

Written Testimony on FY2011 Proposed Budget
presented to the Fairfax County Public School Board on January 27, 2010
on behalf of the Education Committee of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations.

We recognize that additional transfer monies are needed if Fairfax County is to maintain its nationally recognized quality public education system. Toward this end, we support additional tax rate increases and access to other revenue sources, provided that the funds are divided proportionately between the County programs and FCPS. We also continue to support the joint BOS/FCPS Smart Services effort to identify savings through better coordination and potential cross agency support of services.

Partnerships between businesses and schools have been a great help to those schools fortunate enough to have had such partnerships, and while we support the developing effort to centralize and coordinate some of these efforts through a program known as Multimedia Partnerships, we believe that greater effort should be expended more immediately to enlist corporate support for academies and specialized training programs, including the provision for naming rights. Corporate sponsorship support should also be sought for computer labs, and to augment revenue to allow for reduced AP/IB testing fees. Furthermore, we encourage school administrators to encourage more volunteers to support the schools.

We appreciate the effort of the Superintendent and his leadership team in exploring ways to accomplish the same educational results with different organization of some programs and administrative functions.

We also commend the Superintendent and his leadership team for being proactive this fiscal year in redesigning the summer school programs to maintain the essential parts of this education program. The committee appreciates the efforts being made by FCPS to evaluate the needs of each student at Pimmit Hills. We encourage the staff to consider an alternative location in the Tysons area for many of the students because we believe that northeastern section of the county needs a facility similar to those already in the southern and western sections, especially to accommodate some of the students to be enrolled next year.

We believe that our previous recommendation to the Superintendent and some members of the School Board to identify in a single document the reasons for the FCPS budget increases since FY2000 would have helped to address the persistence of an attitude of many County citizens that wasteful spending has been rampant in the school district. We once again encourage the production of such a document.

We have had the same difficulty as we did last year in determining what is in the proposed budget from a single document. Instead, we had to rely on comparing the realignments in the proposed budget with all of the items in the program budget. Having said that we also note that the programs identified in the FY2009 program budget are not always the same in the FY2010 program budget. However, until we can further review these changes we will accept the notion that some of these were necessary because of merging of some programs and the increased effort to separate some programs so as to better explain the function and benefit of each program.

We are aware that FCPS non-school based management is again taking a 5% reduction, which makes a total of 20% over 4 years, and that the non-school-based management staff to total employees is one of the lowest in the metropolitan area. Furthermore, we are aware that not all of the specific reductions in this area have been identified, so we are somewhat limited in being able to comment on the impacts. However, we suggest considering the merger of contracting services in the Finance and Facilities Departments.

Before mentioning some specifics, let us stress the desirability of dealing with some reductions and some fees on the basis of some type of sliding scale, at least a three tiered basis. While the parents' resources determine the FRL category, there is reason to establish at least two additional fee or support levels, based on family income, for those above this FRL level. Some parents above the FRL level may still not be able to pay the required fees for AB/IB tests or for participation in clubs but at least some parents in higher salary categories express willingness to pay a larger amount. One possible way to implement such a policy is to establish a sliding scale or tiered levels based on family salary and rely on a signed statement that the family does not exceed a set level.

We have approached the review of the proposed budget by considering what is most important to the education and development of Fairfax County students, and not solely which activities involve the most students. This is especially relevant when there may be alternatives to some of the programs.

Within the grouping of items that would face reductions without an increase in the transfer or some comparable increase in funding, we believe that funding for band and strings could be reduced provided funding is distributed on a sliding scale to those wishing to participate in this program as a club activity. Foreign language immersion might also be supported with a combination of funding for those on FRL, school funds, and community support.

We believe, however, that some programs in the Proposed Budget have been cut too deeply. Thus, we believe the proposed reductions in the number of assistant principals and in the number of custodians is excessive. For example, when the number of students compared with the combined number of principals and assistant principals shows that FCPS ratio is already higher than Montgomery and Arlington County school districts. Furthermore, a reduction of only 9 assistant principals would place FCPS on a par with Montgomery County schools in a student to assistant principal ratio. Also, while we recognize that some reduction in sports activities will be necessary to deal with the budget shortfall, we are concerned about the elimination of all freshman sports. This activity is very important to the physical and moral development of these students at this time of their lives.

We recognize that some increase in fees will be necessary. However, we believe that some of the fees are excessive especially without a per student or family cap.

We support funding for counselors and social workers during this downturn in our County's economy, and for full-day kindergarten.

We are also aware that a new formula based on an "at risk index" is being developed to distribute funds to schools, and we would suggest that these funds be distributed based on a sliding scale with the largest amount going to schools with the highest "at risk index" with lesser amounts down to some cut off level for extra funds.

Finally, while we remain concerned that there will have been no salary increases for two years for most teachers and staff, we are especially concerned that Fairfax County's most experienced teachers (those with over 20 years service) will have received only a 2% salary increase during this 3-year period.

We hope these comments will be helpful to you in developing the advertised budget, and we thank you for this opportunity to share our perspective during the very difficult budget cycle.