



## Special Edition The School Budget: Changing the Equation

- **The School Budget: Changing the Equation** – I have been leading a group of teachers, parents, community leaders and business leaders that is working to identify ways to address the school budget deficit, including reducing central and in-school administration and finding operating efficiencies. We can address the deficit without eliminating the programs that are so important to keeping our schools the best in the nation.
- **Business, Teacher, and County Groups Call for Cuts in Central Administration** – I am not alone in the effort as there are other groups in the County, including the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce and the Fairfax Education Coalition, that are calling for the school system to keep their necessary budget reductions focused on administration.
- **Upcoming Events**
  - Transportation Town Hall on I-66 Solutions – February 6<sup>th</sup> at Chantilly High School, 10:00 AM
  - Springfield District-Wide Community Parking District Public Hearing - February 9<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 p.m.
  - Relay for Life is Coming to Springfield! - May 14, 2010

### **The School Budget: Changing the Equation**

Our world-class schools are the number one reason businesses and families come to Fairfax County. That quality carries a price, \$2.3 billion. The school system accounts for more than half (54 percent) of all county funding. The county is facing a funding shortfall of \$315 million for the next fiscal year and the school system is facing a shortfall of approximately \$170 million. Even in this difficult economic climate, we need to ensure the quality of our schools. However, this does not excuse the school budget from the healthy fiscal scrutiny these tough times dictate. It is past time to change the equation on how we balance the school budget.

The old equation repeated year after year is to exact pressure on the Board of Supervisors to give more money to schools by putting unpopular cuts and damaging reductions to children on the table. Every budget cycle, we go through the same formula. The School Board and staff warn that if they don't get the money they have requested, teacher salaries will be frozen, the most popular programs will be cut, class sizes will be increased, and multiple sports/activities will be eliminated (this year it is elementary band and strings, all freshmen sports, indoor track, winter cheerleading, and more).

Contrast this to what we have done with the County budget. Despite significant growth in both the county population and the demand for county services (police, human services, etc.) caused by these tough economic times, we have begun to "change the equation" on the county budget. The Board of Supervisors and County Executive have worked hard to cut spending and identify efficiencies, while limiting the impact on critical services. We got a good start last year on the County side, by reducing actual spending, but still have a ways to go.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the school budget. This year, Superintendent Dale is again using the same old playbook. Perhaps even more than in recent years, he is refusing to focus his budget cuts on administration and instead is proposing to cut many of the programs that make our school system the best in the country. Instead of cutting popular and effective programs, the school system should do as businesses all around the country have done – cut administrative costs and focus on functioning more efficiently.

The Superintendent's proposed budget hits the classrooms hard by increasing class size. Teachers, administrators and parents agree that class size is one of the most important factors in a child's education. Because the School Board has voted to increase class sizes for the last two years, we already have serious class size issues in Fairfax County.

I have been leading a group of concerned parents, teachers, and business leaders that have been looking for alternative ways to balance the school budget without sacrificing the quality of our schools, important programs or calling for significant tax increases. Despite what we hear from the school system, there are a slew of options for accomplishing this goal, including the following:

- **Investigate cutting central department administrative costs by at least 10%** - Over \$400 million of the \$2.3 billion non capital school budget this year is spent on central administrative departments. A 10% cut would reduce central administrative costs to just below 2006 levels and save approximately \$40M. For example, the school system's communications and outreach department has 24 people in it. That's the size of a small PR firm.
- **Look into the growth in school based administration for reductions** - For example, the assistant principal to student ratio is higher than our surrounding jurisdictions. In addition, over the last several years we have significantly

increased the number of tests we require our students to take (non state or federally mandated tests). This puts self-imposed burdens on our teachers and schools. Today, each of our schools has an assessment coach, who never enters a classroom and does nothing but arrange for testing. Many of these administrators are paid for 11 or 12 months, while teachers generally are paid for only 10 months. We need to look at reducing the burdens we place on our teachers, so they can focus on teaching our children. Reducing the number of school-based administrative positions to a level that is still above Virginia requirements, and reducing the length of the contract periods for these administrators, could save over \$25M.

- **Review major operations for efficiencies** – transportation, school security, etc. A modest half hour change in bell schedule for a handful of high schools could dramatically reduce the peak number of busses required on the road at one time and save millions without impacting after school activities or sports. We also need to explore alternatives to the school security dispatch system, which currently has its own 24 hour, 7 day a week operation and management function.
- **Conserve and carry forward funding from 2009 and 2010** – According to its own student enrollment data, the school system currently has about 1,500 fewer students than it projected last year. The roughly \$15 million allocated to educate those students who have not yet shown up should be carried forward along with the approximately \$25 million carried forward from the school system's 2009 budget.
- **Strongly advocate for, and encourage parents to advocate for, the state government to recalculate the Local Composite Index** as was scheduled, so that Fairfax County receives the \$61 million it is owed. The Board of Supervisors and the School Board are both advocating for this.

This group has identified over \$100 million of potential cuts and another \$100 million in alternatives that should be reviewed before the Superintendent considers any increases in class size or cuts that impact the quality of our schools. This knowledgeable group is eager to work in partnership with the School Board and school system to review these ideas. Education is not just about money. If it were, Washington, DC with its high spending per student would have the best schools in the United States. To ensure that our school system remains the best in the country, we need to implement solid spending priorities that refocus our education dollars on our classrooms, students and teachers.

