

Public Comment

BoE FY24 Budget Hearing

Feb 1, 2023

Good evening, President Johnson, Vice President Rose, Dr.

Dyson, and members of the Board.

I am Melissa Dirks, President of the Frederick County Teachers Association, which represents over 3,100 members of your staff including teachers, media specialists, school counselors, SLPs, Social Workers, and other certificated educators.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input into the draft budget. It is true that a budget is how an organization operationalizes its priorities, however to get the full picture of those priorities, the budget has to be viewed in the context of the time and environment in which it exists. I am going to set that context with some data that I am sure the Board is aware

of, from independent presentations and sources, but may not fully understand how they relate to one another in our schools.

- MSDE's 5-year enrollment report shows FCPS has the highest enrollment growth at 9.6%. Only five other systems had any growth, with the next highest at 2.4%**
- We are in the midst of a national and state teacher shortage. We have unfilled positions across the system and across job categories. Some of these positions have gone unfilled all year.**
- A recent HR report shows the applications for certificated staff are in rapid decline. In 2020, 1,971 people applied for teaching positions and only 1,445 applied in 2022.**

- **The need to hire more educators has increased due to people leaving FCPS, and the systems increased growth. In 2019, FCPS hired 295 certificated employees. In 2022, they hired 440. Even with that increase we are not fully staffed and we have almost 100 conditionally certificated teachers.**
- **Last year PSTEB shared data that FCPS had a larger staffing problem than other jurisdictions. FCPS had 5.8% of teaching positions unfilled, while Howard had 1.3%, Montgomery 2.5%, and Washington County 1.1%.**
- **Our salaries lack competitiveness with all our surrounding districts. For example, a teacher with a Master's Degree and 5 years of experience will make \$2,264 more in Carroll, \$5,421 more in Washington all the way up to \$14,661 more for driving across the**

county line to Howard. This is not an isolated example and you will find them up and down our pay scale.

- Substitute fill rates are low, requiring teachers to fill in during their planning periods, instead of planning for their students, communicating with parents, grading, and all the other work that teachers need to do.**
- Students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs have only increased since the start of the pandemic.**

What does this data look like in our schools?

It can manifest in many ways, such as the school which has a special education team of four and appears staffed on paper, but one teacher is a long-term sub, and one teacher is conditionally certified. That means the two fully certified

teachers are planning, testing, and case managing not only their own caseloads, but also for the long term sub who legally can't case manage *and* they are providing extra support for the conditionally certified teacher.

It can also look like a teacher resignation early in the school year and which was unable to be filled with either a certified teacher or a long-term sub, so the school made the difficult decision to re-assign those students to the other teachers in that grade level. This increase the already large class sizes because that was the lesser of the two evils, when compared to a having a revolving door of daily subs for those students.

It looks like math and reading specialists who are unable to support new and conditional teachers or work with small groups of students, because they are instead subbing when a

regular sub could not be provided. In some cases they are fully reassigned as teachers of record for all or part of their day because there is no one to hire to fill the needed classroom position. So those specialists are on the roster but they are unable to perform the duties they were hired to do.

All these things, combined with not making a salary commensurate with their surrounding jurisdictions, let alone for people with similar education in other fields is deflating.

We are currently in a vicious cycle that feeds itself; the overwhelming workload created by staffing shortages and our inability to hire (because we are not competitive in the region) cause more educators to resign for positions in higher paying jurisdictions or retire earlier than intended.

Our salary enhancements over the last few years have only been enough to tread water. If we only meet the minimum requirements in the Blueprint, as this budget does, we will still lag behind. We must have a robust salary resource pool that includes enough money to have a significant COLA over and above other jurisdictions or we will never gain any ground in salary competitiveness. That will continue to exacerbate the staffing shortages and FCPS truly will not be able to provide the excellent education all of us want to provide our students every day.

Thank you.

Missy Dirks

President, FCTA

