



## **Questions Received from Constituents at the Telephone Town Hall November 12, 2008**

***Q: Can we end the school year after the SOLs are given? This two week period is when students still attend, but they have “checked out” after the SOL tests that are mandated to be given at a certain time? The school division has more than enough days to qualify for the Virginia Department of Education Guidelines.***

We do not believe the SOLs are the culminating assessment for what has been taught in a course. They are a minimum expectation of content mastery, but do not reflect the actual instruction or full curriculum that has been taught. The time period after SOLs are given is an opportunity for non-SOL driven creative projects or other culminating activities that enrich student learning and teach higher-level thinking skills. It also provides the opportunity to demonstrate a deeper level of understanding than was asked on the SOL tests through concept-centered, project-based work. It is up to our teachers to utilize this time period in an appropriate fashion and to engage students in learning for those two weeks. We believe that a 180-day school year is the best timeframe for optimal learning for all students.

***Q: Why do the schools in southern Albemarle get less funding at the elementary level than the ones in the northern end of the county?***

Funding is provided to students on an equal basis, regardless of the location. On a per student basis, our very small elementary schools are more costly to operate and staff due to the fixed costs associated with a building. The majority of the small elementary schools are located in the southern section of the County, however there are some small schools operating in every geographic region.

***Q: Can we more intelligently create a reserve in boom years, so that we have savings available to cover times of shortfall?***

It is possible to have reserves or “rainy day funds” built up to address one-time shortfalls. Our Division has, through hiring freezes and operational reductions over the past 2 years, been able to build a reserve or “rainy day fund” that will assist in meeting the revenue shortfalls in the current year and also offset the severity of the impact of revenue reduction for next fiscal year. These reserves were built over the past 2 years primarily due to revenue uncertainties from our two largest revenue sources, local taxes and state taxes. Since approximately 83 percent of all expenses in the school division are for personnel and benefits, reducing expenses requires earlier planning and action than materials intensive industries.

***Q: How accurately are we forecasting student population and growth? How far out are we looking in our planning process?***

Our student population forecasts have been extremely accurate in the short term, with accuracy declining as the forecast extends into the future, as do all long-term forecasts. Our current forecasting model has been found to be significantly superior to all other forecasts available. The planning process for facilities encompasses trends of up to 10 years. Enrollment trend data for all schools is available [HERE](#).

**Q: *Can you seek advice for budgetary ideas from your teaching staff? Do you have in place a way for teachers to anonymously review their principals and the school system?***

Teachers and staff are asked to evaluate their principals via an anonymous electronic survey that asked questions about a principals' leadership. The results of these surveys are shared with the principal, and his/her supervisor, the superintendent of schools. They are also used in goal-setting meetings between principals and the superintendent in order to continually improve job performance.

In addition, we have actively sought the input of teachers, staff, parents and community members regarding our budget. Teachers have met in school-based teams, and have had the opportunity to submit their feedback through the Teacher or Employee Advisory Council, as well as through the Division's web site.

**Q: *How will you improve employee morale, and thus reduce absenteeism and improve performance when you are considering not giving employee raises?***

**Q: *How can we increase retention of teachers and make them part of the larger community here in Albemarle County? Many teachers live outside the county due to housing costs and thus their loyalty to the community is lower. By keeping them in their jobs, money in spent in recruiting and hiring can be saved.***

One of our division's five strategic goals is to recruit, develop and retain highest quality teaching personnel, staff and administrators. We recognize that job satisfaction is a key component in employee retention. There are many factors that affect job satisfaction and employee morale, including personal satisfaction with the work, job security, opportunity for creative, engaging work, and reputation of the organization. We have funded substantial raises for employees for the last four years, and we continue to offer a highly competitive benefits package, which includes retirement benefits. Albemarle County spends nearly \$17,000 per year, on average, per employee, on health, dental, social security and Virginia Retirement System benefits, over and above salaries. Unfortunately, the reality of the economic crisis throughout the county, state and nation at this time is such that we do have to consider difficult alternatives, such as salary freezes. If we were to attempt to fund salary increases, we would have to look at reducing staff members to cover that cost.

We also recognize that teaching can be a stressful job. That is why we continue to offer unencumbered planning time, teacher work days at the end of each marking period, and strong teacher mentors to assist teachers who are having difficulty coping with the day to day work.

