

# Updating and Improving Funding for Students in Lower-Income Communities with More Barriers

Support HB825 and SB609 and omnibus JLARC bills HB624 and SB227

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## What is the At-Risk Add-On

Providing sufficient and accurate funding for schools serving many low-income students is critical. The At-Risk Add-on is a program used to help every student thrive by providing additional state funding – up to 36% – per low income student, with the most going to school divisions that serve the most students from low-income families.

## Current Shortcomings

Virginia’s current at-risk add-on relies on outdated free lunch data from before school divisions implemented community eligibility programs. JLARC found that “Starting in 2020, Identified Student Percentage is uniformly calculated for every school division and now provides the most consistent measure of school-level student poverty. The modified free lunch data used in current funding formulas is out-of-date and spans several different years.”

Providing sufficient and accurate funding for schools serving many low-income students is critical. JLARC found: “Resource needs increase substantially at schools with high concentrations of students in poverty.... Low income students often need more direct work with teachers or instructional specialists, meal assistance, and before and after school services to succeed academically.”

## How At-Risk Add-On Improvements Help

These bills, which implement JLARC’s July 2023 SOQ report Recommendations 8, 9, and 10, would move us to an up-to-date formula using Identified Student Percentage data to measure student need. The updated formula more accurately identifies those communities with high concentrations of students in poverty. It also provides 60% of the dollars as a flat add-on for students from low-income families, rather than directing all the money based on poverty concentration like our current formula.

These bills also move the at-risk add-on to within the main Standards of Quality funding formula. JLARC found that “Given how essential at-risk funds are for students who need them to receive a quality education...the broad at-risk programs should be...required.”



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