Fairfax County School Board 2027 State Priority Positions

New Business Draft – 9/24/2026

The Fairfax County School Board (FCSB) believes that strong public education depends on an effective partnership between the Commonwealth and local school divisions. This partnership should include fair state funding that reflects the actual costs of providing a high-quality, student-centered education, avoid policy actions that impose unfunded mandates on local school divisions, and preserve local school board authority under the Virginia Constitution to supervise schools and implement education policy.

The following details the 2027 Fairfax County School Board State priority positions:

1. **Increase State Funding for K-12 Programs**
2. **Improve Virginia's Statewide Assessment System**
3. **Improve Virginia's School Accountability System**
4. **Expand College and Workforce Readiness Programs**
5. **Provide State-Funded Universal Pre-Kindergarten Programs**
6. **Increase State Funding for School Facilities**
7. **Increase Access to Free School Meals**
8. **Reform Virginia's Freedom of Information Act**

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1. Increase State Funding for K-12 Programs

Background

State funding covers a relatively small share of public education costs in Fairfax County. Direct state aid and sales tax make up only 27.4 percent of the FCPS FY 2027 operating budget, leaving local revenues to cover much of the difference between state support and the actual cost of providing high-quality K-12 instruction. In 2023, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission reviewed Virginia's Standards of Quality (SOQ) funding formulas and identified several areas where the formulas do not accurately reflect school division costs.

Requested Actions

The FCSB supports implementation of JLARC's 2023 SOQ funding recommendations, specifically including:

- Implement JLARC Recommendation #6 to calculate prevailing costs using division averages instead of weighted averages, providing a more accurate measure of school division costs.
    - Estimated statewide cost: $205 million
    - Potential benefit to FCPS: $18 million, based on House Appropriations/Senate Finance FY 2027 estimates.
- Implement JLARC Recommendation #12 to create a Virginia labor cost index that better reflects regional cost-of-living differences or, at a minimum, fully fund the existing Cost of Competing Adjustment (COCA).
    - Estimated statewide cost: $595 million
    - Potential benefit to FCPS: $187 million, based on JLARC's original 2023 estimates.

Impact

Implementing these recommendations would better align state funding with the actual cost of providing public education, especially in high-cost regions such as Northern Virginia. For FCPS, these formula changes could provide substantial additional state funding and create a more appropriate balance between state and local responsibility for funding required K-12 programs.

2. Improve Virginia's Statewide Assessment System

Background
As Virginia implements new assessment administration requirements and evaluates a new statewide assessment contract, the FCSB supports reducing the Commonwealth's heavy reliance on standardized assessments. The FCSB supports moving toward a more balanced and flexible assessment system that makes greater use of performance-based tests and other assessment formats that better meet the needs of diverse learners.

Requested Actions
The FCSB supports improvements to Virginia's assessment system that:

- Expand the use of performance-based assessments that provide useful information for classroom instruction without creating excessively burdensome administrative requirements.
- Provide native-language assessments where appropriate for English Learners to improve access and more accurately measure student knowledge and skills.
- Allow students no less than three weeks following completion of a course to take the associated Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment.
- Limit required SOL assessments to those needed for federal accountability or to verify credits for graduation.
- Give school divisions flexibility in determining whether and how SOL assessment results are used in classroom grades.
- Reduce reliance on SOL assessments to verify course credits for student graduation.

Impact
These recommended changes would help mandated assessments provide more useful information for classroom instruction, better meet the needs of English Learners, and reduce unnecessary testing requirements. They would also give school divisions greater flexibility to align assessment practices with instruction, course completion, and student learning.

3. Improve Virginia's School Accountability System

Background
Virginia's new School Performance and Support Framework (SPSF), which took effect in September 2024, significantly changed how school performance is measured. These changes include greater reliance on standardized assessment mastery, earlier use of English Learner assessment results, and changes in how individual student groups impact overall school performance. While 98.5% of FCPS schools were fully accredited under the previous accountability system, only 75% of FCPS schools were rated either "Distinguished" or "On-track" in this current year. The FCSB supports a more balanced approach to assessing school performance that considers student achievement, academic growth, engagement, and progress toward college and workforce readiness.

Requested Actions
The FCSB supports improvements to Virginia's school accountability system that:

- Adopt federal "Exception B," to count English Learner reading and mathematics assessment results toward school mastery measures beginning in a student's third year in U.S. schools rather than the second year.
- Balance mastery and student growth more equitably when calculating elementary and middle school performance.
- Expand the graduation readiness indicator to reflect the full time allowed under Virginia and federal law for students with disabilities and English Learners to earn a diploma, rather than limiting the measure to six years.
- Eliminate provisions that automatically lower a school's performance category when a single student group's performance results in identification for federal support and improvement.

Impact
These improvements would provide a more complete and equitable picture of school performance by recognizing both student achievement and academic growth, better accounting for the needs of diverse learners, and reducing the possibility that a single measure or student-group designation disproportionately affects a school's overall performance rating.

