

FCFT FY 2021 Priorities and Suggested Budgetary Solutions

Fairfax County Federation of Teachers represents over 4,000 educators across Fairfax County and is an affiliate of the 1.7-million-member American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO. Our members are all non-administrative, certified and classified Fairfax County public school employees including teachers, instructional assistants, counselors, clerical employees and other staff who are essential to making our public schools succeed. The Fairfax County Federation of Teachers urges the School Board to make the following changes to the proposed FY 2021 budget in to improve public education in Fairfax County to better serve our educators, students and community.

Student Behavior and Discipline

Our Concern: We are seeing an increase in incidents of students experiencing mental health crises in school. Without adequate staffing in place and sufficient training for staff, these students are not receiving the support they need. This often leads to disruptive and dangerous behavior that jeopardizes the safety and learning of every student. We believe that every student has the ability to be successful in school with the right support. Students frequently experiencing mental health crises need trusted adults who can meet with them one-on-one to problem solve and teach coping skills. Classroom teachers do what they can to meet the mental health needs of their students in crisis, but they are unable to dedicate the time needed to meet these students' needs without letting the academic needs of the class fall by the wayside. These students are frequently referred to administrators for discipline because of a lack of staff to support their mental health needs. We believe that school counselors are the key to teaching these students the skills they need to be successful in school. We also believe that all staff would benefit from further training in de-escalation strategies. Teachers and IAs are usually the first ones present when students enter the crisis cycle. Providing all staff with training in behavior interventions and de-escalation will help them address student behavior concerns with research-based practices.

Our Suggestions:

- **Training for staff:** Dr. Brabrand's proposed budget includes \$100,000 for staff training around student behavior intervention. We would like this money to go toward the following:
 - **Mandatory training on the SRR handbook and discipline procedures for all administrators during the summer:** We believe that the county needs to establish consistency across all schools in the steps schools take in handling discipline referrals. This will begin with providing clear expectations to administrators.
 - **Staff training and school-wide discussion on the SRR handbook and discipline procedures during staff's first week back in August:** We ask that a dedicated portion of the staff training days in the first teacher work week in August be reserved to train staff on the SRR handbook and have a school-wide discussion to establish a consistent set of procedures for responding to discipline referrals. We would also like schools to use this time to discuss what staff are expected to do when the designated person responding to an issue is not available. This will be included in the existing amount of training during the first

teacher work week and will not take from teachers' unencumbered time to prepare for the beginning of the school year.

- **More Academy courses on de-escalation strategies and behavior interventions available to all staff:** Many staff members feel that they need more training to appropriately respond to students in crisis. This need cannot be adequately addressed through an ELearnIt video or other online trainings. We believe that all staff who work directly with students, including classroom teachers, specialists, and IAs should have the opportunity to take Academy courses that will train them on research-based behavior interventions and de-escalation strategies.
- **Allocate more funds for school counselors to reach 250:1 ratio:** Dr. Brabrand's proposed budget currently includes \$6 million as "staffing initiatives placeholder recommendations" which allocates \$1.4 million for school counselors. We estimate this would only account for around 12-14 counselor positions. We are requesting the following:
 - **Increase the funding for counselors to \$2.4 million to increase the counselor ratio in more schools.** Governor Northam is committing more money in the state budget in 2022 to achieve the 250:1 ratio of school counselors recommended by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), so this will likely be a short-term additional investment in order to meet our students' mental health needs as soon as possible.
 - **Prioritize increasing the number of counselors in elementary schools first to focus on early prevention.** We believe that early access to counseling services in elementary school can prevent students from experiencing mental health crises later in their school careers. We also believe that the \$1.5 million suggested for dropout prevention/on time graduation coordinators for high schools may support similar needs, further supporting our belief that we should allocate more of the counselor funding through this initiative to elementary schools.
 - **For schools with a .5 counselor position, we ask for the budget to include funding to increase that school's staffing to allow for a 1.0 position.** It is critical for school counselors to have a consistent schedule in order to establish and maintain a relationship with the students they work with. Having school counselors split among 2 schools harms their relationship to the students they serve because they are not available when their students need them most. Students experiencing a mental health crisis need as much consistency in their lives as possible and having full time counselors will help ensure that these students will have a consistent person they can turn to when they are in need.

Teacher Planning Time

Our Concern: Dr. Brabrand's proposed budget does not currently provide any funding to address a major cause of teacher burnout and issues with teacher retention: the lack of teacher planning time. According to the results of our survey of 625 FCPS teachers, only 5.1% of elementary teachers and 12.1% of secondary teachers report that they can consistently complete the required duties of their jobs within the current amount of planning time built into their schedule. This points to a system-wide issue with planning time that is causing teachers to spend a significant amount of their personal time completing the required duties of their jobs. In one case, a teacher even reported being told by an administrator that they are expected to

dedicate a full day every weekend to preparing lesson plans for the next week. Teachers regularly give up family time and time to focus on their personal well-being just to keep up with the increasing demands of the job. Elementary teachers responding to the survey report spending an average of 11.4 hours per week working outside of their designated work hours, with secondary teachers reporting an average of 10.2 hours per week. This is causing teachers to burn out and leave the profession in record numbers. One of the 4 categories in the district's strategic focus is attracting and retaining a premier workforce. This goal cannot be achieved without addressing the system-wide issue of teacher planning time.

Our Suggestions:

- **Provide a monthly early release day that is designated as unencumbered teacher-directed planning time:** Since the end of early-release Mondays, the district has not been able to ensure that teachers are receiving their mandated amount of teacher-directed planning time. Additionally, teachers' planning time during the school day is often interrupted by dealing with student behaviors, attending additional meetings, covering for unfilled sub positions, etc. The best planning happens when teachers have a long, uninterrupted block of time. Providing a monthly early-release day, which must be left as unencumbered teacher-directed time, would give teachers time to plan for high-quality instruction. This would also provide special education teachers and resource teachers time to plan, as they often have little to no planning time built into their regular schedules.
- **Pay teachers on a 12 month contract:** According to the results from a survey of 625 FCPS teachers, elementary teachers report working an average of 11.4 hours per week outside of their designated 7.5 hour workday. Secondary teachers report working an average of 10.2 hours per week outside of their designated 7.5 hour workday. This amounts to an additional 59 and 52.6 work days worked unpaid each year by FCPS elementary and secondary teachers, respectively. All major school breaks add up to 54 days in the 2020/2021 school year: summer (42 work days) winter break (7 work days), and spring break (5 work days). Teachers are already working the equivalent of a 12 month schedule in terms of number of hours worked. Paying teachers for 12 months of work rather than 10 months would compensate for the number of hours teachers work outside of their designated work hours every day.

Non-budgetary suggestions:

- **Enforce regulation 4422.10:** Results from our survey of 625 FCPS teachers indicate that the majority of schools in the county are not adhering to the county regulation on planning time. Only 22.5% of the 453 elementary teachers responding to this question reported that their school adheres to the regulation of providing teachers with 240 minutes per week of teacher-directed planning time. 72% of the 459 elementary teachers responding reported attending 2 or more CLTs per week, only 1 of whom reported that their school provided an additional hour of planning time per week to compensate for the lost teacher-directed planning time. In secondary schools, 57.4% of the 162 teachers responding reported that their school met the regulation. 50% of secondary teachers report attending 2 or more CLTs per week. The school board and regional leadership need to ensure that their schools are providing teachers with the mandated amount of teacher-directed planning time laid out in regulation 4422.10.
- **Require schools that want to have more than 1 CLT per week to use school funds for extra staffing to ensure that teachers still receive the minimum required amount of teacher-directed planning time.**

- **Elementary:** Some elementary schools are providing their teachers with additional planning time outside of the weekly rotation of specials with classes such as STEAM Lab, Library, Counseling/Guidance, etc. Schools that require more than 1 CLT per week must make up the lost planning time by providing an additional block of planning time within the school day equivalent to the length of the additional CLT(s) to ensure that teachers receive 240 minutes of teacher-directed planning time per week.
- **Secondary:** Provide teachers participating in 2 or more CLTs per week with additional planning periods equivalent to the amount of planning time spent in CLTs beyond 1 period per week.
- **Amend regulation 4422.10:**
 - **Reword the section on collaborative planning time for elementary teachers:** The majority of FCPS schools now require 2 or more CLTs. In many cases, more than half of teachers' total planning time is spent in CLTs or other required meetings. We ask that the school board change the language about elementary collaborative planning time from "*a minimum of 60 minutes of collaborative planning time*" to "*a maximum of 60 minutes mandatory collaborative planning time with the option to meet more frequently at the discretion of the teacher team*". Alternatively, the regulation could specify a certain ratio of mandatory collaborative time to teacher directed time such as 1:4 to ensure that teachers still retain the majority of their planning time for teacher-directed planning.
 - **Further clarify what can be considered teacher-directed planning time for elementary teachers:** Many administrators claim that the 15-20 minutes before students arrive in the morning accounts for the planning time lost due to additional CLTs; however, the language of the regulation does not reflect this. We ask that the school board add a statement to clarify that the 15-20 minutes before students arrive does not qualify as teacher-directed planning time. This can be added after the following statement in the regulation: "*Classroom planning time is provided during art, physical education, music, and/or other instructional programming. Other certified personnel without direct classroom responsibilities may also be assigned in a manner that provides planning time.*"
 - **Set a minimum length for a block of teacher-directed planning time:** We ask that the school board add a statement to the regulation requiring that any given block of planning time must be at least 45 minutes. This will ensure that each block of planning time allows enough time for meaningful work to be done.
- **Amend regulation 4421.19 to protect teacher-directed planning time on Teacher Workdays:** Administrators often schedule meetings and trainings on days designated as Teacher Workdays. There are two types of days on the calendar already set aside for training and meetings: School Planning Days and Teacher Staff Development Days. We ask that language be added to the regulation to designate Teacher Workdays as 100% unencumbered teacher-directed planning time.