We further recognize the associated costs with employee recruitment and training, which is why the School Division has pushed for a competitive compensation package for our employees in the past three-four years. As a result, we have seen our retention rate increase in 2007-2008 over previous years.

Albemarle County Public Schools does exit surveys of employees as they leave the division. This gives us usable data to help us learn how employees are feeling about their jobs, and why they are leaving. This data is reported every year in the Human Resources Annual Report, and is used to help guide hiring and management practices in the Division.

**Q: Can you look at a graduated tax rate since this is such a rich community? What about a higher tax rate for home values in excess of \$500,000?**

A graduated tax rate is not allowed by Virginia law.

**Q: Why are school buses routinely seen driving empty in the middle of the school day, or parked outside of retail establishments during the day? Can money be saved with route efficiencies and by disallowing employees to use the buses for personal use?**

Our Transportation department conducted a comprehensive study of its routing as the Division worked to implement the recommendations of the independent Resource Utilization Study undertaken last year. The School Division surveyed parents about bus ridership, and found about 1,000 students who do not use our bus services and thus do not need to be included in our routes. This year, we changed and combined many routes, attempting to operate school buses as close to capacity as possible so that we are not running partially full buses along routes. These savings implemented this year resulted in nearly half a million dollars in efficiencies.

In addition, we do not allow our bus drivers to use the buses for their personal use. However, we do allow some drivers to take their buses home with them in the evening, particularly if their route is close to their residence, as we try to do. It would be less efficient for a driver to pick up a bus at a school or transportation depot and then drive it, empty, to the starting point of his/her route, rather than simply drive it from their residence.

When you see buses parked outside of retail establishments during the day, it is more than likely the bus driver working at a second job. Many of our drivers work a part-time retail shift at a grocery store or other place of business between their morning and their afternoon routes.

**Q: Could schools be utilized as primary and secondary schools – K-7 and 8-12? Could there be fewer school buildings to maintain and operate, or some savings in teacher salaries if such a structure were in use? Middle school is such a tumultuous experience for so many children, and some students leave the county system during those years to attend private schools.**

We are currently conducting a Long-Range Master Facilities Plan that will look at all of our school buildings in terms of their capacity, safety, accessibility and configuration. There may be opportunities to combine some of our schools, or reconfigure them; however, we are not looking at changing our elementary, middle, high school matriculation model at this time.

**Q: How long has the city of Charlottesville been a separate system from the county of Albemarle, what is being done to consolidate those services so there is not duplicate services especially duplicate administrative positions?**

Virginia is a commonwealth, not a state, and has different rules regarding localities than most states do. (There are four commonwealths: Massachusetts, Kentucky, Virginia and Pennsylvania). In Virginia, a city can be incorporated as a separate legal entity, despite being surrounded by another locality, such as a county. This is the case with the city of Charlottesville which is wholly inside Albemarle County, the city of Richmond inside Henrico County, the city of Harrisonburg inside Rockingham county, the city of Winchester inside Frederick County, or perhaps most confusingly, the city of Roanoke inside Roanoke County. These are separate legal

entities with separate governing bodies—Charlottesville has a City Council while Albemarle has a Board of Supervisors – and separate schools and tax rates. While the two entities can collaborate on services, they cannot be consolidated.

**Q: *If combining with the Charlottesville City Schools is not feasible, are there more opportunities to share with that system, for example, Adult Education and English Language Learner Programs. Could these be community based and jointly operated by both systems, to save money for both budgets?***

**Q: *Can you look to creating additional community partnerships, especially with city of Charlottesville (which receives 10 cents of Albemarle County tax dollars) and with University of Virginia?***

Absolutely. Albemarle County is very open to partnerships with Charlottesville City schools and other community groups and businesses. In fact, Albemarle County and Charlottesville City schools are currently working together on Alternative Learning Centers for students who are not successful in our traditional high schools, and on a joint parent involvement campaign. Albemarle attempted to work with the city on the Newcomer Center for English Language Learner resources to our community members.

