Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Prepared by SwailLandis for the Virginia Department of Education — March 2023

Introduction

Public schools in Virginia are considered among the best schools in the country. According to WalletHub.com, Virginia Public Schools are ranked fourth in the nation for the overall quality and safety of its public schools (McCann, 2022). This is due in part to lower-than-average student/teacher ratios (12.5 to 1) as well as a high percentage of instructional staff with graduate degrees (60 percent) (Virginia Department of Education, 2023a).

However, Virginia, like all states, continues to face challenges related to teacher shortages (Commonwealth of Virginia, 2022). There are currently over 3,500 FTE positions unfilled across the state representing 2.6 percent of all teaching positions. This is exacerbated by the fact that 5.2 percent of current teachers are out-of-field and an additional 5.3 percent are inexperienced. A higher percentage of these teachers work in high-poverty schools around the state (Virginia Department of Education, 2023a).

Exhibit 1 below illustrates the areas with the largest shortages in the state. As illustrated, the greatest number of openings is at the elementary level with 1,253 unfilled positions (4.3 percent of elementary positions). Special education has 736 open positions (5.8 percent), followed by comprehensive language arts (181 positions; 3.0 percent), music, visual arts, and PE (175 positions; 3.5 percent), world languages (130 positions; 3.1 percent), and pure mathematics (114 positions; 3.5 percent). (Additional information on teacher shortages for each Virginia school division is provided in Exhibit 5 on the final page of this brief).

Exhibit 1. Teacher Shortages in Virginia Public Schools, by Focus Area, 2022-23. (VDOE Staffing and Vacancy Report Data)
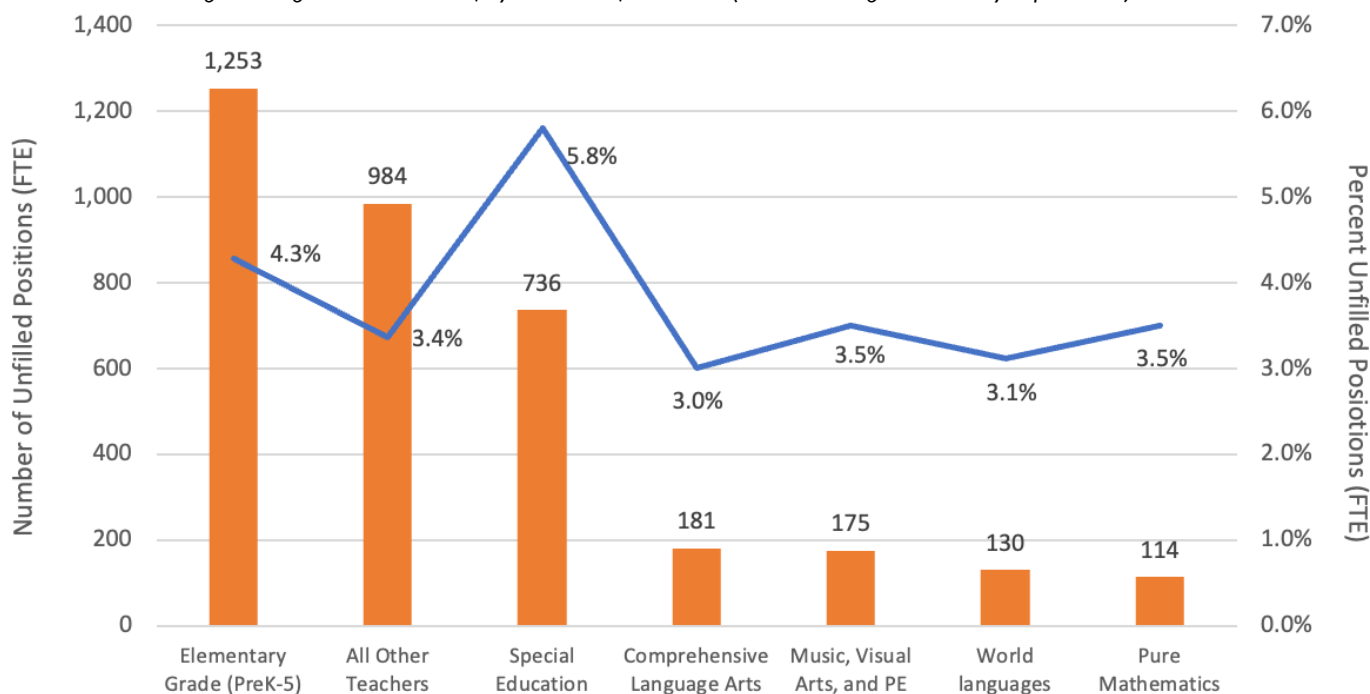
During the 2022-23 academic year, 3.9 percent of all teaching positions were unstaffed due to teacher shortages, representing 3,573 FTE teaching positions. Ten Virginia school divisions had an unfilled FTE percentage of 10 percent or higher, with the highest at 21 percent. These 10 divisions represent a total of 653 unfilled FTE teaching positions with an average of 27.3 per division (Virginia Department of Education, 2023b).[1]

