

**Fairfax County School Board Presentation
To the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
On the
FCPS FY 2010 Budget**

**By Dan Storck, Chairman, Fairfax County School Board
March 31, 2009**

Good afternoon. School systems across the country are facing difficult financial challenges. Here in Fairfax, we are no different.

What sets Fairfax County Public Schools apart from other school systems, is the education we deliver to our students every day. We focus on developing every student to his or her fullest potential—whether that student walks into our classroom from the wealthiest home or has newly arrived from a war-torn country. Our teachers embrace, equally, every individual child and select from the array of teaching tools at their disposal to make sure each achieves up to his or her potential.

And we are succeeding – and improving our levels of success -- by all measures. Most of you are very aware of the success statistics, but I will just put up a slide that lists some of those statistics. Note that our SAT score continue to outpace those in the Commonwealth and in the nation. We are also making sure that our students acquire 21st century skills, such as technological, analytical, and communication skills. This kind of success does not happen by accident.

As all of you know, the enrollment in special education and English for speakers of other languages is increasing, and the greatest increase in the past five years has been in the number of students eligible for free or reduced price meals, and educating these students costs more. Let's see how this plays out in two particular schools (reference to powerpoint slide).

The School Board has worked hard to make sure we continue to educate all students and continue to raise achievement levels, and the system of goal-setting, implementation monitoring, and results reporting we have put in place gives us a very good handle on how we are doing. And we follow through. Here is a chart showing improved achievement in just one area, grade 6 math. As you can see, achievement is improving not only overall, but especially with the neediest students.

But making this happen requires not only excellent teachers and principals, and others who work in schools, but also planning, coordination, and assistance to schools from experts in areas such as instruction and special education. At this

point, I would like to introduce two leaders of those experts – Assistant Superintendent Peter Noonan from Instructional Services and Assistant Superintendent Kim Dockery from Special Services to talk briefly about some of the work they are doing to ensure higher student achievement.

The budget I present to you today balances the educational needs of every one of our students with the financial challenges that we all face. And we have made efforts, just as County government has done, to address the FY 2010 deficit.

The budget we have sent to you is very pared down. Expecting over 5000 additional students next year over the number budgeted for in the current year, we have put together a budget that is \$10.3 million less than the approved budget for the current year with a decrease in per-pupil spending of \$498.

The budget before you includes an increase in the transfer request, over the current year, of \$56.8 million to cover membership growth and some of the revenue loss on the state side. But, since we sent you this budget, we have been able to reduce that requested increase by updating our membership projections - - although the number is still over 5000 – by identifying savings in the current-year budget, and by using federal stimulus funds. Our transfer request is now \$21.3 million. This has also included elimination of 832 positions. As you can see, the only categories of employees which have increased are classroom teachers and classroom assistants. Declines in the other areas will, nevertheless, be felt in schools. It is helpful to compare our administrative efficiency with surrounding school systems. As you can see, we have the smallest percentage of non-school-based management per student. Although it is not part of the operating budget, our capital improvement budget also compares favorably.

We have worked over the years with County government agencies to share and cooperate in order to be as efficient as possible. And our efforts have paid off with better services at the lowest possible cost. However, there are many services that our schools depend on -- that are critical to our ability to provide a safe and secure environment for students -- that are funded directly under the county budget. These include School Resource Officers who work for the police department, clinic room aides who work for the health department, Head Start classes, and the middle-school after-school program which is jointly funded by the county and the school system. Last week's arrests of middle and high school aged children for gang activities, based on an investigation started when a middle school SRO got information from a student, shows how important these programs are. Restoring funding for these and other county expenditures that are critical to the schools will cost another \$3.7 million.

These are our requests today.

All of us know that we live in fiscally trying times, but, as we look ahead we recognize that this recession will end soon. For decades, Fairfax County has

been a national leader in attracting business and cost-effectively offering an excellent quality of life, and schools are critical to our success. Right now we need to continue to foster quality in everything we do -- especially in our schools which, I think everyone here would agree, are a major key to our success.

These sentiments were surely echoed by the hundreds of citizens who attended our community dialogues on the budget last fall and who indicated that education here in Fairfax County is a top priority item. They do understand the connection between great schools and our local economy.

Developing a budget lower than the current year's while providing a high-quality education for an additional 5000 students has required major reductions. And this budget includes major reductions. The most difficult reductions were in employee compensation and class size. No FCPS employee will receive a salary increase of any kind under this budget, and class sizes will increase across the board by .5 student. Support functions provided at schools and from central offices were also cut.

In 2002, Fairfax County was named "one of the best-managed jurisdictions in America" according to the Governing Magazine and the Government Performance Project (GPP), one of only two jurisdictions to receive the highest grade awarded in the study that looked at management practices in 40 counties nationwide. We in the school system work hard to be as well managed as County government, and we believe we are. But don't take our word for it.

Let's look at span of control. With almost 200 schools and education centers, our middle managers -- the level of management between the superintendent and the school -- are critical to our success. These are our "cluster" offices. A cluster office consists of 3 people -- an assistant superintendent, a director, and an administrative assistant. These 3 people are responsible for the staffs of 3 "pyramids," each consisting of a high school and the middle schools and elementary schools that feed into it -- about 30 schools overall. There are about 2000 staff members working with 18,000 to 22,000 students in each of these clusters. In other areas of the country, this span of control -- one of our clusters -- would equal a small to medium stand-alone school system. For instance, the entire Arlington County Public Schools has around 20,000 students.

FCPS is a tight, well managed, cost-effective operation that produces world-class results. Residents of Fairfax County have reason to be proud -- not just of our educational excellence but of our ability to produce this excellence at very low cost.

But excellence does have a cost, and further cuts would undermine the quality of which we are so proud.

It will be a difficult year, but we believe we can maintain quality this year with this budget. When the fiscal clouds lift, we will be ready to move ahead.

I have asked some of our teachers to come to today's presentation -- one from each of your Districts. Each of them is here to invite you to visit his or her school. When each of you visits the school you are being invited to visit, I hope that you will ask the principal questions such as the following:

- What services do you receive from cluster and central offices and how do they help you manage your school and improve student achievement?
- How do you use the professional staff in your school to manage the school and improve student achievement?
- What cuts will you have to make next year to live within the advertised FY 2010 budget?

I hope you take advantage of these invitations before you vote on our budget. We on the School Board believe that the “show” is always better than the “tell.” You will see well trained, enthusiastic teachers teaching in orderly and stimulating environments, administrators focusing on instruction and able to balance many responsibilities. You will likely be surprised at the level of instruction at the grade levels you visit and may ask yourselves (seriously) if you *are*, in fact, smarter than a 5th grader. And, of course, you are welcome to visit any of our schools; just get in touch with the principal.

Education is a people business, and FCPS has for years been able to attract great people -- teachers, school administrators, and many others who contribute to the excellence of our schools. When you visit our schools, you will hear about the quality of the support services that our schools receive as well as the quality of people who work in schools. Our people are a team, and all of them respect and depend on each other.

Excellence attracts excellence, which is why we have been able to attract great teachers from across the country. It is also why people moving to this area want to live in Fairfax County and why businesses want to locate here. Just in the last year, we have welcomed the arrival of Volkswagen of America, Google, and Hilton Hotels. We cannot afford to undermine our excellence with further budget cuts in the short term that will affect our ability to move forward when the economy improves.