

Salem City Schools



2024 Legislative Priorities

Proposed: November 14, 2023

Vision: The Salem City School Division envisions a future where every Salem student reaches his or her full potential. These priorities advocate for the necessary legislative changes to make our vision a reality.

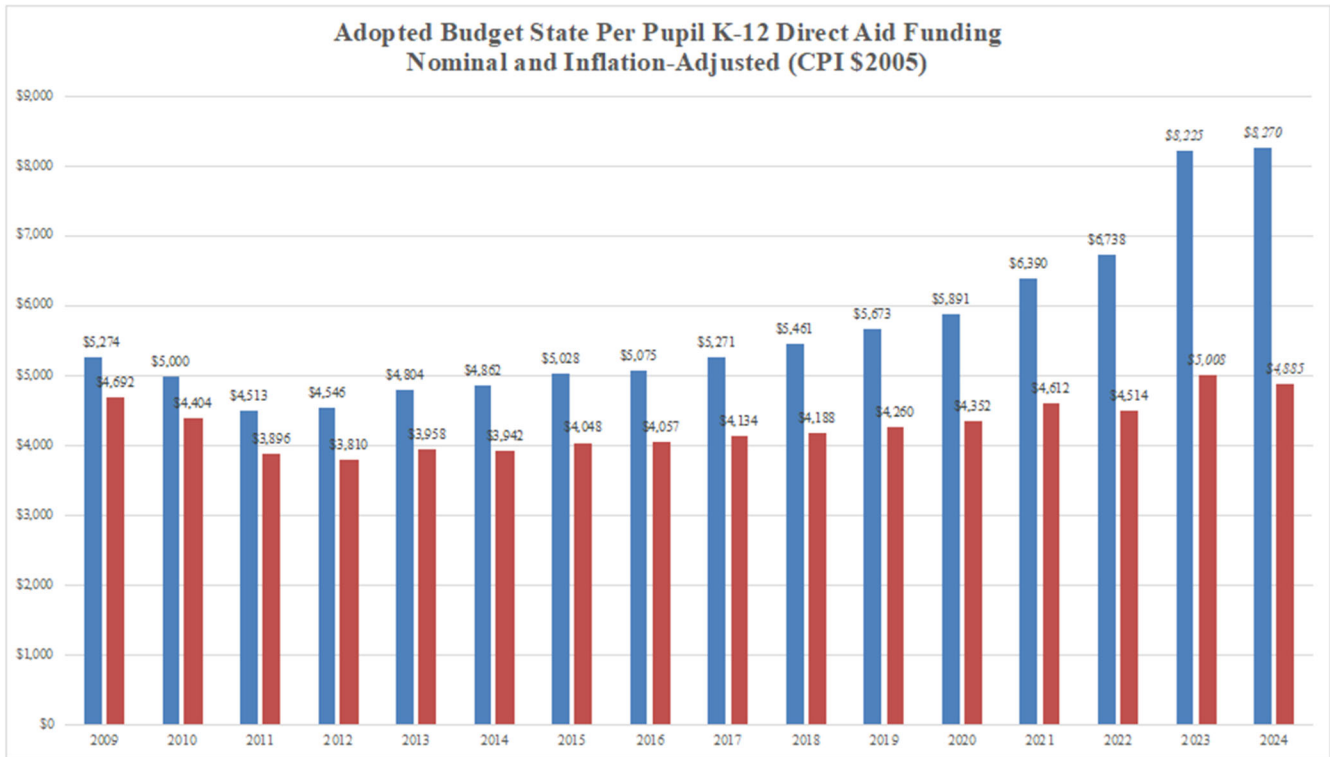
Legislative Priorities: The 2024 session of the General Assembly will consider numerous issues of importance to the Commonwealth's public schools. Positions adopted by the Board will be communicated to elected representatives who are urged to contact the Board and Superintendent regarding legislation with implications for Salem's children.