Nationally, teacher shortages are hindering teaching and learning in every state. A recent study estimates that at least 36,500 teaching positions are vacant nationwide representing approximately 1.67 percent of teaching positions (Nguyen, Tuan D. et al., 2022). The researchers posit that the actual count is likely closer to 52,800. In addition, they estimate that over 163,650 teaching positions are currently filled by underqualified teachers. The ratio of educator hires to job openings has been declining since 2010 (See Exhibit 2). In 2010, the ratio was 1.53, meaning that there were 15 hires for every 10 job openings (Pringle et al., 2022). By 2022, that ratio reversed to 0.55, or 5.5 hires per 10 job openings. Thus, the recruitment portion of the teacher shortage has not been able to compete with demand over the medium term.

Exhibit 2. The Ratio of Educator Hires to Job Openings, 2007 to 2022. (Pringle et al., 2022)
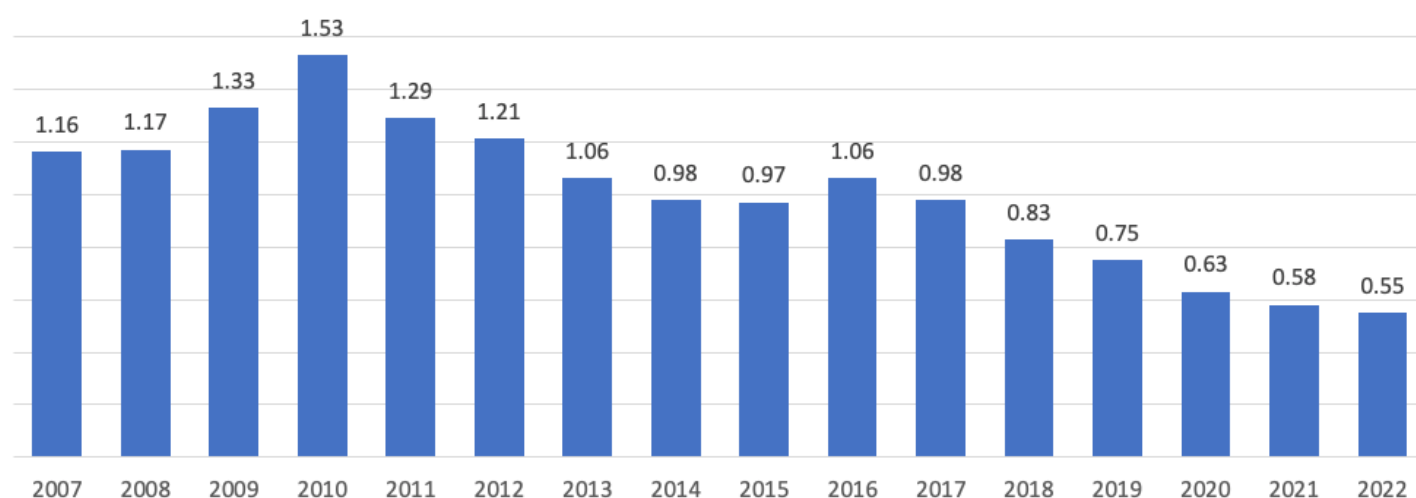
While recruitment of new teachers is a critical issue, so is the retention of current teachers. Teacher turnover/departure is a costly endeavor estimated at a cost of $8.5 billion per year nationally (Donley et al., 2019). But there is perhaps an even higher cost to teacher departure:

> *"When teachers leave a school, they take along their knowledge and expertise in instructional strategies, collaborative relationships with colleagues, professional development training, and understanding of students' learning needs at the school, all of which harm student learning and school operations and climate" (Donley et al., 2019, p. 1).*

A TNTP research report concluded that the "pervasive neglect of the nation's best teachers is a disgrace that derails school improvement efforts and robs millions of students of a potentially lifechanging education" (Jacob et al., 2012). TNTP estimates that approximately 10,000 'Irreplaceables' — those teachers that are so successful that they are nearly impossible to replace — left the 50 largest districts in one year.

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[1] *These data were downloaded and analyzed by SwailLandis using VDOE Staffing and Vacancy Report Data.*

The Commonwealth's Response

In response to these teacher recruitment and retention challenges, Governor Youngkin signed an executive directive (Number 3) in September 2022 to take immediate action to address the teacher shortage (Commonwealth of Virginia, 2022).

> *"The widening achievement gaps in the latest results from our Standards of Learning state assessments demand action. Our children are still recovering from devastating learning loss and other effects of school shutdowns. We must pursue a comprehensive approach to supporting teacher recruitment and retention efforts" (Commonwealth of Virginia, 2022, p. 1).*

The Directive issues nine actions to ameliorate the teaching shortage in Virginia, including altering the retirement systems so that retired teachers can choose to return to the classroom; providing targeted discretionary grants for teacher recruitment and retention; establishing teacher apprenticeship programs; creating childcare opportunities and training for schools, including childcare subsidies; and improving the annual survey of school divisions to better target "critical, unfilled teaching positions" (Commonwealth of Virginia, 2022, p. 2).

What Can We Do About Teacher Shortages?

There are many policies and practices that states, districts, and schools can implement or improve to alleviate the negative impact on teaching and learning that a shortage of teachers can have. There is a significant number of research studies related to the issues of finance and teaching. A major challenge is that teacher salaries are often uncompetitive with other industries (Hanushek et al., 2018). In addition, teacher salaries in high-poverty districts are significantly less than those in low-poverty districts (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Improving teacher pay, implementing incentives, and reducing future teacher debt are a few of the larger-scale options for making teaching more appetizing to those looking for career options. This level of policy is most often left to federal, state, and district decisionmakers or policymakers.

But there is much that building leadership can do to improve the recruitment and retention of instructional staff. In fact, the role of the principal is an essential player in this process. Research has found that principal leadership is uniquely linked to building working conditions that impact teacher turnover (Donley et al., 2019) and can account for 15 percent of the overall school effect on student achievement (Virginia Board of Education, 2022).

In 2022, the Virginia Board of Education released *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Principals*. Some of their sample performance indicators for effective principal performance include:

- actively leading staff selection processes;
- supporting teacher induction processes;
- cultivating leadership potential through personal mentoring and coaching;
- providing timely formal and informal feedback on teacher strengths and weakness and providing support and resources for improvement;
- recognizing and supporting the achievements of highly-effective teachers and staff and provides them opportunities for increased responsibility; and
- providing professional development and growth opportunities for teachers and staff that build on their strengths in improving student learning (Virginia Board of Education, 2022).

Exhibit 3 below is an excerpt from the Virginia Board's Principal Performance Standard 3 (Human Resources Leadership), showcasing a rubric to describe effective leadership management. At the highly effective level, the principal is effecting positive change by demonstrating "impactful human resources leadership" resulting in a "highly-productive workforce." On the other end of the continuum, principals fail to provide leadership in the induction, evaluation, and retention of quality instructional personnel (Virginia Board of Education, 2022).

Exhibit 3. Rubric for Rating the Effectiveness of Principals in Human Resources Leadership. (Virginia Department of Education, p. 64)

Highly Effective *In addition to meeting the requirements for Effective...*	**Effective** *Effective is the expected level of performance.*	**Approaching Effective**	**Ineffective**
The principal consistently demonstrates expertise in impactful human resources leadership, which results in a highly-productive workforce (e.g., highly satisfied stakeholders, increased student learning, teacher leaders).	The principal provides human resources leadership by selecting, inducting, supporting, evaluating, and retaining quality instructional and support personnel.	The principal is inconsistent in providing human resources leadership by selecting, inducting, supporting, evaluating, and/or retaining quality instructional and support personnel.	The principal fails to provide human resources leadership by inducting, evaluating, and/or retaining quality instructional and support personnel.

