



Office of the School Board

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Dear Chair Mallek and Members of the Board:

It is a privilege to send to you our funding request for the 2018-19 school year. The school year that will conclude on June 30 continues the strong upward trend in student academic performance that has defined our division for many years. Our on-time graduation and drop-out rates and our SAT and SOL test scores consistently exceed state and national averages and have led to such national recognition as our current ranking within the top three of Virginia's 133 school divisions.

These student accomplishments would not be possible absent a county that includes within its vision for all residents, "a community with exceptional educational opportunity." Your steadfast support of the fulfillment of this visionary commitment has been essential to the progress our students continue to make each year.

The focus of our funding request to you is summarized by the title of our Superintendent's message to us, *AlbemarleForward: Equity & Opportunity*. If those words sound familiar, they are intentionally so. They build upon the foundation of the current year's investment, *All Means All*, in which opening wider the doors of equity and access for all students and families is of paramount importance.

Returning to the county's vision, which also emphasizes a thriving economy, a research paper for the National Bureau of Economic Research is relevant. That paper found that if all students in the U.S. could be brought up to basic mastery levels of academic performance, the U.S. economy would grow by \$32 trillion, or an astonishing 14.6 percent.

While the scope of this impact may not be quite as sweeping here in Albemarle County, what is incontrovertible is its implications for all communities. Raising the level of student academic performance in pre-K – 12 public education has real and measureable economic benefit. It will move *Albemarle forward*.

Our school board asks that you once again join us in moving proactively to eliminate the fairness barriers and close the opportunity gaps that divide, by demographic group, the academic performance of all Albemarle County students, so that we all may move forward together.

The percentage of students who come to us from economically disadvantaged homes is now more than 30 percent of our student population—more than the total number of students who attend most neighboring school divisions. The same growth trends are present for students who come to us not speaking English as their primary language, as well as those students who come to us with special education needs.

While 64 percent of all graduates earn an Advanced Studies Diploma in the division, only 11 percent of students from economically disadvantaged homes do; only four percent of students with disabilities earn this diploma; and barely one percent of English language learners.

Third grade is an important milestone. It is the first time students take an SOL test, and it often is a predictor for how successful a student will be throughout their academic life. More than seven out of ten students in our school division earned passing grades on the third-grade math and reading tests. Less than two out of ten students from economically disadvantaged homes earned passing grades, and less than one out of ten students with disabilities or English language learners.

Our major initiative from a year ago—a pilot program to lift the social, emotional and academic development of all students in our four urban ring elementary schools—was a beginning in raising the academic performance of all learners. Early returns are promising, and this funding request furthers our commitment to bring to a close the predictive value of race, class, gender, and special capacities on student success.

Equity and access, in application, are not confined to demographic student groups. In our funding request, for example, is the provision of transportation to any student who desires to attend any of our high school academies, regardless of the base school they attend. Currently, students must provide their own transportation if they seek to enroll in our Math, Engineering & Science Academy, our Health and Medical Sciences Academy, or our Environmental Studies Academy and the program they wish to attend is housed in a high school different from the one they regularly attend.

Yet another study, this one by the *World Economic Forum*, signals another path forward for all students. It says that within two years, more than one-third of the desired skill sets of most occupations will be new in their significance.

The good news is that with your assistance in previous years, we are well-positioned to equip our students with the skills that will make them highly competitive in all evolutionary markets. This funding request supports *High School 2022*, a redesign of the learning experience to meet contemporary requirements.

Among the tenets of this approach is an emphasis on authentic learning opportunities through project-based work that benefits community and service organizations, provides paid internships in the private sector, and expands the role of mentors.

Nearly 80 percent of our requested increase in expenditures is devoted to programs and resources that directly link to enriching and increasing learning and career development opportunities for all students and in the closure of opportunity gaps to learning.

The largest share of this increase, \$4.1 million, is devoted to our teachers and classified staff and provides for a two percent rise in compensation. Also included is a one-time salary adjustment for teachers that will eliminate past practices, in which some teachers received less of an increase than recommended by the Board. This one-time equalization will result in most of our teachers receiving an increase of more than two percent next year.

Retaining and recruiting world-class teachers was the subject of a School Board-directed study by an internationally-renown consultant this past year, and it also was the highest priority identified in our annual community survey on the budget.

Overall, the School Board is requesting a school division budget next year of \$188.51 million, an increase of \$8.02 million, or 4.44 percent, over our current budget. When inflation and enrollment growth are taken into consideration, this increase is less than one percent. Revenue projections, which are likely to change over the next two months as both the state and county finalize their numbers, now show an increase of \$6.57 million, or 3.64 percent. This leaves one of our lowest funding gaps in recent years at this point in the budget cycle, of \$1.45 million.

The funding shift we have seen since the great recession of lower state support of local education contributes to this gap and also continues to force a higher reliance on local tax revenues to fund education. Ten years ago, the state contributed \$3,655 per pupil to the county. Next year, it is projected the state will provide \$3,610 to Albemarle County for each pupil, and when inflation is taken into account, the real dollar value is less than \$3,000.

This trend, based upon the state's recent readjustment of its composite index, is projected to reduce state revenues by millions of dollars again next year. The composite index does not take into account the county's land conservation program or the revenue-sharing agreement with Charlottesville City. If it did, state revenues to Albemarle County would not have declined.

More positively, changes in our health care programs have reduced claims, allowing us to project reduced premium costs next year. Our contribution to the Virginia Retirement System also will decline.

One of the strengths of our budget development process is the assistance we receive from various advisory groups in determining priorities for the next year. Of particular note is the guidance we received from high school students to expand the support services we provide to students in the areas of mental health and wellness. This request includes \$160,000 to fund these services on a full-time basis at all three comprehensive high schools.

Albemarle County Public Schools today is among the innovators in education through the modernization of facilities and curriculum; the use and accessibility of technology; pilot programs in such areas as the social and emotional development of children; bus safety; energy-efficient schools and classrooms; and the ambitions we set for our students in our relationships with the business community and service organizations.

We are fortunate to have yet one more distinction among Virginia school divisions: the degree to which our Board of Supervisors has been a reliable and valued partner in making it possible for us to create the new pathways that will move *Albemarle forward* for all.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katherine L. Acuff".

Katherine L. Acuff, Ph.D.

Chair

Albemarle County School Board