2024 State Legislative Priorities

- **Local Control** – Teaching and learning are extremely complex processes. While public education is a national priority and a state responsibility, it is ultimately a local function. The Salem City School Board urges elected representatives to create the conditions that facilitate innovation by supporting local School Board authority to meet the unique needs of the communities served.
- **School Funding** – The Salem City School Board urges the General Assembly to adopt a state budget that fully funds its commitment to teaching and learning and encourages implementation of the following recommendations of the July 2023 JLARC report on SOQ funding:
 - Eliminate the cap on support positions. Partial “rollbacks” of the Support Staff Cap were implemented by the General Assembly in the 2022 and 2023 Sessions. SCS urges full repeal of this Great Recession budget tactic and to re-instate the cost categories removed in FY09 and FY10.
 - Calculate salary and other cost assumptions using the division average, rather than the linear weighted average artificially.
 - Change the local composite index to be calculated using a three-year average of the most recently available data, rather than a single year of data every other year.
- **Employee Compensation** – The Salem City School Board recognizes and appreciates the needed investments in teacher pay made by the General Assembly in recent years, but even those commendable efforts have not kept pace with inflation. There are many factors contributing to the teacher shortage, but compensation remains a primary disincentive. Teacher compensation in Virginia significantly lags the national average, an average skewed by Northern Virginia Districts that receive “cost of competing” funds. Our region also needs increased competitiveness for teachers and other employee groups that are significantly behind the market (CDL drivers for school buses, for example).
- **Assessment Reform** – The Commonwealth of Virginia has successfully implemented performance-based assessments in multiple grade levels and content areas. Further modernization of the system is necessary. The General Assembly is encouraged to reduce 1990s-era fixed-response assessments to the Federal Minimum to permit increased use of modern assessments by divisions without overtesting. Specifically, the “through-year growth assessments” envisioned by the General Assembly have not been effectively implemented by the state’s assessment vendor and need to be repealed or replaced.

The pages that follow are offered as a potential resource for elected representatives when considering specific legislation the Board expects may be considered by the General Assembly.

K-12 Education Funding (Controlled for Inflation)



Source: Fiscal Analytics 2023

Current Reality: The budget adopted by the 2023 General Assembly made necessary and appreciated investments in K-12 education. FY 23 is the first time in 14 years that, when controlled for inflation, the state per pupil investment exceeded 2009. The SOQ Support Staff Cap implemented during the Great Recession was scaled back further but remains an arbitrary limit on calculating actual costs.

Legislative Recommendation: The state budget should pay for its share of what it requires localities and school divisions to do. Specifically, the Salem City School Board urges the General Assembly to fully eliminate the “SOQ Support Staff Cap” that was implemented during The Great Recession. This “short-term” tactic has been in place for well over a decade and it not only shifted the state’s responsibility to localities, it has artificially depressed the re-benchmarking calculation ever since.

Shortage of Qualified Teachers

Current Reality: Virginia must adopt a long-range plan to raise teacher salaries commensurate with Virginia's National income ranking of 12th (JLARC). In 2021, Virginia's Average Teacher Salary of \$54,986 was ranked 32nd in the Nation and, if moved to a National ranking of 12th last year, would be \$67,049. This is a moving target, and closing the gap with other states will require a plan for significant investments over multiple biennia.

Further, in our region, these averages are misleading and are not representative of Southwest Virginia because of the large number of teachers employed by large, wealthy divisions in Northern Virginia that receive "cost of competing" funds. Teacher salaries in Southwest Virginia rank near the bottom on the national comparisons.

Legislative Recommendation: The General Assembly is urged to establish measurable goals for improving teacher compensation in the Commonwealth. Similar to the effort to stabilize VRS over multiple biennia a few years ago, the General Assembly needs to identify a measure, set a target, establish a timeline, and budget accordingly.

Assessment

Current Reality: The Salem City School Division was a pioneer in Virginia in the use of authentic measures of individual student growth. In the years since, other commercially developed, valid, and reliable growth assessments are used by nearly all divisions.

