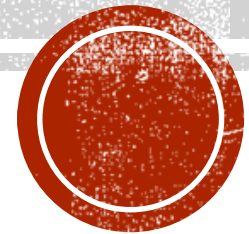


THE STATE OF THE SCHOOLS

HCPS Superintendent to City Council

March 10, 2026



VITAL RELATIONSHIPS

- HCPS & the City
 - Superintendent & City Manager
 - Monthly meeting
 - Regular collaboration on major projects
 - HCPS Operations: HFD, HPD, Public Works, Transportation, CIP
 - HCPS Student Support: CPS, CSB, Fairfield Center, Court Best Practices
 - Finance



POTENTIAL STUDENT POPULATION INCREASE

City Council: “What options is HCPS developing for future enrollment projections in elementary schools?”

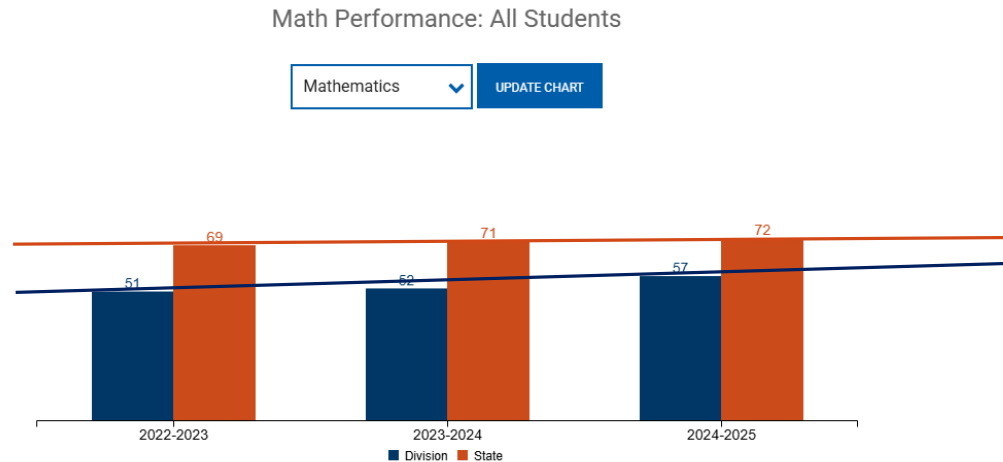
- We have consistently stated our philosophy on growth:
 - Rezone
 - Build on
 - Build new
- We recently balanced some elementary schools by rezoning
- We are casually exploring potential additions to current schools
- We have land for an elementary school in our CIP in the out years



SOL SCORES

- City Council: Please address HCPS standardized test scores ~~falling~~ below Virginia's average and what plans are being developed or implemented to address this?

HCPS is making slow but steady progress.



Math as an example.

ALL STUDENTS FEMALE MALE BLACK HISPANIC

WHITE ASIAN MULTIPLE RACES

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED ENGLISH LEARNERS

[show explanation](#) [show data](#) [export data](#) [download png](#) [download pdf](#)



STATS 101

A basic rule in statistics:

“When we compare groups, we want them to be *as similar as possible* except for the treatment we are studying. If the groups differ in other important ways, these *differences can confound the results* and prevent us from attributing the observed effect to the treatment.” (Introduction to the Practice of Statistics, 2021)



Comparing HCPS's SOL scores to the state average is like measuring how high two basketball players can reach and ignoring that one of them is 7'3".

SOL pass rates are how high the hand reaches. MAP growth data is the jump — how much each student gained from where *they* started. Education is about growth.



CONTEXT IS VITAL: SOL SCORES AND HCPS

The high percentage of English learners:

- SOLs (even math and science) require:
 - Reading complex prompts
 - Understanding academic vocabulary
- Students still developing English proficiency may:
 - Understand the content conceptually
 - Struggle with linguistic decoding or academic phrasing
- Research consistently shows:
 - **Time Needed to Reach English Proficiency:**
 - Conversational English: ~1–3 years
 - Academic English proficiency: **5–7+ years**
- State policy requires that students who are still without academic English proficiency takes SOL tests in English.

