

FROM
THE OFFICE
OF THE
SUPERINTENDENT



Dear Board Members:

Educating children is a people-intensive business. In fact, 71% of our annual operating budget pays for staff salaries and benefits. Since most of our people are school-based, this means we're spending our funds where it matters most – in the classroom, on teaching and learning.

And, as we've come to realize during the pandemic, education is also deeply emotional work. Our students learn best from those whom they trust the most. Subject matter knowledge, while incredibly important, isn't enough. Great teachers also have expertise in child development, psychology, brain research, instructional strategies and classroom management.

Education is a noble profession, one that is difficult to master. Research indicates that teachers and principals have the most impact on student learning, outside of the family. As public schools deal with the nationwide Great Resignation, however, we find ourselves at a distinct disadvantage.

With competition for employees at an all-time high, we are struggling to fill a wide range of positions, from bus drivers and maintenance workers to classroom teachers and principals. HVAC technicians are impossible to find; our pay scales are embarrassingly low. Bus drivers can make more in the private sector, with some trucking companies now offering salaries of \$100,000 or more. GCS is the third largest district in the state, yet we often rank only ninth or tenth in pay.

To address these concerns, I recommend seeking \$18.75 million in new funding from County Commissioners to support the following compensation initiatives:

- \$10 million to increase our local teacher supplement;
- \$5.5 million to complete phase one of our classified staff study; and
- \$3.25 million to improve our local principal and assistant principal salary supplements.

My proposed budget also includes the \$8.5 million increase in funding needed to sustain our current service levels by matching state-mandated pay and benefit-cost increases for locally paid teachers, principals and support staff that were included in the legislature's biennium budget. The increased funding would also pay for higher costs for utilities and liability insurance. In addition, \$3.36 million in new local funding will be needed to pay for anticipated increases in charter school enrollment.

To help offset these costs, district leadership has identified savings of \$1.56 million, resulting in a recommended net increase of \$25.7 million in local funding. In addition, my budget recommendation includes \$10 million in capital outlay funds for deferred maintenance projects including HVAC upgrades, roof repairs, outdoor lighting, and safety and security improvements.

If approved by the school board and funded by county commissioners, Guilford County Schools' operating budget for the 2022-2023 school year would be \$251.31 million, excluding capital outlay. Local funding would account for 25.3% of GCS' proposed operating budget, while state and federal funding would contribute 46.2% and 28.5%, respectively.

While these numbers are important, we can't lose sight of our students, who only have one opportunity to receive a great education. We also know that when it comes to transforming our students' learning and life outcomes, our people make the biggest difference. While our employees are mission-driven, they aren't missionaries. Let's show them we truly care by increasing their compensation and improving their daily working conditions.

For all children,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sharon L. Contreras".

Sharon L. Contreras, Ph.D.