Substitute Shortage

Our Concern: Schools are experiencing an increase in unfilled substitute positions. This has left schools scrambling to cover unfilled positions by pulling staff from their regular duties or splitting the unstaffed class and distributing the students among the other classes in the grade level for the day. Special education IAs are frequently pulled to cover classroom teachers, which

puts their students at risk of not meeting their legally mandated IEP service hours. Secondary teachers are often asked to cover colleagues' classes during their planning time, causing them to fall short of their minimum amount of teacher-directed planning time laid out in regulation 4422.10. On our planning time survey, 24% of secondary teachers reported frequently losing their designated teacher-directed planning time due to covering colleagues' classes. Dr. Brabrand's proposed budget currently includes \$3 million for substitute training but does not include funding for other aspects that contribute to the substitute shortage.

Our Suggestions:

- **Raise the substitute teacher rate to match the highest-paying surrounding district:** Montgomery County Public Schools pays subs as follow: **Certificated:** Short-Term \$19.58/hr.; Long-Term \$27.89/hr. **Non-Certificated:** Short-Term \$18.41/hr.; Long-Term \$26.28/hr. We ask that FCPS match the substitute rate of Montgomery County Public Schools to remain competitive and attract quality substitutes.
- **Expand higher pay for experienced subs:** Many retired teachers left the sub pool when their rate was reduced to the regular sub rate. Although their rate was raised again, it still does not match their previous rate, which was \$22 before it was lowered in 2016. We ask that FCPS return the sub rate for retired teachers back to the rate before it was lowered plus COLA for the years since it was dropped. We also ask for this higher sub rate to apply to the following groups:
 - **any retired instructional staff (teachers and IAs):** To show respect for the level of experience they bring to the job.
 - **licensed teachers:** To account for their level of education, training, and experience.
 - **Subs for special education teachers and special education IAs:** In recognition of the additional responsibility required of the job. We also believe that the amount of responsibility and workload in working with students is equivalent for a substitute covering for a special education teacher and a special education IA, and therefore we believe subs for these positions should receive the same amount. We also see that many special education IA sub positions go unfilled because the position requires the same level of work as a special education teacher position, but pays less. Paying these positions at a higher rate would attract more qualified subs, which would ensure that students in our special education classes receive the level of service and support they require when their regular teachers and IAs are out.
- **Substitute training:** We see that the proposed budget has \$3 million set aside for substitute training. We would like to see this spent on providing one paid work day for new substitutes to shadow an experienced teacher. This will provide professional development for our subs and ensure that they are introduced to best-practices before taking over a class on their own.
- **Pay out unused leave to staff upon leaving FCPS:** Staff are incentivized to use up leave because of the current use-it-or-lose-it system. Paying out unused leave upon leaving FCPS would reduce unnecessary absences and would decrease the need for subs.
- **Compensate staff who cover for unfilled sub positions:** Pay school-based staff who cover unfilled sub positions the maximum sub rate on top of their regular salary for the number of hours they are pulled from their regular duties to sub. There is already money allocated for a substitute for the absence. If a substitute does not pick up the job and a school-based staff member takes it on in addition to their regular duties, the amount that

the sub would have received should go to the staff member doing the job. This could be added as an amendment to policy 4650.5.

