For reference, Albemarle County's adjusted gross income jumped 54% prior to the calculation of the most recent LCI.

- We therefore **request** that the General Assembly consider Virginia's Joint Legislative and Audit Review Commission's (JLARC) recommendation of changing the LCI calculation from a two-year formula to a three-year formula.
- Moreover, since the LCI's creation, better data has become available, and there is growing consensus nationally and among experts that a measure known as "revenue capacity" can even more accurately and fairly measure local ability to pay. We **request** that General Assembly direct a study to be done on the potential benefits of using a revenue capacity system for future cost sharing calculations.
- We **request** a hold harmless year in our county relative to our new LCI so that we do not lose \$5M to \$10M in anticipated funding at the start of our budget development season.



# K-12 Funding

Public education funding in the Commonwealth is enshrined in the Virginia Constitution as a joint responsibility of both state and local governments. To meet that responsibility, it is essential that the state adequately fund K-12 education. Unfortunately, to the detriment of students and localities, the Commonwealth continues to underfund its K-12 obligations, shifting the funding responsibility to local governments and presenting a real challenge to providing a high-quality public education. This local tax burden to cover the state's underfunding is keenly felt in high cost-of-living jurisdictions like Albemarle County.

The watershed 2023 Virginia's K-12 Teacher Pipeline report outlined both the overall inadequacy of state funding and the substantial flaws in current state funding formulas. JLARC's findings are dramatic:

- **Virginia K-12 Contributions Are in Bottom Half Nationally:** Virginia school divisions receive less K-12 funding per student than the 50-state average as well as the regional average, which equates to \$1,900 in underfunding per student. For ACPS' 13,821 students, that amounts to \$25,572,100 of unrealized support or almost 10% of the ACPS operating budget. At a school level, that translates into \$1,000,000 for each of ACPS' 25 schools, which might help in our efforts to close the achievement gap.
- **SOQ Formula Need to be Updated:** The state Standards of Quality (SOQ) formula yields substantially less state funding than actual division spending and benchmarks. The current SOQs are so minimal that all 130 school divisions exceed most standards. As a floor to staffing standards, the current formula dramatically underestimates the actual costs of public education. Overall, the SOQ formula provided \$6.6 billion less than what was spent by local school divisions in FY 2021.
- **School Nurses:** Other positions, such as school nurses, should be added to the list of staffing for the SOQ formula.
- **Great Recession Cost Saving Measures Are Still In Place:** Not only does the SOQ formula systematically underestimate school division costs, it continues to employ several Great Recession-era cost reduction measures that further reduce the state K-12 contribution (including the support positions ratio cap, which has artificially lowered the state's funding contributions for critical educational support positions by hundreds of millions of dollars annually since its adoption in 2009).
- **No Adjustment for Local Labor Costs:** The SOQ formula does not adequately account for local labor costs. As a result, the formula includes additional factors, like the Cost of Competing Adjustment (COCA), as an acknowledgement of the formula's failure to account for cost of living. However, such factors are too minimal to appropriately counteract the inadequacy of the funding formula and, in turn, schools in high cost-of-living regions have difficulty attracting and retaining high-quality personnel. The School Board **supports** the following JLARC recommendations for addressing these deficiencies and underfunding:
  - **Adjustments for High Needs Students:** Increasing state funding support for school divisions with high numbers or concentrations of English learners (approximately 30 percent higher costs than general education), students living in economically disadvantaged households (approximately 10 percent higher costs than general education), and students receiving special education and mental health services (approximately 100 percent higher costs than general education).
  - **Early Childhood Education:** Increasing state resources for early childhood education programs, which help young children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed.

The Board **opposes** changes that divert K-12 funding away from local public schools and toward non-public options.

# Teacher Pipeline

We are grateful to General Assembly for requesting JLARC's research and its report, [Virginia's K-12 Teacher Pipeline](#). Although ACPS has been able to fill most of its teaching positions, it has become more difficult as the numbers of those entering education has decreased. ACPS is finding some of the challenges of teacher and employee recruitment that mirror those of other Commonwealth localities and in the nation. We support JLARC's recommendations and, more specifically, believe some would directly and immediately benefit our school division as emphasized below.

- **Changes in Teacher Licensure:** We **support** [Recommendation 2](#) of the 2023 JLARC study that states: *General Assembly may wish to consider including language in the Appropriation Act directing the Virginia Board of Education to either (i) replace the Virginia Communications and Literacy Assessment with a nationally recognized teacher licensure test that is more relevant for assessing prospective teachers or (ii) eliminate the Virginia Communications and Literacy Assessment as a requirement for a full 10-year renewable Virginia teaching license.*
- **Waivers:** We **support** [Recommendation 3](#) of the 2023 JLARC study that states: *The General Assembly may wish to consider amending the Code of Virginia to create a waiver through which the Board of Education shall issue a full 10-year renewable Virginia teaching license to qualified individuals attending approved higher education teacher preparation programs who have not passed the Virginia Communication and Literacy Assessment but meet established criteria.*
- **Teaching Scholarships:** We **support** [Recommendation 5](#) of the 2023 JLARC study on Virginia's K-12 Teacher Pipeline that states: *The General Assembly may wish to consider including language and funding in the Appropriation Act to increase the annual funding for the Virginia Teaching Scholarship Loan Program.*
- **Monitoring of Reciprocity:** We **support** [Recommendation 7](#) of the 2023 JLARC study that states: *The Virginia Department of Education should list and periodically update on its website the specific teacher license types and endorsement areas in other states that qualify for a Virginia teaching license through reciprocity, prioritizing states from which Virginia receives the most reciprocity applications.*

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## School Division and Local Authority

We also support the following measure:

- **Easement Pre-Approval:** ACPS **requests** the Virginia General Assembly revise the VA Code to allow the preapproval of easements related to school board-approved capital projects. This would be comparable to the right that Albemarle County local government has established through a resolution (in which they cite [state code 15.2-1800-B](#)). This ability would render completion of our capital projects more efficient and, as a consequence, an improved ability to serve our students and local public education.