Teacher Recruitment

The recruitment of teachers into the education arena has become a more common and difficult issue over the years. Unfortunately, college graduates with the highest demonstrated intellectual proficiency are less likely to go into teaching than other college graduates (Allen, 2005). As previously acknowledged, recruiting teachers into high-poverty areas is a real problem for filling positions, but ultimately is critically important because more teachers leave these schools than those in more affluent areas (Podolsky et al., 2016). Shortages in teachers are also felt in STEM areas such as mathematics and physics, where there is a high demand in the labor market (See et al., 2020).

Some of the best practices in teacher recruitment includes the following:

- Create compelling marketing communications to attract teaching talent. Let potential recruits know what sets your school or division apart from others. What is attractive about your school? Why would they want to teach there?
- Remember that good teachers come from anywhere and you have to be creative to find them. Use social media broadly as well as in a targeted manner. Make connections with community organizations for recruitment and also expand your search beyond the local area.
- Understand your district's application requirements and help recruits work around the barriers to entry. Can the application process be streamlined? Is it causing you to lose potential teachers?
- Create a recruitment plan that includes the above activities. Identify job fairs and other places where you may want to engage prospective teachers.
- Start Early. Identify your potential vacancies as early as possible and start hiring as soon as possible.
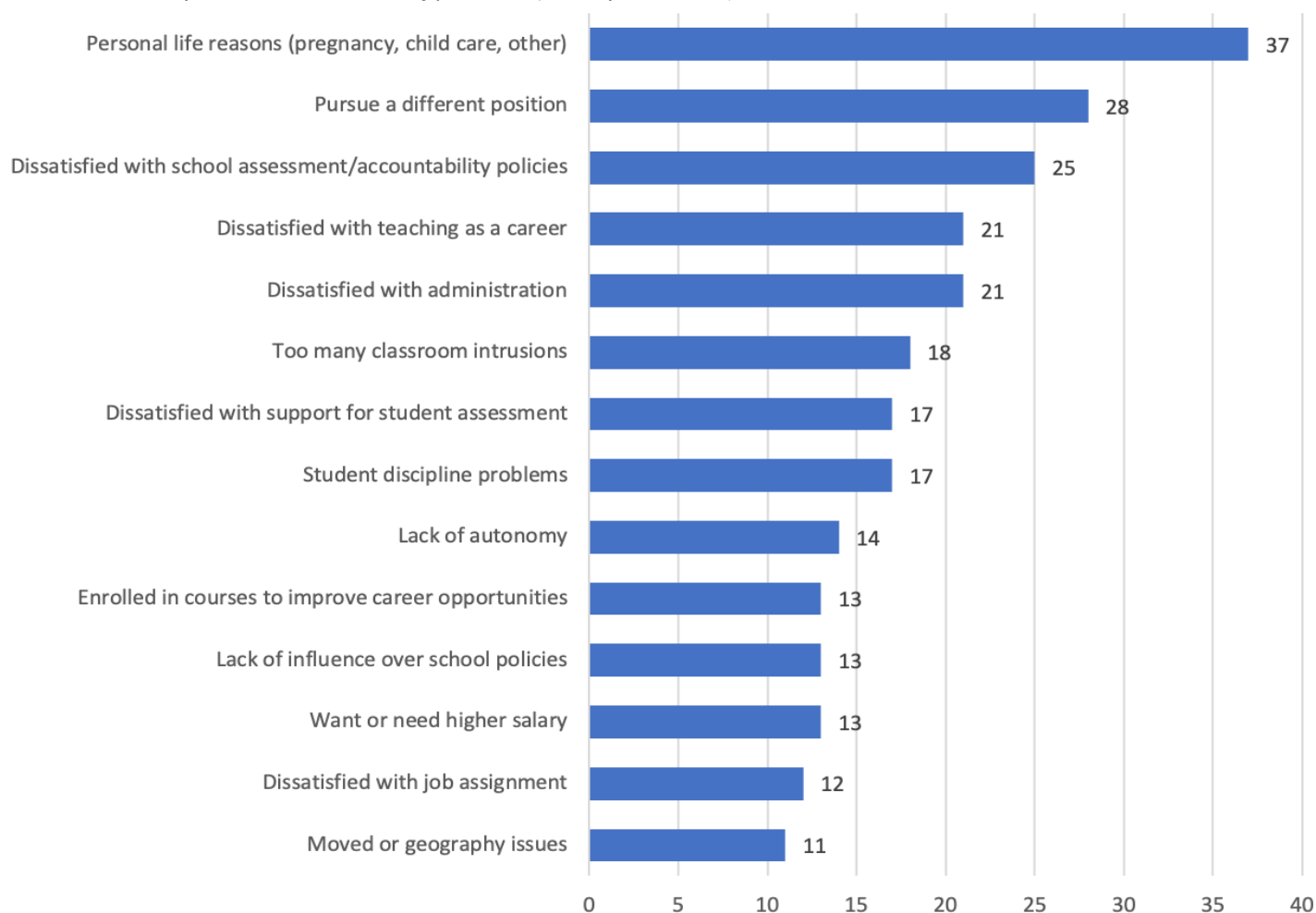
- Consider hiring people outside of their content area until a position opens up within their preferred expertise. This can provide a unique hiring advantage for teachers in disciplines that may be more difficult to hire. (Paraphrased from TNTP, 2014).

