

Testimony on Superintendent's Proposed FY 09 Budget  
Presented by Charles W. Dane, Education Committee Chair  
Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations  
to Fairfax County Public School Board on February 11, 2008

I am Charles Dane, speaking only for the Education Committee of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations.

This will be an extremely difficult budget year requiring careful decisions to preserve the focus on critical educational programs. We appreciate the effort of the Superintendent to involve his staff and principals in the budget decision process. However, the Superintendent has recommended \$41.9M in reductions (eliminations = \$5.7M, reductions = \$27.3M, and streamlining = \$8.9 after the offset for Extended Teacher Contracts), and \$15.0M in program enhancements not including Teacher Benefits or retiree benefits funding, and \$5.2M from additional fees.

Furthermore, we realize that the County may be more restrictive in its transfer than the Superintendent has proposed requesting. And, we realize that the State's General Assembly may alter the Governor's funding recommendations for education. Thus, we realize that we may have to revisit some of the recommendations presented tonight.

There are some programs that we believe that should not be reduced or streamlined. Thus, we do not believe that class size should be increased in elementary school classes. According to WABE FY08 Report, elementary school class size in Fairfax County is larger than those in Alexandria, Arlington, Montgomery, and Prince Georges Counties. Fairfax County's class size in middle school is larger than all surrounding school districts except Montgomery County but we believe that it is in elementary schools that class size is most critical to learning of all students. Furthermore, we do not believe that funding for Instructional Assistants should be decreased, especially given the need for IAs to help address gaps in tests scores of various ethnic and

economic groups, and for special education preschool program. These persons are an important component of the instructional situation.

We believe that the TJ afternoon drop off policy should be revisited. While we believe that walking is good, and while we are not completely clear on what individual hardship situations the proposed policy may produce, we understand that some students may have to walk over 3 miles and/or traverse high traffic and otherwise unsafe areas. Furthermore, it appears possible that the proposed drop-off sites may not be in buildings with accessible study rooms in which to wait for parents to pick up their students. Therefore, we would like to see the policy preclude students walking more than 2 miles – measured so that any crossing of heavily travel arterials is at a traffic light, and measured so that the students do not have to walk through unsafe areas, such as warehouse/light industry areas or wooded areas. We also would like the policy to ensure that open staffed study area are available at the drop-off points. And finally, we question whether there will be a drop off in applications, and whether this would affect diverse groups differently.

And, when considering possible transportation reductions, we recommend that the number of buses scheduled for lease/purchase be reduced from 96 to 48.

We are opposed to charging fees for AP/IB/PSAT testing although we realize that those students on free or reduce lunch programs would not be charged. We are also concerned about charging students fees for each activity in which they participate. However, we could consider accepting an annual per student cap of perhaps \$50 and an annual per family cap of \$150 with the same caveat for students on free or reduced lunch schedules.

We recognize that the additional funding proposed for Teacher Leadership is for longer term teacher contracts and would be used to offset the summer school reductions and most of the streamlining reductions. However, it is unclear if there is any offset for the proposed streamlining savings shown for preschool special

education and college partnership program. Thus, the total reduction from the commendable streamlining efforts appears to total only \$8.9M, and now may be less.

In fact, we recently learned that the expected savings from streamlining of pre-school special education summer program may be reduced by half – further reducing the savings from the streamlining effort.

We find it difficult to comment on the overall effect of the proposed summer school streamlining because while we realize that some reductions will occur from savings resulting from transfer of functions to the school level and while some reductions will be offset by long teacher contracts, we have not been able to discern which, if any, actual summer school programs will be reduced/eliminated.

While we support the enhancement funding for the SASI program, we do not believe that we can support the proposed enhanced funding for TSSpecs. We believe that this is not the year for expanding the FLES program, although it addresses one of the strategic governance goals set forth by the School Board, nor may it be the year for adding to the number of schools with all-day kindergarten, albeit this enhances the educational opportunities. Whether the School Board considers that some of the schools proposed for all-day kindergarten can be added will depend upon other budget decisions that you have to make.

Salary increases both through COLA, step increases, and additional payment into pension programs are substantial, and for non-teacher and higher administrative positions, we believe that the School Board should reconsider these increases for those job categories comparable to those of County employees. The total salary increase for those County employees on merit pay, i.e., without COLAs, last year was about 4.6%, and we understand may be less in this year's tight budget situation for the County. The amount of this disparity could complicate the County's decision on the amount of funds transferred to FCPS.

As expressed in previous testimony, we would hope that there was some way for

teachers in their first few years to benefit from higher salaries and lower payments into the pension funds.

When considering savings in future years, we suggest that the school administration and the board explore expanding upon the Consortium Concept developed by the Superintendent. We believe there may be reason to organize the number of clusters and coordinate transportation operations to conform with the consortia boundaries..

Also, we remain concerned about the competitive disadvantage of FCPS teachers with master degrees and higher academic achievement.

Finally, we present an idea for additional funding that the School Board may wish to consider exploring with the County's Board of Supervisors. We understand that the County may levy an additional real estate tax on non-residential property, and at the level being considered at least \$35M might become available. However, we understand that this tax must be used only for transportation. Furthermore, apparently some (but politically not all) of this might be used to replace existing funds used for transportation and that some of this might be used for school transportation.

Thank you for your consideration of these remarks. We remain committed to the excellent Fairfax County Public School system.