

Richmond's City Council wants funding formula for schools changed

By LOUIS LLOVIO Richmond Times-Dispatch | Posted: Wednesday, November 16, 2016 10:30 pm

Richmond's City Council would like to see the state's legislature change how it calculates how much state money school systems get.

The council has asked its chief lobbyist to get the General Assembly to consider exploring changes to the formula for the Local Composite Index, a move that would increase the amount of money Richmond schools receive.

This isn't the first time city leaders have requested changes to the formula, and it likely won't be the last.

The index calculates the ability of communities to pay for their schools. The calculation largely depends on a locality's real estate values, gross income and taxable sales.

Because of this, Richmond typically ranks as one of the richest communities in the state and thus qualifies for some of the lowest levels of school funding, officials say.

Council members argue that the way the formula is constructed means that "a few outliers" can result "in a representation of greater wealth than actually exists."

In a place like Richmond, where there are a large number of school children live in poverty, city leaders say the false representation of wealth is detrimental. They want to see the index take into account the challenges that a district faces when it deals with so many students living in dire circumstances.

"The LCI needs to be revised to include the additional demand ... required to serve a large, at-risk population," said Michelle Mosby, the City Council's president.

Several members of the council discussed the index and a list of other items they'd like to see tackled in the upcoming General Assemble session at an annual summit held Wednesday to discuss legislative priorities.

The summit, at the Library of Virginia in Richmond, is meant for council members to come together with local legislators to discuss the city's legislative agenda. Along with the index, the conversation focused on police issues, short-term rental regulations and funding for roads and mass transit.

The council's agenda will likely be finalized and approved next month.

Del. Jennifer L. McClellan, D-Richmond, said there has been a reluctance to change the index among delegations from other parts of the state because of worries that it would have a negative impact.



RICHMOND CITY HALL

“There is a fear, particularly among those communities in Southwest Virginia,” she said. “As with any funding formula, when you open it up there will be some winners and losers. And they fear they will be the losers.”

She said localities in Northern Virginia, including Fairfax County, have also submitted legislation to change the formula in the past.

Like Richmond, they have failed.

“It’s not just us,” she said. “But the rural area legislators from the southwest kind of dominate the rules committee where these go.”