

MINUTES
ALBEMARLE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD BUSINESS MEETING
Thursday, March 6, 2025
[Video Link](#)

ROLL CALL - UPON THE ROLL BEING CALLED, THE FOLLOWING WERE PRESENT:

BOARD MEMBERS - Dr. Kate Acuff, Dr. Rebecca Berlin, Ms. Judy Le, Ms. Ellen Osborne, Mr. Graham Paige, Ms. Leslie Pryor, Ms. Allison Spillman, and Student Representative Cam Roper

ABSENT – None

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE - Superintendent Matthew Haas; School Division Counsel Josiah Black; Assistant School Division Counsel Erin Stone; Assistant Superintendent Clare Keiser; Assistant Superintendent Daphne Keiser; Assistant Superintendent Chandra Hayes; Assistant Superintendent Patrick McLaughlin; Chief Operating Officer Rosalyn Schmitt; Public Affairs and Strategic Communications Officer Helen Dunn; and Clerk of the Board Christine Thompson

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1.0 OPENING ACTIVITIES

Agenda Item No. 1.1 Call to Order - At 6:30 p.m., Chair Acuff called the Albemarle County School Board meeting to order.

Agenda Item No. 1.2 - Roll Call

Agenda Item No. 1.3 – Pledge of Allegiance

Agenda Item No. 1.4 - Moment of Silence

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2.0 APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Agenda Item No. 2.1 Approval of Agenda – Dr. Berlin offered a **motion** to approve the agenda. Ms. Le seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Ms. Spillman, Ms. Pryor, Dr. Berlin, Mr. Paige, Ms. Osborne, Ms. Le, and Chair Acuff

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 7:0:0 vote

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3.0 BUDGET WORK SESSION - This was the second Budget Work Session following the Draft Funding Request presentation. Staff presented more detailed information about the [Draft Funding Request – An Investment in Our Future](#)

Statement of Superintendent Dr. Matthew Haas:

“Good evening, Chair Acuff, Vice Chair Berlin, School Board members, and staff.

As we begin tonight's budget conversation, I want to step back and focus on the big picture—or rather, a big window. Like the windows in this auditorium. You can't see the windows. I don't think I've ever been here and seen them because of the blinds. But I did take a picture outside today, and those windows are really pretty magnificent when you take a good look at them. I imagine a long time ago, when they would have assemblies here, they would use the windows for lighting—to let in some daylight.

I want us to think about a window. Albemarle County Public Schools is that window. Our Strategic Plan is that window. *Learning for All* is that window. Our children are the window through which we view our work.

Members of our community usually view us through the windowpane that best represents their experience and perspective, focusing on the priority that matters most to them. And this is entirely understandable, because we all have different needs, fears, and expectations as we relate to the school system and the schools.

Parents, caregivers, and families are focused on student learning, safety, and their children's well-being—that's their windowpane.

Teachers and staff—dedication to instruction, resources, and professional support.
Students—engaged in learning, growth, and opportunities for the future.

Our community members have a windowpane of interest in the school's role and partnership with the broader community.

Our taxpayers are focused on responsible stewardship of resources and investment in education—and a return on that investment.

School Board and leadership—our windowpane is often a commitment to strategic planning, policy, and long-term, sustainable success.

It is critical that we listen to our community members to understand and give voice to their ideas, worries, and concerns.

As we work through this challenging planning process, we aim to keep the whole window intact. We want to keep the child intact at home. We want to keep our mission intact.

No matter the choices ahead, we must remain focused on our mission.

The purpose of this process is to provide you with clear, transparent information to answer your questions so that you have what you need to have thoughtful conversations and make informed decisions. And I'm really proud of their work.

Transparency is essential—we strive to give you a clear picture of ACPS's needs, opportunities, and constraints to chart the best operational path forward together.

We will soon have a spending plan—it's inevitable—for the 2025–26 school year. Regardless of the available resources, our mission remains the same. We will take what we have to work with and do the very best we can with it for our children, families, and staff.

And this will be ok. It will be more than ok.