**Q: *Does the budget include any line item of revenue from local businesses donating to school system, and if so, what is that amount?***

The budget does not presuppose that local businesses or individuals will contribute to our schools. However, we do receive them. As these donations are received by the School Board, each is approved by the Board and acknowledged with appropriate documentation. The amounts vary significantly from year to year; however, the average donations received across a year is typically well under \$100,000.

**Q: *Are there opportunities to have partnering with local businesses who could get tax breaks from donating to the school system or sponsoring some of our programs?***

We are open for business and welcome partnerships and sponsorships from our local businesses. We already have some of these in place, such as the Kluge Foundation's underwriting of our Club Yancey after-school program at Yancey Elementary, State Farm's work with our Driver's Education classes, and the National Radio Astronomy Observatory, among others.

**Q: *We appreciate the Air Force ROTC program that is offered at Monticello High School. We believe that such specialty programs, which appeal to a variety of students and prepare students for the future should not be cut. Will such programs continue?***

This program, as are all non-mandated programs, is evaluated upon its merits relative to the students in the Division. The Air Force ROTC program has been successful at Monticello High School. The program enrollment must continue to grow into the future in order to maintain support from the Air Force.

**Q: *Given the large size of the employee base, and the extraordinarily high increase in the cost of health care, plus the existence of two strong health organizations – MJH and UVA – do we have an opportunity to negotiate preferential costs for health care in our community, which could then provide additional funds that would be available to use elsewhere?***

Consistent with state law, we procure our health care administration through the bid process. Administration of our health program is procured to ensure that competitive services are obtained at the lowest possible costs. As both MJH and UVA are the only two hospitals in the area, negotiation of costs with these two entities is an important part of minimizing the costs of health care.

**Q: *Does the School Board plan to close smaller elementary schools in the southern end of the county?***

The School Division is in the process of a Long-Range Master Facilities Plan, with our Southern Feeder Pattern as the first phase of this project. The Team is studying the three smaller schools, Scottsville, Yancey and Red Hill, to determine if they should be consolidated or renovated. Access to best-practice instruction is driving the facilities study, although efficiencies and growth projections are also being considered. The Team will make a recommendation to the Superintendent in May of 2009, and the Board will consider that recommendation in June.

**Q: *Why can't we have retired teachers donate their time for a small stipend w/ no health benefits to help cover teaching assistant positions or aides?***

We do hire many retired teachers on a part-time basis to assist in the schools, and we welcome parent and community volunteers at all times. Albemarle County has a division-wide Volunteer Coordinator, and each school has a volunteer contact to assist with ensuring volunteers are recruited, screened, and placed in positions that will assist our teachers and our schools. If you are interested in volunteering, contact June Jenkins, School-Community Relations Coordinator, at 293-0288.

**Q: *How do we ensure that liberal political views are not being foisted on our children while they are in the classroom? Schools should be objective and tax dollars should not be spent on a particular political agenda.***

Albemarle County Schools has a Board Policy that prohibits political activities in the classroom that are not directly related to the instruction (such as would occur in a civics or government class, for example). If politics is part of the curriculum, then it is to be presented in a bipartisan manner. Staff members are apprised of this policy and aware that the classroom is not a forum for political agendas. If you have a concern about a specific school or teacher that is not abiding by this policy, please contact that school's principal.

**Q: *Will an early retirement bonus be offered this year? If so, when will details become available?***

This is under discussion during the budget process.

**Q: *Is dental insurance really a necessary benefit? Could dental insurance for employees be cut, keeping the health care insurance and covering the increases there? How much money would be saved?***

Dental insurance is a standard benefit offered to both local government and school division employees. Such a program should be offered with any competitive compensation package. Dental insurance for school division staff costs under \$400,000 overall.

**Q: *Can you do a better job of reviewing employees? If there were better quality personnel in many key positions, such as high school guidance counselors, perhaps there wouldn't have to be as many personnel in those positions.***

Albemarle County Schools made the conscious decision a few years ago to increase the number of school counselors. This was done in order to increase the amount of contact time counselors could have with students. Our counselors were handling caseloads that were way above recommendations by state and national counseling organizations. We recognize that school counselors need to be able to establish relationships with children, and that they need time to do this. We believe that the additional school counselors are having a positive impact on whole –child development, student achievement, and implementing other key curricula such as our Internet Safety and Bullying Prevention programs.

