

Superintendent's Community Advisory Committee

topic: **Balancing Taxes and Expenditures**

comments from Dick Reed – Superintendent's Appointee

Balancing the growing needs of the school system with the desire to lower the property tax burden to Fairfax County homeowners is an increasingly significant issue now that overall membership is stabilizing but the percentages of students with special needs are increasing.

Initiatives – The School Board should consider initiatives that will offer the largest payback. That seems simplistic, but isn't. The largest impact comes at the youngest ages, so expanding **full-day Kindergarten** to all schools in the FCPS would appear to offer a large payback. But full-day Kindergarten only significantly improves those denied substantial investment from their families. As all special needs schools already have this service, and the remaining students already receive substantial investments from their families, **improvement from adding schools is marginal if it exists at all. The School Board should not fund additional full-day Kindergarten.** Those funds can be better used elsewhere, most likely in teacher training.

Teacher training is of considerable importance – it may be the single most important thing the school system can do for its students – and a comprehensive program **should be fully funded.** If the FCPS has such a program, ensuring it's fully funded should be the School Board's top priority among staff initiatives: above salary increases, retirement program funding, or any other compensation issue. The FCPS staff justly values their skills and abilities, and offering them the ability to improve those skills and abilities is something they would prize highly.

Salaries are not low, if not the highest in the region. Why should the FCPS pay the highest salaries in the region? One aspect of compensation – professional development – should be increased. The rest is already competitive. Proof of this is the huge number of job applicants the FCPS receives every year, upwards of ten applicants for every vacancy. Clearly salary is not an issue for new hires. **Salary growth, including all types of compensation – save professional development (see above), should not exceed growth in the cost of living.** This includes step increases, inflation, etc. When combined, these increases should not exceed inflation.

Foreign language instruction in elementary school has value, but only as a nice-to-have. There are other initiatives that are more deserving of funding. It would be even better to expand the language offerings in middle and high schools instead. This **should not be funded.**

Holding the line/cutting back – Holding programs solely to inflationary growth is reasonable, but only if one is buying time to consider eliminating some and adding others at some future date. It's that sort of study that should be done, and its recommendations implemented. Is there such a study? If so, implement them. If not, use the funds that would have gone to new programs to perform a truly in-depth study.

In any FCPS budget there are programs and services that can be eliminated. The study noted above would dictate which ones. If there is no study now, then **there should be no or very few programs or services eliminated** until one is completed.