

WE WILL KNOW EVERY STUDENT

Legislative Agenda



CELL PHONE USE
IN SCHOOLS

REIMAGINED K-12
FUNDING FORMULA

RECRUITMENT OF
BUS DRIVERS

2025

Learning for All

The Albemarle County Public Schools' strategic plan, *Learning for All*, establishes the guidelines by which all decisions pertaining our division are made.

Vision

Our learners are engaged in authentic, challenging, and relevant learning experiences, becoming lifelong contributors and leaders in our dynamic and diverse society.

Mission

Our learners are engaged in authentic, challenging, and relevant learning experiences, becoming lifelong contributors and leaders in our dynamic and diverse society.

Goals

Thriving Students

ACPS will facilitate learning experiences grounded in high expectations, networks of care, and student curiosity to ensure academic and social-emotional development for all students while eliminating opportunity, access and achievement gaps.

Affirming and Empowering Communities

ACPS commits to developing a culturally-responsive environment that respects and champions the diversity of life experiences of all stakeholders and supports the physical and mental health of our students, staff and families so they are actively empowered to engage in our school community.

Equitable, Transformative Resources

ACPS will attract, develop and retain the highest quality staff; develop sustainable and modern facilities, infrastructure and equipment; and distribute all resources in an equitable manner to transform learning experiences and opportunities.

Values

Equity

We will provide every student with the level of support necessary to thrive.

Excellence

We will mitigate barriers and provide opportunities for every student to be academically successful.

Family and Community

We will engage with and share the responsibility for student success with families and community partners.

Wellness

We will support the physical and emotional health of our students and staff.

Who We Are

Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) serves nearly 14,000 students in preschool through 12th grade in Albemarle County, Virginia. Our division boasts a 93% on-time graduation rate with about 56% of our students deciding to continue their education at the next level after graduation and 18% choosing to go directly into employment.

ACPS employs more than 2,700 teachers, administrators and classified staff to serve our division and 64% of our workforce reside in Albemarle County. Nearly 70% of our teachers hold at least a master's degree.

Despite our division outperforming the state average in a number of academic achievement measures, we have seen a persistent gap in the achievements of our students of color and economically disadvantaged students.

That's why, in 2023, we partnered with Bellwether to complete an Instructional Practices Audit. After meeting with students, staff and families over a several-month period, Bellwether identified five main root causes of achievement gaps and recommendations on steps that our division can take to begin to close them.

To this end, several of our legislative priorities for the 2025 Virginia General Assembly support K-12 funding reform in Virginia. If Albemarle County and the Commonwealth of Virginia are to produce a competent and successful workforce, school divisions will need access to funding to implement programs that will help our students succeed.

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Mental Health Supports

The Problem: A growing mental health crisis, exacerbated by the pandemic, has left students without adequate support. Shortages in school counselors leave schools unable to address the wide range of student needs.

Proposed Solution: ACPS supports legislation allowing supervised graduate students to provide counseling services in schools and calls for increased funding for the hiring of full-time school counselors. Following Arizona's model, this approach would both alleviate the shortage and offer practical experience to future professionals.

Cell Phone Use in School

The Problem: Cell phones, while useful tools, often distract students and disrupt the learning environment. Issues like cyberbullying and access to inappropriate content can infiltrate the school day, exacerbating behavioral issues and reducing focus.

Proposed Solution: ACPS supports legislation that empowers school districts to set clear, enforceable guidelines for cell phone usage, such as phone-free zones and designated times for use. By balancing technology with structured usage, schools can minimize distractions while integrating technology responsibly into the curriculum.

Fentanyl Overdoses

The Problem: The rise in fentanyl overdoses poses a significant threat to student safety, with schools becoming a frontline defense in preventing fatalities.

Proposed Solution: ACPS supports legislation requiring all schools to carry naloxone (Narcan) and provide staff with training on its use. Additionally, public awareness campaigns in schools would educate students on the dangers of fentanyl and help to prevent overdose incidents.

Funding Formula That Supports High-Quality Public Education

The Problem: Virginia underfunds K-12 education by approximately \$1,900 per pupil compared to the 50-state average. This shortfall forces school divisions like Albemarle County to shoulder a disproportionate share of educational costs, making it difficult to meet the needs of economically diverse and growing student populations.

