

# Lee 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 3,000 students in Lee 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. Lee 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, Lee County spent \$14,337 per student, ranking us 72 out of 131 school divisions in the state.

Lee has seen an increase in local per student spending of \$90 or 5% between the 2014-2015 and 2022-2023 school years (adjusted for inflation). Compared to the regional average for local per student spending, Lee spent a whopping \$1,522 less in the 2022-2023 school year. While Lee 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 Lee County only spent 88%, which is 19 percentage points below the state average. Lee would need to spend \$801,282 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).

Lee County has capacity to do more to raise adequate revenue for its schools. Lee County's property tax effort is 22% below the average state rate.

A one penny property tax increase in Lee County would raise approximately \$100,000 annually.



### Outcomes

Many students lost significant ground on state academic achievement between the 2018-2019 and 2022-2023 school years. Students in Lee saw a drop in pass rates on the reading SOL test of 11.5% and 36.9% in math - among the largest declines in the state. Yet further disparities exist, with math SOL pass rates dropping 47.6% for economically disadvantaged students. Lee must do more for its students who face significant barriers to education.



### Staffing

The teacher vacancy rate in Lee was 1.6% as of October 2023.

Lee had an average budgeted teacher salary of \$55,748 in the 2023-2024 school year, which is \$14,693 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, Lee is not in a strong position to compete for high-quality educators in the future.