

# FEAtures

A Newsletter of the Fairfax Education Association — Serving Fairfax County School Employees Since 1920

## Message from Your FEA President



## The VEA Legislative Agenda

Dear Colleague

I trust that your year is off to a great start and the holidays were prosperous and you were able to enjoy a well deserved break. As we move forward in 2011, I want to give you an update on all that has happened in the past few weeks. We have much to be proud of and much work to do.

First, since last year at this time the singular focus of FEA has been to insure that not another year goes by without an increase for you! We worked through the spring and were able to get a vote by the school board in June directing the superintendent to include an increase in compensation in the 2012 budget.

We pushed until the bitter end for using the Education Jobs Bill money for an increase this year. While the outcome was not what we worked for, we kept the pressure on the school board regarding compensation and made them aware that we were not backing down. That has had the intended consequence of renewed commitment by board members.

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The FEA Government Relations Council is currently at work planning fund raisers and strategies to support the Virginia Education Association legislative agenda. Being discussed are a garage sale, the annual Casino Night event, and possibly other events by the FEA Political Action Committee. It is important to remember that **no FEA membership dues are ever used to support any political candidates**. All funds used to campaign for education-friendly political candidates are raised separately by FEA PAC.

The following is a summary of the VEA Legislative Program.

### Legislation to Initiate or Support

#### Expand programs and initiatives to raise high school completion rates

The first step in moving our schools toward excellence, and the best course for our Commonwealth's future, is to increase high school completion rates. This is a cost-effective investment in today's students needed to lower future incarceration rates and dependence upon social services, and to ensure future economic productivity.

VEA proposes increasing support for the following research-based interventions to reach that goal:

- Virginia Preschool Initiative
- Comprehensive School Reform
- Enhanced Career and Technical Education (Fine Arts - STEM)
- Increased teacher participation in instructional decisions
- Dropout prevention
- Class size reduction
- Increased salaries for educational professionals and expanded existing scholarship loan programs

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### **VEA will seek an amendment to the state budget to provide the state share of a 3 percent salary increase for public school employees**

The Commonwealth must take appropriate actions to attract and retain high-quality school personnel and to reward school employees for exceptional performance and dedication. Ninety-eight percent of our schools meet SOL standards. Virginia public school students achieved at higher levels than public school students nationwide on all three SAT subsections. NAEP scores show that Virginia elementary and middle school students continue to outperform their peers nationwide and are among the nation's strongest readers. Our schools have achieved the nation's largest five-year increase in student achievement on Advanced Placement (AP) examinations. Yet, Virginia's teachers make a salary \$5,351 below the national average.

### **School funding study**

The Constitution calls on the General Assembly to, "provide for a system of free public elementary and secondary schools for all children of school age throughout the Commonwealth, and shall seek to ensure that an educational program of high quality is established and continually maintained." Deep budget cuts and Virginia's low relative ranking in state funding raise questions regarding the state's fulfillment of this Constitutional obligation. VEA seeks a JLARC examination of this question.

### **Virginia Retirement System (VRS) study**

The Constitution requires of VRS that, "Retirement system benefits shall be funded using methods which are consistent with generally accepted actuarial principles." The teacher fund stood at 106.2 percent funded in 2001 and is now funded at a 67.2 percent funding level. As the Pew Charitable Trust noted, "... Virginia's funds aren't in as healthy shape as they used to be, and the state has stumbled a bit in making its full annual contributions toward its long-term obligation. ... the Commonwealth has frequently made less than the annual required contribution, as set by its own actuaries." Has the continued underfunding been consistent with this Constitutional mandate? VEA seeks a JLARC examination of this question.

### **Support local school board retention of unspent revenues**

In this era of declining state support for public education, local school boards which conserve funds should be

rewarded by allowing them to carry over funding appropriated for public education.

### **Appropriate funding for virtual schools**

If a Fairfax County student enrolls in a virtual school in Carroll County, Carroll County receives more (\$5,653) for that student than Fairfax would (\$2,790) if the student went to a "bricks-and-mortar" school. In addition, traditional schools offer services that virtual schools do not, such as clinics, libraries and athletics. The true costs associated with virtual schools should determine the level of funding - not the traditional ADM amount.

### **W-2 definition of salary**

The VEA shall initiate legislation to include all taxable earnings, including supplements for coaching and sponsoring extracurricular activities, when calculating a school employee's final average compensation for VRS benefits.

