



Office of the School Board

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February 14, 2014

Dear Chairwoman Dittmar and Members of the Board of Supervisors:

It is with a great sense of obligation to maintaining the current level of educational excellence in our county that the Albemarle County School Board sends our 2014-15 school year funding request to you for your consideration. Our direction to the Superintendent, consistent with the Code of Virginia, was to develop a needs-based funding request. Following an extensive review process, we believe this request responsibly meets the needs of our diverse and dynamic community. It supports the division's strategic goal that all Albemarle County public school students graduate having actively mastered the lifelong learning skills to succeed as 21st century learners, workers and citizens.

We recognize the challenges before you are considerable. The demand for public services is not limited to education. We respectfully submit, however, that few services touch as many homes throughout our county or have greater consequence for our ability to support and attract job growth and economic prosperity as does the quality of our schools. Studies have shown that over a lifetime, high school and college graduates return significantly more income to their communities, making education one of our nation's safest and most rewarding investments.

This request projects that next year, our expenditures will increase by six percent and total \$164.33 million. Concurrently, it projects revenues will increase by only 1.3 percent to \$157.66 million, leaving a funding gap of \$6.67 million.

The increase in expenditures is not driven by new programs or initiatives, which total less than one-half of one percent of our entire request. Following several years of multi-million dollar cost reductions in operating expenses and significant increases in student enrollments, we face a revenue problem, not an expenditure problem.

To illustrate, since the 2008-09 school year, per pupil state funding for Albemarle County public school students has declined by eight percent, resulting in a cumulative shortfall of \$22 million if funding had remained stable each year. At the same time, an eight percent cumulative inflation rate has contributed to cost pressures, especially in light of an enrollment increase of 669 students. During this same period, mandated local contributions to the Virginia Retirement System have increased these costs to us by 58 percent, further adding to the fiscal burden faced by your school division.

Although our funding request represents the minimum investment required to preserve the current level of educational quality in our county, we recognize the need to identify areas where expenditure reductions will present the least amount of harm should reductions become necessary. We have attached a list of potential reductions that will be considered to achieve a balanced, final budget should revenues fail to fully meet this funding request.

Additionally, we request one line item be returned to local government's budget. Several years ago, during a time of cuts in the social services budget, local government requested we take on some of the financial responsibility for family support workers. While this program has made significant contributions to our county's at-risk population and remains necessary, our own economic challenges make it difficult for us to continue this funding without impacting core functions. It is our hope you will consider resuming your full support for these local government employees.

While funding requests and budgets by definition are about numbers, we urge you to also view this request as an expression of our joint commitment to protecting community values.

If, for example, we were to lower our educational aspirations to simply meeting the state average, approximately 48 fewer students would have graduated on time this past year, 61 fewer students would have earned an Advanced Studies diploma, 25 more students would have dropped out of school and our students' SAT scores would have declined by 10 percent across the board.

Local government's strategic plan sets our educational aspirations well above average. Educational excellence is a goal that has meaning in every home, increases our wealth through higher property values, is a catalyst for more businesses and jobs to locate here and raises the performance level of arts, athletics and intellectual discourse in our communities. Programs such as the Health and Medical Science Academy and our new Environmental Studies Academy perfectly align with the county's targeted industry study and are examples of how schools, programs, the professions and the private sector can work together to create a stronger economy for Albemarle.

These same community partnerships have yielded immeasurable benefits in other areas in which School Board members and Supervisors share a vision for Albemarle's greatness. Our globally-recognized AVID program is transforming the dream of higher education into reality for students who are the first in their family to attend college; our nationally-recognized M-cubed program opens wider the door of learning opportunities to underserved members of our community; we are one of the few divisions in all of Virginia offering an innovative approach to world languages in the first years of school. And together, we are exploring how best to enhance community services in the southern part of our county, thereby strengthening the health and welfare of our rural communities. Collectively, these initiatives are making Albemarle a champion of inclusiveness and achievement for all.

In your recent citizen survey, 95 percent of respondents shared the county's high priority for education. They said that support for maintaining the current level of educational excellence was very important or essential. This funding request does that.

We ask for your full support of this request and look forward to working with you to meet the expectations of our citizens. We are eager to do our part in maintaining the quality of life that makes Albemarle County such a special place to live and raise a family.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ned Gallaway", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ned Gallaway
Chairman, Albemarle County School Board