

FCPS Budget Deficiency Demands Efficiency

One year ago FCPS was faced with a budget crisis. A crisis by definition is a dramatic turning point or condition of instability and possible danger. Less money for education is no longer a crisis, but a reality that all concerned have had time to digest. As responsible stewards for the children of Fairfax County it now behooves us to become more efficient with available funds, rather than endlessly lament the situation. The Fairfax Education Association is actively seeking budget solutions in the best interest of education, rather than simply riding the tide of a diminished commitment.

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Where precisely is the “fat” in the Fairfax County public school system?

It is clearly more productive at this point to question the way the money is spent. Are the schools best served by the current administrative structure? Is there money being funneled unnecessarily into a bureaucratic black hole— money better spent on teacher salaries, support salaries, or saving the positions of employees targeted for extinction? Are the salaries for the top central office administrators equitable and proportional to the overall system? Are all the central office positions really necessary, or do they continue to drain education funding as the result of uncensored cronyism? It’s time to take a closer look and raise a few questions.

Central office positions... uncensored cronyism?

The so-called “cluster” administrative scheme is a good place to look for possible excess. Originally, there were four areas established to facilitate supervisory control over a rapidly growing school district. The number of areas were reduced to three and then expanded to eight. The reason given for expanding to eight offices was to provide administrative assistance in closer proximity to all schools and work sites. Most recently, and in apparent contradiction to the original goal, all eight of the cluster offices have been consolidated in one building. The combined base salaries of the top three cluster personnel positions average \$336,251 yearly per cluster and this does not take into account the cost of their benefit packages. Multiply this salary by the number of cluster offices (8), and the total salaries for these positions equal \$2.7 million per year plus benefits. These numbers seem conspicuous in the face of two consecutive years of no step and no COLA.

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In addition to the cluster officers, the central office contains many employees who are qualified to teach in the county, and could improve the student/teacher ratio as well as time issues. Yet, these people are paid as Assessment Specialists, Analysts, Coordinators, etc.

Faced with the reality of a deficient budget, the only fair, equitable and responsible way to proceed is to examine the complete picture. Everyone associated with the education of our children deserves no less. To give any part of the system a free pass is an insult to the others. This is especially true when considering the

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salary scale constituted a promise to career employees. That promise was broken and the money lost to a lack of step increase is money lost forever.