4. Expand College and Workforce Readiness Programs

Background
High-quality college and workforce readiness programs help students connect classroom learning with career exploration, workplace experience, and industry-recognized skills. Virginia has made high-quality work-based learning (HQWBL) a more important measure of postsecondary readiness. However, opportunities and placements have not expanded at the same pace and have become more limited in some areas. FCPS students already participate widely in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. In the Class of 2025, 16,600 students earned industry credentials, and 5,400 students were CTE completers, meaning they completed a CTE concentration and met graduation requirements.

Requested Actions
The FCSB supports the following expansions in Virginia's workforce readiness programs:

- Allow students to complete relevant HQWBL experiences at any time during high school, rather than only in the same year they complete a CTE sequence.
- Restore high school elective credit for work experiences, including allowing students to earn credit by completing required work hours and related academic work under the oversight of a CTE teacher or coordinator.
- Maintain broad and relevant lists of industry credentials aligned with established CTE sequences and career pathways.

Impact
These improvements would expand student access to authentic workplace experiences, strengthen connections between classroom learning and future careers, and recognize substantive employment as a meaningful component of a student's educational program. Greater flexibility would also allow students to pursue work-based learning when it best fits their high school program while preserving multiple pathways to postsecondary education, industry credentials, and employment.

5. Provide State-Funded Universal Pre-Kindergarten Programs

Background
High-quality early childhood education helps children build the academic, social, and developmental skills needed to succeed in schools. However, current publicly funded Pre-K programs in Fairfax County lack the capacity to meet demand. In SY2024-2025, FCPS served only 80 percent of income-eligible three- and four-year-olds who completed eligible Pre-K applications, despite substantial local investment to expand the program, leaving almost 500 eligible students unserved by FCPS Pre-K programs.

Requested Actions
The FCSB supports measures to:

- Provide universal state-funded access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs for all children who are age four on or before September 30.
- Provide full state per-pupil funding sufficient to support both program implementation and ongoing operating costs, and which recognizes regional cost-of-living differences.
- Increase state funding to adequately support recruiting and retaining qualified teachers and support staff, appropriate class sizes, and high-quality, inclusive programming.

Impact

State-funded universal pre-kindergarten would expand access to high-quality early learning opportunities and help prepare more children for elementary school success. Full state funding would also ensure that expanded access is supported by appropriate staffing, class sizes, and programming without shifting the substantial costs of implementing a universal program to local school divisions.

6. Increase Access to Free School Meals

Background
Reliable access to nutritious meals helps students come to school ready to learn and reduces financial barriers to participating in school meal programs. FCPS participation increased significantly when federal funding provided free meals to all students. In 2022, the final year of universal federal meal reimbursement, FCPS served more than 30,000 additional lunches and 20,000 additional breakfasts each day compared with 2023, after universal reimbursement ended.

Requested Actions:
The FCSB supports actions that:

- Provide additional state funding to expand access to free school meals for students.
- Reduce financial and administrative barriers to participation in school breakfast and lunch programs.
- Provide sufficient state support to ensure reliable access to high-quality, nutritious meals during the school day.

Impact
Expanding access to free school meals would increase participation in school nutrition programs and improve students' access to nutritious food. It would also reduce financial and administrative barriers for students and families and help address food-access challenges that can affect students' readiness to learn and educational opportunities.

7. Increase State Funding for School Facilities

Background

Modern and well-maintained school facilities are essential to high-quality learning and student and staff well-being. However, major renovations, infrastructure replacement, and ongoing capital improvement needs place significant pressure on local resources. FCPS faces more than $2 billion in unfunded long-term capital needs, including significantly deferred infrastructure renovation and maintenance.

Requested Actions:
The FCSB supports measures that:

- Establish state funding available to all school divisions that complements local capital investments and strengthens state partnerships to address long-term K-12 school construction, renovation, and infrastructure needs.
- Provide flexible state funding for major infrastructure improvements, including HVAC systems and other aging building systems.

Impact
Increased and flexible state funding would accelerate critical school renovations and infrastructure improvements, address deferred maintenance and aging building systems, and reduce pressure on limited local capital resources. Greater state participation would also help FCPS provide safe, functional, and high-quality learning environments while addressing substantial unfunded long-term facility needs.

8. Reform Virginia's Freedom of Information Act

Background
Virginia's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) supports government transparency and public access to records and meetings. However, FOIA compliance can impose significant administrative and financial demands on local school divisions, especially as the volume of electronic records continues to grow. The FCSB supports maintaining public access while better balancing transparency, personal information protection, and compliance time and cost.

Requested Actions:
The FCSB supports FOIA reforms that:

- Address differences in how state open-meeting requirements impact public bodies of different sizes
- Provide state relief from the local costs associated with required FOIA compliance and public notices

Impact
These improvements would preserve public transparency while reducing administrative and financial burdens on local school divisions. More flexible open-meeting requirements would recognize differences in the size and structure of public bodies, while state support for mandated compliance and public notice costs would reduce the use of local education resources to satisfy state-imposed administrative requirements.