

# Albemarle County Public Schools Legislative Advocacy Packet

## Virginia General Assembly – 2025 Session

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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.

Supporting Data:

- [Arizona's school counseling internship legislation](#)
- [NAMI report on post-pandemic mental health needs](#)

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### → Cell Phone Use in Schools

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 tech responsibly into the curriculum.

Supporting Data:

- [France's phone-free school policy implementation](#)

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→ **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, helping to prevent overdose incidents.

Supporting Data:

- [California's naloxone mandate for schools](#)
- [Virginia opioid crisis response](#)

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→ **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.

Supporting Data:

- [JLARC report on Virginia's education funding gap](#)
- [Virginia's SOQ funding shortfalls compared to local spending](#)

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→ **1 cent sales tax**

A proposed code change in Virginia seeks to allow local governments to levy a 1% sales tax specifically to fund school construction and renovation projects. Under current law, only a few localities have the authority to impose such a tax, but the proposed legislation would expand this power to all counties and cities across the state. The tax would need to be approved by local voters through a referendum.

This initiative is seen as a critical step in addressing the \$25 billion needed to replace aging schools across Virginia, especially in rural and economically struggling areas. For example, many schools are over 50 years old and in dire need of renovation. Proponents of the bill argue that it gives local

communities more control over how to finance these projects, which is crucial for keeping schools safe and functional.

However, some lawmakers express concern that relying on local referendums might not be sufficient to meet the broader statewide need for funding school improvements. They suggest that a statewide approach to funding might be a better solution

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### → **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.

Supporting Data:

- Illinois' digital IEP legislation [Illinois State Board of Education, 2023]
- Virginia Department of Education's special education report [VDOE, 2023]

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### → **Restorative Justice**

The Problem: Traditional punitive measures like suspensions and expulsions disproportionately affect marginalized students, leading 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.

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### → **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.

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## → **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.

Supporting Data:

- [JLARC study on funding disparities across Virginia's school divisions](#)
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## → **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.

Supporting Data:

- U.S. Department of Labor apprenticeship funding for K-12 teachers
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## → **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.

Supporting Data:

- [Research on the benefits of free school meals](#)
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## → 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.

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## → Code Change to Allow for 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.

Supporting Data:

- [Examples of student tracking systems](#)
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## → Enhancements to 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.

Supporting Data:

- [Comparison of public vs. private sector benefits](#)
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## → Collaborative Procurement

The Problem: Virginia's procurement process is slow, inefficient, and often redundant, leading 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.

Supporting Data:

- [Case studies on cooperative procurement savings](#)

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