

Summary

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Churchill Road Elementary School Parent-Teacher Association, which has over 500 members. We appreciate the challenges you face in crafting a budget that avoids substantially undermining the quality of education and other critical county services.

The parents and teachers at Churchill Road School, like many others across the county, believe that your Advertised Budget fails to recognize that our public schools are the cornerstone of our community. The excellence of Fairfax County public schools drives much of the County's good reputation – and consequently, its tax base.¹ In this current budget crisis, it is vital that you ensure that our schools continue to have the resources they need to maintain their high quality. Indeed, the public dialogue sessions you held on the budget confirmed widespread support for maintaining sufficient school funding.

Unfortunately, the County's Advertised Budget does not maintain sufficient funding for schools. We strongly urge the Board of Supervisors to

1. Add \$21.3 million to the school budget to fully fund FCPS's "Advertised Budget," in order to address the anticipated increase in enrollment, and
2. Restore the \$3.7 million in cuts to County-funded clinic aides, middle school after-school programs, and school resource officers (SROs).

Ever-larger classes is but one example of the problems created by your failure to fully fund schools. Although the anticipated class size increase in FCPS's FY2010 Advertised Budget may sound modest, you may not fully appreciate how such increases are implemented in the real world. The current school year budget equates to an average of 25.75 students per teacher for most elementary school students. In reality, however, students are not enrolled in convenient multiples of 25.75, nor are the elementary school classrooms necessarily physically adequate to safely or effectively handle classes of this size. Based on the distribution of students at Churchill Road Elementary School, the average of 25.75 students per teacher translates to classes that range from 22 to 32 kids per class. In the larger classes, there is not room for backpacks and coats, much less for desks and students:

¹ Discussed in more detail on Page 3.



And yet, due to the budget constraints you are choosing to impose on the school system, this coming fall, average class sizes will increase by $\frac{1}{2}$ student per class, or even more! That could result in elementary school classes with more than 32 students. Such changes will obviously harm the quality of the County's schools -- and the school changes will harm all of Fairfax County. There will be

1. Long-term injury to the County tax base due to real reductions in the quality of education that may be difficult to restore in the future,
2. Increased illnesses throughout the County which start as student illnesses due to overcrowding and fewer nurse/clinic resources,² and
3. Reductions in citizen and student safety and without the anti-gang/anti-drug awareness that is promoted by after-school programs and SROs.

² Losing clinic nurses will also make it impossible to provide the best education for special needs children.

Background

On January 8th, the Proposed FY 2010 Fairfax County school budget was presented to the Fairfax County School Board for its review and consideration. Our PTA was very concerned about the decreases in funding proposed in FCPS' budget, given the limited baseline resources our schools already have and the expected continued growth in Fairfax County's student body in the coming years. Our concerns turned to disbelief when we saw the County's rejection of FCPS' Advertised Budget.

Your Advertised Budget for schools will harm the County's economy in both the short- and long-term. As you know, Fairfax County schools are some of the very best in the country. You must realize how valuable headlines such as the following are: "Best High Schools: Virginia School Tops the Best High Schools List."³ As a result, families want to locate in our County to have access to these schools, fostering a strong tax base. 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 businesses to our County and the bright, well-rounded, talented graduates of the school system create a natural workforce for future business growth and educated citizenry. Reducing county funding will harm the school system and will prolong the economic downturn here and constrain future success. According to a recent *U.S. News and World Reports* article, economists estimate that the economy would grow by 4.5 percentage points over 20 years if Americans caught up to math and science education levels in other countries.⁴

Conclusion

Please add/redirect \$25 million in the final budget to schools to avoid further increases in class size and to address the anticipated increase in enrollment (\$21.3 million) and to restore cuts to County-funded clinic aides, middle school after-school programs, and school resource officers (\$3.7 million). These changes will benefit all of Fairfax County.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Fairfax County's budget plans for FY2010 on behalf of our PTA

³ *U.S. News and World Reports*, "The New High School Rankings Are Here." December 5, 2008 (<http://www.usnews.com/blogs/college-rankings-blog/2008/12/05/the-new-high-school-rankings-are-here.html>).

⁴ <http://www.usnews.com/articles/education/high-schools/2008/12/04/how-to-solve-our-problem-with-math.html>, December 4, 2008.