And we'll get through it—we always do.

Thank you.”

Agenda Item No. 3.1 – Budget Work Session #2 - This was the second Budget Work Session following the Draft Funding Request presentation.

Market Compensation – Increase Proposal

Dr. Berlin questioned whether ACPS has consistently lagged behind other districts, such as Charlottesville City Schools (CCS), in terms of teacher salaries, particularly concerning the proposed increases. Director of Employee Services, Mr. Brodie Downs, explained that historically, the salary differences between CCS and ACPS have been minimal, often just a few hundred dollars annually. However, ACPS's recent proposed salary adjustments represent a significant leap, especially in the master's degree scale, where they have increased salaries by \$400–\$500. Over the past five years, ACPS has outpaced CCS in salary growth, particularly in the master's degree scale. While CCS has focused on the master's degree scale due to its relevance to current staff and new hires, the bachelor's degree scale gap between CCS and ACPS is even more pronounced, indicating a broader disparity.

Dr. Berlin expressed enthusiasm about the proposed increases for special education assistants and transportation staff, emphasizing the importance of these roles in retaining staff and addressing challenges faced by the district. Mr. Downs highlighted that the proposed budget for the 2025 fiscal year includes funding for 21 positions and seven expenses, such as special education instructional assistants and care and safety assistants. These positions aim to support the district's staffing needs and enhance services for students with disabilities. Additionally, the budget seeks \$2.5 million for salary increases and \$1.3 million for other recurring contractual items, including security software and tuition reimbursements. The discussion underscored the competitive challenges ACPS faces in attracting and retaining qualified staff, particularly in special education and transportation roles. The proposed budget aims to address these challenges by enhancing compensation and support for critical positions.

Dr. Acuff asked for clarification on how the division's compensation for classified staff compares to that of other school divisions, particularly in relation to recent salary increases. Mr. Downs addressed the competitiveness of the division's compensation by examining salary structures across various school divisions. He noted that:

- Historically, salary differences between divisions have been minimal, often amounting to a few hundred dollars annually.
- Recent proposals, such as a 7% increase in certain divisions, have widened the gap, especially for teachers.
- For classified staff, the market trend appears to be an approximate 3% increase.

Contextual Data:

- Nationally, employers are projecting average salary increases of about 3.5% for 2025, a slight decrease from previous years.

The division's current compensation strategy for classified staff aligns with broader market trends, offering approximately a 3% increase. However, neighboring divisions are implementing more substantial raises, potentially impacting the division's competitiveness in attracting and retaining classified staff.

Bellwether Implementation

Dr. Acuff inquired about the duration of HMH's support for teachers, seeking clarity on how long the professional learning services would be available. Executive Director of Curriculum, Assessment &

Instruction, Craig Dommer, responded that the district is in the process of finalizing the contract with HMH. The agreement includes provisions for professional learning sessions, which are typically renewed annually. Additionally, the district plans to offer supplementary professional learning opportunities this year. These sessions will be integrated into the onboarding process for new teachers to ensure they receive the necessary training. The district is working to finalize the contract with HMH, which will provide professional learning support for teachers. These services are typically renewed annually, with additional training opportunities planned for the current year to support both current and new staff.

Scholars Studio Sustainability

Dr. Berlin asked about the enrollment figures for the 9th-grade studio program, specifically inquiring about the percentage of 9th graders participating and the total number of students involved. Health and Science Curriculum Coordinator, Katina Dudley, provided the following details:

- **123 9th graders** have registered for the studio program for the upcoming year.
- **36 8th graders** are projected to join the program in the following year.

She highlighted that this is the first year the program is being offered to 9th graders, and the initial interest indicates a strong alignment with student demand. The studio program is part of the district's broader curriculum offerings, which include a range of courses culminating in over 30 college-level classes on the AP or dual-enrollment level. The course selection process typically takes place in January and February, with events such as a high school curriculum fair and meetings with counselors to assist students in making informed choices.

