

Salem City Schools



2025 Legislative Priorities

Proposed: November 12, 2024

Vision: The Salem City School Division envisions a future where every student reaches their full potential. These priorities advocate for legislative changes essential to realizing this vision.

Legislative Priorities Overview: During the 2025 General Assembly session, numerous issues impacting Virginia's public schools will be addressed. The Salem City School Board will communicate its positions to our elected representatives, urging collaboration on legislation that directly affects the children of Salem.

1. Local Control

- **Position:** Public education, while a national priority and state responsibility, fundamentally operates at the local level. The Salem City School Board urges elected representatives to empower local boards with the flexibility to innovate and meet the unique needs of their communities.

2. School Funding

- **Position:** Virginia should fully fund all state mandates, allowing local boards to have primary authority over the implementation and use of state resources. While the 2024 General Assembly session addressed some recommendations from the July 2023 JLARC report on SOQ funding, further action is needed.
- **Recommendations:**
 - Remove the cap on support positions and reinstate non-personal cost categories from FY09 and FY10.
 - Use division averages, rather than linear weighted averages, to calculate salary and cost assumptions.
 - Adjust SOQ to include all central office positions, eliminate caps on non-personal costs, and account for facilities staff costs.
 - Use a three-year average for local composite index calculations, reflecting recent data more accurately.
 - Support state funding for career and technical education updates that align with evolving workforce needs.
 - Use lottery and casino profits to fund school construction and maintenance as part of basic state aid.
 - Expand funding for recovery high schools in all eight superintendent regions to support students dealing with substance abuse.
 - Fund all mandatory training for school staff in full.

3. Teacher Shortage

- **Position:** The teacher shortage, compounded by the need for increased diversity, is critical. Addressing this requires a multi-faceted approach.
- **Recommendations:**
 - Increase teacher salaries to exceed the national average and match those in comparable fields.
 - Make licensure requirements more flexible to improve the teacher pipeline.
 - Allow locally awarded licenses to be renewable at the superintendent's discretion.
 - Simplify the process for teachers to add endorsements in high-need areas such as counseling and mathematics.

- Provide funding for recruitment and retention initiatives like loan forgiveness, daycare, and housing assistance.
- Fund SOQ positions by function, rather than title or licensure, allowing divisions to hire staff to meet current needs.

4. **Assessment**

- **Position:** Salem City Schools supports the use of SOL tests for mastery and growth but seeks additional assessment options.
- **Recommendations:**
 - Maintain current SOL cut scores.
 - Develop alternative assessments for students in special education who follow the general curriculum but require support.
 - Foster assessment and data literacy among stakeholders.
 - Build a comprehensive accountability system using multiple measures of essential learning outcomes.
 - Reduce the number of mandatory proficiency tests.
 - Extend local growth assessment options.

5. **Accountability and Accreditation**

- **Position:** We support efforts to separate accountability from accreditation and recommend improvements to metrics.
- **Recommendations:**
 - Amend the definition of chronic absenteeism to differentiate types of absences.
 - Exclude non-participating students from the accountability calculations where participation is declined by parental choice.
 - Engage educational stakeholders in developing performance tasks before implementing them in 2025-2026.
 - Retain the Graduation and Completion Index as the Graduation Indicator.
 - Maintain 11-semester guidance for English Learner SOL testing.
 - Replace the “Off Track” category with “Needs Support.”

6. **Student/School Safety**

- **Position:** The safety of students and staff is paramount. Additional support for safety and mental health services is critical.
- **Recommendations:**
 - Increase state funding and flexibility for school-specific safety measures.
 - Enhance mental health resources in schools.
 - Require internet companies operating in Virginia to cooperate with law enforcement during investigations of online school threats.

7. **Dual Enrollment and the Virginia Community College System**

- **Position:** Dual enrollment is a vital component of secondary education.
- **Recommendations:**
 - Allow greater flexibility in assigning high school staff to dual enrollment courses.
 - Secure dedicated state funding to cover dual enrollment costs under the College and Career Ready Virginia Program (HB1087/SB 627), so that students and schools can participate without additional financial burdens.