



August 28, 2026

Chairs of the House Appropriations Committee
Chairs of the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee

Dear Chairs:

On behalf of Loudoun County Public Schools, I am pleased to submit the enclosed report detailing the planning, implementation, and current status of the Loudoun County Public Schools Recovery High School initiative, in accordance with Item 124, Paragraph UU of the 2024–2026 Appropriation Act.

As required by the Appropriation Act, this report outlines the use of state general funds, implementation progress, challenges encountered, and outcomes to date associated with the establishment of a year-round recovery high school serving students in the early stages of recovery from substance use disorder. The report also reflects programmatic updates from the full implementation for the 2025–2026 school year, including the official School Board designation of the program as the R.I.S.E. Academy (Recovery, Inspiration, Strength, Empowerment).

Loudoun County Public Schools remains committed to fulfilling the intent of Item 124 by providing a high-quality academic and recovery-focused educational environment that supports student wellness, academic progress, and successful reintegration into traditional school settings. We appreciate the General Assembly's investment in this critical work and welcome continued collaboration and oversight as the program matures.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,

Tedra Richardson

Tedra Richardson
Assistant Superintendent
Department of Student Services
Loudoun County Public Schools



Recovery High School Initiative - Loudoun County Public Schools

R.I.S.E. Academy Recovery High School

First-Year Implementation and Success Update Update for the General Assembly

2025–2026 School Year

Executive Summary

Item 124, Paragraph UU of the 2024–2026 Appropriation Act provided state general funds to support the establishment of year-round recovery high schools serving students in the early stages of recovery from substance use disorder. Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS), as the designated school division for Superintendent's Region 4, was awarded \$500,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 and \$250,000 in FY 2026 to plan and implement a Recovery High School program.

Following an intentional planning and development period, LCPS successfully transitioned from planning to implementation and opened the R.I.S.E. Academy (Recovery, Inspiration, Strength, Empowerment) for the 2025–2026 school year. The inaugural year represented a significant milestone for LCPS and the region, providing students in recovery with an educational environment specifically designed to support academic achievement, sustained recovery, social-emotional well-being, and successful transition toward graduation and, when appropriate, reintegration into a traditional school setting.

During its first year, the R.I.S.E. Academy served 21 students and demonstrated encouraging progress in student engagement, academic achievement, relationships, and access to recovery supports. The program also expanded its network of community partnerships, strengthening the continuum of services available to students and families. The first year of implementation provided an important foundation for continued program refinement, outcome measurement, and long-term sustainability.



Legislative Authority and Program Purpose

The Appropriation Act directs funding to support year-round recovery high schools that are open to students residing within the defined region, serve students in the early stages of recovery from substance use disorder or dependency, and provide academic, emotional, and social supports that enable students to earn a high school diploma and successfully reintegrate into a traditional school setting.

The LCPS R.I.S.E. Academy was established to meet these statutory objectives while aligning with the division's broader student wellness, mental health, and alternative education frameworks. The program provides an alternative educational environment in which students can focus on their recovery while maintaining progress toward graduation. Students remain concurrently enrolled in their home schools, allowing for continued connection to their school community and providing a pathway for transition back to a traditional setting when appropriate.

The program is grounded in the understanding that the social environment of school can significantly influence adolescents in recovery. A recovery-focused school environment can reduce risk factors associated with returning to a traditional school setting following substance use treatment, including exposure to substance-using peers, peer pressure, and access to substances, while surrounding students with peers and adults who understand and support their recovery journey.

Planning and Implementation Activities

The successful first year of implementation was preceded by extensive planning and stakeholder engagement. In September 2024, LCPS convened a Recovery School Roundtable that included stakeholders and community partners. The feedback received during the roundtable was instrumental in refining the program's vision, goals, and success criteria and helped establish a shared understanding of the needs of students and families.

On November 15, 2024, LCPS held its Project Charter Kick-Off, initiating a structured implementation process focused on program development, staffing, operational planning, partnerships, and timelines. The Project Charter Team met regularly throughout the planning process to guide the development of the program and ensure alignment with the intent of the state funding.



LCPS also presented the Recovery High School proposal to the School Board and evaluated multiple facility options. Ultimately, the division determined that co-location with other non-traditional programs would provide the strongest foundation for implementation, operational efficiency, student access, and wraparound supports.

The R.I.S.E. Academy opened in August 2025 at The North Star building, co-located with Alternative Education and the North Star program. This model provided an established educational setting while allowing R.I.S.E. Academy to maintain a distinct recovery-focused identity and program structure.

First-Year Implementation and Student Outcomes

The 2025–2026 school year marked the first full year of operation for the R.I.S.E. Academy. The program served 21 students during its inaugural year, providing individualized academic, clinical, counseling, and recovery-focused supports.

