

Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations
Membership Meeting of January 15, 2004
MINUTES
(Approved 2/25/04)

The meeting of FCFCA was held at the Packard Center at 7:30 p.m. (Attendance list is attached.) President Carol Hawn introduced School Superintendent Daniel Domenech. Dr. Domenech will retire on March 5, 2004, and this was his last appearance before the Federation.

Program — Dr. Domenech provided his presentation (attached) to the School Board on his proposed FY 2005 school system budget. He emphasized the following points.

The total proposed FY 2005 school budget is \$1.8 billion. In Dr. Domenech's time with FCPS, the student body has grown by 25,000, to 166,780. Lately the growth rate has slowed. Before 2001, there were almost 4,000 more students a year. This year's increase was 1,280.

There has been an 80% increase in the number of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students since 2000 and substantial increases in special education students and students with household incomes below \$24,000. These groups are more expensive to educate.

The FY 2005 budget is \$7.1 million more than last year, an increase described as modest. Last year's budget overestimated the growth rate; the savings of \$34.8 million have been applied to this year's budget.

The budget priority is teacher compensation. Fairfax County pays lower starting salaries than Montgomery County, Alexandria, Arlington, or Falls Church. This hurts in competing for the best new teachers. Dr. Domenech also said the county has lost experienced teachers to Loudon, Prince William, and Montgomery County schools. The proposed compensation package has a total impact of 7.1%. Loudon's increase is 9%, and Montgomery County is in the 8 to 9% range. The budget also includes a new program for autistic students.

The budget increase will not fully cover these expenses. To make up the difference, the budget includes staffing reductions. To avoid larger cuts, the budget requests \$52.1 million more from the county. Dr. Domenech described this budget gap as narrower than in the past.

Dr. Domenech noted Fairfax students have the highest SATs in the DC metropolitan area. Newsweek ranked all of the county's high schools in the top 4 percent nationwide, a record unmatched by any other U.S. school system.

Dr. Domenech commented on the No Child Left Behind Act, which he described as "noble but totally unrealistic." Schools fail under the NCLB if 100 percent of ESOL, special education, or low-income students do not progress well enough in meeting the standards. This has the effect of punishing inclusion, he said. Langley High has already failed because of its special education results. If schools fail for two years, the county must bus students at those schools to other county schools upon request, regardless of cost or logistics. Dr. Domenech fears that, as students abandon certain schools, performance will fall, leading to re-segregation and white flight.

A brief question-and-answer period followed. The topics included:

- the new program for autistic students, which will have a cost of \$45,000 per child
- the cost of unfunded federal mandates on the school system
- whether to refuse federal money as other systems have (he felt the money was needed)

On behalf of the Federation, President Carol Hawn presented Superintendent Domenech with a certificate of appreciation and a non-Federation commemorative mug.

Superintendent Domenech then left for a School Board meeting. Andy Hawkins, Director of Budget Services, and Paul Regnier, Community Relations, answered questions on these topics:

- the outside audit (Gibson Report) regarding the county's special education program
- the autism program and an earlier proposed charter school for autistic students
- possible after-school programs for middle-school students (funded by county)
- students failing Standards of Learning, who won't graduate; limiting the failure rate

Business Meeting —

- a. The minutes of the December 18, 2003, Membership Meeting were moved, seconded, and approved as published.
- b. Acceptance of the treasurer's report for January (attached) was moved, seconded, and approved.
- c. President Carol Hawn reported she testified before the local delegation on January 10 on the Federation's legislative package. Copies not handed out will be mailed to Supervisors and the delegation.
- d. Charles Dane reported the Education Committee plans to draft a position on the FY 2005 FCPS budget and circulate it for Board approval before the first budget hearing.
- e. Flint Webb provided a county phone number, 703-324-1937, to correct stormwater management problems or report lack of compliance with low-impact construction standards.
- f. Sally Ormsby reported that as of the General Assembly opening on January 14, 300 House bills had already been filed. Another 1,263 bills were filed January 14. This is on track for about 3,000 this year, a high number. The primary focus of the session will be tax reform. Several bills address the redistricting process, on which the Federation does not have a position. Local legislators introduced several bills, including impact fees and a piggyback local income tax.
- g. Becky Cate noted the county wants to post 150 "Yield to Pedestrian" signs this year. If you know where one is needed, notify the county at Mimi.Murray@fairfaxcounty.gov.
- h. Art Wells reported Jeffrey Nolan will serve on the Students with Disabilities Committee.

New Business —

There was a suggestion to create a web site and list serv committee. It was suggested we post the minutes after each meeting, but noted this could put errors into the public domain. Instead, it was suggested that draft minutes could be distributed to interested members by e-mail.

Next Membership Meeting: Thursday, February 19, 2004

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Addenda:

Superintendent's FY 2005 Proposed Budget (presentation notes)
Highlights / FY 2005 Superintendent's Proposed Budget, FCPS