

Testimony at School Budget Hearing

January 19, 2015

First, we'd like to commend Superintendent Garza for making tough decisions and coming up with a cooperative budget number.

We agree with focusing on increasing compensation for FCPS employees as compensation is crucial in trying to attract and retain a superior workforce. In continuing to develop your thoughts on salary, we recommend considering flexible compensation packages as younger employees could have different needs than employees close to retirement.

We understand that minimum and maximum class sizes are being reconsidered. We recommend flexibility to allow for exploring ways to reduce class size in the most needed courses. In this spirit we recommend trying the following pilot program in some high schools, which may require a waiver or discussion with state authorities. We suggested this idea last year as well, but reiterate our support for creative approaches to dealing with high class sizes.

The pilot program is to ask some high school principals to choose one or two courses to have much larger class sizes than normal, and use the related cost savings to have reduced class sizes in some other courses. The larger classes could be taught similar to college lecture classes and, if feasible, periodically broken down into smaller groups. Teachers teaching the larger classes could get a bonus or reduced number of teaching periods, but this should be done in a way to lower the overall cost of that larger class. Further on class size, the proposed budget has 40 extra teacher positions to help alleviate large elementary school class sizes. For transparency, we recommend that later this year FCPS states the impact of these extra positions.

FCPS is seeking to increase revenue by recruiting business partnerships. We encourage this effort and also to explore other ways to broaden the revenue base. One idea you may wish to consider, as mentioned in the Federation's 2015 Legislative package, is for the education and medical communities to partner to increase the Virginia tobacco tax and allocate the increased revenue to health care and education. The current Virginia tobacco tax per pack is much lower than the national average, and even substantially lower than our neighboring major tobacco growing states.

There appears to be better cooperation between the School Board and Board of Supervisors. We appreciate this and encourage continuing to improve cooperation, as we believe this helps in providing quality education in a cost-effective manner.

Thanks for your collective service to the children in our communities.

Ed Saperstein
Co-Chair Education Committee
Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations