

Caroline County Public Schools Budget Factors

The Schools Our Children Deserve

We all want our children to attend schools that are well-resourced and able to provide reliable transportation, nutritious meals, quality instruction, and essential health services. Since the pandemic, our roughly 4,000 students in Caroline face more challenges than ever, from staff shortages, drops in academic achievement, and additional mental health needs. When looking at our current local spending, it's clear our budget comes up short in meeting the most pressing challenges our students and schools face today. Caroline can step up to fund our schools at levels that meet our students' needs and better reflect our capacity and commitment to our children.



Budget

In the 2022-2023 school year, Caroline County spent \$12,399 per student, ranking us 124 out of 131 school divisions in the state. Yet, when adjusted for the high cost of living, the spending power drops to \$12,290 per student and Caroline County ranks 115 out of Virginia's 131 school divisions.

Caroline has seen an increase in local per student spending of \$616 or 16% between the 2014-2015 and 2022-2023 school years (adjusted for inflation). Compared to the regional average for local per student spending, Caroline spent a whopping \$1,342 less in the 2022-2023 school year. While Caroline had a strengthening economy over this time, its level of commitment and effort towards schools did not reflect this.



Capacity and Effort

Virtually every locality in the state spends beyond what the state requires it to match (referred to as Required Local Effort) because the state vastly underestimates what it actually costs to run schools. In aggregate, divisions spent 107% above the Required Local Effort, but Caroline County only spent 41%, which is 66 percentage points below the state average. Caroline would need to spend \$7,836,224 more annually to be at the average state percent above the Required Local Effort (this reflects the low level of effort the division puts into per pupil spending relative to the state).

Caroline County has capacity to do more to raise adequate revenue for its schools. The locality has a typical revenue capacity score according to the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts, but does far less than most and has a lower level of fiscal stress than most localities. Caroline County's property tax effort is 3% below the average state rate.

A one penny property tax increase in Caroline County would raise approximately \$340,000 annually.



Outcomes

Many students lost significant ground on state academic achievement between the 2018-2019 and 2022-2023 school years. Students in Caroline saw a drop in pass rates on the reading SOL test of 13.9% and 49.3% in math - among the largest declines in the state. Yet further disparities exist, with math SOL pass rates dropping 59.0% for English Learners and 60.6% for economically disadvantaged students. Caroline must do more for its students who face significant barriers to education.



Staffing

The teacher vacancy rate in Caroline was 15.7% as of October 2023, 11.8 percentage points higher than the state average. The overall staffing vacancy rate was 10.2% as of October 2023, 5.3 percentage points above the state average, adding pressure for all staff to cover shortage areas.

Caroline had an average budgeted teacher salary of \$52,940 in the 2023-2024 school year, which is \$17,501 below the state average. Adjusted for the relatively high cost of living in the locality, the average teacher salary drops to \$52,476. With high salaries and lower cost of living in nearby communities, on top of a dwindling supply of graduates with teaching degrees, Caroline is not in a strong position to compete for high-quality educators in the future.