

Churchill Road Elementary



everychild. onevoice.

January 14, 2009

Mr. John Foust
Member
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
1437 Balls Hill Road
McLean, VA 22101

Ms. Jane K. Strauss
Fairfax County School Board
Fairfax County Public Schools
8115 Gatehouse Rd., Suite 5400
Falls Church, VA 22042

[By electronic mail: dranesville@fairfaxcounty.gov and jane.strauss@fcps.edu]

Dear Mr. Foust and Ms. Strauss:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Fairfax County's budget plans for FY2010 on behalf of the Churchill Road School Parent-Teacher Association (CRS PTA), which has over 500 members. The parents and teachers at Churchill Road School, like those across the county, recognize that our public schools are a cornerstone of our community. The excellence of Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) drives Fairfax County's good reputation – and consequently, its tax base). In this current budget crisis, it is vital that Fairfax County ensure that our schools continue to have the resources they need to maintain their high quality. We strongly urge the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and the Fairfax County School Board to make our Fairfax County Public Schools a top priority throughout the budget process.

Fairfax County schools are some of the very best in the country. As a result, families want to locate in our county to have access to these schools, fostering a strong tax base that benefits our entire community. Moreover, the quality of our school system also attracts high caliber principals and teachers, as well as many other employees in the school system, that are vital to ensure that our children have the best quality education possible. The excellence of our schools also attracts business to our community and the bright, well-rounded, talented graduates of the school system create a natural workforce for future business growth and educated citizenry. Fairfax County, with its proximity to the Federal Government and limited manufacturing base, is better positioned to weather a recession than most; however, harming the school system will prolong the economic downturn here and constrain future success.

On January 8th, the Proposed FY 2010 Fairfax County school budget was presented to the Fairfax County School Board for its review and consideration. We recognize the difficult budget crisis being faced by the county and the efforts to craft a proposed budget that limits cuts to avoid substantially undermining the quality of education. Nevertheless, given the limited baseline resources our schools already have (as evidenced by significant increases in class size at the elementary and other levels) and the expected continued growth in Fairfax County's student body in the coming years, we remain very concerned about the decreases in funding proposed in this budget, as well as the potential for other budget cuts.

We look forward to working with the School Board and the Board of Supervisors as they examine and evaluate the budget proposal. We want to emphasize how important we believe ensuring full funding for FCPS is to our children and our community.

Given the severity of the projected shortfall for Fairfax County, we recognize that other drastic actions may be required to achieve the goal of full funding for FCPS. We list below several options that are being considered in our community (although not agreed to by all CRS PTA members and therefore not endorsed by the CRS PTA):

- **Temporarily raise the real estate tax (mill) rate to offset the reduction in property values.** Much of the shortfall (at least \$150 million) is due to reduced tax revenues resulting from falling property values. Even though most politicians view raising taxes as political suicide, some believe that Fairfax County citizens would support a temporary real estate tax increase at this time, if used solely for the purpose of maintaining the quality of the schools.
- **Suspend employee pay raises and consider furlough days for non-critical employees.** While also a very difficult suggestion, some believe that it is preferable to retain county employees at the same pay level, than to lay-off employees.
- **Create fees for County services.** Many current fees, such as garbage collection, make programs self-supporting. Some believe that adding fees to some currently non-fee programs should be considered.
- **Review redundant programs.** For example, both Fairfax County and Metro provide bus services. Some have suggested that some county bus routes may be redundant to Metro bus (or subway) routes?
- **Revamp programs to be more cost-effective.** Fairfax County has experienced such a prolonged period of phenomenal growth, it would be surprising if some of the programs implemented could not be redesigned to be much more efficient. FCPS' recent experience with revising school start times provides a useful example: when FCPS staff first evaluated the costs of revising school start times, they estimated that it would cost \$13.3 - \$14.6 million to make the change. When asked to revamp their implementation program, they were able to reduce costs to \$4.3 - \$4.7 million. When asked to be more creative, they were able to find ways to make the changes at NO ADDITIONAL COST!

We at the CRS PTA recognize the challenges that you and the County government face. Nevertheless, we strongly encourage all of you to do everything possible to support the quality of education in Fairfax County, which is the cornerstone of the County's own reputation and prospects for growth.

Sincerely,

/s/

Eric Malès
CRS PTA President

/s/

Cat Lippmann
CRS PTA Vice President

cc: Mr. Daniel G. Storck, Chairman, Fairfax County School Board (daniel.storck@fcps.edu)