Albemarle County has an excellent application review process when hiring new employees. The School Division is a popular place to work; we receive large numbers of applications for all open positions. During the hiring process, our applicants are asked to provide work samples, undergo several rounds of interviews, and we conduct significant reference checks. As a result, we believe that our division is able to hire great people who are highly qualified, creative and diverse.

Lastly, our teacher and administrator performance appraisal process has been significantly improved in recent years to not only align with state standards, but to foster professional growth. It is no longer adequate to simply do an adequate job. Teachers and staff must commit to doing a better job next year through outcome-based, measurable goals that are created and documented on an annual basis. This new appraisal process focuses on continuous improvement of each of our employees.

**Q: *Do principals and assistant principals and guidance directors all need to be 12-month positions?***

We constantly review the contract length for various positions in the division. It is likely there will be some changes next year as a result of fiscal challenges. However, the work of schools occurs all year-round. Principals and other 12-month employees are creating master schedules, reviewing student achievement data and planning for next year, planning professional development opportunities for teachers, and participating in professional development themselves during the summer months, as well as running our comprehensive summer programs.

**Q: *Can you combine routes for elementary, middle and high school so that buses can be combined and miles only driven once? Would there be savings on wear and tear on the buses?***

Actually, combining routes for all students, kindergarten through 12th grade, is more expensive than doing an elementary school run and a later middle/high school run with the same bus. In 1994, Transportation Services studied the K-12 consolidation of all grade levels within an area on the same bus, fully expecting a savings in resources and time needed to transport students to and from school. Instead we found that the K-12 consolidation requires far more resources than were being used at the time. In 1994, to implement this plan would have required the purchase of an additional 53 buses at an additional cost of \$2,575,787 for equipment, salaries and supplies. This scenario would have a higher cost in 2009.

To help illustrate this point, consider the western region of the county. The 1994 study included Western, Henley, Brownsville, Murray, Crozet and Meriwether Lewis. At the time there were 3,195 students attending these schools utilizing 54 buses, 12 of which already did double runs. The average student load was 48.4 students per bus. At 50 students per bus (the number used for calculating bus requirements) it would have taken 64 buses to pick up the 3,195 K-12 students at the same time, rather than the current double-run system. Those numbers still hold true today, except the total count for students and buses would be higher. By doubling up on runs with the same bus, we save considerable resources.

**Q: *The Charlottesville City Schools calendar has 5 paid holidays for teachers, while the Albemarle County calendar has none. If there is not a possibility of a teacher raise, then perhaps Albemarle teachers could be given the additional five paid holidays?***

In Albemarle County we pay teachers for a standard 200 day contract, as guided by State law. Within those 200 days, there are, depending on the adopted school calendar, 4-7 professional development and duties days, which are the paid holidays that City employees receive. Those paid days are in recognition of the significant amount of teacher work that is performed outside of contract hours or is used for professional development outside of the school day. Teachers are paid for these days despite not being required to “punch in” at their school building or being given specific duties to perform on those days, making them parallel with the City’s paid holidays. Both the City and the County operate on the same adopted school-year calendar.

**Q: *Two large information management programs have been implemented in the School Division in the past two years: SchoolNet and TEMS. Can you elaborate on the costs of these programs, not just in terms of the software, hardware and maintenance, but also in the costs of training and implementation, including substitute teacher pay to cover attendance at training sessions? Could these programs be put on hold to free up funds? Why are these programs important and worth the money?***

It is important to provide efficient access to student achievement data, provide a repository for exemplary curricular materials, and provide a framework for administrators to measure performance, effectively plan improvement and monitor progress toward district goals. After several years of research and conversation about implementing a data warehouse in Albemarle County Public Schools, the Division entered into a 6-year contract with SchoolNet. The information management tool provided to ACPS by SchoolNet was purchased using capital improvement funds. Capital improvement funds may not be used for personnel.

SchoolNet includes five modules that cost approximately 150,000 per module. The modules support local assessments (school, feeder pattern, division), curriculum development and sharing, access to student achievement data, parent outreach, and professional development tracking. The purchase price included funds for training. The majority of SchoolNet trainings have come during normal teacher contract hours. The average operating costs are \$60,108. The average annual maintenance fee is \$110,287. Typically, with any large-scale software product, annual maintenance fees are 15 percent of the total purchase price. SchoolNet is one of many information management tools and software currently being used in the Division. Examples of other products include SASI XP, InfoCentre, Microsoft Exchange, and Microsoft Office Suite.

