

Salem City 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 Salem 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. Salem 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, Salem City spent \$14,530 per student, ranking us 65 out of 131 school divisions in the state. Yet, when adjusted for the high cost of living, the spending power drops to \$14,159 per student and Salem City ranks 74 out of Virginia's 131 school divisions.

Salem has seen a slight increase in local per student spending of \$20 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 Salem City spent 122%, which is 15 percentage points above the state average.

Salem City has capacity to do more to raise adequate revenue for its schools. The locality has a typical revenue capacity score according to the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts, but does far less than most.

A one penny property tax increase in Salem City would raise approximately \$260,000 annually.



Outcomes

Many students lost significant ground on state academic achievement between the 2018-2019 and 2022-2023 school years. Students in Salem saw a drop in pass rates on the reading SOL test of 8.6% and 26.8% in math - among the largest declines in the state. Yet further disparities exist, with math SOL pass rates dropping 45.8% for English Learners and 40.3% for economically disadvantaged students. Salem must do more for its students who face significant barriers to education.



Staffing

Salem had an average budgeted teacher salary of \$68,411 in the 2023-2024 school year, which is \$2,030 below the state average. Adjusted for the relatively high cost of living in the locality, the average teacher salary drops to \$66,665. With high salaries and lower cost of living in nearby communities, on top of a dwindling supply of graduates with teaching degrees, Salem is not in a strong position to compete for high-quality educators in the future.