Students demonstrated strong academic progress while participating in the program. The integrated model allowed staff to address students' academic needs while simultaneously supporting their social-emotional well-being and recovery goals. Students were provided with access to coursework aligned with state standards and the requirements necessary to progress toward a high school diploma.

The first year also demonstrated the importance of creating a school environment centered on belonging, safety, relationships, and recovery. Students had opportunities to build positive relationships with peers and staff and to participate in individualized and group supports. The program established a foundation for students to experience school as a place where they could pursue academic goals while being supported in their recovery.

In addition to academic and student-level progress, LCPS significantly expanded community partnerships during the first year. Collaboration with community mental health, substance use treatment, recovery, and other service providers strengthened the network of resources available to students and families. These partnerships have become an important component of the R.I.S.E. Academy's comprehensive support model and will continue to be developed as the program matures.



Program Goals and Success Criteria

The R.I.S.E. Academy's goals and success criteria are designed to measure the program's impact beyond traditional academic outcomes. The program seeks to create a safe, nurturing, and welcoming environment in which students develop a sense of belonging and positive relationships with peers, teachers, clinical staff, and administrators. Student experiences are assessed through interviews, ongoing interactions, and service delivery.

The Academy is also committed to ensuring that every student has access to an academic program that meets state standards and supports progress toward a high school diploma. Academic progress, credit attainment, and graduation outcomes will continue to serve as key measures of program success.

Supporting students' social-emotional health and recovery remains central to the program. Students have access to counseling, student assistance services, clinical supports, and internal and external community resources. Individualized plans provide a framework for identifying student goals, monitoring progress, and engaging students in their own success.

The program also emphasizes student and family engagement. Families are encouraged to participate in their child's educational and recovery journey through communication, workshops, events, and ongoing progress monitoring. Student attendance and family participation are important indicators of engagement and program effectiveness.

Finally, the R.I.S.E. Academy seeks to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and supports necessary to sustain recovery during and following participation in the program. Through education, counseling, individualized planning, community partnerships, and follow-up supports, students are provided with tools to make healthy decisions and pursue long-term success.

Use and Alignment of State Funds

State funding provided through Item 124, Paragraph UU has supported the development and implementation of the R.I.S.E. Academy in alignment with the approved Grant Award Notification. Initial expenditures supported the establishment of essential clinical capacity, including the Clinical Coordinator position, whose work was instrumental in developing the program's clinical intake process, transition planning, community partnerships, and staffing structures.



As the program transitioned to full implementation during the 2025–2026 school year, remaining state funds and the FY 2026 allocation supported the staffing necessary to operate the Recovery High School and provide students with an integrated academic and recovery-focused program.

The investment of state funds has enabled LCPS to move from program design to implementation and establish a sustainable infrastructure for serving students in recovery.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

As with the development of any new program, LCPS encountered challenges during the planning and implementation process. The initial launch timeline was adjusted from March 2025 to August 2025 to allow additional time for facility planning, staffing, program development, and the establishment of appropriate operational structures.

The decision to co-locate the program ultimately provided a strong foundation for implementation and access to existing educational and support infrastructure. The first year also reinforced the importance of developing strong community partnerships and ensuring that academic, clinical, and recovery services are coordinated around the individual needs of each student.

The inaugural year has provided valuable information that will be used to refine intake and transition processes, strengthen outcome measurement, expand partnerships, and further define the supports necessary for students at different stages of recovery.

Next Steps and Outlook

Building on the success of the 2025–2026 school year, LCPS will continue to strengthen the R.I.S.E. Academy through ongoing evaluation of student outcomes, academic progress, attendance, family engagement, recovery supports, and successful transitions.

LCPS will continue to expand and deepen community partnerships to ensure that students and families have access to a comprehensive continuum of recovery and mental health resources. The division will also continue to refine the personalized success planning process and develop meaningful measures of long-term student outcomes.



As the program matures, LCPS will examine opportunities to expand access to students throughout Superintendent's Region 4 and, ultimately, to other school divisions within the region, consistent with the intent of the General Assembly's investment.

Conclusion

The 2025–2026 school year represented a significant and successful first year of implementation for the LCPS R.I.S.E. Academy. With the support of the General Assembly, LCPS established a recovery-focused educational program that served 21 students, supported strong academic progress, strengthened student engagement and relationships, and expanded partnerships with community organizations.

The R.I.S.E. Academy provides students in recovery with an opportunity to pursue their education in an environment intentionally designed to support both academic achievement and recovery. The first year has demonstrated the value of this model and established a strong foundation for continued growth and improvement.

Loudoun County Public Schools remains grateful for the General Assembly's investment in recovery-focused education and is committed to ensuring that these resources continue to provide meaningful opportunities for students to achieve academic success, strengthen their recovery, and build a pathway toward graduation and a successful future.