- **Limit the amount of time a school-based staff member can be pulled to cover an unfilled sub position:** We see school-based staff, especially IAs, pulled to cover unfilled sub positions on a regular basis. For many IAs it happens multiple times per week. We ask that the school board limit the amount of time school-based staff can be pulled from their regular duties to cover for an unfilled sub position to a maximum of 7.5 hours per week.

Pay for Teachers at the Top of the Salary Scale and Retirement

Our Concern: The FY 2020 teacher salary scale stops at the 23rd step. However, teachers hired after 2010 (teachers on VRS Plan 2 and the Hybrid Plan) are not eligible to retire until their age plus their years of service adds up to 90. This is an increase from VRS Plan 1 in which the numbers only had to add up to 80. With this requirement, a teacher starting their career with FCPS at age 22 would work for 34 years (age 56) before they would be eligible to retire. This means that they would have 12 years without a pay increase at the end of their career. This significantly stunts these teachers' retirement base rate which affects the money they receive from their pensions for the rest of their lives. Pensions for teachers on VRS Plan 2 and the Hybrid Plan are based on the average of teachers' highest 5 years of pay. We compared the highest 5 years of salary on the current pay scales for FCPS, Loudoun County Public Schools, Prince William County Public Schools, and DC Public Schools. FCPS fell short in comparison to all other school divisions in terms of annual pension for both BA and MA lanes (see attached report). The difference is most stark when comparing FCPS to Prince William County. The lifetime compensation of a pension based on the current FY20 salary scale in Prince William County would pay teachers \$391,524 more in the BA lane and \$312,397 more in the MA lane compared with the pension calculated using the FCPS FY20 salary scale. This was calculated by applying the annual pension over 22.69 years using the average U.S. life expectancy of 78.69 years and assuming the teacher would start teaching at age 22 and retire at 56.

We found that when FCPS had longevity steps (steps 24-29), the amount that these steps increased year to year dropped significantly compared with the average increase between steps earlier on the salary scale. The longevity steps in the MA lane on the FCPS FY 2019 scale increased by an average of \$790 every 2 years, while salaries increased by an average of \$1,906 each year up to step 23. Alternatively, we found that the Loudoun County and Prince William County scales have 30 and 32 steps, respectively and increase at a steeper rate closer to the top of the scale, which ensures that the base for retirement is higher. Additionally, Loudoun County announced in December, 2019 that their proposed budget will raise teacher salaries across the entire pay scale to 5% above the region's market average. If FCPS wants to retain quality teachers, we need to consider how to provide competitive compensation across all steps of the pay scale and ensure that we are fairly compensating teachers at the top of the pay scale to ensure that their pension reflects the respect we have for their years of service to the district.

Our Suggestions:

- **Ensure that COLA/MSA matches that of Fairfax County employees:** we recognize that the Market Scale Adjustment (MSA) in the budget is only 1% because employees will also receive a step increase to increase salaries by about 3% total. However, for employees at the top of the pay scale who are not eligible for a step increase, this

means that they are only going to receive the 1% MSA. We ask that any employee not receiving a step increase at least receive a MSA that is equivalent to the amount proposed for Fairfax County employees in the 2021 budget. The proposed Market Rate Adjustment for county employees in the FY 2021 County and School Fiscal Forecast is 2.06%.

- **Expand the salary scale past 23 steps:** We recognize that the 23rd step in the FY 2020 salary scale is equivalent to the amount in step 29 of the FY 2019 salary scale. However, even with 29 steps, teachers would have to go at least 6 years without a pay raise at the end of their careers. Under the old equation where age plus years of service had to add up to 80, a 22 year old could retire after exactly 29 years of service. However, now that that number has been increased to 90, teachers starting at 22 will have to work for 34 years before they are eligible to retire. We need to change the salary scale to match this change in math in the newer VRS plans. As stated above, Loudoun County and Prince William County have 30 and 32 steps in their pay scales and also compensate their teachers at an increasingly higher rate as they reach the top of the pay scale. We need to adjust the salary scale to remain competitive with surrounding school divisions and to ensure that our most experienced teachers are fairly compensated for their continued service to the district.
- **Restore step increases missed due to past budget cuts upon retirement:** Several years ago, the county had to forgo step increases for staff members due to budget cuts. We recognize that the county is unable to monetarily compensate these staff members for salary increases lost over time from this setback. We instead ask that the county restore the lost steps upon the employee's retirement. This would allow these staff members to base their pension on the salary that they would have reached if not for the years of stagnation. This will ensure that these staff members do not continue to suffer the consequences of these past budget cuts with a reduced pension on top of the salary already lost.