SASI XP has been the Division’s Student Information System for 10 years. Our Student Information System is a

core business program that allows for student scheduling, attendance, state reporting, and other important functions. SASI was purchased and implemented in 1998 for 24 schools at a price of \$210,921. Since the original purchase, the Division has added, at additional software cost, Baker-Butler Elementary. The SASI-XP product is facing its end-of-life; therefore, the Division entered into a competitive bid process for a replacement. Tyler Educational Management Solution was chosen as the new Student Information System and was purchased for \$264,800. This enhanced web-based product offers much more functionality, including an integrated report card and a parent portal. Training for the new Student Information System will be conducted in the coming months as part of the implementation process. Full implementation should be completed by December 31, 2009.

**Q: Some of the most influential people in my life are the teachers. I will be glad to increase my tax rate to pay higher teacher salaries. However, in times of dire straits, would it be possible to look at the average teacher salary, and give an across the board raise equal to the percentage of that average salary, perhaps a one or two percent --\$500 or \$1000 – just something to keep salaries going forward and improve morale? How much would this cost?**

The school division is likely to be reducing both staff and expenses over the next year. Adding increased salaries would increase the number of staff likely to be reduced. While a salary increase for staff is part of the overall recommendations if revenues were available, the current ability to fund such an increase without significantly impacting the classroom would not be possible. A slightly less than 2 percent salary increase for teachers would cost nearly \$1.2M.

**Q: I am interested in the total dollar spent for energy consumption across county schools. What measures are being taken to reduce energy consumption? Are there savings to be realized through implementing automated thermostats, compact fluorescent bulbs, light sensors? Indiana and New York state piloting hybrid or plug-in school buses; do we have any such plans?**

1) Total dollar spent for energy consumption in Albemarle County Public Schools:

Utility	FY2007/08	FY2008/09*
Electricity	\$1,941,184	\$1,964,857
Gas	311,748	313,826
Heating Oil	278,961	283,709
Water & Sewer	226,441	226,441
Total	\$2,758,334	\$2,788,833

\*We are anticipating a \$300,000 shortfall.

2) Measures being taken to reduce energy consumption.

The Building Services Department is fortunate to have a total direct digital control (DDC) energy management system with central control of all schools. This system provides for:

1. Optimized Start: Outside air and zone temperatures are monitored and the pre-occupancy start time is calculated each day
  2. Freeze Protection: Circulating pumps run when outside temperature drops below 38 degrees Fahrenheit; boilers maintain water temperature.
  3. Outside air units function only when the system is in "Occupied Mode"
  4. Night setbacks for rooms are controlled at 58 degrees Fahrenheit
  5. Some exterior and interior lighting are controlled by the energy management system and more lighting controls will be added
  6. Control domestic hot water heaters and circulating pumps
  7. Monitor equipment for unusual night operation
  8. Monitor override timers for excessive use
  9. Monitor critical equipment and activate paging system in case of failures
  10. Schedule off-hour events (e.g., school must call ahead to schedule occupancy HVAC settings for an after-hours meeting room)
  11. Shut down equipment on holidays or cancelled days (e.g., snow days)
  12. Deactivate all equipment with one command in the event of an emergency
  13. Older pneumatic controls are upgraded to digital controls for more efficient operations.
- 3) Albemarle County Public Schools does not use a standard automated thermostat, but all classrooms are controlled automatically, either through pneumatic controls or through the energy management system. We have utilized the Building Automation System to control 85% of classroom thermostats. The winter set points are 70°–71° and the summer set points are 73°-74°.
- 4) Compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs) are used in desk lamps, in place of halogen or incandescent bulbs, when possible. Additionally, ACPS has already changed from T12 to T8 lights with electronic ballasts in many schools, with an upgrade schedule in place for the schools that have not yet been upgraded. Motion sensor installations for the classrooms and hallways are being installed when T12 lights are being replaced by T8 lights.
- 5) Energy consumption is monitored and reviewed by an energy consultant. When a building appears to have abnormal levels of energy consumption, an energy audit is conducted by the energy consultant and an HVAC technician, to determine the source of the problem.