In addition, consider creating a "Grow Your Own" teacher program. These programs identify local talent early and help them through the teacher-development track. Partnerships with community organizations and teacher preparation programs can help create a teaching funnel for individuals who perhaps had never thought of teaching as a career. Provide prospective teachers with financial, academic, and social supports to help ensure their success (REL Pacific, 2022).

Teacher Retention

There are many reasons why teachers leave the teaching force. Exhibit 4 illustrates the primary reasons why teachers leave, with personal reasons at the top (37 percent), followed by interest in pursuing a different position (28 percent), assessment and accountability policies (25 percent), and dissatisfaction with teaching as a career (21 percent).

Exhibit 4. Reasons why teachers leave the teaching profession. (Podolsky et al., 2016)

Reason	Percent
Personal life reasons (pregnancy, child care, other)	37
Pursue a different position	28
Dissatisfied with school assessment/accountability policies	25
Dissatisfied with teaching as a career	21
Dissatisfied with administration	21
Too many classroom intrusions	18
Dissatisfied with support for student assessment	17
Student discipline problems	17
Lack of autonomy	14
Enrolled in courses to improve career opportunities	13
Lack of influence over school policies	13
Want or need higher salary	13
Dissatisfied with job assignment	12
Moved or geography issues	11

Considerations for School-Based Leaders

Working Conditions. Ladd (2011) found that working conditions were highly predictive of North Carolina teachers' decision-making regarding staying or leaving in addition to leadership support. Ingersoll et al. (2017) surveyed the working conditions of 900,000 teachers in 16 states and were able to equate teacher decision-making and school performance, finding that high levels of instructional leadership were correlated with higher mathematics and English language arts test scores. School climate matters to students and to building staff. Principals can focus on the physical and the cultural climate in the school.

Challenging Schools. Teacher turnover is more likely to occur in schools that have higher proportions of low-income, minority, and low-performing students (Allen, 2005). In 2012-13, it was estimated that one-in-10 teachers in high-poverty schools left the teaching profession compared to one-in-15 at low-poverty schools (Podolsky et al., 2016). Leadership needs to be mindful of these issues.

Teacher Workload. In a 2022 survey of 4,665 PreK-12 teachers across the country, 81 percent reported that their overall workload had increase and 80 percent reported spending additional time on student mental health issues. In addition, 71 percent said they are spending more of their own money for supplies and 55 percent had less planning time due to staff shortages (AdoptAClassroom.org, 2022). Principals can look to move the workload around in order to lessen burdens on teachers. A 2017 study by REL Southwest (Lazarev et al., 2017) found that rural teachers whose workload was balanced between teaching and nonteaching assignments were more likely to be successfully recruited and retained than teachers whose workload included only teaching. These assignments may include a variety of administrative, coaching, or counseling roles (REL Pacific, 2022).

