



Board-to-Board, January 2025

A monthly report from the Albemarle County School Board to the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors

Albemarle County Public Schools Begins Drafting FY26 Budget—Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) has officially begun drafting the FY26 budget. Over the next several months, the Albemarle County School Board will hear from Superintendent Dr. Matthew Haas, various ACPS staff members and community members about where funding for the 2025-26 school year should be focused.

In December, members of the School Board held a joint meeting with the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors to discuss Capital Improvement Project needs across the division and requested \$560,000,000 over 5 years for a number of projects. These projects include building renovations and updates to the bus fleet.

Presentations of a draft funding request to the School Board will begin in February. The School Board will present an approved funding request to the Board of Supervisors in March and will take time to make adjustments in order to approve a final, balanced budget in May.

Albemarle County Public Schools Approves Policies for Personal Communication Device-Free Education—The Albemarle County School Board has approved a new policy and revised two existing policies to support a device-free learning environment. The new Personal Device-Free Education policy (JFCP) and updates to the Responsible Use of Technology policies for staff (GDA) and students (IIBE) aim to reduce classroom distractions caused by cell phones and other personal devices, enhancing student learning.

Research shows that excessive device use in schools can hinder focus, concentration, and academic performance. These policies reflect the division's dedication to fostering a focused and healthy learning environment.

Aligned with Governor Glenn Youngkin's Executive Order 33, which attempts to establish cell phone-free education statewide, the new and revised policies focus on five key areas:

- **Device Storage:** Students must store devices in lockers, backpacks, or designated areas during the school day to ensure distraction-free learning.
- **Medical Exemptions:** Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and Section 504 Plans will accommodate students requiring devices for medical reasons.
- **Emergency Communication:** Schools will develop procedures to communicate with families and staff without relying on student devices. Device use in emergencies will be evaluated case-by-case.
- **Bell-to-Bell Policy:** In middle schools, devices will continue to be stored from the first bell of the day until the last one. In high schools, cell phones will remain stored during all instructional time, with efforts underway through August 2025 to appropriately phase out device use during lunch and class changes.
- **Special Circumstances:** Policies apply to school-sponsored events, trips, and transportation, with exceptions for educational purposes authorized by staff.

Middle schools will maintain their current processes, while high schools will share procedural updates with families, covering:

- No device use during class periods or blocks.
- Clear and consistent expectations for device storage.
- Emergency contact procedures for parents.
- Strategies to support students during transitions and lunch.

The new policy (JFCP) will take effect on January 7, following winter break.

Two Schools Receive Purple Star Designation from Virginia Department of Education—Baker-Butler Elementary School and Lakeside Middle School have been recognized by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the the Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children as Purple Star Schools, which is awarded to military-friendly schools that have demonstrated their commitment to meeting the needs of military-connected students and their families.

In order to receive this designation, schools must identify a staff point of contact (POC) to ensure that the school completes several required activities to qualify. These include hosting school-wide professional development that informs staff on the unique needs of military families and military-connected students, leading a peer-to-peer support group for students in military families and hosting a webpage with information and resources on the school's website, just to name a few.

Mountain View Upper Elementary School Construction Moves Forward—Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) recently announced a significant step in construction of the new Mountain View Upper Elementary School. Following the receipt of competitive bids on October 24, the project will move forward with Nielsen Builders, Inc., based in Harrisonburg, VA, as the selected contractor. Nielsen Builders has a strong history of collaboration with ACPS and the Charlottesville community, including the award-winning Crozet Elementary School addition and renovation and ongoing projects such as the Charlottesville Middle School expansion.

Construction is expected to begin in early 2025, following some initial site mobilization later this month. A groundbreaking ceremony is currently being planned, with details to be announced soon. The construction timeline anticipates a completion date for the 2026-27 school year.

Six Albemarle County Public Schools Earn Virginia's Highest Achievement Award for Exemplar Performance—Six schools within Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) have been recognized with the Virginia Board of Education's prestigious Highest Achievement Award for the 2024-25 academic year. This recognition, awarded to just 92 schools across the state, highlights outstanding academic performance and achievement based on the 2023-24 school year data.

The following ACPS schools earned the Highest Achievement Award, signifying that the Board of Education recognizes their commitment to academic excellence and equity for all students:

- Broadus Wood Elementary School
- Community Lab School
- Hollymead Elementary School
- Ivy Elementary School
- Stony Point Elementary School
- Virginia L. Murray Elementary School

To qualify for this top honor, schools must meet a series of rigorous criteria, including:

- **Accreditation:** Schools must be fully accredited or hold triennial waivers.
- **Core Subject Benchmarks:** Schools must achieve state benchmarks of 75% for reading and 70% for both math and science, determined by current year pass rates on state assessments, excluding growth or English Learner progress.
- **Student Group Performance:** All student groups within the school must meet the same benchmarks (75% for reading and 70% for math) based on current year pass rates. For schools with two student groups, there must be no more than a five percentage point gap between the lowest performing group and all other students. For schools with three or more student groups, this gap must not exceed 10 percentage points.
- **Chronic Absenteeism:** Schools must demonstrate a chronic absenteeism rate of 15% or lower.

For schools with graduating classes, two additional criteria apply:

- **Graduation and Completion Index (GCI):** Schools must achieve a GCI of 88 points or higher for the current year.
- **Dropout Rate:** Schools must maintain a dropout rate of 6% or lower.

These awards are a significant milestone for schools, as they are indicators of an ongoing commitment to preparing students for success in a global society while ensuring that achievement gaps are minimized and every student has the opportunity to excel.

Henley Middle School Student Wins University of Virginia Equity Center's Voices of Democracy Writing Contest—Henley Middle School 8th-grader Aanya Sonkusare has taken home the grand prize in the University of Virginia Equity Center and Karshe Institute of Democracy's "Voices of Democracy: What Democracy Means to Me" writing contest.

Public, private and homeschool students throughout Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville were invited to submit essays or other pieces of writing that reflected on one or more of three prompts:

- How does democracy show up in your life and/or the lives of the people you love?
- How would you like democracy to be a part of your everyday life?
- What are your hopes and dreams for democracy?

According to the Equity Center, this contest aims to provide rich exploration of how democracy affects the daily lives of students and their communities and honor the spirit of civic engagement and critical thinking.

Burley Middle School 8th-grader Amerson-Joi "AJ" Wright, Journey Middle School 8th-grader Halil Stinnie and Western Albemarle High School 9th-grader Max Harris all took home honorable mentions.

To read our students' entries, visit the Equity Center's [Voices of Democracy: What Democracy Means to Me Writing Competition webpage](#).