

# Essex 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 1,000 students in Essex 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. Essex 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, Essex County spent \$16,595 per student, ranking us 28 out of 131 school divisions in the state.

Essex has seen an increase in local per student spending of \$940 or 17% between the 2014-2015 and 2022-2023 school years (adjusted for inflation).



### 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 Essex County only spent 53%, which is 54 percentage points below the state average. Essex would need to spend \$2,690,919 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).

Essex County has capacity to do more to raise adequate revenue for its schools. The locality has a relatively high revenue capacity according to the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts and has a lower level of fiscal stress than most localities. Essex County's property tax effort is 8% below the average state rate.

A one penny property tax increase in Essex County would raise approximately \$160,000 annually.



### Outcomes

Many students lost significant ground on state academic achievement between the 2018-2019 and 2022-2023 school years. Students in Essex saw a drop in pass rates on the reading SOL test of 20.3% and 66.2% in math - among the largest declines in the state. Yet further disparities exist, with math SOL pass rates dropping 88.0% for English Learners and 70.5% for economically disadvantaged students. Essex must do more for its students who face significant barriers to education.



### Staffing

The teacher vacancy rate in Essex was 13.6% as of October 2023, 9.7 percentage points higher than the state average. The overall staffing vacancy rate was 6.4% as of October 2023, 1.5 percentage points above the state average, adding pressure for all staff to cover shortage areas.

Essex had an average budgeted teacher salary of \$56,284 in the 2023-2024 school year, which is \$14,157 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, Essex is not in a strong position to compete for high-quality educators in the future.