### **Provide retiree health care credit to Education Support Professionals (ESPs)**

In 2007, VEA was successful in winning long-overdue improvements to the retiree health care credit for teachers and several other groups covered through the VRS. To date, however, most hard-working ESPs are uncovered, unlike state employees. That means that a custodian in a state jail receives the credit, but one working in a public school does not. Local governments would bear the costs of this change, estimated at \$10.3 million for 2010-2011.

### **Support funding for teachers who receive national board certification**

When teachers earn their certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), the benefits extend to their students and the local school system. Recognizing this, the Commonwealth has historically provided stipends to help defray the cost of application fees and bonuses to teachers who successfully earn their NBPTS credential.



The 2010 GRC Legislative Reception held Dec. 9 at FEA was well attended

## Designation of April as Civil War in Virginia Month

With the sesquicentennial celebration of the Civil War approaching, it is important that Virginia commemorate this historic period in a manner inclusive of the sacrifices and contributions of all.

## Legislation to Oppose

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### Oppose the use of vouchers or tuition tax credits

Vouchers and tuition tax credits remove much-needed dollars from the public schools, and studies of their use in other states found that the primary beneficiaries were students from wealthier families. At a time when Virginia's state school funding ranks so poorly on the national level, and resource inequities abound, it makes no sense to siphon more money from public schools.

### Oppose efforts to undermine security of Virginia Retirement System (VRS)

The VRS is a traditional pension plan, which means that the eventual benefits are predictable and designed to afford an income stream commensurate with a participant's years of service. Advantages of these traditional "defined-benefit" pensions include the fact that they are guaranteed, professionally managed, and include cost-of-living adjustments.

Some legislators and administrative officials support a so-called "defined-contribution" alternative for VRS. Such accounts are more accurately described as "personal risk" accounts. They subject individual investors to market risks, and under such plans participants' retirement income would depend heavily on how astutely they invested their money. Under certain scenarios, participants could outlive their retirement savings. PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates that a shift to a defined-contribution approach would lead to a 48% reduction in retirement benefits.

Be part of a growing *FEAtures*, and share your experiences and important announcements with fellow FEA members.

Submit FEA member stories, photos, etc., to Pete Marinovich, [pmarinovich@fairfaxea.org](mailto:pmarinovich@fairfaxea.org).

Help us make *FEAtures* as member friendly as possible!

## Message from Your President

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During the holiday break, I did interviews with the Washington Post and Fox 5 News on the budget. I was able to convey our commitment to seeing an increase in compensation for *all* employees in the FY2012 budget. As you now know, the superintendent did include an increase of two percent plus step in his proposed budget.

At our December representative assembly we outlined our plan on dealing with the working conditions that have created so much stress for you. We are working with Fairfax County Federation of Teachers (FCFT) on this critical issue, and we are already having an impact. If you have read the various news stories and the superintendent's email on the budget, you can see that they are beginning to hear us.

Recently, both FCFT President Steve Greenburg and I have been on WTOP and in the Washington Examiner talking about the ever increasing demands and time wasters that are foisted upon you. Following the budget presentation at the school board meeting on Jan. 6, we were on Fox 5 News; and I also did an interview with Tony Perkins of Fox 5 News the following day regarding the workload issue. Our goal is to reign in the administrative initiatives that make for endless meetings, extending your day and encumbering your planning time.

In addition to these activities, we have formed a coalition of Fairfax County unionized employees called SAFE (Standing Altogether for Fairfax County Employees). This coalition is comprised of school employees (active and retired), firefighters, police, and SEIU service workers. The focus of the group is on retirement and maintaining our current defined benefit pension plans. We are in the process of meeting with all of the Board of Supervisors and the County Executive to encourage support for maintaining this benefit.

Invite a not-yet-member to join us in this important work. Trust me when I tell you that the reactions you are seeing from the superintendent, the school board and the media are because of the collective actions we are taking.



*Power concedes nothing without demand.*  
— Frederick Douglass

## FEA Action Plan with FCFT

For the first time in history, FEA and the Fairfax County Federation of Teachers (FCFT) held a joint meeting of our building level leaders. We are taking unprecedented steps because we are living in unprecedented times. Both organizations have found common ground and recognize that it is critically important that we stand together if we are to achieve the goals for ourselves and our students. Many of our members have expressed a certain amount of relief and hope with the emergence of our partnership. Our strong showing is making a difference with the school board and the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.

