

Lancaster 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 900 students in Lancaster 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. Lancaster 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, Lancaster County spent \$15,461 per student, ranking us 44 out of 131 school divisions in the state. Yet, when adjusted for the high cost of living, the spending power drops to \$14,362 per student and Lancaster County ranks 69 out of Virginia's 131 school divisions.

Lancaster has seen a drop in local per student spending of \$146 or 1% between the 2014-2015 and 2022-2023 school years (adjusted for inflation). The Northern Neck region increased local per pupil spending by 6% over this time.



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 Lancaster County only spent 64%, which is 43 percentage points below the state average. Lancaster would need to spend \$2,908,962 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).

Lancaster County has capacity to do more to raise adequate revenue for its schools. The locality has one of the top revenue capacity scores according to the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts and a low level of fiscal stress. Lancaster County's property tax effort is 21% below the average state rate.

A one penny property tax increase in Lancaster County would raise approximately \$270,000 annually.



Outcomes

Many students lost significant ground on state academic achievement between the 2018-2019 and 2022-2023 school years. Students in Lancaster saw a drop in pass rates on the reading SOL test of 27.9% and 61.4% in math - among the largest declines in the state. Yet further disparities exist, with math SOL pass rates dropping 68.3% for economically disadvantaged students. Lancaster must do more for its students who face significant barriers to education.



Staffing

The teacher vacancy rate in Lancaster was 14.3% as of October 2023, 10.4 percentage points higher than the state average. The overall staffing vacancy rate was 6.8% as of October 2023, 1.9 percentage points above the state average, adding pressure for all staff to cover shortage areas.

Lancaster had an average budgeted teacher salary of \$56,972 in the 2023-2024 school year, which is \$13,469 below the state average. Adjusted for the relatively high cost of living in the locality, the average teacher salary drops to \$52,921. With high salaries and lower cost of living in nearby communities, on top of a dwindling supply of graduates with teaching degrees, Lancaster is not in a strong position to compete for high-quality educators in the future.