**Q: *I hear discussion of consolidating schools and I strongly feel that smaller, community-based schools are so much better. The world is so dehumanizing, small children need the security of being known well, and their family known; certainly easier to get families to school in a small community-based school and not have to go 15-20 miles out of the way; may not be efficient but its effective.***

Albemarle County does not operate any truly large elementary schools. All of our elementary schools are small to mid-sized when compared to elementary schools in the rest of the state. Our division does operate a number of very, very tiny schools with resulting very high costs per child. Our smallest elementary schools cost nearly \$3,000 more per child educated than our most recently built schools, which are still considered mid-sized by the state.

**Q: We chose to move to Albemarle County because of the quality of the schools and overall we have been very pleased. However, most public institutions don't have a system of getting rid of folks who are deadweight to the organization. Is it possible to take 10 percent of employees and say that your performance is lacking, so you've got to go?**

We have a process in place for evaluating the performance of employees. Employees that do not demonstrate adequate levels of performance either in their own jobs, or in the case of demonstrated student performance, are placed on plans for improvement. If such improvement does not occur in the allotted timeframe, the Division may dismiss the employee. It is important to note that in many cases, plans of improvement do result in improved performance.

**Q: Every one of our students is impacted by teachers, and Albemarle County is a very well –off county. Can you consider a program where different teachers are sponsored for additional pay bonuses by folks who like what they do ? Could you create a merit pool that community members and businesses contribute for teachers who are top performing?**

The School Board has held two work sessions exploring alternative compensation models for future years. It will also be interesting to see what Congress and the Obama administration enact regarding a reform of the No Child Left Behind act. Obama has indicated that he supports more flexible compensation models for teachers that would allow the Board to pay bonuses to teachers who work in hard-to-staff schools or who are top performers.

The board does accept donations from community members who wish to support specific programs, schools or initiatives.

**Q: Can you raise some money for athletic programs by "auctioning" off uniforms and jerseys at the end of a season to parents who would be willing to pay an inflated rate to have the memento of their child's athletic experience? The money raised could then be used to buy several new uniforms for next year's team. Is there a way to have athletics become more self-sufficient in this way?**

The disposal of public properties is governed by the state and can be quite restrictive. While sizeable public monies are provided for extracurricular athletics, many parents, booster clubs, and local businesses contribute very substantially to the effort. Fees are collected for athletic events and profits associated with booster concessions at events are funneled back into athletic programs. Athletics are a positive influence on students and incent many students to perform well in their development of life skills and their academic pursuits.

**Q: Instead of raises, can you do a bonus for top performers? Those who are top performers would get a bonus.**

One time bonuses have been discussed as a less costly and less rewarding means of compensation. For classified employees, there is currently a merit-based pay structure based upon performance. No cost-of-living raises or other non-merit based pay has been used to compensate classified staff. Teachers are rewarded based upon a longevity based system, consistent with pay structures across the nation. Annually, pay is compared between Albemarle County and other cities and counties in the Commonwealth in order to ensure that staff is

paid competitively. For the coming fiscal year it is unlikely that the revenues will be sufficient to meet recommended salary increases.

**Q: *I'm concerned about funding activities for special education. I think the aides are so necessary for those children.***

Albemarle County has a well-deserved reputation for meeting the needs of special education students. Assistance is provided to children based upon need. Assistance will continue to be based upon demonstrated need. Children who need special education services will still receive those services.

**Q: *How much do public schools fundraise? Is there an opportunity to bring in additional revenues through large-scale fundraising?***

Fundraising is an option to *supplement* the resources provided through public funds, not a means of *supplanting* public dollars allocated to education. Our schools already perform a number of fundraising events, depending upon their location and community. There are always opportunities to increase fundraising at schools, however the funds raised are relatively small in proportion to what is required to operate even the smallest schools in our division. Since fundraising is a relatively volatile revenue source, core operations cannot depend upon these resources for support.

The Charlottesville Albemarle Area does have the Public Education Fund that has raised money to support educational initiatives in the area. One example is the Odyssey 2025 middle-school science camps, which were held in summer 2008.

