

Written Testimony on FCPS Superintendent's Proposed 2008 Budget.

Presented by Dr. Charles Dane for the Executive Board of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Association on Jan. 29, 2007.

We appreciate the Superintendent's cost-saving efforts in 2007 in order to carry-over additional funds toward the lower County transfer projections for 2008, especially since FCPS has no sinking funds to fall back upon. In addition, we recognize the County's \$8M contribution to Teacher Salaries Enhancements to maintain competitiveness in selected categories.

This will be a lean tax year, and while no new programs are proposed, there are necessary increases in some line items. Of the eight line items increasing by over \$1M, seven are necessary to maintain current programs, including salaries and health benefits (whose rate increases are both reduced), membership adjustment, alternative school program (assuming responsibility for a troubled-children's school previously supported by the County), and contribution toward GASB 45 (requiring an existing fund to fully cover up front the health benefits of retirees), an increase in VRS retirement contribution, and the State retirement rate increase. The latter three items are mandated by State and federal government actions and the mandated amounts total \$35.9M or almost 48% of the Superintendent's requested increase.

We recognize that FCPS is required to contribute the additional 0.5% toward the Virginia retirement plan, and when this program was initiated we raised the concern that beginning this commitment might put a strain on the budget in subsequent years. Thus, this is an unavoidable expansion.

We believe that there are some areas that should receive additional funding, and under a pay-go philosophy we believe that at least two of the higher cost expansions should proceed at a slower pace. We are also concerned that deferral of many routine costs for one year anticipating a different economic and/or political climate in the next budget year is speculative.

We recognize the necessary reduction in salary increases, and note that recent COLA or market share increases with step increases have been reasonable compared with other working groups, and the FCPS benefits (apparently not mentioned in the budget) are at the high end compared with surrounding jurisdictions. We have already recognized the County's \$8M contribution to Teacher Salaries Enhancements to maintain competitiveness in selected categories.

Nevertheless, we are concerned about the low increase for those teachers not receiving a step increase in this budget year, and support at least a 2.5% and preferably a 3% increase for those individuals. A 1.0% increase for the approximately 10% of teachers not receiving step increases would amount to approximately **\$1.1M**.

We understand that non-teacher employees also receive step increases, but are concerned about limiting the non-step employee increases to 2%. Perhaps, an additional **\$0.5M** should be included in the budget for appropriate increases.

Secondly, although we recognize that despite the significant salary and benefits offered to attract bus drivers, there may still be a pressing need for bus drivers, and to the extent that administrative persons have to perform this function, this results in inefficiency. Perhaps, changes in incentives and revised strategies for enlisting

drivers could provide the needed drivers without additional resources.

In addition to having identified the salary issue for those teachers in non-step years and the possible need for additional resources for other employees, we think the following activities should receive additional funding:

1. We believe that preventative maintenance should always be adequately funded – an additional **\$1.0M**. Although keeping the funding level the same may save in the short term, it will likely cost more in the longer term. Major maintenance is also a concern, but perhaps those significant items can be addressed in the Capital Improvement Program.

2. We agree with the increased support for incorporating expelled students back into the educational process, but we do not see a parallel effort to support continued education for suspended students during the period of their suspensions. Perhaps, this calls for a new strategy rather than an increased cost.

3. We also support the unfunded increase for professional learning coaches – an additional **\$1.0M**. Continued development and support for our teachers is critical to the continued high performance of the FCPS system.

4. While we believe the identified unfunded support for T-specs is important this would be an additional \$1.3M, which cannot be accommodated within our proposed increases and offsetting reductions.

The Federation has always supported the concept of all-day kindergarten in all elementary schools. However, recognizing the tight budget year, and in suggesting how to pay for our recommended increases, we believe a more cautious approach to the kindergarten expansion is warranted. Slower initial expansion of kindergarten to 10 additional schools will also allow more time to incorporate needed additional space into planned renovations – Savings [\\$2.9M](#).

We also support the Strategic Governance goal of Fairfax County students achieving competency in two foreign languages, including expansion at the elementary level, and eventually through middle schools. Some future savings may be realized by focusing on four or five “world” languages throughout all grades.

However, in regard to expansion of foreign language programs into the elementary schools in this tight budget year, we believe that the proposed expansion is inadequate to provide the type of education/experience needed, and could be delayed until another year – Savings [\\$0.7M](#).

In conclusion, we support that Superintendent’s proposed 4.6% increase in the County’s transfer, but have recommended a few changes in priority.