

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

AlbemarleForward: Equity & Opportunity

Earlier this month, the U.S. stock market's Dow Jones index closed above 25,000, a historic, even unimaginable accomplishment considering the financial upheaval we experienced less than a decade ago. Traditionally seen as one of the most commonly used harbingers for the health of our nation's economy, the news is certain to extend the boundaries of expectations for the opportunities that await today's students.

Such a development would be an ideal fit for a school division that sets its strategic goal as preparing graduates for lifelong success as learners, workers and citizens.

There is a qualitative difference, however, between the opportunities that a constantly modernizing and expanding economy offers and the opportunities provided to each student to join that economy at the highest level of their potential.

This was the challenge our school division formally embraced a year ago with the launching of our SEAD (social, emotional and academic development) pilot program for four urban ring elementary schools. Its goal, as we said in the program's mission statement, is to *end the predictive value of race, class, gender, and special capacities on student success by working together with families and communities to ensure each individual student's success.*

Our Opportunity Gap Imperative

The impetus for the program was the constant divergence in the academic profile and performance between economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and special education students and the rest of our student population.

This funding request builds on that promising start by focusing more resources on the fulfillment of our strategic goal for every student. The challenge and the rewards are considerable and national in scope.

One of most respected non-profit research organizations in the world, the *Brookings Institute*, published an article that characterized the U.S. educational system as "one of the most unequal in the industrialized world, one in which students routinely receive dramatically different learning opportunities based on their social status." It added that, "Despite stark differences in funding, teacher quality, curriculum, and class sizes, the prevailing view is that if students do not achieve, it is their own fault. We must confront and address these inequalities", it added.

The community value of such action across our nation can be quantified in a research paper for the *National Bureau of Economic Research*. Using data from the *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)*, the authors said that if all students in the U.S. could be brought up to basic mastery as defined by NAEP, the U.S. economy would increase by \$32 trillion, or 14.6 percent.

Eliminating learning barriers and opportunity gaps for all students has a companion—enriching the personal growth and development of every single student, allowing them to succeed in the fiercely competitive environment they surely will encounter upon graduation.

The *World Economic Forum* tells us that on average, by 2020, more than a third of the desired core skill sets of most occupations will be comprised of skills that are not yet considered crucial to the job today. Overall, social skills—such as persuasion, emotional intelligence, and teaching others—will be in higher demand across industries than will be narrow technical skills, such as programming or equipment operation and control. In essence, technical skills need to be supplemented with strong social and collaboration skills.

"Most existing education systems at all levels provide highly siloed training," according to the Forum, "continuing a number of 20th century practices that are hindering progress on today's talent and labor market issues. Businesses should work closely with governments, education providers, and others to imagine what a true 21st century curriculum might look like," was the Forum's conclusion.

The good news in Albemarle County is that these conclusions have driven our investment decisions for several years. Our high school academies; maker curriculum; expanding world language programs in our elementary schools; burgeoning instructional offerings in entrepreneurial thinking; learning environment modernizations; and now our redesign of the high school learning experience, *High School 2022*, all are purposed to equip graduates with contemporary life and job skills. We may not be able to predict the exact nature of the organizations and jobs that will dominate our economy in future years, but we do know that the skills our students will possess will be timelessly relevant.

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Collective Efficacy

Installing these foundational programs has been the goal of previous operational and capital budgets, and we are beginning to see early and encouraging results. Now it is time to build on this beginning by empowering our faculty and staff to increase our return on this investment for our students through a division-wide commitment to the principle of collective efficacy.

Collective efficacy is a term coined several decades ago by a Stanford University psychologist, Albert Bandura. It was his belief that individuals are capable of overcoming any number of disadvantages if they believe their actions will make a difference. His research showed that when children were convinced they could solve math problems, they were more successful than peers who had more talent, but doubted their own abilities. “A resilient sense of efficacy enables individuals to do extraordinary things by productive use of their skills in the face of overwhelming obstacles,” Dr. Bandura said.

A study for the American Education Research Association supports his finding. It said that when teachers believe that together, they and their colleagues can impact student achievement, the “faculty as a whole can organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students” (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004, p.4). Why that is true may be found in an article in *The Journal of Education Research*, which says, “Educators with high efficacy encourage student autonomy, attend more closely to the needs of students who are not progressing well, and are able to modify students’ perceptions of their academic abilities (Ross & Bruce, 2007).”