FEA President Michael Hairston and FCFT President Steve Greenburg have been in constant contact all year long concerning the issues of the federal Education Jobs Fund disbursement, new teacher initiatives and many other areas of concern. They have met with the board of directors from both organizations and have labored diligently to come off with a joint action plan proposal to move forward with as much influence as possible.

One primary focus stems from the FCPS Leadership Team allowing for an unlimited extension of the workday and the encumbrance of planning time, which has created an unacceptable work environment for FCPS employees. FEA has created an online survey to help determine the extent of teacher frustrations and identify specific areas of concern.

FEA and FCFT will jointly call upon the school board to reign in the administrative power by adopting policy language that specifies contract hours and protect teachers' planning time from required meetings.

Strategies are being developed to coordinate some of the activities of the two organizations and demonstrate unity on many fronts.

## Update Your Member Profile!

It is critical that FEA has your current employment information on file, particularly if your work status has changed from full- to part-time or vice versa.

Please contact the FEA office at 703-352-7300, or email your updated information to May Ewald at [mewald@fairfaxea.org](mailto:mewald@fairfaxea.org).

## National Board Certified Teachers

National Board Certification (NBC) is a voluntary, advanced teaching credential that goes beyond state licensure. NBC has national standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do. It is a process that measures a teacher's practice against these standards through a series of performance-based assessments, which includes teaching portfolios, samples of students' work, and classroom videotapes. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certifies teachers who successfully complete its rigorous certification process.

The last round of successful NBC candidates included twelve FEA members: Daniel Ashley, Mary Ciarcia, Sara Cox, Kenneth Halla, Jill Hamlin, Julia Haywood, Kathleen Herron, Camille Hodges, Daina Lieberman, Katherine Noble, Julia Schickel and Gloretta Wilson-Omolo Shale. Camille Hodges was kind enough to share her NBC experience with *FEAatures*.

**FEAatures:** How has the NBCT process helped you professionally?

**Camille:** Working through the process of achieving National Board certification enabled me to learn to examine and re-examine my professional teaching techniques from a variety of perspectives. The teaching profession is a series of complicated endeavors integrated among curriculum goals and objectives, student learning, professional development, and parent involvement. In the midst of this, the National Board process required me to reflect on these entities, analyze them, and make changes where necessary.

I was encouraged to self-reflect on a continuous basis. This required "stepping back" and taking a look at what I was doing as a teacher to foster and enrich student learning as well as what I was doing to further develop my professional expertise. The teaching profession constantly encourages perfecting one's craft and the National Board process has supported me in doing this. It has given me the skills to respond to the challenges I encounter in the classroom with a higher degree of efficacy.

**FEAatures:** Would you recommend National Board certification to your colleagues?

**Camille:** I definitely recommend National Board certification to my colleagues. The National Board experience increases personal and professional growth and reiterates the value of best practices in the classroom. The process of "achieving" helps one uncover superior teaching qualities already in use and learn how to further develop them through self-examination.

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# RESPECT

## ESP Thankful for Help from FEA

John Christoforatos, a food service worker at the Energy Zone Food Service Center credits help from FEA, in particular ESP Specialist Bertie Hamilton, for his continued employment at FCPS. John has been an FEA member since 2006.

Mr. Christoforatos was hired by FCPS in 1985 as an electrician helper. His reliability and dedication to the job earned him a promotion to building engineer in less than two years. He continued in that capacity for several years, often working late into the night to keep the building operational. Then, in 1998, he became injured on the job and underwent a debilitating surgery to his shoulder.

John's return to work was extremely difficult as pain from the injured shoulder limited some of his ability to perform his regular tasks, but he forged on to the best of his ability. In 2006 he was given notice from FCPS Human Resources that he was not sufficiently performing his duties and must return home until he was capable. Even though John provided a letter from his surgeon indicating that it was not safe for him to continue in his job as it was currently described, he knew his retirement was in jeopardy.

**“From the day I called and asked for help, they were right there with me, fighting to keep my employment with FCPS.”**

“From the day I called and asked for help, they were right there with me, fighting to keep my employment with FCPS. Thanks to FEA, and especially Mr. Bertie Hamilton for all of his time and effort, I was allowed to return to FCPS as a Food Service employee in June of 2010.”

John is also very grateful to Food Service for accepting him. “I'm grateful to them for the opportunity. I also cannot express enough the benefits of belonging to the FEA family.”

FEA is also extremely proud of members like John Christoforatos.



