

Message from the Superintendent

Learning for All

This is the first funding resolution I have submitted since our School Board adopted our strategic plan, *Learning for All*. The plan is an important document, because of the process that produced it, what it says about our values and our commitments to you and as a guide for how we will structure programs and invest our resources next year.

Learning for All is a bold affirmation of purpose; that we will address the needs of every single student; that we will provide learning opportunities that expand the boundaries of each student's interests and potential and that we will equip both our students and our employees with the skills to be lifelong contributors to and leaders of an increasingly diverse and dynamic world.

The plan came together with the input of students, families, employees and community leaders, and serves as a blueprint for achieving and maintaining a high-quality education system, one that embraces the wisdom, counsel and participation of families, colleagues and community, especially those for whom engagement has been far too rare.

As often noted, while funding requests are by necessity dominated by numbers, they are above all else, primarily about the future of people and communities. Specifically, they detail how a school division will influence that future.

A recent study of high-performing school divisions in various parts of our nation by the Education Trust's Karin Chenoweth, *districts that succeed*, identified five distinguishing characteristics of schools that consistently are making continuous improvements in the lives of their stakeholders, including in such critical areas as closing achievement gaps.

What Makes School Divisions Great

The good news is that not only does our strategic plan align with these characteristics but this funding request will build upon and extend these strengths. For example, it prioritizes:

- *Effective leaders* by funding a commitment to recruit, develop and retain the most highly qualified, capable, dedicated and accessible professional team in our industry;
- *Collaborative teachers*, who enthusiastically embrace new teaching strategies in virtual environments, in keeping classrooms safe, in partnering with colleagues in professional learning communities and in volunteering as substitutes to support the classrooms of teachers;
- *Involved families*, a new electronic school notification system now in place translates emails from schools to families into 100 different languages and an instant messaging system to be piloted next month and introduced for all schools next year empowers teachers to securely and regularly text one or several families in their native languages and to receive replies;
- *Supportive environments* that fulfill our anti-racism policy, establishing and sustaining an equitable community and removing barriers that prohibit individual excellence and success. Also, the request of a needs-based capital improvement program that delivers the competitive advantages that come from facilities that promote innovation, teamwork, choice, resourcefulness and excellence,

- *Ambitious instruction* practices that measure true student learning growth, promote mastery learning and provide meaningful counsel to families and students. And, the expansion of career learning centers to more closely align college and career preparation with those learning experiences most highly valued by business and community organizations.

The financial news at this time of the year again is promising. Projected revenues for the 2022-23 school year are expected to increase by \$30.8 million, fueled in large part by an expected increase of 17.6 percent in local revenues and an 11 percent increase in state funding. Overall, this funding request seeks a 2022-23 school budget of \$242.0 million, 14.6 percent better than this year's adopted budget.

Almost 70 percent of our 2022-23 budget would be funded by revenues from local government, totaling \$167.5 million and reflecting the continued growth and development of our local economy. Similarly, the strong economic comeback in Virginia will raise the state's share of our budget next year to 27 percent or \$65.9 million. Federal funding is expected to remain at \$3.7 million.

A total of 85.9 percent of this funding request is devoted to compensation and benefits for the more than 2,600 professionals who teach, care for and support our nearly 13,500 students in 25 different schools, three regional centers and four local centers.

World Class Investments

The pandemic has highlighted the urgency of investing in a world class team. The current school year has been marked by persistent shortages of school bus drivers, school nurses, technology professionals, child nutrition staff and substitute teachers. The marketplace model used to determine our ability to compete for the most qualified professionals is outdated.

Ever since the great recession more than ten years ago, annual compensation increases often have lagged behind inflation and in some years totaled zero.

We took a significant step forward a year ago with the adoption of a 5.2 percent compensation increase for teachers, a four percent raise for classified staff and the first step in the adoption of a \$15 hourly minimum wage for regular hourly employees. Next month, we will supplement these investments with a four percent increase for employees and for July, I propose a six percent compensation increase.

This at a time when the annual inflation rate is 7.5 percent, its highest level in 40 years.

Also provided for in this request is:

- The redesign of our Human Resources capabilities, moving from a staff shared with local government to a model 100 percent dedicated and focused on the staffing needs and employee support services of Albemarle County Public Schools employees;
- An investment of \$2.1 million to add 46 school-based substitute teachers to classrooms.

Prominent among the teaching and learning values in our division has been maintaining class sizes that are well below those required by the Virginia Department of Education. A decline in enrollment allowed us this year to temporarily reduce our class sizes. This funding request would continue these reductions at a cost of \$2.5 million. Average class sizes this year were 17.5 students in our elementary schools; between 18.5 and 20.4 in our middle schools and from 20.1 to 20.3 in our high schools.

Capital Needs Long Overdue

The most substantial roadblock to continuous improvement facing our school communities are teaching and learning spaces that average more than 50 years in age and are so limited that we are forced to utilize more than 80 mobile classrooms or trailers at 12 of our schools. We have not added a new school to our division in 20 years, when the population of our county was 30 percent lower than it is today.

Our Long-Range Planning Advisory Committee has recommended a capital investment program for the next five years, identifying the need for two new elementary schools, a new high school center and renovations to elementary, middle and high schools.

In 2016, the school division, in partnership with local government, went to the voters to make the case for significant facility improvements that enhanced public safety and our ability to deliver high quality education services. More than 70 percent of those voting supported the capital improvements, resulting in more secure and modern learning environments for thousands of students.

The invaluable lesson of 2016 was one of partnership. When a thoughtful, relevant, well-reasoned, candid and quality of life appeal is made to the taxpayers of Albemarle County, it can prevail.

Regional planners advise us that over the next 30 years, Albemarle County's population will expand by 30 percent. The strategy of continually expanding facilities built before the Eisenhower administration and continuing to add even more mobile classrooms, is not sustainable. It is not in the best educational interests of our children, their families nor representative of our future as a thriving, prosperous county.

Our capital budgets, like our operating budgets, must be based upon documented needs with dedicated funding, designed in cooperation with our school community and our local government partners.

Learning with and for All

Throughout the pandemic, our widespread use of technology platforms has transformed meetings that once involved a handful of community members to forums that have included hundreds and even thousands of participants.

The participation of our school community has contributed to our strategic plan, the redesign of our high school experience, our school naming reviews, our redistricting studies, our grading policies, the priorities in this funding request and the values that bring us together, are essential to our continuous improvement. We must continue to expand engagement even wider.

As I have noted on several occasions, these past two years, difficult, risky and inconvenient as they have been, have revealed uncommon strengths. Students have experienced learning environments known to no other generation of students, at least for 100 years. Learning has been different, not lost. Students have felt the support of caring adults who enthusiastically offer the expertise and the will to keep alive curiosity and energy, to focus on assets and not deficits, to advance *Learning for All*.

I would like to thank our School Board, our Board of Supervisors and our partners in local government, who come together to support our important work by putting student interests and those of our family and county first.

Especially, I am grateful for the thousands of parents who have partnered with us, the thousands of employees who have moved us closer to our mission every day and for our students, who constantly teach us valuable lessons about that human spirit that so powerfully brings to life, the turning points of transformational opportunities.



Sincerely,

Dr. Matthew S. Haas
Superintendent of Schools

