



BY ALEXANDRIA CITY HIGH SCHOOL



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TOPIC

Affordability for All: Easing the Cost of Living by Expanding Access to Essential Resources for Families in Alexandria

TOPIC DESCRIPTION

Our topic focuses on the high cost of living in Alexandria and how it affects families who struggle to afford basic needs like food, hygiene products, and other essentials. We want to create a space inside schools where students and their families can easily access these resources for free or at low cost. This would help families spend less money on necessities and instead focus on important expenses like rent and bills. The goal of this project is to reduce financial stress and support families by making schools a reliable place to get the help they need.

RESULT

In Alexandria, roughly 35% of households struggle to afford basic needs, our project aims to reduce financial stress by providing free essentials in schools so we aim that at least half of these individuals get the help they need.



35%

families in USA

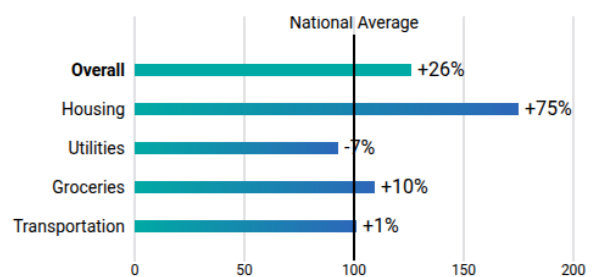
CYCP GOAL AND STRATEGIC AREA

We are focusing on the “Affordability for All”. 2 strategies from CYCP that we feel would be most helpful are strategy 15 and 20. Strategy 15 talks about offering affordable essentials, like childcare, healthcare, and job training co-located at community hubs. While strategy 20 focuses on creating youth discount programs for fresh produce and healthy foods.

SIGNIFICANCE

This result matters for our project because it shows how basic needs directly affect people’s health and daily life. When families struggle with the high cost of living, they may not have enough money for necessities like food, clean water, or hygiene items, which can lead to stress and health problems over time. By creating a space at our school where families and students can get these essential resources for free, we can help reduce that pressure and make their lives a little easier. This support allows families to focus their money on important expenses like rent and housing instead of worrying about basic needs. Overall, having access to these resources can improve well being, reduce stress, and help students do better in school because their basic needs are being met.

Cost of Living in Alexandria, Virginia by Expense Category

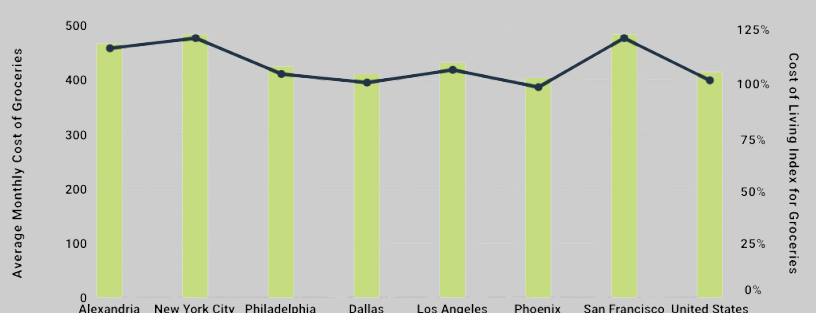


HOW ARE WE DOING?

Based on the chart, we see that Alexandria has high grocery costs compared to many other U.S. cities, with about \$450-\$470 per month for one person. This is close to expensive cities like New York City and San Francisco and higher than places like Dallas and Phoenix. This shows that families in Alexandria are already spending a lot on basic needs like food, and costs are around or above the national average. Since this is only for one person, families with more people likely spend much more each month, which increases financial stress. This supports our idea because it shows that cost of living is already a real issue in Alexandria, and creating a school resource space for essentials like food and hygiene items could help reduce that pressure for families.

AVERAGE FOOD & GROCERY COSTS

Average Cost of Groceries for One Person in Alexandria Compared to Major U.S. Cities



The image is a chart that compares the average monthly grocery costs for one person in different U.S. cities, including Alexandria, showing how expensive basic food costs are in each place. [Click here to learn more!](#)

IMPLEMENTATION

- Since the Children & Youth Community Plan (CYCP) began in 2021, the City of Alexandria has regularly tracked progress using CYCP Report Cards, which provide updated data on issues such as cost of living, housing, and youth well-being.
- Between 2024 and 2026, the City has continued efforts to address affordability by expanding access to housing support, food programs, and other essential resources that help reduce financial pressure on families.
- In 2026, Alexandria released a CYCP Impact Report (2021–2025) that highlights improvements in community programs, equity efforts, and support systems for children and families, showing measurable progress in reducing economic challenges.
- The City has also increased student involvement by collecting input through surveys and assessments, including the Youth Needs Assessment, which helps leaders better understand challenges related to cost of living and basic needs.

PARTNERSHIPS

- The Children, Youth & Families Collaborative Commission (CYFCC)
- Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS)
- The Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS)
- Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria (SAPCA)
- Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy (ACAP)
- Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria
- Youth Services Coordinating Council (YSCC)



PERFORMANCE EFFORT

How much did we do?

- In March and April 2026, the City partnered with the Alfred Street Baptist Church, which pledged over \$1 million to clear back rent for nearly 450 public housing families facing eviction.
- The FY 2026 budget increased the Alexandria City Public Schools operating transfer by \$9.4 million, which includes \$1.2 million for student and family support services

How well did we do it?

- The partnership between the City of Alexandria and Alfred Street Baptist Church effectively cleared the back rent for approximately 75% to 100% of the families initially identified as facing eviction in public housing.
- As of early 2026, the program serves 148 to over 110 households directly

PERFORMANCE EFFECT

1. In FY25, about 98% of surveyed youth and families said they were getting the help and support they needed, showing that most people feel their needs are being met through local services and programs.
2. Around 67% of the 11 planned action steps for securing affordable housing are either in progress or already completed, according to the CYCP Housing Report Card, which shows steady progress but also that more work is still needed to fully address housing affordability.
3. About 90% of students reported learning more about how nonprofits work to improve Alexandria, which shows increased awareness of community organizations and how they help address local issues like cost of living and family support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend ACPS open in-school centers where students can collect donated shoes, clothes, supplies, and electronics for themselves and their families to ease financial burdens. We are aware that ACPS has food drives currently but we aim to cover needs beyond just food, and allow them to focus their money on other essential living expenses.



ONLINE

1. Renter resources is a resource program with the main idea to provide essential financial, legal and educational support to ensure tenants can access and maintain safe, stable and affordable housing. These resources allow families to have a financial relief. They free up family budgets for other necessities like food, medicine, utilities and so on.
2. The Partnership to Prevent & End Homelessness serves as the single coordinating agency of Alexandria's collaborative network of public and private stakeholders working to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring.

IN PERSON

1. ALIVE! Food Hubs & Events- Families can visit community food hubs for free groceries and financial wellness workshops.
2. ACPS FACE Center- The Family and Community Engagement Center provides in-person parent support groups and navigation to help families access community resources.

CITATIONS

Citations in APA format

- Alexandria City Public Schools. (2022, December 2). Food resources available to the ACPS community. Retrieved April 30, 2026, from <https://www.acps.k12.va.us/boutus/express/stories/~board/epress/post/food-resources-available-to-the-acps-community>
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