

Message from the School Board Chair

Learning for All

Dear Chair Price and Supervisors,

On behalf of the entire Albemarle County School Board, I write you to present our funding request for the 2022-23 school year. We remain very grateful to you for the support that you show our community's public schools year after year, and our annual funding request process is a testament to your dedication to public education in this county. Like last year, our \$242 million funding request reflects a balanced budget, but this year it also represents our school division's desire to promote *Learning for All*, our new strategic plan that maintains a focus on excellence but casts a renewed eye toward equity, family and community, and wellness.

Throughout the past two years, the appearance of learning has shifted repeatedly. What school looked like on a daily basis was redefined by the rapidly-changing health and social concerns consuming members of all populations. Learning has been virtual and it has socially distanced; it has expressed itself through masks and it has shown its face whenever possible. But learning has persisted, and it has been a higher priority than ever for government officials and communities since March of 2020.

During this same period, ACPS revisited its strategic plan. It was a difficult time to take on such work, as meetings had to convene virtually using technologies that many, at least at first, were not accustomed to using. Ultimately, though, what became clear was something that no one anticipated: planning during difficult times makes it easy to see what matters most.

From the beginning of that process, there was no question that excellence would be a top priority. Our funding request shows the importance that Albemarle County Public Schools places on excellence by its suggested spending on the very thing that creates it: people.

The bulk of our \$30.8 million increase in expenditures is made up of compensation increases. We are asking you to grow your investment in our employees so that we can recruit and retain the kind of educators who bring excellence to our schools, helping our students to thrive.

That number includes a 10% salary increase by July 1, as well as targeted pay increases for certain hard-to-fill positions. Beyond improving the quality of life for our employees, this change means improving our ability to hire bus drivers, substitute teachers, special education and ESOL teachers, and mental health counselors, among others. It is no coincidence that these initiatives improve wellness both for employees and students.

As important as are the professionals who deliver high quality learning and services to students are the environments in which these transfers take place.

We are in a school division where approximately 100 classrooms are in trailers. Many of our elementary school students spend most of their school day in this makeshift setting. And, while we invest millions of dollars to enhance the security of front entrances to our schools, we are sending thousands of children to trailers separated from the main building.

Unlike many counties in Virginia, Albemarle is a destination of choice, with businesses and school populations continuing to expand. That will continue to put pressure on our public schools. Having schools that can accommodate its student population without a heavy reliance on trailers and having upgraded facilities to accommodate modern learning needs is a necessary investment in the economic vitality of our county.

We are deeply appreciative both of the increase in the division's capital budget recommended by the county executive and for the collaboration between local government and school division in strategically focusing on a budget that recognizes the direct link between the quality of learning and the quality of learning spaces.

This funding request represents our commitment to wisely investing the funds you approve to meet our commitment to all of our county's residents. It promises to deliver a better future, one true to our values of excellence, equity, community and family, and wellness.

Every member of our School Board is thankful for the excellence in education that you have made possible and for a partnership that lifts up our entire community. I respectfully seek your approval of our 2022-23 Albemarle County Public Schools funding request.

Sincerely,



Graham Paige
Albemarle County School Board Chair

