

VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS PRESS CONFERENCE

Remarks by Jack Dale Superintendent of Fairfax County Schools

Good morning, I'm Jack Dale, Superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools. When I first faced the challenge of creating this very lean budget, I asked staff and school board members how they managed a similar circumstance in the early 1990's. While they offered great advice, I can now say with all confidence that the current budget crisis is the worst one our county has ever faced and, with the wrong decisions, it will take decades to recover the world-class instructional programs we have built over the years. The ultimate losers are the students in the classroom.

The 2009 Fairfax County Public Schools' budget required significant funding, staffing reductions and an increase in class size to come into balance. Because of the continued economic downturn, we are facing a projected shortfall of more than 200 million dollars. Adding to the challenge, we will educate more than 5,000 new students in 2010, which follows an increase of more than 3,500 this year. And we will be opening two new elementary schools in September of 2009 to help accommodate some of this growth.

The FCPS 2010 Proposed Budget of \$2.2 billion, is a reduction from the current year's. Furthermore, reductions in state funding only exacerbate an already significant challenge. And at this point difficult cuts have already been made, leaving Fairfax with choices which will of necessity impact the quality of education. Without increased local funding, our class size will increase 2.0 students per teacher on top of the increase of .5 students last year. Consequences for students will be dire:

- Elementary School could have more split grades with some higher level classes, some exceeding 30 students
- Secondary schools will have fewer course offerings and class sizes will exceed the Standards of Quality
- Counselor, psychologists and social workers will experience 10 percent increases in their caseloads. This means spending more time in mandatory meetings and less time providing direct services to students and their families, even as economic pressures add to family stress.
- There will be reductions in administrative, clerical and custodial positions at all schools. All personnel will have their salaries frozen.

While we tried to minimize classroom impact, it was impossible. Reductions to central offices equal 10 percent, whereas cuts to instruction were 5 percent. We believe there will be some layoffs necessary in the central offices to accommodate these cuts, which are in addition to 5 percent reductions this year.

Ninety-two percent of our resources are what we define as "school based," so reductions in state funding, no matter how they are presented or structured, will of necessity have some impact on staffing and on instructional programs. Not only do these cuts impact choices for higher level students that can never be re-gained, it also impacts resources dedicated to our most at-risk students.

Finally, as you consider your options, please grant localities as much discretion as possible in managing any possible reductions. While all school divisions share similarities, no two school divisions will have exactly the same challenges, have exactly the same programs, or allocate staff in exactly the same way. So please avoid "one-solution-fits-all" approaches.