	English Learners	Econ. Dis.
HCPS	44%	80%
State	15%	43%

The high percentage of economically disadvantages students: Research consistently demonstrates a strong positive correlation between family wealth and higher standardized test scores (ED100, 2026)



MORE CONTEXT: FUNDING DISADVANTAGES

- **Inadequate Formula Ratios:** Virginia's Standards of Quality (SOQ) funding system is widely considered inadequate for meeting the intensive needs of these learners.
- **Lower Supplemental Funding:** VA provides roughly 25% additional funding for EL students. Research from JLARC suggests a 40% increase is necessary to meet the actual costs of instruction.
- **High-Need School Divisions Receive Less Revenue:** Despite having higher needs, districts serving the highest number of EL students have historically received significantly less state and local revenue.
- **Reliance on Local Property Taxes:** Districts with lower property wealth struggle to generate the local revenue needed to supplement inadequate state aid.
- **Failure to Account for True Costs:** The state funding formula fails to fully account for the higher, uncontrollable costs associated with specialized language instruction, translator resources, and support services for immigrant families.

(For more, visit The Legal Aid Justice Center)



SOL TESTS ARE NOT THE STORY OF HCPS

- **Narrow Scope of Measurement:** SOLs focus primarily on rote memory and multiple-choice answers, neglecting critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving skills necessary for real-world success.
- **"Teaching to the Test":** High-stakes pressure forces educators to narrow their curriculum, focusing on test-taking techniques and rote memorization rather than offering a rich, comprehensive education.
- **Socio-economic and Demographic Bias:** Scores often correlate more closely with family income, parental education levels, and English proficiency than with school quality or student intelligence.
- **Snapshot, Not Growth:** As a single-day assessment, they fail to account for test anxiety, illness, or individual learning styles, providing only a limited "snapshot" of a student's ability.
- **Disproportionate Impact:** The high-stakes nature disproportionately penalizes low-income, minority, and special education students, who are more likely to receive drill-based instruction and face barriers to graduation.
- **Distorted Data:** Changes in "cut scores" (the threshold for passing) can manufacture crises, where passing rates drop despite no actual change in the quality of instruction or student learning.

(American University, July, 2022)



HCPS = GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY

Growth:

Our MAP data show that at all grade levels in math and reading our students are performing above the NATIONAL average for growth.

Opportunity:

We offer an array of learning opportunities and student supports far surpassing divisions of our size.

To be clear: we have no specific plans to focus more on SOL testing. We plan to continue to focus on GROWTH and OPPORTUNITY and to develop the WHOLE CHILD despite the national obsession with standardized, high-stakes testing.



OUR FOCUS: AUTHENTIC STUDENT SUCCESS



- Out of more than 1800 schools in Virginia, only 21 earned this award.
- 2024 HHS graduation rate of 96%, while the state average was 88%.
- Passing the SOLs is required for graduation.
- Before the split = ALL schools contributed.



RICH LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

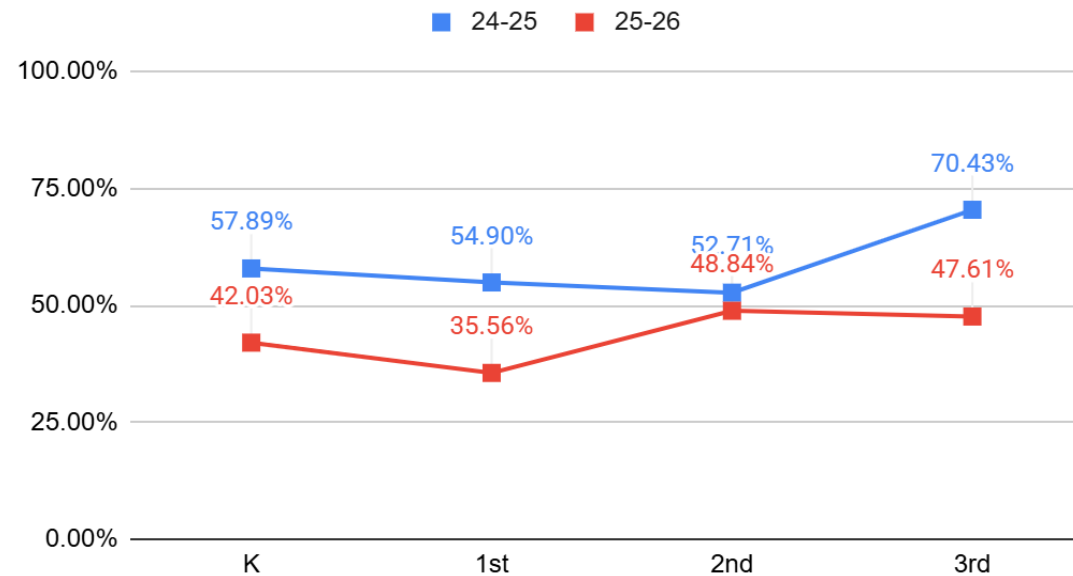
- The Arts (The only school division in the region to have a full dance program & a Kennedy Center-supported arts integration school)
- STEM (The HHS/RHS STEM Academy is one of only 22 Governor's schools in Virginia)
- Rock City Musical
- JROTC
- Rock City Regiment
- Outdoor learning
- The World Is My Classroom
- Athletics: 104 teams
- Extracurriculars: 70+
- AP & Dual-Enrollment high school courses
- Dual language program in 5 and soon all 6 elementary schools
- AVID/GEAR-UP/TRIO
- Blue Ridge Scholars
- Career and Technical Education (CTE): 29 programs, 1477 students
- Big announcement coming on STEM...



