

April 27, 2020

Fairfax County School Board
8115 Gatehouse Road
Falls Church, VA 22042

Dear Chairwoman Corbett Sanders and Honorable Members of the Board,

On behalf of our thousands of members and supporters across Fairfax County, the undersigned organizations strongly urge the Fairfax County School Board to adopt a budget for the FY 2020-2021 academic year that prioritizes increasing support for our most vulnerable populations, increasing social emotional supports and sustaining the staff that serve our community.

We appreciate the School Board's commitment to our community during this novel period and its dedication to helping our school community weather this storm. We value that the School Board shares our concern about the immediate and long-term impacts COVID-19 will have on our community and we hope that we can work together to adopt a school budget that will help Fairfax County recover from this pandemic.

Budget Priorities for the FY 2020-2021 Academic Year

Following are key priorities and principles that the undersigned organizations strongly urge the School Board to adopt as part of the budget process.

Increase social-emotional and mental health support for students:

- As numerous experts have noted, "Between closed schools, social isolation, food scarcity and parental unemployment, the coronavirus pandemic has so destabilized kids' support systems that the result, counselors say, is genuinely traumatic."¹ To help support our students when they return to school, it is critical that we increase investments in mental health support for students, including increasing the number of school counselors and psychologists. We were pleased to see the proposed budget include funding for 10 new social worker positions. However, it shouldn't be one or the other. To meet the needs of all our students, we urge the School Board to increase the number of social workers, psychologists and counselors to support students' social and emotional needs. We urge the School Board to reallocate the money that is allocated for a) Executive Principals and b) an increase in elementary principal pay, to instead go towards increased mental health support for students.

Increase support for our most vulnerable student population:

- Due to school closures, students that receive IEP/504 accommodations or EL services are not able to fully receive the direct support and resources that they deserve. This will deepen disparities in achievement gaps and graduation rates. For this reason, it is critical that the School Board prioritize funding school-based special education positions to directly address the needs of students. We would like the proposed \$800,000 for seven new central office Special Education Resource Teachers to be reallocated to hire new school-based Lead Special Education Teachers who would also serve as the Local Screening Chair, prioritizing schools with the largest special education populations. By redistributing this funding to school-based positions, we believe it will more directly serve students. We were encouraged to see the budget include funding to move ahead with the special education review and urge the Board to maintain this funding to help improve these services in the future. We also urge the Board to increase funding to hire new

¹ https://www.npr.org/2020/04/20/828026185/school-counselors-have-a-message-for-kids-it-s-ok-to-not-be-ok?utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_source=facebook.com&fbclid=IwAR1niZtzl16kctfhTwk2pAW0yf3cKltUV1-HRrEcWZVYUGyzJIKnQh9Z8FY

English Language Learner teachers to ensure our EL students are receiving the direct support and instruction they deserve. We also urge the School Board to continue to invest in the community schools model.

- Fairfax County Public Schools has struggled with consistency in handling discipline procedures. To foster a positive school environment and meet FCPS' goal of creating a "caring culture", we urge the School Board to reallocate the \$100,000 budgeted to hire a Restraint and Seclusion Specialist and \$100,000 budgeted for Behavior Intervention Services, and utilize this \$200,000 to train all school staff in de-escalation and positive behavior intervention to improve consistency in how discipline is handled.

Eliminate the digital divide for students and employees

- We recognize that the School Board is working with FCPS to provide all students and families with the technology they need for distance learning. Unfortunately, like many of our students, not all FCPS employees are provided with the technology they need to help provide distance learning for our community. COVID-19 will likely continue to impact our community in the coming academic year and we urge the School Board to develop a budget that provides computers, wifi and interpretation and translation services to all students and educators to ensure they can participate in distance learning.

Sustain the employees that serve our community

- FCPS employees are proudly serving our community during this crisis and continue to provide quality education to our students. Just as our school employees are invested in our community, we urge the School Board to adopt a budget that invests in these employees. We urge the School Board to commit to not reducing the FCPS workforce, providing health benefits to all employees and ensuring all employees planning to retire, are able to do so as if the closures had not occurred.
- Our Technology Support Specialists (TSSpec) and School Based Technology Specialists (SBTS) are working diligently to help provide virtual learning for our communities. We urge the School Board to institute hazard pay to provide additional compensation for these employees to recognize the significant work they are doing during this period to ensure learning continues in Fairfax County. TSSpec employees provide all levels of information technology consulting, planning, support and services to our schools, including serving as the primary school technology leader, managing the school local network, servers, and all associated technologies. SBTS employees provide school-based leadership, planning, coaching, and instructional support to educators to support student learning and student achievement through the integration of technology and collaborates with appropriate instructional and technical staff to manage and optimize the use of instructional technology resources to support quality teaching and learning.
- We urge the School Board to move forward with the planned CIS Scale Enhancement to bring the salaries of IA's and PHTA's to 50% of teacher salaries in the BA lane. These employees receive some of the lowest compensation in Fairfax County and work multiple jobs to provide for their families. Due to COVID-19, many of these employees have lost these jobs and it is critical the School Board adopt a budget that invests in these positions because they are critical to student learning.

Finally, we urge the School Board to commit to reviewing the budget at least quarterly during the FY 2020-2021 academic year. We also request that the School Board include and seek public input during this review. We recognize that COVID-19 has significantly reduced our public-school budget. However, we urge the School Board to work with local, state and federal leaders to seek additional revenue and if additional funding becomes available, invest this funding in the priorities stated above so that our students, employees and communities are made whole.

We sincerely thank you for your dedication and stand united in working with the School Board to adopt a budget that invests in Fairfax County so that we recover from this crisis and achieve strong and equitable public education.

Sincerely,

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Anonymous List for Change, Inc.

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Big Brothers Big Sisters of the National Capital Area

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