Mr. Paige sought information on how details about the studio program were being communicated to students and their families. Curriculum Coordinator for Career and Technical Education, Meagan Maynard, outlined the comprehensive efforts undertaken to disseminate information:

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Collaborated extensively with school counselors, engaging in multiple sessions to ensure they are well-informed and can effectively relay information.
- **Leadership Involvement:** School leaders have been actively involved in promoting the program, ensuring consistent messaging and support.
- **Community Outreach:** Organized several community meetings to engage families directly, providing platforms for discussion and information sharing.
- **Curriculum Fairs and Events:** Participated in both middle and high school curriculum fairs, offering detailed information and answering questions from students and parents.
- **Targeted Communication:** In late January, hosted two virtual community meetings specifically for current 8th-grade families, ensuring they received detailed information about the program and its benefits. Invitations were sent to all 8th-grade families, emphasizing the program's relevance to their upcoming transition to high school.

The district has implemented a multifaceted communication strategy to ensure that information about the studio program reaches all stakeholders effectively. These efforts reflect a commitment to transparency and active engagement with the school community.

Ms. Spillman sought clarification on the following points:

- The percentage of students enrolled in the studio program who are from the Western feeder schools.

- The capacity of the studio facilities, given that not all students will be present simultaneously.

Ms. Dudley, provided detailed information regarding enrollment and facility capacity:

- Western Feeder Schools Enrollment:
 - Specific percentages of students from the Western feeder schools participating in the studio program were not provided during the meeting. Ms. Dudley offered to retrieve this data for further clarification.
- Facility Capacities:
 - Ace Academy at Lane: Designed to accommodate up to 800 students, with a daily attendance of 400 students on each of the two daily sessions.
 - Center 1: Capable of hosting 120 students per day.
- Enrollment Projections and Cohort Management:
 - Enrollment is monitored by cohort (grade level). For the upcoming year:
 - Rising 9th Graders: 60 students enrolled, meeting the target for the cohort.
 - Rising 10th Graders: Enrollment did not reach the target of 60 students.
 - The goal is to maintain consistent enrollment of 60 students per cohort to optimize facility usage and program effectiveness.
- Future Enrollment Considerations:
 - The district is assessing enrollment numbers to determine the feasibility of utilizing additional spaces, such as the Center 2 facility. Decisions will be influenced by student interest and capacity considerations.

The studio program's enrollment and facility usage are being carefully managed to align with student interest and available resources. Continuous monitoring will inform decisions about utilizing additional spaces and ensuring the program meets the needs of all students.

Intensive Support Centers

Ms. Spillman sought information on the cost per student for private day special education placements and how that compares to the costs associated with the district's in-house programs, such as the Integrated Center. Director of Special Education, Katy Compel responded:

- **Private Day Placements:** The average annual cost for a private day special education placement is approximately \$144,000, which includes tuition, room, and board.
- **In-House Programs:** The district's in-house programs, such as the ISC, are designed to provide services at a significantly lower cost, aiming to serve students effectively within the public school system.

Ms. Spillman inquired about the number of students traditionally placed in private day schools and the associated costs, expressing concerns about the safety implications of integrating younger students with older ones in the same facility. Ms. Compel explained that the district is implementing separate classrooms within the same building to ensure age-appropriate groupings, thereby addressing safety and developmental concerns. The ISC program will offer distinct classes for elementary, middle, and high school students to maintain appropriate age groupings and ensure safety.

Ms. Spillman also raised concerns about feedback from post-high school teachers and faculty who felt they were not consulted regarding decisions that impact their students, particularly in relation to the inclusion of students in the ISC program. Ms. Compel explained that the district has been gathering

feedback from students and families over the past 18 months, indicating a desire for more comprehensive services beyond daily living skills. The expansion of the ISC program is intended to provide students with opportunities to develop job readiness skills, such as using public transportation and adhering to work schedules, which are not adequately addressed in the current setup.

- **Program Costs:** The district is evaluating the per-student cost for the ISC program, including expenses for additional instructors and services, to ensure financial sustainability and effectiveness.
- **Faculty Feedback:** The district acknowledges the importance of consulting with faculty and staff to ensure that program decisions align with the needs and expectations of those directly involved in student education.

