

Russell 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 Russell 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. Russell 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, Russell County spent \$13,543 per student, ranking us 92 out of 131 school divisions in the state.

Russell has seen a drop in local per student spending of \$114 or 4% between the 2014-2015 and 2022-2023 school years (adjusted for inflation). Compared to the regional average for local per student spending, Russell spent \$795 less in the 2022-2023 school year. While Russell 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 Russell County only spent 39%, which is 68 percentage points below the state average. Russell would need to spend \$4,177,348 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).

Russell County has capacity to do more to raise adequate revenue for its schools. Russell County's property tax effort is 21% below the average state rate.

A one penny property tax increase in Russell County would raise approximately \$150,000 annually.



Outcomes

Many students lost significant ground on state academic achievement between the 2018-2019 and 2022-2023 school years. Students in Russell saw a drop in pass rates on the reading SOL test of 12.0% and 35.6% in math - among the largest declines in the state. Yet further disparities exist, with math SOL pass rates dropping 44.8% for economically disadvantaged students. Russell must do more for its students who face significant barriers to education.



Staffing

Russell had an average budgeted teacher salary of \$46,474 in the 2023-2024 school year, which is \$23,967 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, Russell is not in a strong position to compete for high-quality educators in the future.