SY 22-23 proved that the DOE's current "through-year growth assessments" did not achieve the objectives of HB 2027. The measures did not impact accountability as purported, the reports were of limited usefulness, and the impact on instructional time to administer the DOE's assessment was far too great.

The Salem City School Division is following the work of the HB 585 Workgroup on Assessment closely and division staff are available to assist and inform needed modernization of Assessments in the Commonwealth and the expected efforts to revise the Accreditation and Accountability systems.

Legislative Recommendation: Repeal or amend the "through year growth assessments" required by HB 2027 by the 2022 General Assembly to permit local school divisions to utilize DOE-approved, commercially available assessment programs as an alternative by using the student test identifier (STI) as a means for divisions with commercially available, valid and SOL-aligned assessments to submit growth data as an alternative to the DOE's through-year growth.

Salem City Schools



2024 Standing Legislative Positions

Proposed: November 14, 2023

In addition to the annual list of Legislative Priorities, the Board and the Superintendent of Schools will monitor the proceedings of the General Assembly and make known to its representatives the Board's positions on other issues that may arise.

The following chart is provided to indicate standing issues of particular interest to the City of Salem School Board and the Board's official position on each issue. The Board makes every effort to communicate with elected representatives and also urges legislators and state officials to contact the Board or the Superintendent regarding legislation that might have implications for public education.

Budget and Financial Issues

Fully funding the re-benchmarking of the Standards of Quality (SOQ) so that the standards are, "realistic in relation to the Commonwealth's current education needs and practices" (Code of Virginia – 22.1-253.13.1)	Support
Changes in the Standards of Quality (SOQ) Funding Formula (such as arbitrary staffing caps) which would reduce the state's responsibility to fund its mandates to local school divisions.	Oppose
Funding annual raises using the linear weighted average and real inflation figures derived from annual reports from the school divisions.	Support
Reducing funds to Risk Reduction Programs that support at-risk and disadvantaged students to achieve the high standards necessary to earn a diploma.	Oppose
Increase state reimbursement for school lunches to .10 per student lunch and .05 per student breakfast	Support
Use of the Literary Fund for purposes other than school construction.	Oppose

Supplanting state or local support for public education through the use of federal monies ***Oppose***

Increased funding for the School Construction Program ***Support***

Maintain and consider increasing state funds for Instructional Technology ***Support***

Expenditure of public funds on private schools through tuition tax credits or tuition vouchers ***Oppose***

Fiscal autonomy for elected school boards ***Oppose***

Changes to the authority of local governments to set and collect local real estate taxes ***Oppose***

Employment Issues

Expansion of grievance procedures for Licensed and Continuing Contract Employees to Employees with an Annual Notice of Employment. ***Oppose***

Continuing the requirement for teaching experience to obtain licensure as a school leader whether by traditional or alternative licensure ***Support***

Amendment of the grievance procedure to provide for the decision of the grievance panel to be final and binding ***Oppose***

Expansion of collective bargaining for school employees ***Oppose***

Requirements for written contracts for at-will employees (non-teachers) ***Oppose***

School Board Governance Issues

Control of the school board calendar as an authority of the local school board. ***Support***

Maintaining the authority of local school boards granted in Article VIII, Section 7 of the Constitution to regulate firearms on school property and at school events, including school board meetings ***Support***

Maintaining the Virginia High School League as a voluntary association to regulate high school competition **Support**

Legislation or BOE/DOE Regulation seeking to regulate the VHSL **Oppose**

Maintaining the Virginia charter school law in its present form whereby local school boards retain authority and control over such schools **Support**

State Leadership on Federal Issues

The Salem City School Division supports the 2015 Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and urges the BOE/DOE to extend the spirit of increased local control. Further, the Salem City School Board encourages the BOE/DOE to continue to rethink and redesign assessment in the Commonwealth to take full advantage of the flexibility ESSA extends to states so that students and teachers in Virginia may persist in the transformation of the long-standing 1990's approach to assessment in Virginia.