The discussion highlighted the district's commitment to providing cost-effective, age-appropriate, and comprehensive educational services for students with special needs. Efforts are being made to balance financial considerations with the need for specialized support, while also addressing faculty concerns and ensuring the safety and well-being of all students involved in the ISC program.

School Resource Officers

Ms. Osborne inquired about the training requirements for School Resource Officers (SROs) and the potential replacement of safety coaches. Director of School Safety & Security, Ralph Bradley responded that SROs are required to complete 40 hours of specialized training over a two-year period. This training includes certification and ongoing educational requirements to ensure they are equipped to handle the unique challenges of working in a school environment.

Dr. Acuff expressed support for the roles of safety coaches, noting their collaborative efforts with school administration to monitor buildings and address student matters effectively. She emphasized that while SROs play a critical role, safety coaches and school security officers also contribute significantly to maintaining a safe school environment.

Mr. Bradley pointed out the following:

- **Safety Coaches and SROs Collaboration:** Safety coaches and SROs work together with school administration to ensure the safety and well-being of students. Their roles are complementary, with each bringing unique skills and perspectives to the school safety team.
- **Training and Certification:** The training and certification of SROs are designed to prepare them for the specific demands of working within a school setting, focusing on areas such as conflict resolution, student behavior, and emergency response.
- **Role of Safety Coaches:** Safety coaches play a vital role in supporting students and staff, providing additional resources and assistance in maintaining a positive and secure school environment.

The discussion highlighted the importance of both SROs and safety coaches in creating a safe and supportive school environment. Their collaborative efforts, supported by appropriate training and certification, are essential in addressing the diverse needs of students and ensuring school safety.

Dr. Berlin inquired about the locations and roles of SROs and safety coaches within the district. One SRO is assigned to Albemarle High School. Each secondary school (middle and high schools) has one safety coach.

Dr. Acuff inquired about summer availability. Safety coaches are available throughout the summer to support schools as needed. Additionally, safety coaches assist in conducting security assessments and receive training to ensure effective implementation.

Ms. Spillman expressed concerns regarding the proposed introduction of SROs into schools, highlighting several key points:

1. **Survey Data Interpretation:** She noted a discrepancy in survey results, pointing out that while 82–84% of students reported feeling safe, 85% were unaware of the presence of an SRO, suggesting potential issues with the data's accuracy.
2. **Community Feedback:** Ms. Spillman emphasized strong opposition from the community, particularly in the Western feeder pattern, to the introduction of SROs. She felt that the community's concerns had not been adequately addressed in the decision-making process.
3. **Equity and Resource Allocation:** She questioned the equity of assigning SROs uniformly across all schools without clear evidence of need, suggesting that resources should be allocated based on specific school requirements rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.
4. **Safety Coaches vs. SROs:** Ms. Spillman expressed support for maintaining safety coaches, viewing them as integral to the school environment. She was concerned that replacing safety coaches with SROs might be perceived as a cost-cutting measure rather than a genuine enhancement of safety services.
5. **Request for Principal Feedback:** She called for input from school principals on the matter, valuing their perspectives on whether SROs are necessary and beneficial for their specific school communities.

Ms. Spillman advocated for a thoughtful, data-driven approach to school safety, one that considers community sentiments, equitable resource distribution, and the insights of school leadership.

Dr. Beth Costa, Principal of Monticello High School:

- **Shared SRO Model:** This year, Monticello High School has been collaborating with a trained officer who serves multiple schools. While the officer is not permanently stationed at Monticello, he can be deployed as needed.
- **Team Approach:** Dr. Costa emphasized the importance of a collaborative team that includes administrators, counselors, mental health practitioners, school safety officers, and SROs. She noted that each role serves distinct functions, and the combined efforts contribute to a comprehensive safety strategy.

