

# Suffolk 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 14,000 students in Suffolk 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. Suffolk 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, Suffolk City spent \$13,597 per student, ranking us 91 out of 131 school divisions in the state. Yet, when adjusted for the high cost of living, the spending power drops to \$13,365 per student and Suffolk City ranks 96 out of Virginia's 131 school divisions.

Suffolk has seen an increase in local per student spending of \$607 or 13% between the 2014-2015 and 2022-2023 school years (adjusted for inflation). Compared to the regional average for local per student spending, Suffolk spent \$408 less in the 2022-2023 school year. While Suffolk 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 Suffolk City only spent 96%, which is 11 percentage points below the state average. Suffolk would need to spend \$4,292,489 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).

Suffolk 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 Suffolk City would raise approximately \$1,150,000 annually.



### Outcomes

Many students lost significant ground on state academic achievement between the 2018-2019 and 2022-2023 school years. Students in Suffolk saw a drop in pass rates on the reading SOL test of 10.4% and 50.6% in math - among the largest declines in the state. Yet further disparities exist, with math SOL pass rates dropping 67.9% for English Learners and 68.0% for economically disadvantaged students. Suffolk must do more for its students who face significant barriers to education.



### Staffing

The teacher vacancy rate in Suffolk was 8.6% as of October 2023, 4.7 percentage points higher than the state average. The overall staffing vacancy rate was 9.0% as of October 2023, 4.1 percentage points above the state average, adding pressure for all staff to cover shortage areas.

Suffolk had an average budgeted teacher salary of \$60,975 in the 2023-2024 school year, which is \$9,466 below the state average. Adjusted for the relatively high cost of living in the locality, the average teacher salary drops to \$59,935. With high salaries and lower cost of living in nearby communities, on top of a dwindling supply of graduates with teaching degrees, Suffolk is not in a strong position to compete for high-quality educators in the future.