



MEMO

August 25, 2020

TO: Senator Janet Howell, Senator Chap Petersen, Delegate David Bulova, and
Delegate Ken Plum
FROM: Melanie Meren, Member, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) School Board
RE: **General Assembly's actions regarding education funding in FY21 and FY22**

This Memo addresses three topics:

1. Actions FCPS School Board took during COVID-19 in relation to County and State activities
2. Implications of the General Assembly's (GA) technical change to the sales tax revenue
3. The GA's actions can mitigate harm to our public schools

1. FCPS School Board Actions in relation to County and State activities

On July 6, Governor Northam wrote in a [letter to Superintendents and School Boards](#) that, "This process leaves the final decisions about reopening squarely in the hands of local school boards." A week later, [Governor Cuomo of New York announced data-driven guidance for reopening schools](#). The contrast couldn't be more striking. Soon after, California joined suit with NY.

Also on July 6, FCPS Superintendent Scott Brabrand transmitted a letter from the school division to Fairfax County Executive Bryan Hill, with specific requests for help from the County Health Department to establish guidance and metrics for opening and closing schools. The Superintendent received a response later that day saying that the County had already provided "volumes of guidance." While the response included additional information, it was mainly about how contact tracing would be accomplished. This did not respond to FCPS' questions.

In the absence of forthcoming guidance and metrics from the County or State, the FCPS School Board directed the Superintendent on July 21 to prepare metrics for the school division to use in making decisions to open or close schools. FCPS' *public education professionals* did so, and presented *preliminary* metrics to the School Board on August 18 ([Download here](#), and see slides 34-37). **In essence, FCPS undertook creating the equivalent of what the states of NY and CA created, because of lack of local and state support.**

Furthermore, while Fairfax County received \$200M in CARES Act funding, FCPS received just one tenth the amount (\$20M); however, no funds to date have been earmarked or allocated from the County to FCPS.

Ultimately, FCPS' services have not only provided education, but also critical help for mental and physical health, employment, and childcare challenges - for students, families, and workers.

- Since March 13, FCPS has provided over 2.2 million meals to families through daily weekday meal distribution at schools and via bus stop delivery.
- The Superintendent has pledged to keep support staff employed - including bus drivers, food service workers, custodians, and other positions. Some positions will be reassigned to other responsibilities in an effort to keep staff employed. This is an unemployment strategy that not only benefits Fairfax residents: one third of FCPS staff live outside the county.
- A plethora of mental health supports are available to students, families, and staff - including the ability to speak with a live mental health professional via phone.
- FCPS has outlined a plan to provide childcare to classroom teachers who otherwise couldn't return to the classroom for lack of childcare - something that didn't even exist prior to COVID.

2. Implications of the General Assembly's technical change to the sales tax revenue

Given the astounding amount of work and challenges that FCPS staff have responded to, reducing state funding at this time will not only wreak havoc on the ***already adjusted*** budget in place for the current FY21 year (for the school year that officially began on August 17 with teachers beginning work), **but will also jeopardize and remove supports that many children, families, and employed adults rely on for their survival.**

The "technical" change in sales tax revenue estimates due to State reforecasts reveal significant revenue reductions for all school divisions above and beyond previous state "unallotments". Statewide, revised sales tax revenue estimates for education purposes would reduce revenues for school divisions by \$95.2M in FY21 and \$93.6M in FY22. FCPS would face a reduction in sales tax revenue of \$20.3M in FY21, with a similar reduction projected for FY22.

Even before this new proposed reduction, FCPS already faced an unpredictable and challenging budget environment:

- Significant cuts have already been made in our FY 21 budget due to state unallotments and county revenue reductions of \$79M. Federal CARES Act funding was helpful, but that funding is allocated to cover COVID-related expenses in the FY21 budget and cannot not be used to replace lost revenues.
- There are nearly \$19.6M in unfunded needs above and beyond those in our current budget as we prepare for school reopening in the Fall, and even that figure likely underestimates the true costs of reopening.
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- Our Food and Nutrition program could lose as much as \$35M in sales revenue due to lost meals sales depending on how long schools operate at less than full in-person capacity. Those shortfalls can only be made up via operating revenue.
- Finally, we face the prospect of uncertain student enrollments. To date, our enrollments are running substantially behind where they were at the same time last year. That enrollment uncertainty is likely to linger through the year as school divisions adjust operations to address local health conditions and as parents make corresponding enrollment decisions. Enrollment loss would affect our Average Daily Membership numbers and thus our state per pupil funding allocations, compounding funding losses elsewhere.

3. The General Assembly's actions can mitigate harm to our public schools

The cumulative effect of these budget challenges alongside the reduction in sales tax revenue could be devastating to FCPS. While we understand that the state's revenues and resource availability are equally uncertain as our own, there are few ways we ask that the General Assembly help limit the impact of these potential reductions:

- Reduce or eliminate the proposed reductions to K-12 education funding in FY21 resulting from the Sales Tax revenue reforecast.
- Use the higher student enrollment data from last year (SY19-20) when calculating Basic Aid and other education funding (either based on the September 30 pupil count or the March 31 ADM). This would help to protect school divisions from the budget uncertainties created by a fluctuating student population in the coming school year.
- Finally, avoid legislation during this Special Session that is not fully funded by the state and that would increase costs for local school divisions.

Melanie K. Meeren