Ms. Jennifer Sublette, Principal of Western Albemarle High School:

- **Transition from SRO to Safety Coach:** Ms. Sublette shared her experience of transitioning from having an SRO to working with a school safety coach. She highlighted the safety coach's deep connections within the community and the proactive, preventative measures they bring to the role.
- **Challenges with Shared SRO:** While the shared SRO, Officer Lily, has been effective when available, Ms. Sublette pointed out logistical challenges. The officer's duties across multiple schools can lead to delays in communication and response times, especially when immediate assistance is required.

Key Insights:

- **Distinct Roles:** Both principals acknowledged the distinct roles of SROs and safety coaches. SROs provide law enforcement expertise and immediate response capabilities, while safety coaches focus on building relationships and implementing preventative measures.
- **Resource Allocation:** The principals highlighted the challenges associated with limited resources, especially when safety personnel are shared across multiple schools. They emphasized the need for thoughtful consideration of staffing to ensure that each school's unique needs are met effectively.

The principals advocate for a balanced approach that leverages the strengths of both SROs and safety coaches, ensuring that each school has the appropriate resources to maintain a safe and supportive environment for students.

Education Foundation

Ms. Spillman inquired about the status of the Education Foundation position. Ms. Kumazawa clarified that the position was frozen in FY25 but is not included in the list of reductions. It will be eligible to be filled as of July 1, with a total cost of approximately \$176,000 including benefits.

Staffing Reduction

Dr. Acuff asked for clarification on the School Board staffing reduction, specifically whether the “1” referred to the unfilled Assistant to the Clerk position. Ms. Kumazawa confirmed that this position has been officially reduced.

Foreign Language in Elementary Schools (FLES)

Ms. Spillman asked why staff at Mountain View Elementary chose to prioritize maintaining a FTE position over continuing certain class offerings.

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Clare Keiser responded:

- The decision at Mountain View was based on a review of school data and a focus on equity and student outcomes.
- The school leadership team opted to shift from a pull-out Spanish instruction model (PLUS) to a dual language immersion model, allowing all students to receive Spanish instruction throughout the day rather than just a subset.
- This shift supported a more inclusive and consistent instructional experience.
- Due to both previous language teachers not returning, the principal at the time requested to use the available FTE for literacy intervention support instead, which was based on student academic achievement data.
- The choice was not a reflection on the value of the language program but rather an effort to address more immediate academic needs within the school.

Dr. Acuff expressed skepticism about the academic benefits of dual language immersion, noting that many studies showing cognitive benefits are based on homogeneous populations with more intensive instruction than what ACPS offers. At Mountain View—ACPS’s most intensive and longstanding immersion program—achievement data does not show a measurable academic boost compared to

schools like Greer. While supportive of evaluating different program benefits, Dr. Acuff emphasized that existing data within the division does not reflect the broader cognitive gains cited in some of the literature. She also acknowledged that the field is still developing, especially considering historical state-level legislation impacting bilingual education.

Ms. Le affirmed that foreign language instruction is beneficial, especially for young children, and shared personal support based on her own upbringing. She emphasized the importance of diversity and inclusion, especially during a time when many groups are being marginalized. Ms. Le recognized the emotional and cultural value of these programs but also acknowledged the current budget constraints and the need to make difficult decisions with a broader, long-term view of school needs and equity across the division.

Ms. Osborne asked whether there are examples of schools with well-rounded and well-designed world language programs at the elementary level that Albemarle County could look to as models for future implementation. She noted that the FLES program may not have yielded strong results in its current form but affirmed the belief that world language instruction remains valuable. Ms. Osborne suggested that if the Board were to revisit world language programming in the future, it would be beneficial to have a division-wide program design or implementation guide to ensure it is done effectively and equitably. Staff responded that this is possible and noted that it is a focus area for the Virginia Organization of World Language Supervisors, and mentioned an upcoming meeting related to this topic.

Board Discussion

Dr. Berlin reflected on the emotional difficulty of the decisions the Board is facing, emphasizing that none of them ran for office to make cuts; they all ran in support of public education, and many have their own children in public schools. She highlighted the value of programs like field trips and work-based learning, noting their lasting impact on students and the importance of exposing students to the broader world—especially those who may not otherwise have that opportunity. Dr. Berlin urged the public to recognize the challenging position the Board is in, trying to make the best possible decisions while staying within limited resources.