A FOCUS ON LITERACY

Recently we implemented a science-based literacy program, and we are starting to see great results.

Division Identified High Risk (VALLSS) 24-25 vs. 25-26



STUDENT SUPPORTS

Mutli-tiered Student Supports (MTSS)

- **Universal Screening:** Assessment of all students at least three times per year to identify those at risk for poor learning or behavioral outcomes early.
- **Tiered Continuum of Supports:** A layered system where intensity increases based on need (Tier 1: Core/Universal, Tier 2: Targeted, Tier 3: Intensive/Individualized).
- **Evidence-Based Practices:** Interventions and instruction at every tier are backed by research and implemented with high fidelity.
- **Data-Based Decision Making:** Regular analysis of data to identify student needs, determine the effectiveness of interventions, and make adjustments.
- **Progress Monitoring:** Ongoing, frequent tracking of student performance (biweekly or weekly) to ensure interventions are effective and to guide movement between tiers.
- **Team-Driven Leadership & Collaboration:** A dedicated team (administrators, staff, specialists) that shares responsibility, meets regularly, and works with families.
- **Strong Core Instruction (Tier 1):** High-quality, culturally/linguistically responsive instruction for all students.
- **Active Family and Community Engagement:** Involving families in the decision-making process and supporting students holistically.



MEETING BASIC NEEDS SO STUDENTS CAN FOCUS ON LEARNING

- Mental health teams
- Sentara Health Clinic at the Family Resource Center
- Virtual Health Clinics (piloted and now expanding)
- Distribution of basic necessities
- Social & emotional learning
- Two free meals per day at school
- Mobile Café
- Handle with Care
- Restorative practices



DEVELOPING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- JMU (multiple partnerships)
- EMU (multiple partnerships)
- Blue Ridge Community College (multiple partnerships)
- Harrisonburg Education Foundation (HEF)
- Sentara RMH
- Virginia Department of Health
- Care Solace
- The Gus Bus
- Church World Services
- Boys and Girls Club
- Blue Ridge Area Food Bank
- Backpack Coalition
- JMU sororities & fraternities
- Area thrift stores
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Village-to-Village
- Mercy House
- 2nd Home
- On the Road Collaborative

And many more...



PARENTS AS PARTNERS

- HCPS Immigration Task Force
- English classes for families
- Family/School liaisons
- Language support services
- Dedicated days for conferences
- Talking Points
- School and division newsletters
- The Family Resource Center



RECRUITING AND RETAINING TALENT

- Building pipelines
- Recruiting diverse & talented staff
- Support systems for new staff: mentoring and professional support
- Compensation
 - Regionally competitive
 - Progressive raises
 - Raises at least as high as the state's contribution
- Benefits
 - A generous general package
 - Optional add-ons
 - Parental leave
 - Assistance with childcare
 - Tuition assistance
- Collective Bargaining



GRATEFUL FOR COMMUNITY SUPPORT

And especially, and most importantly, support for our

TEACHERS

This is SO important, especially in a often toxic political environment.

We should tell the story of their work accurately and fully.

I know I speak for them when I say THANK YOU to the Harrisonburg community for supporting public education and for always focusing on what's truly important in the education of our children.



THE STATE OF OUR SCHOOLS

Any questions?