Last summer, we completed a survey of our faculties across the division, asking them to rate the conditions for achieving high collective efficiency in every one of our schools. They evaluated six components—advanced teacher influence, consensus around goals, knowledge of the work of their peers, having a sense of cohesion among staff, the responsiveness of leaders, and the effectiveness of our intervention systems. We had an unprecedented response—1,344 of our educators responded, including all but five of our teachers. Their ratings on the presence of these components in our learning environment were strong, indicating that investments in programs and personnel are likely to produce meaningful results.

This year’s funding request builds on that confidence.

Investments With a High Rate of Return

More than 80 percent of our requested increase in expenditures is devoted to programs and personnel directly linked to expanding learning and career development opportunities for students and attracting and retaining world-class employees who are building the collective efficacy of our school division.

Overall, expenditures are projected to increase next year by 4.20 percent, which is two percent above the inflation rate. The largest share of this increase, 38.3 percent, will support programs and services that meet increased needs driven by student enrollment growth within various demographic groups.

We are projecting revenues next year will increase by 3.5 percent, the majority of which will come from local government revenue. The strong upward trend we saw this year should continue with a 5.28 percent increase for 2018-19. By contrast, federal revenues will continue their recent fall, and we are expecting a decrease next year. State revenues, which only recently began to recover, also will not improve in 2018-19, inching down by nearly one percent. We still are not at the real dollar levels in state revenues that we were receiving more than 10 years ago.

Federal & State Revenues Continue to Challenge Us

Our state revenues are driven by the state’s local composite index, which uses various economic measures to determine the ability of localities to pay for education from their own revenues. Albemarle County’s index for next year increased by six percent, largely due to a 28 percent jump in adjusted personal income (compared to a statewide average of 11 percent). The increase in our composite index lowered our expected state revenues by at least \$2 million. That \$2 million would have wholly eliminated the funding gap in this request.

Two budget areas that recently have driven substantial increases in spending will instead decrease next year. Following several improvements that led to the more efficient use of services by our employees, our health insurance claims have declined for two years in a row. These reductions benefit both the school division and our individual employees, and next year, will cut our insurance health premiums by \$1.05 million. Our contribution to the state retirement system also will decline, by \$588,000. Other significant savings include \$853,000 from the closing of Yancey Elementary School and \$770,000 in lower salary costs resulting from staff turnover.

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Overall, we are projecting 2018-19 expenditures will be \$188,074,644, and revenues will be \$186,810,012, resulting in a funding gap of \$1,264,632. Revenues, however, will not be finalized for several more months, and it is likely that our revenue number will change before the 2018-19 budget is formally approved by the School Board.

I would like to express my appreciation to the nearly 2,300 community members who participated in our annual budget survey and who listed as their top priorities the support of competitive salaries for teachers and classified staff and the expansion of workforce readiness opportunities for students.

We are grateful, too, for the guidance of multiple citizen and staff advisory committees and for the contributions of our principals and department leaders who so enthusiastically put forth innovative program ideas that move us closer to fulfilling our strategic goal for all students. I especially want to note the recommendations from high school students that we provide more crisis intervention services in our high schools. This funding request includes \$160,000 to fully staff mental health counselors for all three comprehensive high schools.

On a Personal Note

On a personal note, this is my final funding request as Superintendent of Albemarle County Public Schools. Over the years, it has been a privilege to have worked with you, to have learned from you, and to have had the chance to meet your highest expectations for your children. We have been ambitious in our dreams for our students and our community during times of abundance and made difficult management decisions during times of financial crisis, including navigating one of our nation's most difficult recessions. With your help, we never had to compromise on what was best for students or for the highly talented professionals who support our mission in classrooms, in libraries and cafeterias, on buses, stages and athletic fields, in the care and operation of our facilities, and in the offices that make our systems work so well.

Through every one of the 13 years I have been Superintendent, our parents and community partners have set Albemarle County Public Schools apart from our peers. Your consistent engagement and support, your unshakeable belief in public education, and your championing of equal opportunities for all are an invaluable reason why our students always will be able to open the doors to a better, more prosperous future.

Thank you,



Dr. Pamela R. Moran
Superintendent of Schools