Dr. Acuff added that the division is in this position largely due to instability in the state's education funding formula. She pointed out that if the state had maintained its funding level from two years ago, the division would not be facing this budget gap—estimating the loss at around \$10 million.

Ms. Le commented that the funding pool feels too small, and ACPS is competing with other divisions for limited state resources, adding to the strain.

Board members expressed **frustration, sadness, and concern** over the difficult budget decisions facing the division. Many emphasized that while they expected tough choices, the impact on children, teachers, and school communities remains deeply painful.

1. Frustration with State and Local Funding

- Members voiced frustration with the lack of sufficient funding from the state and uncertainty about additional support from the Board of Supervisors.
- Dr. Acuff and others noted that the current shortfall wouldn't exist if state funding levels had remained stable over the past two years.
- Several members emphasized the importance of needs-based budgeting and communicating transparently to the Board of Supervisors about the real impacts of proposed cuts.

2. Concerns About Public Engagement

- Board members expressed disappointment that the public hearing occurred before the full list of proposed reductions was shared, limiting community feedback.
- There was agreement on the value of more time for public input and calls for continuing the conversation even beyond the official hearing.

3. Reallocation and Program Trade-Offs

- Debate emerged around reallocating funds—for example:
 - The \$200,000 salary for the Education Foundation position was contrasted with the desire to retain school safety coaches.
 - Some members, including Ms. Osborne, suggested that certain reductions (e.g., deferring Center 2 for a year or reconsidering the instructional coaching model) made sense in the current climate, even if not ideal.

4. Equity and Strategic Planning

- Equity in program distribution and decision-making was raised, especially as board members weighed division-wide impact vs. individual school needs.
- There was discussion about how to prioritize cuts and investments while staying aligned with long-term strategic goals.

5. Calls for Realistic, Unified Action

- Several members acknowledged that reducing the full \$5.5 million gap would be challenging and that a smaller, consensus-driven package of reductions may be more realistic.
- There was a call to be clear about what's included in the Superintendent's proposal vs. what the Board will ultimately recommend, particularly for the April 17 joint presentation with the Board of Supervisors.

6. Next Steps and Process

- School Division Counsel, Josiah Black recommended 2x2 meetings for the coming week to allow board members to further discuss options and preferences without violating open meeting laws.
- Chair Acuff and Vice Chair Berlin will work to synthesize feedback from these meetings to prepare a final budget recommendation for the April 17 presentation.

Ms. Le offered a **motion** to accept a set of proposed budget cuts listed in the first column of the Superintendent's presentation (slide 50). With a key exception to specifically exclude the reduction of student safety coach positions from the accepted list of cuts. Ms. Osborne seconded the **motion**. **A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Ms. Pryor, Dr. Berlin, Ms. Osborne, Mr. Paige, Ms. Spillman, Ms. Le, and Chair Acuff

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 7:0:0 vote

The updated **budget gap was stated as \$5.25 million**, establishing a new starting point for further reductions or decisions.

Next Steps



Regular Business Meeting

- ▶ School Board Approves Funding Request
- ▶ Regular Public Comment



Board of Supervisors Work Session

- ▶ School Board Presents Funding Request



Regular Business Meeting

- ▶ Additional Requested Information
- ▶ Regular Public Comment



Regular Work Session

- ▶ Additional Requested Information
- ▶ Regular Public Comment



Regular Business Meeting

- ▶ School Board Adopts Budget

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AGENDA ITEM NO. 9.0 OTHER BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 9.1 Other Business by the Board Members and the Superintendent – None

Agenda Item No. 9.2 Closed Meeting – none.

Agenda Item No. 9.3 Closed Meeting Certification – none.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 9.0 ADJOURNMENT - At 9:13 p.m., hearing no objections, Chair Acuff adjourned the meeting of the Albemarle County School Board.

Clerk

Chair