Induction Programs. Good school districts and schools provide top-quality induction programs for new teachers and other instructional staff (Donley et al., 2019). While induction programs are not new, how well a program is composed can make the difference in both teacher excellence and retention. Mentoring programs (also below), workshops, reduced course loads, and planning time with experienced teachers can impact retention. Induction programs are even more critical for special education teachers, who have higher turnover rates than other teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Vittek, 2015).

Establish and Support Peer Mentor Programs. The best resources for new teachers are established, lead teachers. One study found that an effective mentoring program with new teachers increased annual retention by six percent (REL Pacific, 2022). The opportunity to talk, formally and informally, about issues related to instruction, assessment, and classroom management can help alleviate stress in new teachers.

Recognize Teachers' Accomplishments. People like to be acknowledged for doing something well. TNTP studied highly effective teachers who reported that they were more likely to be retained if their leadership let them know how well they were doing (REL Pacific, 2022).

Empowering Teachers. Great educational leaders empower their teachers and staff. They allow teachers to be part of the decision-making group and trust their professional instincts. "They seek out feedback from their teachers. They bring teachers into the decision-making process and are transparent about how and why decisions are made" (Seay, 2022). As Seay states, they recognize the small wins and the big wins together, and praise privately and publicly. Talented teachers are ambitious and look for growth opportunities. Effective leaders will ensure that their teachers have sufficient opportunities to be active in school planning and decision-making and capitalize on their individual strengths (McCann et al., 2015). Leadership provides "career ladders" that offer teachers a chance to build a career through leadership and specialization. Fullan says leaders should

think about "bottom-up support," and listen to what teachers have to say and what they think of the school environment (Langreo, 2023). Research has found that schools that provide mentoring and induction programs and provide teachers with autonomy and administrative support have fewer disciplinary problems and were more likely to possess higher teacher retention than other schools (Guarino et al., 2004).

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Exhibit 5. Unfilled FTE Teaching Positions, by School Division, Virginia, 2022-23