*Editor's Note: This article was published in a few local newspapers earlier this week. The school system is indicating that they do not agree with some of the numbers which I find interesting since all of the numbers referenced in this article were pulled from FCPS budget documents. Perhaps even more interesting is the fact that they cannot readily provide what they think the numbers are. This clearly indicates a need for additional transparency in the numbers.*

## **Business, Teacher, and County Groups Call for Cuts in Central Administration**

I am not alone in my calls to focus our education resources in the classroom. The Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce is also advocating for FCPS to focus their cuts on central administration. The Chamber sent a letter to the School Board this week asking them to keep their budget reductions focused outside the classroom.

Another group also calling for cuts in administration is the Fairfax Education Coalition (FEC). The FEC is a group made up of representatives from the Fairfax County Federation of Teachers (FCFT), the Fairfax Education Association (FEA), FAIRGRADE, SLEEP, Zero Tolerance Reform, the Fairfax Coalition of Advocates for Public Schools (FairfaxCAPS) and the Fairfax County Association for the Gifted (FCAG). Many members of the FEC testified at this week's School Board public hearings asking that FCPS focus their cuts on administration. For more information on the FEC please go to their website <http://fairfaxeducationcoalition.org/>.

This broad based coalition supports the notion that there are ways to address the school deficit without eliminating programs that make our schools so successful or by increasing class size.

## **Upcoming Events**

### **Town Hall Meeting on I-66 Solutions**

Along with Congressman Wolf and Supervisor Michael Frey, I will be hosting a Town Hall Meeting on **February 6, 2010, from 10 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.** at Chantilly High School. Titled "***I-66 – Today and the Future: Common Sense Solutions to Address Gridlock,***" we invite you to learn the about short and long-term solutions to the congestion on I-66 outside of the Beltway that are underway or being discussed including:

- Extended use of the shoulder lanes, including weekends
- Non-HOV use of the ramps at Monument Dr. and Stringfellow Rd. outside of normal HOV hours
- The bus-only ramp at Nutley (Vaden Street)
- The interchange at I-495 and I-66
- The status of the Environmental Impact Statement for an I-66 Multimodal Study
- The status of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation's study of Transit/Transportation Demand Management for I-66
- A session on Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).

There will also be a question and answer session where the public will be provided an opportunity to ask questions and provide input on these important issues.

## **Public Hearing set for proposed District-wide Community Parking District**

Based on feedback I have received in response to previous Herrity Report articles and a meeting of the Springfield District Council on this issue, I have asked the Board of Supervisors to move forward with a public hearing to establish all of Springfield District as a Community Parking District (CPD). Vehicles that would be restricted include:

- Boat Trailers
- Watercraft
- Motor Homes
- Camping Trailers
- Trailers or Semi-trailers, even if attached to a vehicle
- Vehicles  $\geq$  3 axles
- Vehicles with a gross vehicle weighted rating (GVWR)  $\geq$  12,000 lbs

Vehicles temporarily parked (for up to 48 hours) for the purpose of loading, unloading or preparing for a trip are exempt. More information is available at:

[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fcdot/rtap.htm#cpd](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fcdot/rtap.htm#cpd)

**The hearing is set for February 9<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 p.m.** and will be held in the Board Auditorium of the Government Center located at 12000 Government Center Parkway in Fairfax. To submit comments in support of or against this proposal, e-mail the Clerk to the Board of Supervisors at [ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov), who will disseminate them to the entire Board.

## **Relay for Life is Coming to Springfield!**

Last summer, a group of local residents created the Springfield-Burke Relay for Life Committee and teamed up with West Springfield High School to launch the community's first Relay for Life event. I am proud to be a small part of the team bringing this event to our community.

On May 14, 2010, West Springfield High School will host the Relay for Life of Springfield-Burke. Relay is the American Cancer Society's signature activity. It offers everyone in a community an opportunity to participate in the fight against cancer. Teams of people camp out at the high school and take turns walking around the track. Teams of people from all walks of life have fun while raising much-needed funds to fight cancer and raise awareness of cancer prevention and treatment.

One in three people will be diagnosed with cancer within their lifetime. The money raised at events like Relay saves lives by funding cutting-edge cancer research, early detection and prevention education, advocacy efforts, and patient services. Relay offers us a chance to celebrate those who have fought cancer and won, remember those lost to the disease, and fight back against this disease by raising resources and awareness.

No matter who you are, there's a place for you at the Springfield-Burke Relay for life. To participate, form a team, dedicate a luminary, or obtain more information about the Springfield event, please visit [www.SpringfieldBurkeRelay.org](http://www.SpringfieldBurkeRelay.org), or email the organizers at [SpringfieldBurkeRFL@gmail.com](mailto:SpringfieldBurkeRFL@gmail.com).

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The *Herrity Report* is a monthly publication from the Office of Supervisor Pat Herrity to keep citizens informed on the issues facing Fairfax County. Communication is important to Supervisor Herrity and he encourages your feedback on the items in the *Report* or other issues that concern you. Past issues of the *Herrity Report* can be found at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/springfield/herrity-report-newsletter.htm>. To sign up for the Herrity Report please go to <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/springfield>. If you no longer wish to receive the *Herrity Report*, please send an e-mail to [springfield@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:springfield@fairfaxcounty.gov) with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line.