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# New funding pitched for schools

## Raises for teachers included in Northam's budget proposal

» BY EMILY SIDES  
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Teachers in Virginia could see a 5 percent salary increase starting July 1 if the General Assembly passes Gov. Ralph Northam's proposed budget amendments.

Northam proposed on Dec. 11 to increase public school funding by an additional \$268.7 million for fiscal 2019-20, according to a news release. The governor's plan includes \$88 million for an additional 2 percent pay increase for educators.

The General Assembly, which begins its session Jan. 9, approved in 2018 a 3 percent increase for teachers starting July 1, 2019.

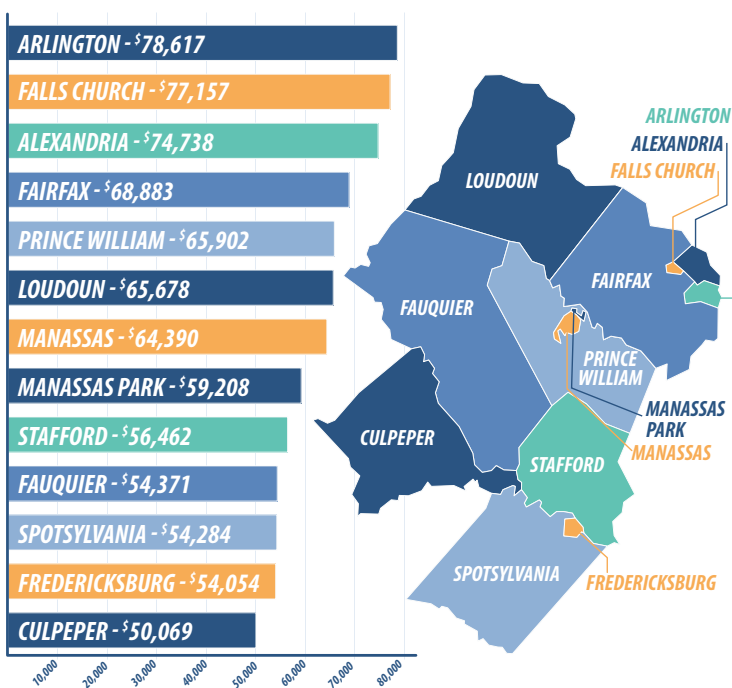
Northam said his proposed pay increase aims to attract and retain educators. With an average public school teacher salary of \$50,620, Virginia is ranked No. 30 in the country in 2014-15, according to the Virginia Department of Education's report on teacher salaries from 2016-17.

"Every child in the commonwealth should have access to a world-class education — that can't happen if Virginia is unable to compete with other states on attracting and retaining the best teaching talent," Northam said. "Raising teacher pay is one step to securing the quality of our K-12 education system for years to come."

If the General Assembly approves Northam's proposed teacher pay increase, it will be the largest raise in a single year in more than 15 years, according to a news release.

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### AVERAGE TEACHER SALARY



Average teacher salaries in the region in fiscal year 2017 ranged from \$50,000 in Culpeper County to more than \$78,000 in Arlington, according to data from the Virginia Department of Education.

# State looks to support more school counselors

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In response to mass school shootings and suicide rates among students, leaders across the nation are looking at how mental health professionals can better assist students, and the effort is getting a push with Gov. Ralph Northam's call to increase the number of counselors in Virginia schools over the next three years.

School counselors work with students on academic and career development to plan class schedules and work on post-secondary plans. They also help students develop social and emotional skills.

Reducing the ratio of school counselors to students will allow counselors more time to implement preventative programs, said Anne

Henry, a school counselor at J.W. Alvey Elementary School in Haymarket.

"We don't want to handle the issue when it's too late," she said. "We definitely want to make sure we are equipping students to deal with their emotions and to deal with each other from a very early age."

In 2017, public schools in Virginia reported 9,238 threat assessments — half of which were threats of self-harm.

"A lot of people are surprised to learn that elementary school counselors are fielding threats of self-harm and suicidal ideation," Henry said. "At all levels, school counselors have been dealing with it. I think making sure school counselors are appropriately staffed and making sure we can spend an

amount of time on direct counseling services are key to making sure kids are safe in school, and outside for that matter."

Northam's budget proposal, announced last month, includes \$36 million to hire more school counselors, with the governor noting that suicide is one of the leading causes of death among school-aged youth nationally and in Virginia.

Northam's proposal is part of a plan to increase funding by \$39 million for school safety in the state budget that covers fiscal 2018-19 through 2019-2020. The General Assembly will consider budget amendments in the session that starts Jan. 9.

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