**Q: *Can there be minimum requirements for bus service? For example, there is a child in my neighborhood who is picked up in the middle of the day and is the only person who rides that bus. There are also students who are the only ones back in a subdivision, but a bus winds through the subdivision to get that one or two children. Can these children be taken to a more logical pick up point, charged a surcharge for bus service, or parent carpooling arranged?***

Normally we do not transport students from home to school during the middle of the day unless there is a special education need. This is dictated by special considerations regarding the transportation needs of the child such as an assistant or having handicap capability on the bus. Special needs students are routed in the most efficient and practical manner possible given the resources and transportation requirements appropriate to the situation. Additionally, there are Virginia Department of Education, Department of Motor Vehicles and federal regulations that address the safety and operation of the school bus.

During the regular school year, the determination for entering a cul-de-sac or private road is based on the student's proximity to the primary road intersection. For high/middle schools, this is 1/2 mile and elementary must be more than 3/10 of a mile from the referenced intersection prior to a scheduled stop being made. The elementary pick-up location is extended in neighborhoods designed around community schools such as Hollymead or Woodbrook. We are working with Safe Rides to School to identify additional safe school walking zones throughout the county.

Our driver supervisors and routing personnel do investigate and act on reports of inefficiency. If there is a concern where a specific problem is perceived, please contact Transportation Services, (434) 973-5716 and ask to speak with a supervisor.

**Q: *We do not live in Albemarle County, but as an employee, I pay tuition for my children to attend school here. I understand this is not an option for community members. Could we open up the option of paying tuition to attend Albemarle County Schools to others as a way to increase revenues?***

The School Board offered the ability for employees of Albemarle County Schools to send their children to the County School System for a tuition rate equal to one-half of the per-student expenditure the county provides for its students. This was done in recognition of the cost of living associated with living in Albemarle County and the fact that many of our employees live in the surrounding localities but would like their children to attend the school system that they work in.

The School Board has not given serious consideration to expanding this program to include any family who does not reside in Albemarle County. Our board feels that doing so would be against the spirit of high-quality public education for all students in the Commonwealth, as it would take students away from sister school systems, who would then no longer receive the state revenues for that student.

**Q: *I think the school year should run from Labor Day to Memorial Day. We would save much money in air-conditioning costs and students would benefit as there is little accomplished at the end of the year once SOL tests have been given. Could we lose 15 days from the calendar? What cost savings would be generated?***

It is not possible to reduce the state-mandated 200 day teacher contract. Albemarle County Schools believes that a full 180 day school year is an important part of meeting our goals for each and every student in the division. Should this reduction be a serious consideration, it would be solely to address the financial situation at hand. It is possible to save more than \$60,000 per day should school not operate, which would primarily be possible by reducing hourly 10-month contract employee days.

**Q: *Are district boundaries drawn correctly? Is there unused capacity at one of the high schools, such as Western Albemarle, that could be used for students at another of the schools, rather than building more additions?***

This is one of the questions that will be reviewed and answered through our Long-Term Master Facilities Planning Committee. This is a two-year review begun in the Fall of 2008 with Phase I, which addresses the Southern Feeder Pattern. Phases II and III, the Northern and Western Feeder Patterns will be undertaken in 2009-10. In addition, our independent Resource Utilization Study provided some new insight regarding our existing school capacities and ways we can make more efficient use of our facilities. These recommendations from the efficiency review are part of the Master Facilities Planning process.

**Q: *I think the cuts being proposed are too small and surgical. I think the county should look at a 4-day work week. What cost savings would be generated by doing so?***

School divisions that are moving to a 4-day school week are also increasing the length of the school day from the current 6.5 hours to as long as 8 hours to partially offset the lost time. Albemarle County currently has

staggered bus service to minimize costs where elementary students are picked up first and then the same buses are used to pickup middle and high school students. If the school day were lengthened, pickup times would be unrealistically early for elementary pickup and unrealistically late for middle and high school drop-off. In order to move to a 4-day school week, a substantial number of additional buses and drivers would have to be added, which would more than offset potential savings. A typical 4-day school week does not have the same number of hours of instructional time as a full 180-day school year. A more realistic financial savings for our division would be to operate fewer school days.