

# Amherst County Public Schools Budget Factors

## The Schools Our Children Deserve

We all want our children to attend schools that are well-resourced and able to provide reliable transportation, nutritious meals, quality instruction, and essential health services. Since the pandemic, our roughly 4,000 students in Amherst face more challenges than ever, from staff shortages, drops in academic achievement, and additional mental health needs. When looking at our current local spending, it's clear our budget comes up short in meeting the most pressing challenges our students and schools face today. Amherst can step up to fund our schools at levels that meet our students' needs and better reflect our capacity and commitment to our children.



### Budget

In the 2022-2023 school year, Amherst County spent \$13,676 per student, ranking us 89 out of 131 school divisions in the state.

Amherst has seen a drop in local per student spending of \$762 or 17% between the 2014-2015 and 2022-2023 school years (adjusted for inflation). The Valley region decreased local per pupil spending by 3% over this time. Compared to the regional average for local per student spending, Amherst spent a whopping \$3,261 less in the 2022-2023 school year. While Amherst had a strengthening economy over this time, its level of commitment and effort towards schools did not reflect this.



### Capacity and Effort

Virtually every locality in the state spends beyond what the state requires it to match (referred to as Required Local Effort) because the state vastly underestimates what it actually costs to run schools. In aggregate, divisions spent 107% above the Required Local Effort, but Amherst County only spent 42%, which is 65 percentage points below the state average. Amherst would need to spend \$6,330,475 more annually to be at the average state percent above the Required Local Effort (this reflects the low level of effort the division puts into per pupil spending relative to the state).

Amherst County has capacity to do more to raise adequate revenue for its schools. Amherst County's property tax effort is 23% below the average state rate.

A one penny property tax increase in Amherst County would raise approximately \$250,000 annually.



### Outcomes

Many students lost significant ground on state academic achievement between the 2018-2019 and 2022-2023 school years. Students in Amherst saw a drop in pass rates on the reading SOL test of 17.9% and 51.2% in math - among the largest declines in the state. Yet further disparities exist, with math SOL pass rates dropping 61.8% for economically disadvantaged students. Amherst must do more for its students who face significant barriers to education.



### Staffing

The teacher vacancy rate in Amherst was 2.7% as of October 2023. The overall staffing vacancy rate was 4.8% as of October 2023, adding pressure for all staff to cover shortage areas.

Amherst had an average budgeted teacher salary of \$54,750 in the 2023-2024 school year, which is \$15,691 below the state average. With high salaries and lower cost of living in nearby communities, on top of a dwindling supply of graduates with teaching degrees, Amherst is not in a strong position to compete for high-quality educators in the future.