Proposed Solution: ACPS supports revising the state's funding formula to better reflect the true local costs of providing a high-quality public education. This includes removing outdated Great Recession-era cost-saving measures, recognizing cost-of-living variations, and increasing funding for divisions with high numbers of English learners, economically disadvantaged students, and those requiring special education and mental health services.

IEP Reform

The Problem: The current IEP process is bogged down by excessive paperwork, limiting the time educators can spend directly supporting students with special needs.

Proposed Solution: ACPS advocates for legislation that implements digital IEP systems, similar to Illinois' model, which would reduce the paperwork burden on educators and improve tracking of student progress. This shift would allow educators to spend more time focusing on personalized student support and less on administrative tasks.

Restorative Justice

The Problem: Traditional punitive measures like suspensions and expulsions disproportionately affect marginalized students, which leads to long-term negative outcomes including higher dropout rates and involvement in the criminal justice system.

Proposed Solution: ACPS supports legislation that mandates restorative justice practices in schools, requiring these methods to be used before resorting to suspensions or expulsions, except in extreme cases. Restorative justice encourages accountability and helps rebuild community ties, rather than isolating students from educational opportunities.

Recruitment of Bus Drivers

The Problem: A significant shortage of bus drivers has made it difficult for school divisions to safely and efficiently transport students. Existing state retirement practices, including a mandatory six-month break in service for retirees, limit the pool of potential bus drivers.

Proposed Solution: ACPS supports shortening the break-in-service requirement for bus drivers, making it easier for retired Virginia Retirement System (VRS) members to return to work during times of critical shortage.

Local Composite Index (LCI)

The Problem: The current LCI, which determines state aid for school divisions, fails to adequately reflect the actual costs of educating students with varying needs. This has resulted in inequitable resource distribution, particularly for higher-cost regions like Albemarle County.

Proposed Solution: ACPS advocates for replacing the LCI with a per-pupil funding model that equitably distributes resources based on student needs, including cost-of-living adjustments and extra funding for students requiring special services such as English language learning and mental health support.

Workforce Development and Alternative Pathways to Teaching

The Problem: Virginia faces a persistent teacher shortage, particularly in high-demand areas like STEM, special education, and early childhood education. Traditional teacher preparation programs are not producing enough qualified educators to meet demand.

Proposed Solution: ACPS supports restoring and expanding state funding for alternative teacher pathways such as apprenticeship models, teacher residencies, and career-switcher programs. These models offer practical, cost-effective routes into teaching, allowing candidates to "earn while they learn" and address critical workforce gaps.

Free School Meals

The Problem: Families who don't qualify for federal free and reduced-price meal programs but struggle to afford school meals often accumulate meal debt, negatively impacting students' well-being and academic performance.

Proposed Solution: ACPS supports legislation requiring free meals for all public school students in Virginia, eliminating meal debt and stigma. Universal free meals would ensure all students, regardless of income, have access to nutritious meals during the school day, leading to better academic and social outcomes.

Solar Opportunities for Schools

The Problem: Ever-changing regulations and technical requirements for solar panel installation have increased costs and delayed projects, negatively impacting school divisions' ability to implement sustainable energy solutions.

Proposed Solution: ACPS supports legislation that provides cost recovery measures to offset the impact of additional equipment and regulatory requirements, making it more feasible for schools to adopt solar energy solutions.

Safe Technology Use on School Buses

The Problem: Current Virginia law restricts the use of wireless telecommunications devices by bus drivers, preventing the adoption of technology that could enhance student safety and streamline operations.

Proposed Solution: ACPS supports legislative changes allowing the use of safe, hands-free technology on school buses for student tracking, communication and route management. By modernizing the law, school divisions can improve safety without compromising driver focus.

Enhancements to the Virginia Retirement System

The Problem: Diminishing retirement benefits have made public-sector employment less attractive, hindering efforts to recruit and retain high-quality educators.

Proposed Solution: ACPS supports enhancements to the Virginia Retirement System, including increasing the employer contribution to the VRS Hybrid Plan and restoring the competitiveness of public-sector retirement benefits, particularly for education employees.

Collaborative Procurement

The Problem: Virginia's procurement process is slow, inefficient and often redundant. This leads to delays and increased administrative costs for public entities like school divisions.

Proposed Solution: ACPS supports legislation expanding collaborative procurement opportunities, allowing multiple agencies to pool their purchasing power, reduce costs, and streamline procurement timelines. Joint contracts and a centralized procurement platform would lead to significant cost savings and efficiency gains.



ALBEMARLE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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