John Christoforatos, FCPS Food Service worker

### Remember the Date!

ESP Council meetings for 2011: Mar. 1, April 5, May 3, June 7.

### We are Here to Help You!

When you've been called into a meeting with your supervisor:

1. Remain calm, attend the meeting and be polite
2. Take notes so you will remember all that was discussed
3. Respond to direct questions
4. Don't offer more information than necessary
5. Remember it is okay for no one to speak at times; let the supervisor break the silence
6. When you leave the meeting, review notes and make any additions
7. Call the FEA office as soon as possible for assistance or advice



FAIRFAX EDUCATION ASSOCIATION  
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#### FEA ESP Council Officers

**Chair:** Mary Anderson

**Vice Chair:** Christal Tanks

**Secretary:** Angela Almond

## National Board Certified Teachers

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Throughout the lengthy process of certification, many friendships develop and strong bonds are established among colleagues who have chosen to set higher standards for themselves. I am personally and professionally richer as a result of my participation in the National Board experience.

### Fight for Compensation from Education Jobs Fund

In the summer of 2010 we witnessed the passing of the federal Education Jobs Fund bill. This was a significant victory for education throughout the nation that came about largely through extensive lobbying by NEA and its affiliates. It should also be deemed a victory for FCPS employees who have recently endured so much neglect—some unavoidable, some not.

The primary purpose of the Education Jobs Fund bill was clearly defined: “To provide additional funding to states for the support of local teacher (and other school-level personnel) salary and related costs at the early childhood, elementary and secondary school levels.” In spite of such clarity of purpose, FEA decided to take every measure possible to assure the money was not misallocated or, for that matter, lost altogether. In an effort to maximize its influence for this campaign, FEA allied itself with the Fairfax County Federation of Teachers (FCFT). Together the organizations were able to come to an agreement on the most appropriate use for the windfall. A joint position was drafted which included a 2% mid-year salary increase for FCPS employees and the reinstatement of 66 custodial positions lost to the previous year’s budget cuts.

No stone was left unturned in pursuit of this goal. FEA organized email campaigns, showings of solidarity, and created contact teams to meet individually with every school board member. The process revealed which of those school board members were truly concerned with the morale and well being of FCPS employees. Yet, in spite of the associations’ best efforts, the school board took a straw poll at its Oct. 18 work session and voted 8-4 in favor of withholding distribution of the funds until FY 2012.

The next significant date in the process was the Dec. 2 regular meeting of the school board. FEA hoped at a minimum to force a vote by the school board on use of the Education Jobs Fund money with the help of board member Tina Hone. A public vote would assign accountability to individuals. However, a procedural complication placed an unlooked-for obstacle before such a vote could be accomplished.

At the meeting FEA President Michael Hairston gave a speech on behalf of FCPS employees expressing great disappointment in the school board’s failure to adequately advocate for its employees to the Board of Supervisors. This speech, no doubt, was lingering in the minds of school board members as the session went into overtime with a discussion on employee compensation highlighted by Tina Hone’s passionate address on the apparent disregard for FCPS employees over the past two years.

While the failed attempt to achieve a public vote can be viewed as a temporary setback, it became crystal clear that the efforts of local unions were having an impact, and the school board would be unable to hide from the issue of compensation.

### UniServ Director Departs



FEA bids the fondest of farewells to UniServ Director Anthony Jefferies who served the association admirably as an energetic and creative UniServ director since September of 2006. Anthony also served as the liaison to the FEA Government Relations

Council. Although his good nature and engaging personality will be sorely missed among the staff, we wish him well in his new endeavors as he travels to Illinois to accept a higher position with the Illinois Education Association as Director of Field Services.

Before leaving, Anthony expressed tremendous gratitude for his experiences at FEA and credited the association for critical training that he will rely on in the future. His former duties will temporarily be shared by the remaining UDs while a permanent replacement is sought.



## Spring Reading and Instructional Issues Conference

# Supporting Struggling Students

## March 5, 2011

8:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., Mason Inn at George Mason University

Keynote presentations by Katie Keier and Pat Johnson

- Door prizes
- Workshops in the afternoon

Visit [www.fairfaxea.org](http://www.fairfaxea.org) for more information and to register.

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### Contact your dedicated representatives:

**Phyllis James**  
phyllis.james@gwrs.com

**Catherine Pfeilsticker**  
catherine.pfeilsticker@gwrs.com

**1-877-449-FCPS (3277), option 2**

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