School District	FTE Teachers	Unfilled FTE Teachers	Percent Unfilled	School District	FTE Teachers	Unfilled FTE Teachers	Percent Unfilled
Accomack County	379	11.7	3.1%	Lexington City	40	0.0	0.0%
Albemarle County	1,083	16.0	1.5%	Loudoun County	6,511	74.5	1.1%
Alexandria City	1,162	33.0	2.8%	Louisa County	442	1.0	0.2%
Alleghany Highlands	229	18.5	8.1%	Lunenburg County	117	7.0	6.0%
Amelia County	112	2.0	1.8%	Lynchburg City	609	64.2	10.5%
Amherst County	327	4.0	1.2%	Madison County	125	8.0	6.4%
Appomattox County	170	2.0	1.2%	Manassas City	432	25.0	5.8%
Arlington County	2,383	32.8	1.4%	Manassas Park City	231	17.0	7.4%
Augusta County	713	6.0	0.8%	Martinsville City	144	13.0	9.0%
Bath County	55	2.5	4.6%	Mathews County	80	1.0	1.3%
Bedford County	678	8.0	1.2%	Mecklenburg County	243	10.5	4.3%
Bland County	57	6.0	10.6%	Middlesex County	102	2.0	2.0%
Botetourt County	340	1.0	0.3%	Montgomery County	762	2.0	0.3%
Bristol City	207	1.0	0.5%	Nelson County	126	2.0	1.6%
Brunswick County	99	6.9	6.9%	New Kent County	238	2.0	0.8%
Buchanan County	198	3.0	1.5%	Newport News City	1,736	161.9	9.3%
Buckingham County	111	5.0	4.5%	Norfolk City	2,102	319.0	15.2%
Buena Vista City	62	0.0	0.0%	Northampton County	113	7.5	6.7%
Campbell County	592	7.0	1.2%	Northumberland County	114	4.0	3.5%
Caroline County	278	16.0	5.8%	Norton City	66	0.0	0.0%
Carroll County	279	3.0	1.1%	Nottoway County	155	21.8	14.1%
Charles City County	65	11.0	16.9%	Orange County	333	16.3	4.9%
Charlotte County	136	0.0	0.0%	Page County	255	4.0	1.6%
Charlottesville City	389	8.0	2.1%	Patrick County	178	1.0	0.6%
Chesapeake City	2,945	82.3	2.8%	Petersburg City	320	22.0	6.9%
Chesterfield County	4,519	220.0	4.9%	Pittsylvania County	635	12.5	2.0%
Clarke County	133	1.0	0.7%	Poquoson City	154	9.1	5.9%
Colonial Beach	48	2.0	4.2%	Portsmouth City	959	158.0	16.5%
Colonial Heights City	231	4.0	1.7%	Powhatan County	308	4.0	1.3%
Craig County	45	2.0	4.4%	Prince Edward County	143	15.0	10.5%
Culpeper County	561	31.0	5.5%	Prince George County	440	22.0	5.0%
Cumberland County	102	5.8	5.7%	Prince William County	5,967	388.5	6.5%
Danville City	433	29.0	6.7%	Pulaski County	311	4.0	1.3%
Dickenson County	173	6.2	3.6%	Radford City	118	0.0	0.0%
Dinwiddie County	331	6.0	1.8%	Rappahannock County	68	2.0	2.9%
Essex County	99	1.0	1.0%	Richmond City	1,914	79.6	4.2%
Fairfax County	12,681	419.3	3.3%	Richmond County	93	3.0	3.2%
Falls Church City	207	0.0	0.0%	Roanoke City	1,066	34.0	3.2%
Fauquier County	832	14.5	1.7%	Roanoke County	999	0.7	0.1%
Floyd County	135	1.0	0.7%	Rockbridge County	224	4.0	1.8%
Fluvanna County	249	2.0	0.8%	Rockingham County	818	8.4	1.0%
Franklin City	85	11.0	13.0%	Russell County	288	1.0	0.3%
Franklin County	524	10.5	2.0%	Salem City	286	0.0	0.0%
Frederick County	1,001	26.0	2.6%	Scott County	309	0.0	0.0%
Fredericksburg City	252	20.3	8.0%	Shenandoah County	443	20.5	4.6%
Galax City	97	1.1	1.2%	Smyth County	353	5.6	1.6%
Giles County	193	5.6	2.9%	Southampton County	194	40.4	20.8%
Gloucester County	369	8.5	2.3%	Spotsylvania County	1,591	120.5	7.6%
Goochland County	199	0.0	0.0%	Stafford County	2,338	65.2	2.8%
Grayson County	148	2.5	1.7%	Staunton City	195	3.0	1.5%
Greene County	227	4.0	1.8%	Suffolk City	1,002	87.4	8.7%
Greensville County	168	1.0	0.6%	Surry County	84	4.0	4.8%
Halifax County	380	13.0	3.4%	Sussex County	85	7.0	8.3%
Hampton City	1,473	83.7	5.7%	Tazewell County	392	13.0	3.3%
Hanover County	1,265	8.0	0.6%	Virginia Beach City	4,661	106.4	2.3%
Harrisonburg City	524	10.5	2.0%	Warren County	382	13.0	3.4%
Henrico County	3,450	165.0	4.8%	Washington County	577	6.0	1.0%
Henry County	520	7.0	1.3%	Waynesboro City	238	5.0	2.1%
Highland County	25	0.0	0.0%	West Point	65	0.0	0.0%
Hopewell City	310	10.0	3.2%	Westmoreland County	123	11.0	9.0%
Isle of Wight County	393	7.0	1.8%	Williamsburg-James City County	828	9.5	1.1%
King and Queen County	67	7.0	10.4%	Winchester City	359	17.0	4.7%
King George County	307	28.0	9.1%	Wise County	478	6.0	1.3%
King William County	147	4.0	2.7%	Wythe County	311	2.3	0.7%
Lancaster County	77	4.0	5.2%	York County	935	20.0	2.1%
Lee County	241	9.0	3.7%	**Grand Total**	**92,579**	**3573.3**	**3.9%**

NOTE: This table was downloaded from the VDOE Staffing and Vacancy Report "Build-a-Table" system on February 21, 2023.